

FITZROY BASIN ASSOCIATION INC.

# ANNUAL REPORT

2007/08



FITZROY BASIN ASSOCIATION

# Chair's report

*Ted Scott*

A year ago, FBA held a successful annual general meeting attended by more than 80 people. The event marked FBA's tenth anniversary, triggering much reflection on the past. More recently though, FBA has been jolted into thinking about its future.

A new government brought new funding arrangements and a period of uncertainty for FBA. The Board was pleased with the way management and staff negotiated this period of uncertainty.

The situation motivated us to examine ways to diversify our revenue base and attain more financial independence. As a result, the Board has created a new Business development committee.

The committee has already started to pursue other funding options and is also working to strengthen our relationship with mining companies and the mining industry, which are significant investors and resource managers in our region.

In June this year the FBA Board had the opportunity to host a meeting of the Australian and Queensland Government Joint Steering Committee in Emerald.

This offered a unique opportunity to influence and inform decision-makers. Committee members saw first-hand some of the issues being faced in our region during a tour of Ensham Mine and the "Kingower" property, both badly affected by flooding in early 2008.

The Board was pleased to see FBA break out of its comfort zone to invite applications for untried project ideas under its Innovation Fund, with nine successful applications. The Board believes FBA has an ongoing role stimulating innovation in the NRM space.



"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

- Sir Winston Churchill

# Chief Executive Officer's report

*Suzie Christensen*

The floods of January and February this year were a timely reminder of the power of nature, but also of the resilience of the Fitzroy region. It seems to me the region's capacity to deal with crises is borne from the same qualities that see us cope with change. The past financial year has seen more of what has become the only constant in FBA and broader community based NRM - that is, change. A change of government at the federal level bought a totally new funding program to replace NHT - the Caring for Our Country program.

FBA will need to remain flexible and adaptive to continue to thrive under Caring for our Country. The program focuses on achieving national outcomes, rather than regional. Base funding has been reduced, with an open call process being run under various themes.

The greatest challenge is funding security again being reduced to 12 months. The government's business plan, to be released late September, will give greater certainty for years 2-5 of the program. We have secured \$4.1 million for 2008-2009 so far, and retained staffing capacity in the region to deliver that funding on-ground.

FBA successfully collaborated with other reef region CEOs and peak industry bodies on a submission that resulted in a \$200 million Reef Rescue election commitment from the Labor Party, which includes \$146 million for grants to landholders. We look forward to an announcement in October of the success of our \$3.5 million bid under that program.

December 2008 sees the end of the NHT2 and NAP programs. In wrapping this activity up, several key evaluations were undertaken and important science projects completed. The knowledge, capacity, and on-ground outcomes achieved over the six years of these programs will serve us well as we move into a new phase. We will face the future with a more diversified income base as the results of our business development strategy are realised, ready to deliver on our objectives through Reef Rescue and Caring for our Country.



We value **Leadership**: We are proactive in engaging the future.



# Everybody needs good neighbours

FBA's flagship initiative, the **Neighbourhood Catchments** approach, continues to ensure real changes in the way natural resources are managed on-ground.

With an area more than twice the size of Tasmania to cover, FBA focuses its attention in **Priority Neighbourhood Catchments (PNCs)**, to ensure money is spent as strategically as possible.

Last financial year, FBA significantly improved its available knowledge through several science projects that will help to better determine where on-ground work needs to occur to get the best value for money.

This information, combined with local knowledge gained through a series of community workshops in 2007, helped FBA to determine PNCs for 2008 to 2011.

**Sustainability will be boosted across 13 catchments in the Fitzroy Basin region over the next year**, giving land managers access to incentive funding for infrastructure and management changes that improve land management.

## But do PNCs work?

An independent evaluation of the Neighbourhood Catchments approach commissioned by FBA in 2007 found the process does have an influence on landholders' attitudes to land management, which is **likely to result in noticeable changes in resource condition over the long-term**.

Sixty-five percent (65%) of those surveyed in the evaluation reported changes, particularly in the areas of:

- Management of riparian areas by fencing
- Installing moisture monitoring equipment leading to increased production and more efficient water use
- Improved cropping practices with Controlled Traffic Farming (CTF) with benefits of reduced erosion, and fuel costs, and greater water use efficiency of plants.

Almost half of the respondents reported knowledge growth in the areas of:

- Property management
- Vegetation management
- Fertiliser and pesticide use
- Retention of groundcover and its response to grazing pressure.

Landowners spoke of a greater desire and ability to work together and influence one another.

Many also indicated they had seen positive environmental improvements on their properties, and were now more aware of environmental issues.



## What landholders say...

**"With neighbourhood catchments you've got communities actually working together..."**

*"Because we got the funding it probably happened a bit quicker..."*

**"We can all do our own little bit, but if we all work together and do it, it becomes more important to everybody..."**

*"The groups have been in place long enough now that I feel like there's a kind of generational change starting to happen."*

**"...It's always a challenge to get those people who possibly don't do as well at managing their country as others, to get them involved. And I think in getting communities across catchments involved I think you've got more chances of picking those up."**

# ACHIEVEMENTS

## Managing the land...

- Priority Neighbourhood Catchments (PNCs) were selected to help target activities over the years 2008 to 2011.
- Cultural heritage was incorporated into the selection of PNCs.
- The Grains Best Management Practice (BMP) program reached the pilot stage with four groups of landholders completing the pesticide application module and customised training. Program partners include Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F), AgForce, and sub regional groups.
- Through DPI&F, four CQ BEEF groups were formed to enable graziers to discover ways to improve their long-term profitability and sustainability.
- Technical support was provided to catchment and property planning activities, demonstrating the value and effectiveness of investment in science.
- FBA's Salinity Risk Assessment project was presented at the second International Salinity Forum in Adelaide.
- A land condition and ground cover assessment project provided land condition data dating back to 1988, as well as current ground cover recordings from more than 3000 locations across CQ.

## New weed strategy

A **Fitzroy Basin Weed Management Strategy** was developed to prioritise local weeds for control.

The 639 weed species present in the Fitzroy Basin were narrowed down to the most invasive. Then a triple bottom line impact assessment was applied to look at the social, economic and environmental impact of each weed and determine the most cost-effective approach.

The process was coordinated by the Capricorn Pest Management Group (CPMG) and the Central Highlands Natural Resource Management Group (CHNRMG), funded by the FBA.



## Improving waterways...

- Water quality staff oversaw monitoring of the largest flood since 1991.
- A fish way prioritisation report to direct funds to overcome barriers to fish migration was delivered that will be used to prioritise funding for the removal of fish barriers throughout the region.
- Healthy waterways media campaign raised awareness among landholders and general public of river health issues, including coverage on a state-wide television program.
- Riparian and wetland projects were finalised; with the area protected exceeding the amount that was contracted for the period June 2004 - June 2008.
- Continued success was achieved in increasing water use efficiency (WUE) in irrigated crops.
- Irrigation WUE was expanded to the Mackenzie River Big Bend area.

### WHAT A DIFFERENCE A FENCE MAKES

Land type fencing and extra watering points helped Jeff Edgar of Mountain Hut in Morinish to improve ground cover by around 20% in just over 15 months up to September 2007.

The project, funded by FBA and Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc (FRCC), also resulted in less run-off from the fenced paddocks into nearby Nine Mile Creek, reducing sediment by around 35%.

Jeff said "It's great to see the improved grass coverage helping to retain topsoil and nutrients and the dams filling so well after rain. You've got to keep that water and soil on the land and not washing down into the creeks."

Loss of topsoil affects water quality in the Fitzroy River, and eventually has an impact on the Great Barrier Reef. The results on Mountain Hut show how the benefits of improved land management extend beyond the fences of individual properties. Through similar projects with landholders, FBA is on target to cumulatively reduce sediment run-off in the region by 4.1 million tonnes over 10 years to 2014.



We value **Teamwork**: we share the kudos, the pain and the workload.



# Caring for our coasts...



Two wetland rehabilitation projects were completed in St Lawrence (pictured) and Corio.

- A study was completed into the impact of dredging on inshore reefs that will improve outcomes following dredging operations in future.
- The Livingstone Shire Shoreline Management Plan was published and endorsed by the local council.
- On-ground works to rehabilitate, re-vegetate and clean-up coastal ecosystems took place in collaboration with council and community groups.
- Two fish ways improved connectivity between marine and freshwater systems.
- A report card on the health of Port Curtis was made available to the public through the Port Curtis Integrated Monitoring Program (PCIMP).
- A fact sheet was produced about migratory shorebirds.
- The acid sulphate soils risk mapping project was completed and a fact sheet was produced to increase community awareness.
- DNA of Snubfin and Pacific Humpback dolphins was sampled to learn more about numbers of the species in the region. The surveys indicate there may be an isolated population of around 50 Snubfin dolphins at the mouth of the Fitzroy with a range extending to just above Yeppoon.

## Boost for Broadsound region

A wide-ranging study commissioned by FBA and conducted by CQU's Centre for Environmental Management- 'Landscape condition in the Broadsound Basin' will boost future management of resources in the region.

The study identified natural assets in the area and the risks they face. It found native vegetation remains across 59% of the Broadsound region and the area is home to many rare or endangered species of plants and animals. The area's wetlands support nationally and internationally significant colonies of waterbirds and migratory shorebirds. The area is also home to two nationally threatened bird species.

Improved knowledge and recommendations from the report will help direct efforts to encourage sustainable land use in the region, mainly grazing. FBA held a public meeting for stakeholders in the Broadsound region to discuss the report; it was attended by around 30 people.



## Beach crusaders save scrub

Through the 'Bringing back the beach scrub' project, FBA is helping improve the condition of beach scrub on the Capricorn Coast, which is an endangered ecological community.

FBA supports the Emu Park Community Bushcare Group to carry out activities on beach scrub at Fisherman's Beach including weed control, rubbish removal, fencing and re-vegetation.

The local council provided in-kind support to erect fencing and improve access to the beach.

The project is a joint project between three regional groups and the Environmental Protection Agency, with Australian Government funding.

# Protecting biodiversity...



- FBA worked with the then Calliope Shire Council to coordinate release of the Tingid Bug, a biological control agent for Cats' Claw Creeper weed in the Boyne Calliope region.
- More than 50 people attended a Rainforest discovery field day.
- Stewardship payments were made to almost 40 contracted landholders to manage grazing pressure to protect valuable patches of remnant vegetation and habitat for wildlife.
- A draft of a major report analysing the impact of various grazing practices on biodiversity was received.
- Oversaw projects aiding the recovery of threatened species and communities including:
  - Restoring Brigalow regrowth
  - Mapping endemic flora of the Marlborough Serpentine Ecosystems
  - Improving awareness of two endangered birds, the Yellow Chat and Crimson Finch
  - Supporting the breeding of the endangered Bridled Nailtail Wallaby (shown left)
  - Helping conserve the Fitzroy River Turtle in the Alligator Creek area.

We value **Innovation:** We are willing to invest in research and experimentation.



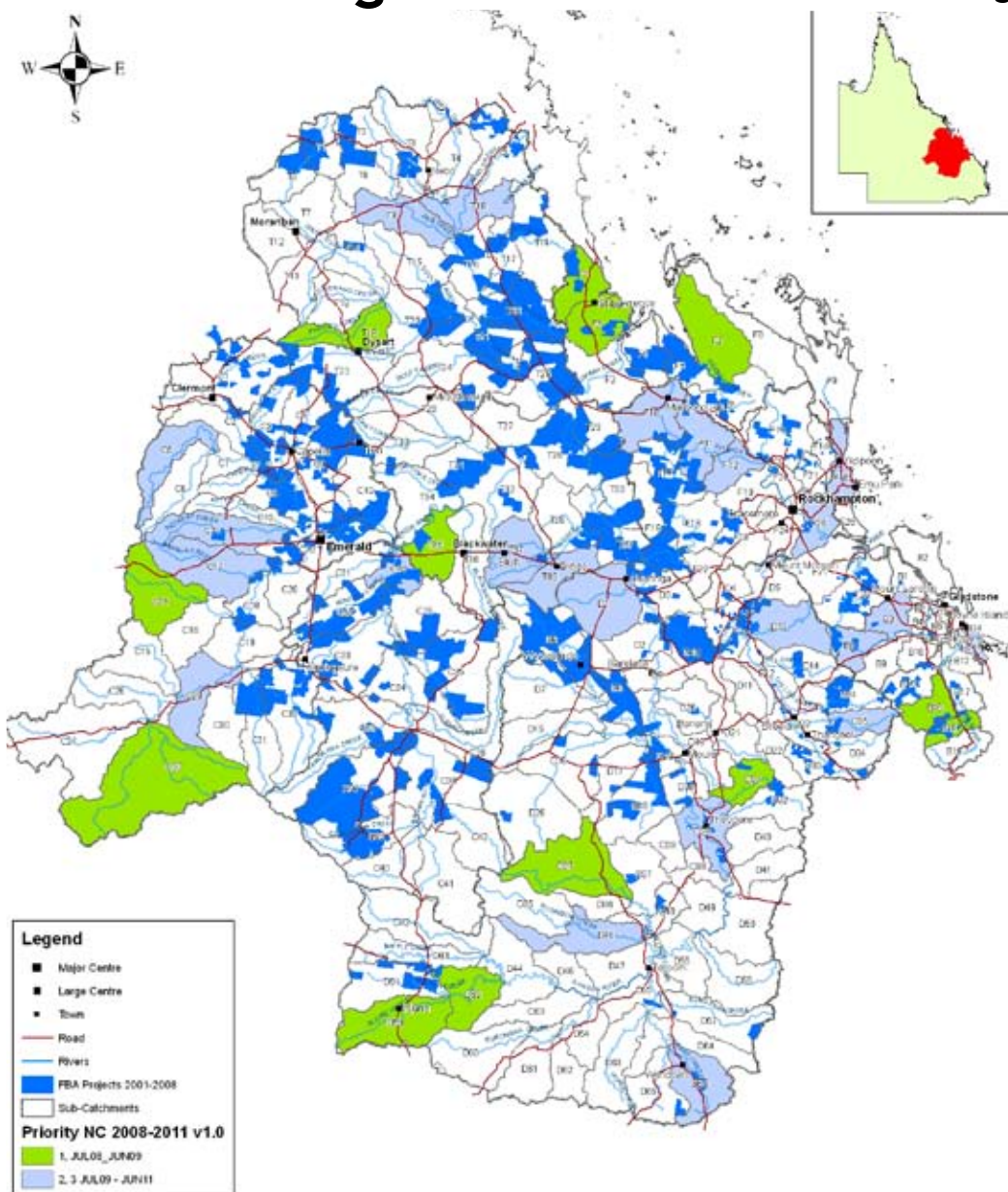
# What we've been up to...

**Getting projects happening:** We have achieved tangible on-ground benefits through activities to engage land managers and collaborative efforts to protect and restore natural resources.

**Evaluating our past work:** We took the opportunity to review a number of long running initiatives to illustrate the very strong results achieved and see what lessons could be learned.

**Understanding our region better:** We have ensured a better return on future investment by commissioning a number of studies and reports to improve our scientific understanding.

## Lots of on-ground action...and we've got some busy years ahead



Areas where projects have been undertaken since 2001 are shown in dark blue on the map above. The areas in green and light blue show the catchments FBA intends to work in over the coming years to achieve more great outcomes for local natural resources.

In 2007-08 FBA worked with rural families on 26 properties covering an area of more than 97,000 hectares. More than 2600 hectares of waterways and wetlands were enhanced, with 22km of riverbank area protected.

Landholders were supported to introduce more sustainable grazing and cropping land management across almost 12,700 hectares of farming land. Salinity and water use efficiency issues were addressed, encompassing 143 hectares.

Just over 100 hectares of essential ecosystems and habitat of native plants and animals were protected.

FBA has a strong record of successful on-ground outcomes. Since 2002, we have:

- Worked on 670 properties
- Covered an area of more than 3 million hectares, which is 19.7% of the FBA region
- Improved cropping and grazing management on almost 190,000 hectares of land
- Protected more than 1000 kilometres of river.

We value **Trust:** We respect the competence of those that work with us.