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Barfield Road district erosion control projects

THE Grazing Resilience and Sustainable Solutions (GRASS) program supports graziers to develop and implement strategies to improve land condition and reduce erosion risk. Participating graziers who have areas of C and D land condition may be eligible to apply for incentive funding for works identified in their land management plan.

Barfield Road, Banana producers Robert and Melinee Leather and Desmond Coupe and Jenny Newton of Brookleigh were among the first producers to participate in the GRASS program.

The Leather family purchased the 6000 hectare Barfield Station in 2016 to finish Brahman and Brahman Limousin cross weaners from their other properties. Brookleigh has been in Des' family for several generations. The property is just under 7000ha and runs a predominantly Droughtmaster herd of around 1000 head.

Both families have worked closely with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and are actively improving their land management techniques. Participation in the GRASS program has helped both families develop land management plans to address areas with land condition problems.

Both the Barfield and Brookleigh property owners were successful applicants for the incentives project within the GRASS program. Both properties had gully systems that needed remediation to prevent further erosion.

Matt Brown (DAF), Rob and Melinee Leather inspecting a series of porous check dams constructed on Barfield, Banana.

At Barfield Station, a series of porous check dams were installed along two gully systems to slow the flow of water and assist the gullies to stabilise and develop grass cover. Whoa boys were constructed to slow runoff and manage gullying along tracks and fence lines.

A pipeline and an additional watering point were established in one paddock to enable better management of grazing pressure.

The Brookleigh project used several techniques to deal with gully problems. Contour ripping and seeding was appropriate at some sites, but others required porous check dams. The most severe gully site required diversion banks and a rock chute to control water flow. This was built using prefabricated bed concrete matting and quarry rock. Temporary fencing was constructed at some sites to exclude stock while the treated areas recovered.

Aaron Kurtz with a rock chute constructed on Brookleigh, Banana to remediate a gully system.

The work on both properties was done over a six month period and is an excellent demonstration of the range of erosion control strategies that can be used to reduce runoff, improve land condition and prevent damage to fence lines and roads.

The Barfield Road projects show the advantage of neighbours working together, as the work done on each property benefited the other. The gully remediation work is a credit to both families as it was done to an exemplary standard.

The GRASS program is funded by the Department of Environment and Science, Queensland and has $1.4m available for graziers in the Burdekin, Fitzroy and Burnett Mary regions to subsidise land management practices such as fencing, water infrastructure and erosion control.

For more information, contact your local DAF extension officer.

New prickly acacia control option on the market

Granular Products, in collaboration with Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), have launched Regain 750WG herbicide for the control of prickly acacia and other woody weeds.

It provides graziers with a new option to manage infestations using existing spray equipment.

Eliza Barrett, research and development, Granular Products said Regain 750WG contains Tebuthiuron in a new wetable granule (WG) formulation.

"Granular Products' focus has been to develop a new formulation and management regime to treat large sections of young sporadic prickly acacia plants," Ms Barrett said.

"Efficacy trials run over two years, resulted in 100 per cent control of prickly acacia."

MLA program manager, sustainable feedbase resources, Cameron Allan, said the aim of this joint project was to deliver a new product which could assist overall management of prickly acacia.

"This control method is targeted at prevention across large areas of grazing land to minimise expansion of infestations and allow productive grazing to continue," he said.

Paul Hubbard, chief executive officer of Granular Products, said the release of the product had been very well received by graziers and farmers.

"The availability of this product offers farmers and graziers an opportunity to control prickly acacia, without being cost prohibitive. It provides an alternative, affordable and longer-term approach for the end user in their fight to control prickly acacia," Mr Hubbard said.

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Inspiring careers in the cattle industry

Taking steps to be 'job ready'

A NEW pastoral training program in Western Australia's Kimberley region is providing practical skills for Aboriginal trainees seeking employment in the grazing industry.

Developed in response to industry requests, the program aims to support a career path for young Aboriginal people and provide the pastoral industry workforce with a skilled, entry-level cohort.

The program was coordinated by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Western Australia (DPIRD WA) and delivered by Queensland's VET Centre, the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation and the Kimberley Agricultural and Pastoral Company.

Ten young men spent two weeks working on Myroodah station in WA's Kimberley region gaining practical skills with cattle and horses, developing confidence and learning the foundational skills required to be "job ready" to work in the pastoral industry.

"The graduates learned practical skills like fencing, water point maintenance, animal handling and welfare, and additionally received language, literacy and numeracy training," Melissa Hartmann, the DPIRD WA Aboriginal economic development manager said.

"The Academy has had great industry support, including offers of employment for graduates and offers to host future training opportunities."

Three program graduates have commenced full-time employment on stations across the Kimberley and others have opted to return to school.

The program delivered a low stress stock handling course, in conjunction with the Nyamba Buru Yawuru people's Warrmijala Murrgulayi pre-employment program.

"Joining with the Warrmijala Murrgurlayi program for this part of the course has been a great opportunity for trainees of both programs to learn practical skills together," Ms Hartmann said.

The Aboriginal Pastoral Academy pilot will now be developed into a broader program by DPIRD WA with input from the local industry.

For information contact DPIRD WA, (08) 9474 2505, enquiries@dpird.wa.gov.au

The first participants of the Aboriginal Pastoral Academy recently completed their intensive training program.

> The Aboriginal Pastoral Academy pilot has laid the foundations to build employment pathways, which will generate far reaching benefits to industry, as well as local communities in the north.

Kangaroo grass susceptible to over grazing

KANGAROO grass (*Themeda triandra*) is a widespread native perennial grass in Queensland and can be found on a wide variety of soil types.

It is found throughout the world and is an important native grass in much of Africa.

Prior to European settlement, kangaroo grass was thought to be the dominant perennial grass over much of what is now the black speargrass (*Heteropogon contortus*) area.

It was replaced by black speargrass, which is more tolerant of heavy grazing.

Kangaroo grass is a summer growing perennial grass. Growth usually starts with storms in spring and continues until early April. Growth occurs from small tiller (stem) buds located at the base of existing tillers and most new tillers emerge in spring/early summer.

The tillers grow until February/March when some flower and produce seed.

Kangaroo grass tussocks can live for up to five to six years. New seedlings usually appear after the first spring/early summer storms, but only where mature plants are present and produced seed in the previous summer. Burning probably boosts seedling recruitment.

Kangaroo grass is susceptible to grazing and this is thought to be due to most new tillers emerging at the same time in spring/early summer.

Excessive grazing at this time kills new tillers and ultimately the grass tussocks. Consequently, kangaroo grass is often sparse on heavily grazed country.

Kangaroo grass benefits when rested in spring/early summer until new tillers become established. The density of kangaroo grass can be increased with moderate grazing pressure and wet season spelling.

Dr David Orr, formerly a DPI pasture scientist, Rockhampton.

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What is the NABRC?

Advancing the beef industry

THE North Australia Beef Research Council (NABRC) is an independent, incorporated association established in 1992.

Its mission is to drive a focus on research (R), development (D), adoption (A), education and training that benefits the northern beef industry. Producers, research organisations, research funders and education providers come together to discuss strategic industry issues and identify priority RD&A issues.

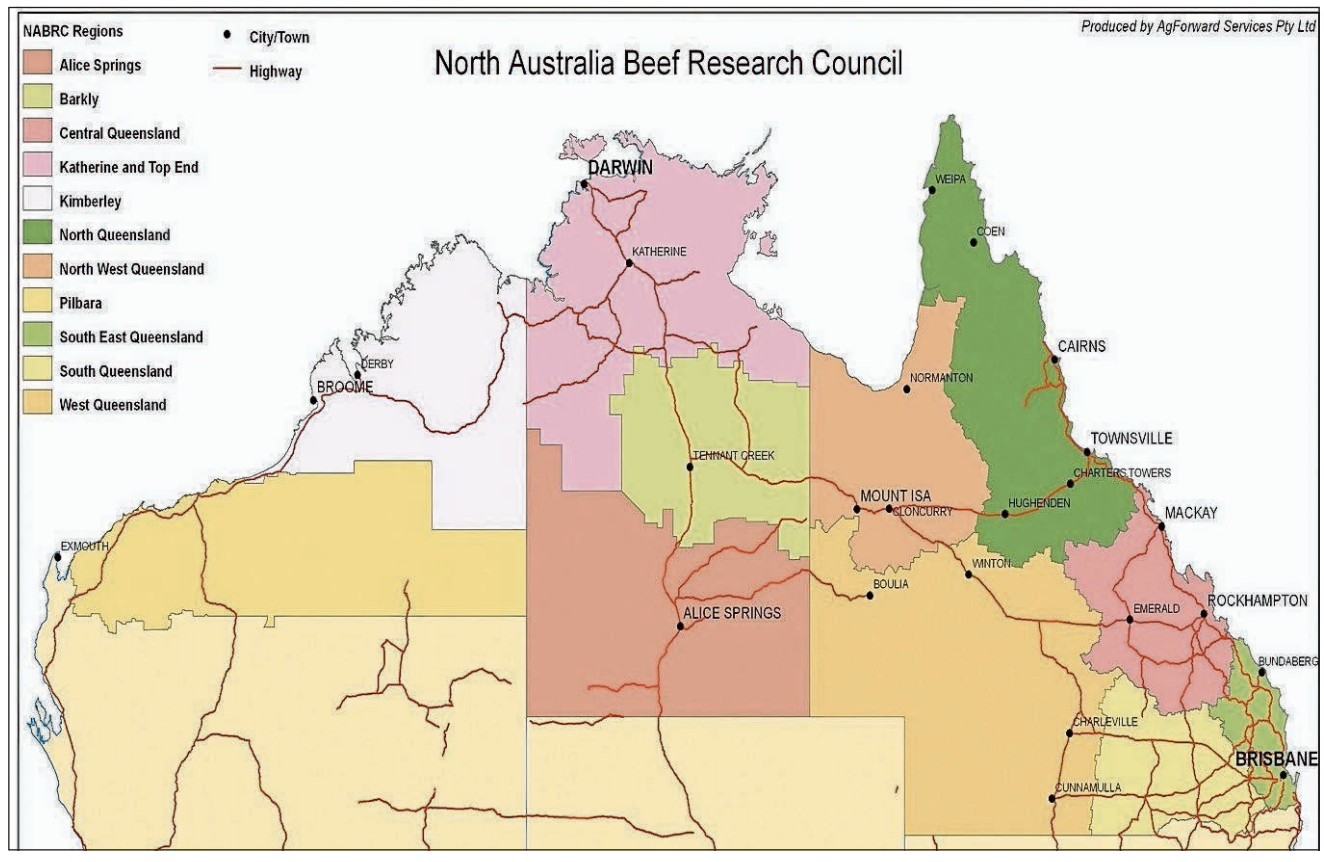
Eleven Regional Beef Research Committees (RBRCs) led by a producer chair and supported by an agency-sponsored secretary, provide grassroots input to NABRC from across Queensland (6), the Northern Territory (3) and the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia (2). There is a core of up to six producer members, plus other members represent state/territory agencies, CSIRO, universities, and key stakeholders in the region (stock and station agents or NRM groups).

The RBRC chairs are representatives on NABRC, alongside senior representatives of Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), relevant state government departments (QLD, WA, NT), CSIRO, industry organisations and other major R&D providers.

NABRC meets twice a year and plays a key role in the consultation structure MLA use to determine RD&A investment priorities. In addition, two NABRC representatives sit on MLA's Red Meat Panel which assesses regional issues in the context of national red meat and livestock industry RD&A priorities.

Following a survey of members, incoming NABRC chair, John Taylor plans to strengthen RBRCs.

"NABRC is only as good as the RBRCs - they are critical to defining the issues to address and identify new ways to advance the industry in those regions," he said.



Regional beef and sheep industry RD&A advisory groups.

> NABRC meets twice a year and plays a key role in the consultation structure MLA use to determine RD&A investment priorities.

The plan includes expanding capacity within RBRCs to ensure they are equipped to address current and emerging industry issues and provide important consultation for R&D funding bodies.

If you are interested in being more involved in your region's RD&A activities or knowing more about NABRC, visit www.nabrc.com.au, contact NABRC chair John Taylor chair@nabrc.com.au, 0429 725 838 or secretariat Janine King secretariat@nabrc.com.au, 0419 735542.

Understand the biology of black speargrass

BLACK speargrass (*Heteropogon contortus*) is a widespread, native perennial grass in eastern Queensland, particularly in areas receiving 600-1000 millimetres annual rainfall. It grows on a variety of soil types but does best on coarse textured soils.

Prior to European settlement, much of today's black speargrass area was dominated by kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) which declined because it is less tolerant of grazing. There is evidence that black speargrass is in decline in many areas due to high stocking rates. Extensive areas are now dominated by inferior grasses such as Indian couch (*Bothriochloa pertusa*).

Black speargrass is a summer growing perennial. Growth usually starts with spring/early summer storms and continues until April. Growth occurs from small tiller (stem) buds located at the base of tussocks. Most new tillers emerge in spring, but some appear in summer. Tillers grow until about March, and by late April, characteristic "bunches" of seeds become prominent.

Most tussocks live for around five years, which means that regular seedling recruitment is necessary to maintain plant density. Seedling recruitment is boosted by burning within a few days of the first useful rainfall event (20mm plus).

Black speargrass responds well to moderate grazing pressure. However, where grazing pressure is consistently too high the tussock death rate exceeds seedling recruitment and the population declines.

Pastures with low black speargrass density can be rehabilitated with rest over autumn to maximise seed production, burning in spring following the first 20mm storm to maximise seedling recruitment and then resting over the summer.

Dr David Orr, formerly DPI principal pasture scientist, Rockhampton.

Sheep industry insights

AS WE head into winter, it's an important time to take stock of the outlook for Australia's sheep industry and how Queensland producers are positioned following the summer and autumn periods.

Despite the significant challenges of 2020, there is general optimism around for many sheep producers and woolgrowers who have signalled interest in boosting flock numbers following a prosperous season and sustained high prices.

According to Meat & Livestock Australia's 2021 Sheep Industry Projections, the national sheep flock is set to enter a rebuilding phase this year, with strong sheep and lamb prices expected to remain, provided favourable seasonal conditions continue.

The report cited that in Queensland, the sheep population will continue to grow with the greater implementation of widespread cluster fencing, reducing the impact of wild dogs and dingoes.

This was echoed at the Leading Sheep Forum held in Longreach in March 2021, where Queensland sheep producers signalled intentions to boost Merino numbers, seeing value in establishing two income streams between meat and wool to help offset the impacts of key market and seasonal challenges.

Andrea McKenzie, extension officer with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, said that although the outlook is positive for many Queensland producers, some are still facing impacts of ongoing dry conditions with minimal rainfall across the summer period.

"Summer rainfall across northern Queensland and part of the southern inland districts was above average, but below average from the Capricornia to Wide Bay and Burnett districts and inland," Ms McKenzie said.

"This is creating a number of challenges for sheep producers receiving lower than average rainfall to feasibly and sustainably restock in the current high price market.

"Following an improved season for many, we are also noticing wool prices are steadily climbing and the production of shorn wool is increasing overall."

The Australian Wool Production Forecasting Committee (AWPFC) has released the fourth forecast of shorn wool production in 2020/21 citing a 2.1 per cent increase on 2019/20 to 290 million kilograms (mkg) greasy.

"Though parts of Queensland have benefited from rainfall which has added to on-farm water stocks, the AWPFC forecast expects the number of sheep shorn will fall by 4.5pc in Australia during 2020-21 to 65.5 million, with a 14.2pc downward trend expected in Queensland," Ms McKenzie said.

"The national shearer shortage is creating delays in shearing for many areas, which provides potential challenges to producers by disrupting their individual on-farm programs and shorn wool being longer than usual.

"The sustaining challenges around getting shearers nationally will continue to create a number of issues for producers as we move into the spring joining period."

According to Meat & Livestock Australia's 2021 Sheep Industry Projections, the national sheep flock is set to enter a rebuilding phase this year.

> For many Queensland sheep producers, it was a good start to the year, and despite significant challenges for some, the overall positive market conditions indicate an opportunity to rebuild flocks and make on-farm changes that drive greater sustainability and returns.

In addition to highly variable seasonal conditions, the Queensland sheep industry's rebuilding period has also been impacted by pest and disease challenges such as locusts.

"Following early rains, large numbers of locusts occurred in parts of western Queensland and heavily impacted pastures," Ms McKenzie said.

"Emerging greenery from crops and pastures were destroyed, meaning some producers were facing another period of destocking as fodder was gone."

Though the break in the season was a relief for most Queensland producers, for many it created health issues in livestock like nitrate poisoning and cases of pulpy kidney.

"The long-awaited rain for many producers meant the growth of pigweed and other pests in pastures, which when consumed in high quantities, lead to nitrate poisoning in sheep. Pulpy kidney disease also surfaced in some flocks where the rain leads to lush fast-growing pastures," Ms McKenzie said.

"For many Queensland sheep producers, it was a good start to the year, and despite challenges for some, the overall positive market conditions indicate an opportunity to rebuild flocks and make on-farm changes that drive greater sustainability and returns."

Later this year, Leading Sheep will run a series of ewe and lamb survival, nutrition and drought response workshops. These workshops will help sheep producers optimise reproduction by implementing effective condition score management and feeding programs that minimise ewe losses and boost reproduction and lamb survival rates. More details to come, at: www.leadingsheep.com.au/event-list/.

To subscribe to the Leading Sheep monthly 'Around the Camp' eNewsletter, visit: www.leadingsheep.com.au/subscribe.

Leading Sheep is a joint initiative of Australian Wool Innovation and DAF, supported by AgForce. Leading the way for a more profitable Queensland sheep and wool industry through new technology knowledge and skills.