



Riparian fencing

Long-term projects show improved conditions

Grazing is in Chris Hensley's blood. He grew up on a grazing property and has been a grazier for over 40 years. In that time, he has made significant improvements to his enterprise, improving its sustainability and profitability.

In 1997, Chris and his wife Nina took over Peak Vale. They have since expanded their enterprise to run over three properties in the Drummond Range, south-west of Clermont: Annmore, Peak Vale and Theresa Hut.

The problems and early remedies

When the Hensleys took over Peak Vale, cattle watered from the creeks so the creek banks were overgrazed. To improve pasture condition, they started fencing creeks and building smaller paddocks. This allowed stock to rotate and paddocks to rest. It also prevented cattle from accessing streams and improved water quality.

Since starting their enterprise in 1997, the Hensleys have progressively developed each of their properties to rotate cattle, rest paddocks and fence creeks. However, it wasn't until about 2006 that they first heard about funding to improve grazing operations while protecting creeks and reducing sediment reaching the reef. "The funding was greatly appreciated and it encouraged us to keep going," Chris admits.

Funding helps fencing continue

Since 2011, the Hensleys have worked closely with Central Highlands Regional Resource Use Planning Cooperative (CHRRUP) to complete two projects, with another in progress. The projects were supported by Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. (FBA) through funding from the Australian Government's Reef Programme (previously known as Reef Rescue) and have resulted in almost 23 km of fencing and one water point, and have protected 19 km of creek.

Overall, the Hensleys have now completed 52 km of riparian fencing across the properties that make up their enterprise. Most of this work was done with just two people: Chris and an off-sider.



April 2014 - visible wheel ruts and low groundcover.



June 2015 - significant increase in groundcover.

What a difference a year makes. With new riparian fencing in place and a single wet season, groundcover has increased considerably between April 2014 and June 2015. Paddocks and creek banks have stabilised, thus reducing run-off and improving water quality.



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Now after nearly 20 years on Peak Vale, Theresa Creek, which runs through the middle of the property, is fenced on both sides for most of its length. On Theresa Hut, the Hensleys have fenced creek lines and created a number of paddocks. On Annmore, the Hensleys are constructing one more riparian fence to protect both banks of Cattle Creek, the property's major waterway.

Hard work pays off

The Hensleys are now reaping the benefits of their years of hard work with well-grassed access to waterways, clearer water, stable creek banks, fatter cattle and easier stock mustering and management. "Chris and I wish we had taken some photos when we first came as the change has been incredible," says Nina.

Both the environmental and economic benefits are obvious to the Hensleys. "Before we did all this fencing the cattle were always hanging around the creek, drinking from the waterholes and the parthenium was so high," Chris explains, raising his hand above his waist. "Each time we have fenced off a section of the creek, there has been fantastic grass growth in that area, green panic instead of parthenium and bare ground. It also it saves time in mustering.

"Before [we installed the riparian fencing] the cattle would hide in the creek and it would be much more difficult to get them yarded. Now we just need a couple of people and a couple of dogs to muster most of the paddocks."

The creek ecosystems are also functioning better, which means water infiltration is increased and less run-off occurs.

The Hensleys' commitment to improving their infrastructure and controlling grazing to re-establish native pastures and improve natural ecosystems is clearly evident.

"We would have eventually completed this work without funding as it is fundamental to our core values in operating sustainably and with minimum impact," said Nina. "The projects have enabled us to complete it quicker, and that has to be a better outcome for the reef."



By making changes to their grazing operations, Chris Hensley and his wife Nina are inspiring others to improve their profitability through protecting their environment.

By the numbers

- 17 years since stream fencing started
- 52 km out of 65 km of stream length along Theresa and Tomahawk creeks have been fenced along both creek banks
- 6 km of creek has been fenced on one bank
- 2 projects completed, and 1 underway, with CHRRUP/FBA since 2011
- 22.8 km fencing installed with Reef Programme funding assistance
- 2 people did most of the on-ground work

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