



Our country, Our future.

Paddocks need rest

Using cattle to regenerate land



Controlling up to 1500 head of cattle that use a short stretch of Fitzroy River frontage is no easy task, but Andrew and Meagan Lawrie have changed their property and management to use livestock to regenerate previously degraded areas.

A fresh look at fences

Andrew and Meagan invested heavily in infrastructure to systematically rest paddocks from cattle grazing to maintain good ground cover and reduce erosion, helping reduce contaminants entering waterways and reaching the reef.

“We were losing precious soil into the river from cattle trampling down the soft banks and from having hardly any groundcover to hold it and the cow pats back during a heavy rain.

“It’s easy to say ‘we’ll just wack up some fences to keep them out and that should fix things’, but there’s more to it than that. The situation can even be made worse by just removing the cattle. It is important to understand the cattle need to be a part of the system to regenerate the landscape,” he said.

The Lawries have gradually transformed their 3474ha Moora Plains property west of Rockhampton in central Queensland by splitting it up into 40 paddocks for an intensive rotational grazing system – with the purpose of improving overall land condition and ultimately improve the property’s productivity.

“The key is to have more control over when, how long and how many livestock are used when it is grazed and also working out how long the country needs to be rested before this happens again, especially when you’re talking about kilometres of waterways across 3440 ha,” Andrew said.

“There’s also the cost and time to put up all that fence. Then you have to think about how you’re going to water your cattle,” he said.

“What we have done is totally overhaul the layout of the farm and how we traditionally managed our stock. We’ve turned 12 massive paddocks, one was 1134 ha, into 75 paddocks and installed 27 watering points all over the property.”

How Reef Rescue helped

Part of the suite of changes were funded by a \$58,157 grant from Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. (FBA) through the Australian Government’s Reef Rescue initiative, enabling the Lawries to establish fencing and watering points on 2106ha of Moora Plains to better manage 14.5km of creeks and riverbank.

The funded fencing also enabled more sustainable management of 519ha of vegetation along the waterways.

High density grazing for a short period followed by extensive resting of the river and creek bank areas facilitates the growth of vegetation which stabilises creek banks, improves water quality and promotes biodiversity.

The Lawries allow cattle to graze riparian areas for short periods during the dry season (April to August) within the rotational grazing system.

“This means we can move our herd across the whole farm making sure that no one area is being over grazed; the cattle don’t have to walk far for a drink; and the stream banks have had time to regenerate,” Andrew said.

“It’s taken us ten years, 65km of fencing, and 27km of poly pipe, to overhaul the farm and only now, after a couple of droughts, are we starting to see a noticeable difference in our paddocks and waterways. So much that visitors get a bit freaked out by all the vegetation.”

