

GOOD LAND MANAGEMENT REDUCES

Good land management has helped prevent more than 75,000 tonnes of sediment being washed into the ocean by recent flooding.

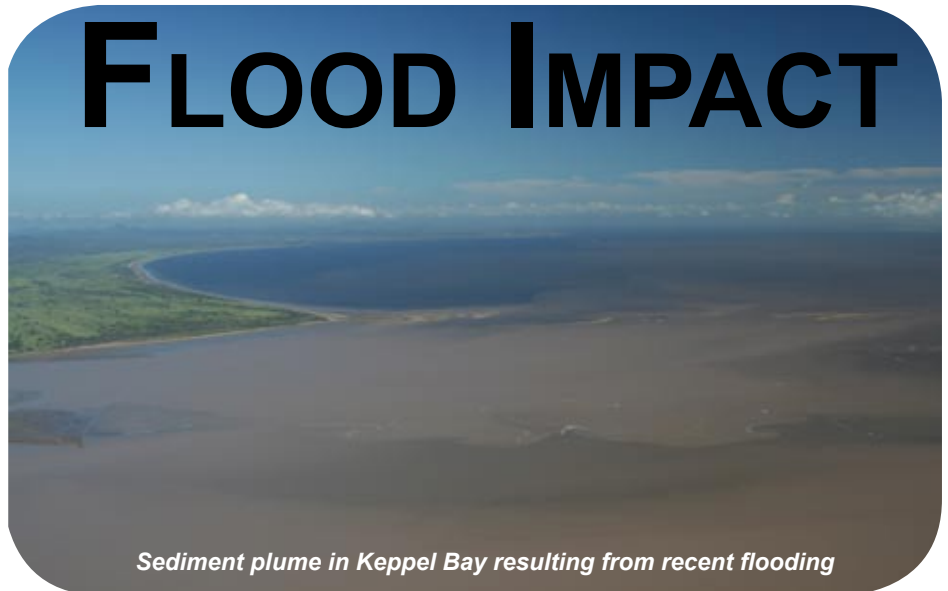
FBA's CEO Suzie Christensen said "The effect of this flood on the reef would have been worse if landholders weren't already taking steps to reduce impact on the land by retaining ground cover and using best practice farming techniques."

"Landholders are reducing annual average sediment loads delivered to waterways by about 75,000 tonnes, and we're on target to cumulatively reduce sediment entering waterways by 4.1 million tonnes over ten years," she said.

"FBA worked with more than 200 landholders last year to improve land management to prevent run-off into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

"The Fitzroy Basin is the largest river system draining to the east coast of Australia, with 20 850km of waterways all leading to the reef lagoon.

FLOOD IMPACT



Sediment plume in Keppel Bay resulting from recent flooding

"Floods of this magnitude cause an exponential increase in erosion where poor land management practices have been implemented.

"In particular, land has been eroded where practices have allowed the ground to be disturbed such as some mining on floodplains and some areas cleared for cropping and grazing."

Ms Christensen said the flood waters would flush sediment, fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides and other run-off several kilometres out onto the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon, which would have consequences for the reef ecosystem.

She said the flood highlighted how vital it was to plan for the sustainable use of our natural resources.

"We've seen the benefit of forward-planning and preparation by the councils and emergency services in limiting the impact of flooding on our local communities," she said.

"The same kind of benefits can be realised for the environment. Good planning and management in farming and mining operations can minimise the environmental impact."

ALSO THIS ISSUE

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- Reminder of benefits of wet season spelling
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RESEARCH UNCOVERS LIFE OF ELUSIVE FINCH

New research has shed light on the secret life of the elusive Crimson Finch, a bird once common in central Queensland, but now fighting for survival.

The FBA funded research by Central Queensland University (CQU) to learn more about the Crimson Finch and how to look after it.

The research will help improve conservation efforts to ensure the bird's survival. A fact sheet on the finch is available from the FBA office by phoning 4999 2800, or via the website.

Crimson Finches are also known as 'blood' finches. The male and female birds sport bright red faces and tails, and the males also have a crimson chest.

The finch is now only found at scattered sites within a range of 100km from the lower Isaac River to the lower Connors, Funnel Creek and their tributaries.

CQU Research Officer Wayne Houston said that while there was still more to learn, the research uncovered some possible reasons for the finch's decline.

"Factors such as heavy grazing along river areas have affected finch numbers and distribution," Mr Houston said.

SEEN A FINCH? If you've spotted a bird that looks like the Crimson Finch, please contact Wayne Houston on 49309087.



"They are usually found near major streams with healthy vegetation along the banks, especially Chionachne, also known as River or Cane Grass – the seeds of which provide their main food source.

"If cattle graze the grass during the wet season, it can mean the plant won't produce enough seed to sustain the finches in the dry season.

"We also found that Crimson Finches live in small family groups up to about 15 birds and build nests in trees along the river margins.

"They have up to five or six chicks and in the right conditions can probably breed more than once a year."

FBA and CQU are continuing their research into the Crimson Finch to gain a better understanding of their population, food and habitat requirements, and to develop guidelines for grazing and fire management.

New staff join FBA team



Fresh from 12 months travelling and working overseas, Kristy Dalton (left) has joined FBA as the new Boyne Calliope coordinator.

Paul Birch (middle) brings years of experience in finance and corporate management to the role of FBA



Business Manager. Paul helped establish what is now known as ASIC.

New Isaac Connors field officer Johnelle Stevens (right) has lived and worked on properties, worked as a property planning consultant and is in her fourth year of a B.Ag. Science in Rural Technology.



Combating *Hymenachne* a collective effort

A group of landholders along Hedlow Creek have shown that working together can help keep *Hymenachne* under control.

Field Officer with Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments (FRCC) Murray Bullock said the group had been managing the weed since 2005.

“FRCC, together with the FBA, helped get funding to purchase herbicide, and Rockhampton City Council offered great support through the availability of their Quickspray Unit, meaning landholders could spray the weed in a coordinated and targeted way to achieve maximum impact,” Mr Bullock said.

Mr Bullock said the project had reduced the initial severe outbreak to isolated patches of weed within the creek.



Robert Beak spraying Hymenachne in Hedlow Creek

“Landholders such as Billy Dennis, Robert Beak and the Barrett family have been particularly proactive both during the initial spraying and with ongoing control measures.”

WET SEASON SPELLING SECRET TO SUCCESS



ABOVE: Jeff Edgar (left) chats to FRCC field officer Darcy Murray about pasture condition **BELOW:** Cattle drinking from the Mountain Hut dam

Grazier Jeff Edgar has been amazed by the positive impact fencing to land type and wet season spelling has had on the condition of his pasture.

With help from the FBA and Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc. (FRCC), Mr Edgar fenced the hills from the lower creek flats on his Morinish property “Mountain Hut”.

Following rain last wet season, he used the new fence to move his herd into the hills to give the pasture along the creek flats a rest for three months of the growing season.

“The difference along the creek flats is amazing after only one wet season’s spelling. We’ve already seen a big improvement in ground cover and general pasture condition.” Mr Edgar said.

Ground cover monitoring being conducted by FRCC recorded an improvement in pasture cover of up to 27% in Mr Edgar’s 9-Mile Creek paddock.

FRCC Field Officer Darcy Murray said Mr Edgar’s story was an example of the benefits of wet season spelling of pastures.

“Following the recent rain across CQ, graziers will be tempted to restock. However it’s critical to give grasses time to fully recover from the dry conditions,” Mr Murray said.

“Wet season spelling is the secret to allowing drought affected pastures to recover for long term beef production.”

Mr Edgar’s success story is now the subject of a case study available online at www.fba.org.au, or by phoning 07 49992800.



Celebrating our wonderful Wetlands

FBA supported two events to help celebrate World Wetlands Day on Saturday 2 February 2008, which marks the date the Ramsar Convention was signed in 1971 to coordinate international wetland conservation efforts.

St Lawrence Wetlands Tour



FBA's Shane Westley and Darren Jennings from DPI&F inspect a fishway at the St Lawrence wetlands

Around 20 people joined a bus tour of the St Lawrence wetlands near Marlborough organised by FBA together with Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc. (FRCC).

Coastal and Marine Coordinator, Shane Westley, said "The St Lawrence wetland forms part of the

East Asian – Australasian Flyway. Thousands of birds may be present, with many of these birds likely to use the wetlands for breeding.

"It's also a significant nursery habitat for key recreational and commercial fish species such as Barramundi and Mangrove Jack."

The day included an inspection of rehabilitation work completed at the wetlands under the Queensland Wetlands Programme, including two fishways recently installed at the site by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries.

Darren Jennings from DPI&F was also on hand to explain how the fishways work.



The picturesque St Lawrence wetlands

Emu Park wetlands day

About 50 people attended an event at Bicentennial Park Lagoon in Emu Park organised by the Capricorn Coast Landcare and Emu Park Community Bushcare.

The event was supported by the Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. under funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.

Advice, educational material and various activities, including Tai Chi and Yoga demonstrations focused on healthy living activities.

Bushcare member Murray Bullock said "The World Wetlands Day really helps to focus public awareness on the significance of these areas for the community's health and well being."

Livingstone's Remnant Vegetation group provided free trees and both Landcare and Bushcare had poster displays with informative booklets and fact sheets.

A number of speakers addressed issues including plant pest management control and the interaction between native species and exotic problem weeds.



Rhonda Truscott from Capricorn Coast Landcare joins kids taking advantage of free trees



Emu Park Bushcare member Murray Bullock