



Butts in the Burdekin Dry Tropics

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Title Landscape Linkages revitalizes the Desert Uplands

By Terry Butts

An innovative pilot scheme financed by Townsville based Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM to entice land owners in the Southern Desert Uplands to manage their land with native vegetation and at the same time conserve wild life in their pastures, is being hailed a great success

Known simply as Landscape Linkages it is a scheme whereby land owners and managers in the region bordered by the shires of Jericho, Aramac and Barcaldine submitted a price to provide the required maintenance of vegetation on the submitted areas on their properties while not increasing the intensity of grazing.

Winning tenders were financed by BDTNRM (at an average of around \$2 a hectare) but at all times land owners managed and were in control of their own commitment. A total of 15 properties covering 85,207 hectares were involved.

According to Andrea Lingard, the project officer of Barcaldine based Desert Uplands Build Up & Development Strategy Committee (DUC) the first year has seen a 40 per cent increase in grass cover over the areas submitted into the project.

"And the biodiversity improvement has also been significant." She said.

The two year project is due for completion in October and the DUC will source funding opportunities for the continuation and extension to the project.

"Of course the drought breaking rains in December out here benefited everyone- but we are extremely pleased with our results," she said.

Had the drought continued, there would have been less impact on the properties in our scheme.

Long time land carer, Margaret House of Fortuna Station near Aramac, said the Landscape Linkages project had been a break away from the mantra of last century when it was all about the three Bs- bulldozers, buffel and Brahman.

"Everyone thought you had to be big to survive. So paddocks were cleared buffel grass planted and Brahman stock increased.

"At first people made a lot of money- and those who kept grazing smaller herds on spinifex were being left behind. Until the inevitable drought.

"It was spinifex that pulled them through. Those with large areas of native pastures were going to survive" she said.

Margaret House said the undeniable lesson that Landscape Linkages is bringing home is that, "less is more"

"There might be less cattle- but you often get more beef," she explained.

Adding, "You don't have to destroy nature to have a viable enterprise".

However she did stress the point that in the good times- in the years without drought- those land managers who chose to clear and run with buffel laughed all the way to the bank. It was in the drought years, from 2002 that spinifex proved a saviour for those who stuck.

Juliana McCosker, of Queensland Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and an advisor to the Land Linkages project says it is not only cattle that have benefited from retaining spinifex in the Desert Uplands

"The features of native vegetation that make good wild life habitat are tree, shrub and ground cover as well as fallen logs and leaf litter.

"These features provide food and habitat for native wildlife such as the black throated finch.

“You don’t find them in cleared pastures” she said.