



Annual Report 2009-10

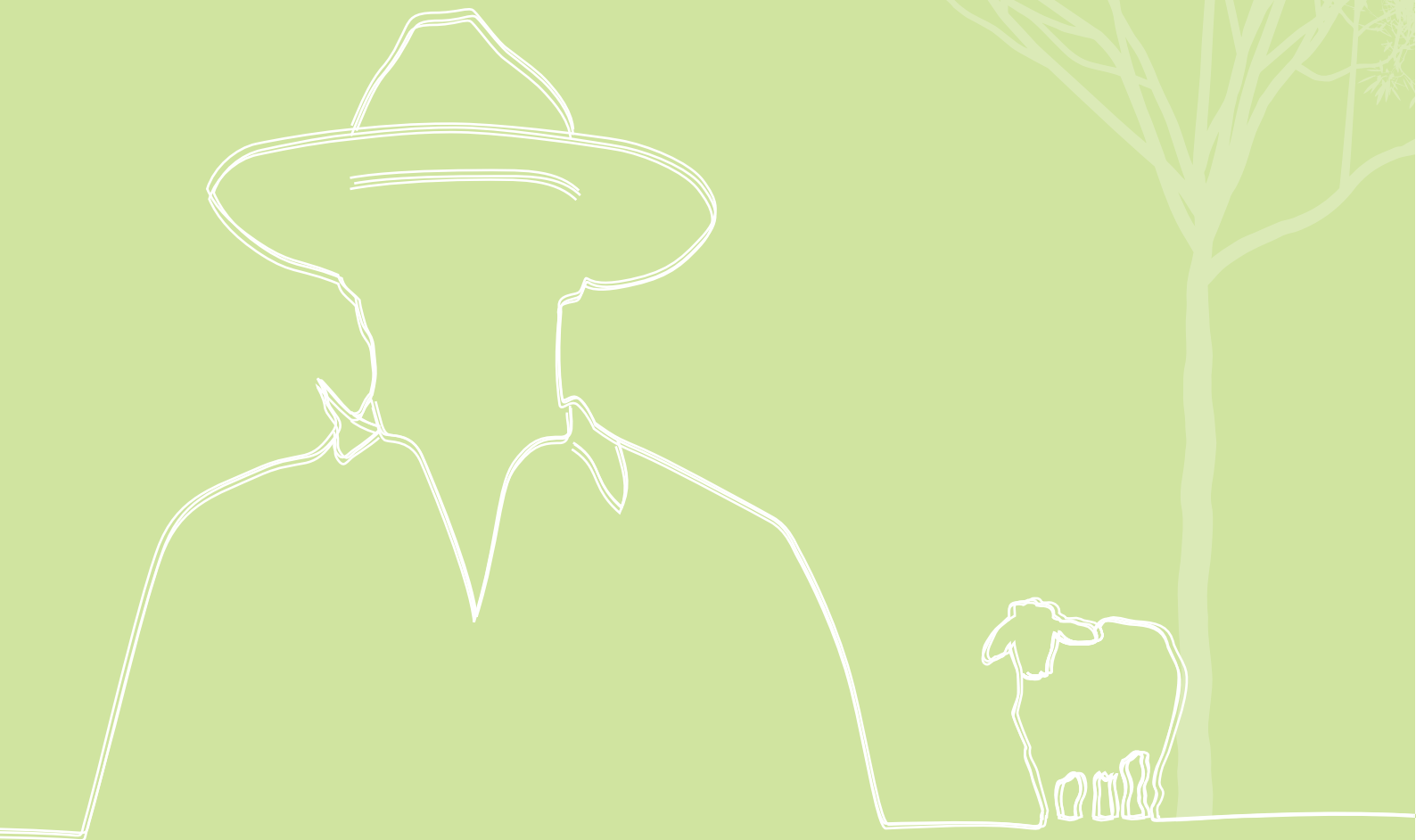
empowered communities
for a sustainable CQ

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Overview

Our region

We work across an area more than 156,000 km² in size extending from Nebo in the north to Injune in the south, and west to the Drummond Range. As well as the catchments of the Fitzroy River, we cover adjacent coastal waterways and the Boyne and Calliope Rivers. The basin includes the largest river system running to the east coast of Australia, draining to the iconic Great Barrier Reef.

We have a plan

FBA coordinates work to achieve natural resource management targets set out in the regional plan, the Central Queensland Strategy for Sustainability (CQSS), which was developed and endorsed by the wider community.

Natural resource management

Natural resource management (NRM) is about finding the balance between protecting the environment and land use needs of the community, agriculture and industry. Primarily FBA strives to: protect natural assets like habitats and ecosystems, wetlands, plants and animals; improve land condition and land management practices; and ensure healthy waterways.

NRM in action

We make NRM happen by working with five sub-regional groups to provide information, resources and technical assistance to landholders, local government, community groups, and the wider public. We support better and more efficient farming and grazing through incentives that reward landholders for maintaining and increasing ground cover where it will result in land condition and water quality improvements.

Our success so far

We've been working towards a more sustainable CQ for more than 10 years, and we are making an impact. For example, modelling has shown our on-ground projects are reducing the amount of contaminants entering local waterways by around 75,000 tonnes per year, which means we're on target to cumulatively reduce sediment and nutrients being delivered to waterways by 4.1 million tonnes by 2014.

Our partners

Sub-regions

FBA devolves funding to a network of five sub-regional groups to ensure land managers can access technical support and advice in their local area. Sub-region staff also help in the development of on-ground projects. Our sub-regions are:

- Three Rivers (Isaac, Connors, and Mackenzie River catchments)
- CHRRUP - Central Highlands Regional Resources Use Planning Cooperative
- BCSR - Boyne Calliope Sub Region
- FRCC - Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments
- DCCA - Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association

Australian Government

Through Caring for our Country, including the Reef Rescue component, the Australian Government is funding FBA to deliver a range of on-ground outcomes and water quality improvements. FBA also benefits from various one-off grants from the Australian Government.

Queensland Government

Through Q2 Coasts and Country the Queensland Government is supporting FBA to improve community involvement in water quality issues, establish a monitoring program, and protect natural assets.

Local Government

We collaborate with regional councils to provide feedback on planning, deliver projects, and raise community awareness.

Land managers

Land managers that work with us contribute at least 50% of the value of the project being developed on their property, and in many cases they contribute much more in both cash and in-kind.

The community

Without dedicated volunteer-driven organisations, many natural resource management projects with a wider benefit wouldn't happen – that is why we support grassroots community groups.



Message from the Chair

Ted Scott,
Chairman of the Board

The 2009-10 financial year has seen FBA settle into new funding and operational arrangements, with long-term contracts in place that provide greater financial stability, as well as several pilot programs being brought into full implementation. Staff are busy delivering on-ground projects, with the board continuing to provide strategic direction as our region faces a number of emerging land use issues.

During the year the Board fostered its understanding of grassroots issues by travelling and talking with people in the region. Baralaba hosted the Board for its last meeting of 2009, after which members of the Landcare Group accompanied members on a tour of the Hymenachne eradication project in the Dawson Anabranch.

The Deputy Chair and CEO toured the region in October 2009; the tour confirmed rising concern about coal seam gas expansion. FBA is attuned to this concern and the Board heard the latest from the Queensland Government on management and environmental protection issues faced by the state with respect to expansion of the gas industry into our region at our annual planning session in February.

The Board was also determined that FBA should provide input into the new policy for protection of strategic cropping land - the CEO sat on a state-wide committee providing input into the Government's deliberations on the matter. We are pleased the new policy framework seems to provide greater security for valuable agricultural land.

The Board's concern for protection of our regional assets has also prompted our scaling up submissions to Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) referrals and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process for development applications. As well as making written submission, we have met with many companies during the year in the course of EIS development. An increasing number of these are exploiting gas reserves.

Source Fitzroy Limited continues to make gains. One major project has seen FBA's commercial arm oversee activities to mitigate the environmental impact of construction work on the Coal Connect project, which is helping deliver a major upgrade to Queensland Rail's rail system. Source Fitzroy allows FBA to operate in the commercial world to increase our capacity to implement our regional plan beyond that afforded by funding from government programs.

More recently FBA engaged an external consultant to conduct a Performance Excellence Review. It's an opportunity to reflect and the outcomes can be used by the Board and management to make improvements. The review confirmed that FBA has improved its performance across a number of key business areas in the past four years.

Continuous improvement is just one facet in our ongoing efforts to make central Queensland a more sustainable community. To this end, FBA continues to support resource condition improvement, advocate for sustainable development and provide leadership on natural resource management issues.

Message from the CEO

This annual report provides a snapshot of the activities of the Board, the projects and achievements of our partners and staff, and touches on some of the major issues facing the Basin. While many other regional groups in Australia have faced funding cuts and program reductions, FBA has increased our budget and expenditure with an income of \$9.9m and expenditure including some reserves of \$10.1m. Importantly, a ratio of 88% towards delivery continues to meet stakeholder expectations of low administrative costs.

A major component of that funding has come as a result of the Australian and Queensland Government's strengthened commitment to the Great Barrier Reef. More than \$19 million in the Fitzroy Basin region alone over the next two years will support activities to improve water quality to help preserve the reef for future generations. Landholders are encouraged to get involved in these opportunities to continue demonstrating how successful a voluntary approach to industry-led best management practice can be.

Training opportunities, projects and grants for activities that offer a win-win, continue to be offered to foster land management practices that improve productivity, as well as save money and the environment. We make it easy for people to get help in their own community by partnering with a strong network of five sub-regional groups.

FBA continues to do its best to represent the region's interests on bigger picture issues, and we have been working hard on that front. For instance in 2009-10 FBA:

- Advocated greater consideration of rural communities surrounding issues including prime agricultural land, involvement in carbon trading schemes, mining and gas exploration, and the impact of regulation.
- Invested in research to improve sustainable land management, e.g., a bare ground index study we funded has helped us target new grants to help landholders restore land condition in degraded paddocks.
- Explored the use of satellite technology to provide a community GPS network to improve

Suzie Christensen,
Chief Executive Officer



adoption of precision agriculture across the basin.

- Established an integrated water quality monitoring partnership. The Fitzroy Partnership for River Health has met on two occasions - drawing together mining and agriculture, local and state government - and work is progressing towards a collaborative regional approach to monitoring and reporting.
- Been involved in the governance component of the Reef Plan initiative.
- Met with state and local governments to discuss and provide input into planning initiatives.
- In a difficult funding environment, continued to invest in coastal, marine and biodiversity projects, and involve traditional owners in cultural heritage assessments of on-ground projects.

Through our peak Queensland body, the Regional Groups Collective, and the national NRM roundtable, FBA continues to advocate for a long-term commitment to regional community-based natural resource management and the institutions and resources required. The success of Reef Rescue is testament to why the approach should be continued. However, events such as the establishment of the Fitzroy Partnership, influence in the strategic cropping land debate, and the early commercial success of Source Fitzroy Limited remind us we must remain relevant to our region and its people as a priority, and increase our resilience to the ups and downs of funding programs.

I could not close my message without a huge thank you to the wonderful, dedicated and altruistic staff and Board that are the FBA family. And lastly, pay tribute and thanks to retiring chair Ted Scott whose leadership has taken us forward tremendously over the last three years. It has been a great honour to work with you Ted.

History of FBA Snapshot



1989-1997

1989-1997

- Landcare movement begins
- National Soil Conservation Program
- Fitzroy Basin Symposium held to discuss water quality
- 'Cascading Catchments' research project examines catchment-scale land management
- Fitzroy Catchment Coordinating Group established (FCCG)

1998-2001

- FCCG changes name to Fitzroy Basin Association Incorporated
- First version of regional plan (CQSS) launched
- Sub-regional groups start to form

2002-2005

- Catchment projects and monitoring workshops held across basin
- GIS mapping introduced to project development
- Neighbourhood Catchments boundaries defined
- Regional plan accredited by government, guiding funding in the region
- FBA Satellite Imagery project modernises GIS data



2006-2008

- Grains BMP initiative begins
- FBA achieves 700 projects delivered across region
- Neighbourhood Catchments Muster held
- Cultural heritage integrated into projects
- FBA constitution renewed to formalise more professional board structure



2008-2010

- FBA Innovation Fund offers grants for new ideas
- Fitzroy Partnership for River Health established
- New FBA incentive program - Voluntary Land Management Agreements
- Work begins on developing a grazing BMP

The growth of FBA throughout our history as an organisation has been supported significantly by investment through various Australian and Queensland Government funding programmes.

How do you measure success?

4

Number of new groups that joined our innovative program helping graziers improve their bottom line while becoming more environmentally friendly. Through the CQ Better Environmental and Economic Futures (BEEF) project groups of graziers work through common business challenges, and then develop ideas for training opportunities and events. There's now a network of eight groups, comprising 68 businesses that collectively graze an area of 491 542

ha. Over 20 group activities like field days were held involving more than 370 producers. FBA works to deliver the program in partnership with the Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI).

It was great to learn so much about working with others and dealing with some issues on the farm in a group of like-minded women, often who are dealing with the same issues."

Sally Kirk, participant at a Fitzroy Farming Women Workshop

14

Number of rural women that shared stories, built new networks and gained knowledge of key natural resource management concepts at a Fitzroy Farming Women workshop held in Emerald. FBA also held the workshop in Rockhampton and in Injune, made possible with a grant from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Australia's Farming Future.

37

Number of enterprises that scrutinised and improved their grain growing operation. In a workshop setting, the growers self-assessed their practices against industry standards and identified areas for improvement, through FBA's highly successful Grains Best Management

Practice (BMP) program. As a result, more than 250 farm plans were completed and FBA provided grants for a number of on-ground projects to help growers modify their equipment or practices. Grains BMP is a joint effort between FBA, AgForce and DEEDI.

"I would strongly recommend Grains BMP to other growers. It showcases better farming practices, which should lead to better crops, better environmental outcomes, improved sustainability and better profits."

Ben Lawrie, 'Evergreen' at Westwood

100

Number of graziers that partnered with us to deliver water quality improvements through projects funded under the Australian Government's Reef Rescue. Projects included fencing to land type and

riparian and wetland protection. Improved nutrient and ground cover management practices were adopted across almost 72,000 ha of grazing lands. In addition, training was given to more than 100 graziers to increase their knowledge of sustainable land management and their skills with essential property planning technologies including GPS and computerised mapping software.

500

Number of hectares of endangered beach scrub to be protected from the impacts of weeds of national significance like lantana and rubber vine. FBA undertook field work to identify and accurately map the region's remaining areas of notophyll/microphyll vine forest on coastal dunes, also known as beach scrub. We're now working to help protect and better manage these patches in collaboration with local councils and grassroots community groups.

2009-10 Year in Review

FBA is interested in seeing an outcome that doesn't further compromise environmental conditions while allowing mines to operate viably. That's what sustainable development is all about – being able to use economic resources without compromising the environment.

Suzie Christensen, CEO

FBA named as a member of the Fitzroy Water Quality Advisory Group to provide community input into water quality issues in the Fitzroy Basin. The group replaced the Technical Working Group established in response to flooding and subsequent mine discharge in 2008.

Planning for the future of farm businesses became easier for attendees at a succession planning workshop successfully run by the CHRRUP sub-region in Emerald.

More than 35 sites were surveyed throughout the Ramsar listed Shoalwater and Corio Bay wetland area to identify aquatic invasive species. The knowledge gained will help improve the wetlands' future management.

Land managers in the Isaac, Connors and Mackenzie River catchments are given a place to call-in for advice with the opening of a Three Rivers sub-region office in Middlemount.

July 2009

September 2009

December 2009

A group of 17 people developed skills needed to lead their communities via the inaugural FBA Emerging Leaders workshop.

A complete picture of water quality information from across the region was made available in FBA's Water Quality Improvement Report.

Grains growers across the Dawson, Central Highlands and Three Rivers regions participated in self-assessment workshops in the second round of the Grains Best Management Practice (BMP) project.

A large-scale chemigation and fertigation system at James Skuthorp's 'Pinearama' farm wins the horticulture award at the FRCC sub-region's Best Projects awards. Two prizes for innovative grazing projects were also awarded.

We feel this has been a step in the right direction in looking after our land and water for future generations, as well as incorporating more cost-effective farming practices.

James Skuthorp, winner of FRCC Best Project award

view Timeline



Wetlands were showcased at two events supported by FBA in Rockhampton and Emu Park. More than 150 community members attended the Emu Park event in celebration of World Wetlands Day.

Around 40 landholders discover the finer points of vegetation management at an information day at Mt Larcom organised by FBA's Boyne Calliope Sub Region.

Grazing land managers are given the chance to assess their carrying capacity and pasture budgets at workshops offered by sub-regions to complement a new FBA incentive scheme aimed at restoring the condition of degraded paddocks.

Water quality data collected by landholders over four consecutive wet seasons was compiled into a report released by FBA - indicating a general reduction in sediments entering waterways.

Almost 900 Year 6 and 7 students from across the Central Highlands descend on the Emerald Showgrounds to learn about environmental management as part of the CHRRUP NRM Expo.

In response to strong local interest in Natural Sequence Farming, FBA releases a guide to the legislation relevant to the implementation of NSF principles.

We have seen a broad reduction in sediment and nutrient parameters over the last three years. Exceptions to this have been isolated areas of intense rainfall, and catchments where there are mainly clay soils contributing to sediment in run-off.
*FBA Healthy Waterways Officer
Luke Ukkola*

June 2010

March 2010

Workshops were run across the basin in partnership with the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management to collect community feedback on the value of local waterways to feed into the setting of Environmental Values and Water Quality Objectives.

A workshop is held near Emerald to improve knowledge of native grasslands and determine how to protect them. FBA aims to regenerate, or reduce threats to the area's native grasslands - which have been reduced to less than half of their original extent.

FBA relocates its Rockhampton office to the site of the former Rockhampton Post Office, which was built in 1892 and is listed on the Queensland Heritage Register.

More than 100 growers attend demonstrations of innovative WeedSeeker spray equipment at five on-farm grower meetings - development and trials of the technology are funded by FBA.



How do we help graziers?

In the 2009-10 year, about one hundred graziers partnered FBA in Reef Rescue funded projects to deliver water quality improvements. FBA works with land managers through our flagship Neighbourhood Catchments approach. The Neighbourhood Catchments approach involves working with landholders in a common catchment that has been identified as a priority area where we can achieve cost-effective changes in land condition at both the paddock and landscape scale. We support landholder-driven projects that improve land condition and ground cover, and therefore reduce the amount of sediments and nutrients reaching waterways and the reef.

Such projects have included:

- Purchasing mapping tools and accessing training and specialist advice to develop a whole-of-property management plan.
- Fencing paddocks to land type, thereby enabling better management control of stock to avoid overgrazing of preferential land types and reduce erosion.
- Installing fences or off-stream watering points to control stock access to riverbanks and wetland areas, to help reduce erosion caused by trampling and cattle pads.
- Improving control of stock access to sensitive coastal vegetation or wetlands through the installation of fencing.

What the heck is a VLMA?

Last year saw FBA develop a new incentive grant to reward improved resource condition, called a Voluntary Land Management Agreement (VLMA). VLMAs are developed in priority areas to restore paddocks in poor land condition. Under a VLMA, landholders undertake agreed works and training to recover ground cover in described areas over a five year period. Payments are made on signing the agreement and each year dependent on reaching ground cover and biomass targets.

Paddock condition is identified by field officers, supported by tools including a bare ground index and VegMachine. VegMachine is a spatial extension product designed to identify average ground cover levels across a wide range of soil and vegetation types, and to determine trends in condition at the paddock scale. With the increasing importance of VLMAs to achieve improved ground cover, all our field staff are now trained in the use of VegMachine.



Getting better all the time

Through Reef Rescue funding, FBA works with a number of industry partners across central Queensland to support programs that help land managers operate at their best. Best management practice (BMP) systems set standards that support landholders to identify areas for improvement and work towards building a more sustainable business. The following programs are supported by FBA.

Grains BMP

A voluntary, industry led process for broad acre grain growers developed with Agforce and DEEDI. Growers complete up to five modules through a web-based self-assessment process that helps them identify the steps they can take to incorporate best management practices into their enterprise. Growers are also able to apply for incentive grants through FBA to help them adopt improved practices more quickly, such as by modifying or purchasing equipment, or accessing expert advice. More than 100 businesses have completed the program since it began in 2008.

Cotton BMP

Cotton Australia Developed Cotton BMP, which has recently been upgraded and is now known as myBMP. FBA funded trials of a new online system, which is delivered to growers in consultation with an accredited delivery agent. myBMP allows growers to assess their current practices against industry standards, develop action plans, and in some cases access grants for projects including: installation of irrigation scheduling equipment and moisture probes; soil testing; spray management consultants to improve pesticide application; modified and alternative irrigation application; and works to manage storm and tail water.

Growcom FMS

Growcom developed a water quality module for its Farm Management System (FMS), a property management system owned and developed by Growcom and the Queensland Farmers' Federation. FBA makes grants available to horticulturalists that have completed the water quality module of the FMS and identified eligible project activities in their action plan. Eligible activities include: chemigation and fertigation works; water use efficiency; and improved spray application equipment.

Grazing BMP

FBA has been able to garner support from AgForce and Queensland Government agencies to design a best management practice system for grazing. The grazing BMP is under development and will include a strong focus on soil management, drawing on knowledge gained through a variety of FBA-funded initiatives to improve local understanding of soil fertility and management. This will feed into a tool incorporating continuous improvement to help landholders understand their systems and how to improve the condition of their resources.

Many land managers within the Fitzroy Basin run mixed enterprises. With this in mind, the Grains BMP and myBMP online systems were developed to complement each other. Grazing BMP will also be modelled on the same system. This will ensure these best management systems are highly compatible, to reduce duplication for landholders.





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