



ANNUAL REPORT 2008-09



fba

FITZROY BASIN ASSOCIATION

This is a place where....

Natural beauty is protected

Rodds Bay, Calliope

We live in a beautiful, diverse and valuable region. Central Queensland boasts rich soils, pockets of virgin scrub, a wealth of mineral deposits, flowing rivers and the Great Barrier Reef on our doorstep.

Our landscape offers many opportunities: for mining, tourism, agriculture and residential living. But while we all benefit from development, we also recognise our connection with nature and understand our natural world is an asset in its own right.

It is vital that we appreciate our environment, understand its limits, and use resources sustainably to ensure we all enjoy the benefits for years to come. Fitzroy Basin Association Incorporated (FBA) is a local group working to achieve this balance by engaging with all levels of the community to support improved natural resource management.

Plant and animal life

One of our region's greatest natural assets is our richness of plant and animal life. FBA has worked hard over the past year to encourage 10 new properties to enter into Biodiversity Stewardships to protect native plants and animals. These new partnerships cover more than 5,500 ha of land, comprising 'Endangered' or 'Of Concern' ecosystems. They bring the number of biodiversity stewardships that FBA supports to 48, across a total area of more than 75,000 ha.

During 2008-09 FBA developed a new calculation method to more closely match the incentives offered to landholders against the biodiversity values being protected. This new calculation method will apply to new agreements only.

Additional activities to enhance biodiversity include:

- Supporting sub-regional groups to include conservation of native plants and animals in property management activities with landholders on more than 65 on-ground projects.
- Three projects to enhance knowledge and protection of migratory shorebirds, including a survey of six previously undiscovered roosts in the Broad Sound area.

- A survey of the population and habitat of two rare plants, the Byfield Matchstick (*Comesperma oblongatum*) and Headland Commersonia (*Commersonia perkinsiana*).
- A captive breeding program for Bridled Nailtail Wallabies that produced 11 joeys in early 2009, which will provide genetically sound stock of this endangered species for wild release, hopefully in 2010.
- Distributing a report to landholders in the Isaac catchment to help guide the management of habitat critical to the survival of the Crimson Finch.

Coastal and marine

We have supported picturesque and fragile coastal ecosystems in the past year through on-ground work, improving knowledge gaps and empowering passionate grassroots community groups.

Engaging with budding community groups working in coastal areas enabled FBA to support volunteers to achieve more and work together, which also provided a platform for several of these groups to secure funding for on-ground projects under the Australian Government's Caring for our Country open grants.

Fact sheets were developed and distributed about wetland protection and acid sulphate soils; the FBA website was updated to include comprehensive coastal information; and a number of workshops, field days and media opportunities were organised.

On-ground activities included:

- Fencing of 1,510 ha of mangroves and salt marshes to allow better grazing management.
- Removal of two high priority fish barriers on Amity and Bridge Creeks, through the installation of fish ways.
- Supporting local groups to undertake weed control in areas of endangered beach scrub.
- Assisting community volunteers to monitor reef health, reef damage and presence of marine species to provide baseline knowledge for future reef protection work.

FBA empowers those who manage the land to make change happen.

Our incentive schemes support landholders to undertake property improvements and adopt new management techniques. Most people we work with are already motivated to improve their business and just need a bit of financial help to get projects up and running.

FBA worked with landholders on 96 projects in the 2008-09 year to deliver improved land management across 64, 828 ha.

Of these projects:

- 64 were aimed at improving grazing management.
- An additional 32 projects were established under a new program that specifically rewards landholders for maintaining and increasing ground cover.

Activities funded include the construction of fences and installation of watering systems to control grazing on areas with reduced cover, as greater control over grazing reduces the incidence of patch grazing, which leads to areas bare of ground cover for at least part of the year.

Increased ground cover also reduces loss of chemicals like Tebuthiuron on those properties where it may have been used to control regrowth.




Landholders in thirteen priority neighbourhood catchments and three areas with persistent low groundcover were engaged to undertake land condition improvements resulting in water quality improvements.

In addition, FBA is building capacity in the grains industry by helping growers assess their enterprises and adopt best practice under the Grains BMP initiative.

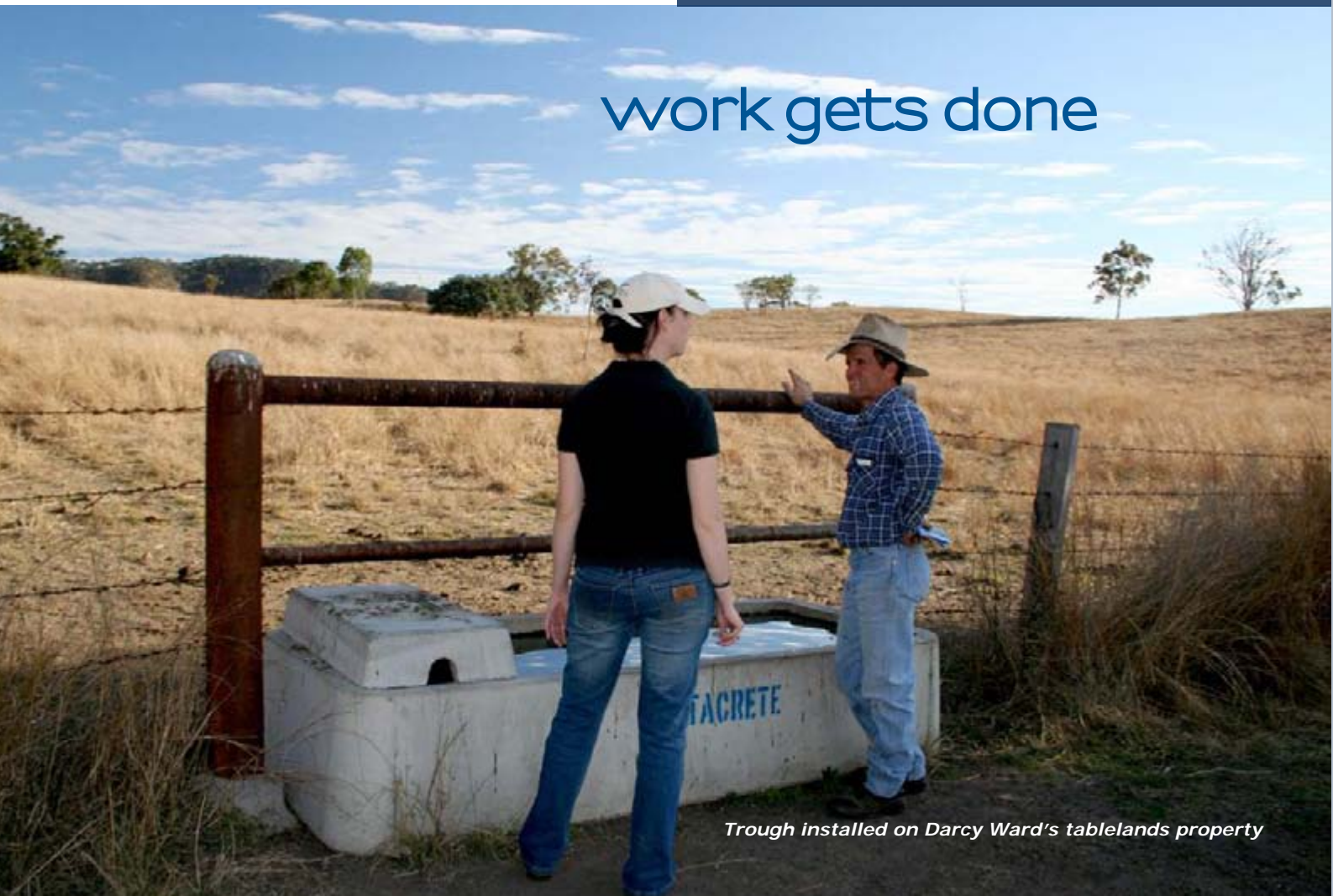
We are also helping beef businesses become more economically and environmentally sustainable through the CQ BEEF project.

Collectively, these on-ground works will significantly reduce erosion and run-off, protecting the iconic Great Barrier Reef from sediments and associated nutrients and chemicals.



-  Fitzroy Basin and coastal catchments
-  FBA Neighbourhood Catchment projects 2008-09
-  FBA Neighbourhood Catchment projects 2001-08

work gets done



Trough installed on Darcy Ward's tablelands property

Working in partnership with the community has always been the cornerstone of FBA's success.

We recognise that collectively, we can all do more and learn more. This philosophy is the key to our flagship Neighbourhood Catchments approach, where groups of landholders in a common catchment work together to improve land management.

Other excellent examples of collaboration in the past year include:

- Supporting six groups of grain growers to self-assess and receive training under the Grains BMP program, a joint initiative of FBA, Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries and AgForce. The program has resulted in more than 30 applications for on-ground projects to improve farming practices submitted to FBA.
- Working with four new CQ BEEF groups in Billaboo, Rolleston, Broadsound and Middlemount. These groups of graziers work together to analyse and improve the economic and environmental sustainability of their beef businesses. There are now eight groups comprising 67 businesses who collectively manage grazing on around 400,000 ha.
- Working with Traditional Owner groups to ensure on-ground works are aligned with requirements of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Protection Act and also providing opportunities for Traditional Owners to develop improved relationships with landholders.

We also rely on the experience and local connections of a strong network of five sub-regional groups spread across the basin.

Sub regions engage communities in priority catchments to help landholders develop and execute on-ground property improvements, to ensure FBA gets the greatest 'bang for its buck' in the delivery of incentives.

In addition, sub regions provide a critical information sharing and capacity-building role. Some key achievements are listed right.

Sub region achievements include:

- **Boyne Calliope Sub Region supported 35 landholders to protect more than 2,200 ha of native coastal rainforest.**
- **Boyne Calliope Sub Region ran ten well-attended field days and workshops to improve skills in weed control, grazing land management, soil health, GPS and computerised mapping.**
- **In partnership with Growcom, Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc developed projects to improve nutrient and water-use efficiency across 573 ha.**
- **More than 450 people attended community events hosted by Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments to promote water quality, grazing land management and wetland care.**
- **Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association Inc celebrated 10 years of operation.**
- **Events including a Bird Watching Day, Innovations forum, Rural Information Day, and Controlled Traffic Farming Expo organised by Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association Inc attracted large numbers of landholders to improve their knowledge and skills.**
- **Three Rivers sub region supported the Clarke Creek community to develop a community plan to help them address barriers to growth and lobby for improved government support.**
- **Central Highlands Regional Resource Use Cooperative ran its second NRM Expo exposing more than 700 high school students from across the Central Highlands to environmental issues.**

We work together



'Birrong', near Springsure

Ideas take flight



Brolgas on 'Greenlake'

Challenges often inspire us to find new ways of solving problems.

This year, the Fitzroy Basin was faced with a dilemma resulting from heavy flooding in early 2008. Overflowing rivers flooded mine pits in the Emerald region. The discharge of water from mines raised salinity levels in local waterways, causing health and environmental concerns.

FBA has applied considerable resources to working with the mining industry and government agencies to find ways to achieve a better balance between the competing water use needs of community, agriculture and industry. Strategies to address the issue have included:

- A new project to establish a healthy waterways monitoring and reporting partnership for the Fitzroy Basin that includes all stakeholders including local and state governments, mining and industrial sectors;
- The development and release of a Fitzroy Basin Water Quality Improvement Report;
- Membership of the State Government's Fitzroy water quality advisory group; and
- The creation of a new Healthy Waterways Manager position to support partnership development across the Fitzroy.

Other innovative developments over the past year include:

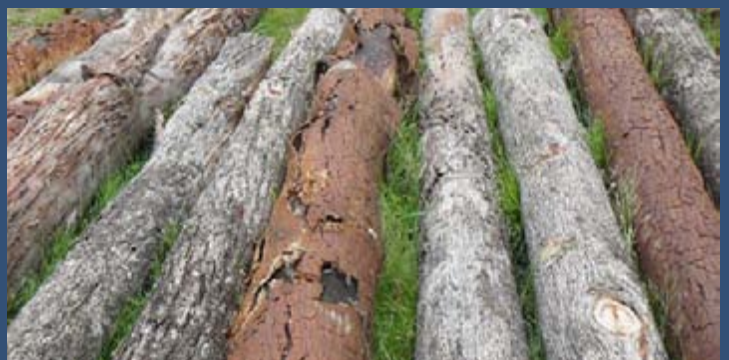
- FBA Healthy Soils Project, in collaboration with Northern Gulf Natural Resource Management Group, to help landholders learn about, design, and evaluate innovative approaches to managing and improving soil biological health. More than ten demonstration sites, and one replicated trial site, have been established and are being monitored. A workshop with guest speaker Dr Elaine Ingram from the United States attracted 160 attendees over two days. A separate field day attracted 63 interested landholders. FBA considers this a critical element in the future for landholders across our region as they deal with soil carbon loss and other soil health issues causing pasture rundown and decreasing returns from cropping enterprises.
- A scoping study was initiated to provide advice on the establishment of a base station network to accelerate adoption of controlled traffic farming technology across CQ.
- FBA trialled the use of digital technology to engage the community by hosting six webinars on topics including shorebirds, media skills, grazing management, controlled traffic farming, and pesticides.

Making farm forestry more sustainable

Landholders are increasingly looking for new ways to enhance their viability and farm forestry is an attractive option.

The Sustainable Farm Forestry Practices project successfully trialled a number of incentives for landholders to sustainably manage their forestry resources. The Central Queensland Forestry Association engaged a group of neighbouring landholders in the Herbert Creek catchment to establish a range of native forestry options including plantations and management of standing timber resources.

As well as improving forest practices over 17,000 ha of native forest, a beneficial spin-off of this project has been increased interest in Biodiversity Stewardships, with at least two landholders signing up for five-year voluntary conservation agreements.



New ground cover management tools

A new computerised tool was developed that captures historical trends in ground cover based on remote sensing technology.

The tool, and training in its use, was made available to landholders to increase their ability to understand cover at paddock, property, and catchment scales, allowing them to more confidently manage for improved ground cover.

A ground cover field book was developed to complement this computerised tool and enable landholders to visually assess ground cover in the paddock.

great minds reflect

A message from the CEO, Suzie Christensen:

The 2008-09 year has been a difficult period for regional natural resource management groups. New funding arrangements under the Australian Government's Caring for our Country required groups to contest funding that had previously been guaranteed. A new approach that addressed national, rather than local, priorities proved somewhat difficult to navigate, and the application process was a drain on staff time.

Despite these hurdles FBA secured base level funding of more than \$4.6 million over two years, plus \$250,000 core funding from the Queensland Government. In addition, we received just over \$10 million under Reef Rescue to develop on-ground projects with landholders in collaboration with industry partners. Together with Greening Australia and other partners, FBA will also manage a project worth \$600,000 to protect Ramsar listed wetlands in the Shoalwater and Corio Bay areas. Unlike many regional groups, FBA has also been fortunate to retain all staff during this past year – a fantastic achievement and testament to our careful planning.

FBA's ability to secure government support is in large part due to our continued investment in science and monitoring, enabling us to show evidence of the positive impact our work with local landholders is having on the landscape and reducing run-off to the reef.

The machination of funding cycles has not deterred us from the pressing need to continue to support landholders to adopt best practice. This year we succeeded in contracting 96 landholder projects across 64, 828 ha.

The impact of poor water quality was brought sharply into focus for the Fitzroy Basin community this year after mine pit discharges raised salt levels in local water supplies. FBA has been busy working with mines and government to ensure public concern transformed into a tangible outcome to improve water quality. The Queensland Government has now provided FBA with \$500,000 to help assess environmental values and establish a new healthy waterways monitoring partnership.

Again this year FBA has proven our worth as a conduit for change, an advocate of improved knowledge, and a practical, results-driven organisation.

A message from the Chair, Ted Scott:

This financial year has seen the continued development of an effective and streamlined board. Alongside the existing Finance, Audit and Risk and Natural Resource Management committees, a Business Development Committee was established. The Business Development Committee has been exploring alternative revenue sources for FBA. As a result of these deliberations it has overseen the establishment of a new arm of FBA, called Source Fitzroy Limited.

Source is providing a vehicle for FBA to explore opportunities including carbon off-set brokering, NRM technical consulting and commercial partnerships, with any funds raised to be directed back into on-ground projects. This is one of the first steps towards our long-term goal of greater financial independence.

Our continued commitment to grassroots engagement saw Board members meet with around 90 community members in Calliope. We heard first-hand people's concerns for the region, particularly their fears about potential constraints being imposed by government legislation. It was an excellent reminder of the value of FBA hearing directly from landholders about their NRM concerns. We are planning to hold more board meetings in the sub-catchment regions, with a December meeting planned for Baralaba.

A further initiative from the Board resulted in the development of a leadership program, which enabled 17 people from diverse backgrounds to improve their capacity to take on leadership positions.

Our vision of empowered communities for a sustainable CQ cannot be achieved without leaders in the community with the capacity to motivate and inspire others to participate and make a difference. Because of the success of this program, the Board at its most recent meeting endorsed a recommendation that this program should be an ongoing commitment from FBA.

For more information about FBA:

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