

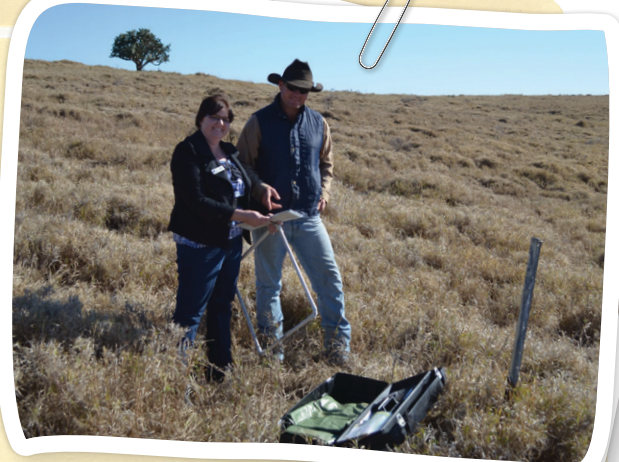


FITZROY BASIN ASSOCIATION

Our country, Our future.

# Long-term restoration

## Improving land condition



Ross Christiansen and his son Garth were some of the first landholders to partner with Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. to trial a new approach to restoring the condition of grazing land.

### Five year commitment

Ross, his wife Yvonne, and son Garth run Campo Santo, a 12,624 acre grazing property located approximately 40km south-east of Taroom in the Fitzroy Basin. The family has owned the weaner fattening operation for more than 30 years.

In 2009 the Christiansens started an FBA pilot program to develop a Voluntary Land Management Agreement (VLMA), which is designed to return paddocks in a poor state to better condition over a five year period.

They could not be more pleased with the results - better ground cover, healthier pastures and improved carrying capacity. In fact, Garth believes "we couldn't have gotten a better response."

### Planning for the most impact

FBA identified parcels of land within the Dawson region as targets for restoration, based on ground cover mapping and studies on the cost-effectiveness of rehabilitating particular land types. VLMAs are a long-term approach to improving the resilience of agricultural land, thereby reducing erosion and run-off into waterways that eventually flow to the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

In the initial stages of the pilot, the Christiansens were introduced to the Vegmachine software – a tool that combines mapping and data used by FBA to determine changes in ground cover over time. Using this tool they could see changes at the paddock-scale and compare this to the rest of the property, as well as average cover levels for similar land types within their local catchment.

After reviewing Vegmachine, two locations on Campo Santo were highlighted as requiring attention. The Christiansens were given help to assess the condition of the two parcels of land, 19ha and 53ha respectively, and develop a plan of action to apply appropriate remedies.

### The work

The Christiansens received a VLMA sign-up payment early in 2010 and set about completing the on-ground work. Both areas were treated by cutter barring to a depth of 20-30cm. Due to the existing buffel grass seed bank no grass seed was sown - instead a mix of Seca, Wynn Cassia and Burgundy bean was planted.

An electric fence was installed to divide the paddocks which improved the capacity to spell the treatment area. Ross and Garth used the same approach to treat a further 900 acres of the same paddock. They considered the treatment a valuable investment to rejuvenate the tired country.

The family received \$23,362 in Reef Rescue funding and also contributed around \$70,000 towards project works.

The value of their efforts to improve ground cover is evidenced by a 60AE increase in carrying capacity. The land condition has started to change from C and D condition to A in some patches.

"Desirable pasture species have increased, ground cover has improved and there is still signification stand of feed in the paddock," Garth said.

"The paddock had been earmarked for treatment but by taking advantage of the VLMA incentive we were able to get it done a few years earlier," he said.

### The future

The Christiansens project will continue until December 2014, with incentive payments each year dependent on the landholders meeting ground cover targets and monitoring.

Field staff from Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association Inc. (DCCA), are helping Garth and Ross with technical support to keep the project on track.

