

Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments Inc.

NEWSLETTER • December 2011

President's Message

Michelle Hanrahan

This year has once again seen further development of the initiatives and services provided by FRCC. The organisation has continued to deliver its core contracted functions as well as creating new activities and FRCC staff are commended for their enthusiasm and commitment towards providing quality services to our clients.

I thank the members of the Management Committee for their insights and willingness to share their expertise and interests to further develop the direction of the organisation in 2011. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the valued contributions made by outgoing committee members Paul Birch and Jeff Mills for their wise counsel on financial and grazing matters.

We wish everyone a happy and safe Christmas, a prosperous New Year, and hope that you will continue to support FRCC in 2012.

Executive Officer's Update

Jeff Krause

The last quarter of the year has seen FRCC active in a range of local and catchment wide activities. The Chair of the Fitzroy Basin Association, Charlie Wilson invited local NRM group Chairs and Executive Officers to a coordination and information sharing event in early October which resulted in greater levels of understanding of current local and regional issues and priorities.

Also during October the opportunity arose to contribute to the development of 2012 – 2022 Regional NRM plan. The draft of this plan is expected to be available in early 2012 with a series of information sessions being proposed in centres around the region.

Water quality remains a hot topic with an invitation accepted to participate in a forum that focussed on Rockhampton's urban water quality. The FRCC team continues to advocate for increased community information and education regarding water quality.

We continue our investigation into the broad scale mineral and infrastructure developments in our area with attendance at a range of information sessions presented by industry proponents and conservation groups. Our aim is to obtain the unbiased facts regarding the implications for our local communities of these proposed developments. Whilst there is detailed information relevant to each individual proposal there is little information that quantifies the cumulative impact of each of these developments on every aspect of our local environment.

Staff have planned and facilitated a range of workshops and events aimed at contributing to changed land management practices that limit sediment discharge into our waterways and ultimately to the Reef. Examples are detailed in this newsletter and regular emails continue to be distributed to members highlighting coming events.

FRCC individual membership has increased by 10% in the past six months and two new groups have joined our organisation. We are also working with more community groups and schools to promote our objectives and develop new approaches to engaging with people to bring about change to support more sustainable natural resource management. In 2012 a new venture with North Keppel Island Environmental Education Centre is proposed with students learning on the River while paddling and boating down the Fitzroy with specialist and scientific support being coordinated by FRCC staff.

We look forward to working with you in 2012.

Fitzroy Barrage Open Day

Shelly McArdle

Rockhampton Regional Council (RRC) recently held an open day on Saturday 23 October at the Rockhampton Barrage to celebrate National Water Week.

FRCC teamed up with the Fitzroy Basin Association to provide information on activities and services that are available to landholders. The children were kept occupied with the Beasts of the Basin colouring competition aimed at increasing their awareness of the importance of the animals that inhabit our catchment. Free face painting was provided by Maria Hope from Glitterbug Facepainting.

Participants were also able to get a better idea of the scale of the catchment with an interactive model of the catchment onsite.

The day was a huge success with over 4,000 people attending to cross the barrage with the RRC most appreciative of the support provided by our teams. This event provided an excellent opportunity to engage with the local community regarding natural resource management and water quality issues.

Particular thanks to Ingrid Fleming from FBA, Maria from Glitterbug Facepainting, and FRCC President Michelle Hanrahan for her support during the day.

Best Coastal Project 2010/11

Lisa Sutton

This year was tough competition for FRCC's best coastal project. I am very pleased to advise that the winners were Mal, Jenny and Stewart McKenzie of "Plainview". This is the second FRCC project completed by the "Plainview" team, who also hosted a DPI Stocktake workshop in 2009.

The winning project has production as well as environmental benefits. It involves 3.25km of funded fencing, 2 troughs and 500m of water pipe connected to an existing tank as well as 2.5 km of in kind fencing. The marine plains will be spelled during the wet season to reduce sediment and nutrient inputs and to allow the ground cover (mainly marine couch) to increase, which will improve future grazing potential. Cattle will be returned later in the dry season.

Fencing the freshwater creek and dam and providing off stream water points will protect the water supply from contamination and improve cattle weight gains, as well as promoting biodiversity. The project is protecting 269 Ha of marine plains which adjoin estuarine wetland of the Great Barrier Reef.

Coastal Project Update

Rhys Kellow

FRCC is partnering with the Fitzroy Basin Association to administer the 'Communities Caring for Coast' program with five groups currently engaged and progressing well with their projects. The projects range from Birds Australia's shorebird surveys to Beach revegetation activities carried out by the Friends of the Beach.

The crew at Capricorn Coast Landcare had a busy week for Weedbuster week holding various information displays including a wonderful display at Keppel Bay Plaza, attracting over 850 people to their exhibit. Alby, Rhonda and the dedicated volunteers had an exhausting but rewarding week.

We are presently in the planning stages of developing projects with other interested groups who are looking for support to undertake projects along our coastline, and would also like to hear from other groups who have an interest in similar projects.

Watch this space in the February newsletter for a more extensive update on each group's projects.

Dung Beetle Workshop

Shelly McArdle

FRCC recently hosted information sessions at the Wycarbah Hall and Belmont Research Station aimed at highlighting the value of dung beetles for soil and pasture improvement. Presenter John Feehan played a key role in the CSIRO's Dung Beetle Project from 1965-1991, rearing, releasing and redistributing dung beetle species into Australia. At the conclusion of the project he set up his own very successful dung beetle redistribution company, Soilcam.

He was also a finalist for the 2011 Australian of the Year awards for his work with dung beetles.

During the information sessions attendees learned how dung beetles create habitat for microbial activity by taking organic matter underground and excavating tunnels that allow greater root penetration, therefore storing more carbon.

The list of benefits continues with aeration of the soil that leads to better rainwater retention and increased groundwater stores (instead of runoff into the waterways), deeper topsoil, increased fertility and a reduction in bush fly and parasite numbers. All of this leads to improved environmental outcomes, better production, and a reduction in costs.

The presentation was followed by a field walk in which the following species were found:

- *Onitis viridulus*
- *Onthophagus gazella*
- *Euoniticellus intermedius*
- *Sisyphus spinipes*

The presentation was remarkably informative and engaging with individual landholders able to talk to John about specific issues relating to their own properties.

In closing the workshop John said "Not even John Deere could make a machine which a farmer could drag around his paddock every fortnight throughout the year which would place dung underground as efficiently as dung beetles do."

John also offers a free dung beetle identification service for anyone interested in finding out about the dung beetle activity on their properties and how to ensure they thrive. For more information Ph/Fax 02 6248 0376

FRCC hopes to be able to support these workshops again in 2012, so if you are interested in learning more about the benefits of dung beetles please give us a call.

Erosion Control Workshops

Rhys Kellow and John Rodgers

Late September saw one of Australia's leading experts in erosion control present a series of workshops throughout Central Queensland. FRCC was fortunate to have Darryl Hill present two workshops in our region – Marlborough on 21 September, and Kabra on 23 September. Darryl is highly regarded throughout Australia for his practical knowledge and experience using graders and other machinery to reduce the effects on landscape water flows by roads, fence lines and fire breaks. Darryl's input at the workshops was well received by 20 land managers throughout the region from Bajool to St Lawrence, and included representatives from Qld Parks and Wildlife, the Gladstone Area Water Board, and also Stanwell Power Corporation. A big thank you again to Darryl Hill for sharing his considerable expertise, and also to Max Baldwin at Marlborough Station and Gerard Halbestater at Table Mountain, Kabra for hosting the two workshops.

Best Horticulture Project 2010/11

Rhys Kellow

This year's winner is certainly deserving of the 'Best Horticulture Project of Year' award. Eric Coleman of Gracemere took out the award for his project, focusing on reducing stormwater and sediment runoff from his vegetable property into neighbouring wetlands.

The project involved laser levelling some sections of the farm to re-locate a roadway and installing a drain along the eastern and western boundaries to guide the water. Another drain was installed as well as a sediment trap to filter the water before it leaves the property and enters the adjacent wetland.

All drains and roadways will be grassed and technical support was sought from both DERM and DEEDI staff and the Farm Management Systems (FMS) guidelines.

Eric contributed greatly to this project, working with Rob Doyle from Growcom to request only a relatively small amount of financial support through FRCC.

Looking After Our Precious Frogs

Kristy Byers

Several frogs found in Central Queensland are being mistaken for Cane Toads. Frogs are an important environmental indicator and having a healthy frog population can tell us a great deal about our local environment. Tadpoles are important for keeping waterways clean as they eat the detritus, while adult frogs are essential in the regulation of insect populations including disease-carrying mosquitoes.

As frogs require both aquatic and terrestrial environments to survive, and as their permeable skin is particularly susceptible to any toxins, they make great bioindicators. So if there are plenty of frogs, this is a good sign that an ecosystem is pretty healthy. Frogs are also important for medical reasons with many pharmaceuticals being developed through the use of chemicals produced by frogs.

Unfortunately people appear to be confusing some of our local frogs with Cane Toads due to their similar colouring. In particular, the New Holland Frog (*Cyclorana novaehollandiae*), the Scarlet-sided Pobblebonk (*Limnodynastes terraereginae*) and the Salmon-striped Frog (*Limnodynastes salmini*) seem to be common targets. Numbers of Salmon-striped Frogs appear to be declining.

There are however, a couple of simple ways to tell the difference between the introduced Cane Toads and native frogs. The main difference is the presence of prominent poison glands on the toad. These are located on either side of the body just behind the ear drums. Toads also have horizontal pupils in their eyes whereas frogs generally have round pupils. Please refer to the accompanying photos to see the differences between these animals.

By reducing chemical use around the home and garden and putting in a toad-proof, frog friendly pond, we can all help to ensure that our native frogs have the best chance to survive.

For further information visit the Queensland Frog Society website at www.qldfrogs.asn.au or in Rockhampton, contact Bethlea Bell on 4933 1591. For information on building a toad proof frog friendly pond visit http://www.nqcc.org.au/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=67.

Gawula Vegetation Survey Launch

Shelly McArdle

Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments recently attended the launch of the 'Vegetation of Gawula' report prepared by Central Queensland Environmental Surveys.

The launch was opened by Darumbal elder Bob Muir followed by a special welcome to country dance by indigenous cultural dancer Will Hayden of Murrildjarn along with his son and nephew.

Rhonda Meltzer author of Plants of Capricornia and her husband Alistair were there on the day to talk about the range of vegetation communities within Gawula. They then led participants on a field walk to show the various plants and how to identify them.

Event organiser Sally Vea Vea said "The survey's completion is another step in the development of a management plan for the area."

Reef Guardian Honours

Jeff Krause

Jeff and Karen Mills hosted the official launch of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's **Reef Guardian Graziers** at their property "Melrose" at Morinish on Thursday 3 November 2011.

The Reef Guardian Farmers and Graziers program is about recognising sustainable practices that are economically viable as well as environmentally sound.

Reef Guardian Farmers and Graziers are improving the economic and environmental viability of their farms while increasing the Reef's resilience. They are aware that by adopting new practices, including investing in new technology, they are improving their farms' financial returns and working towards delivering a range of environmental benefits including:

- Efficient management of water resources to ensure clean and healthy catchments
- Efficient management of energy systems to minimise greenhouse gas emissions
- Maintaining healthy soils through wise mineral and nutrient management
- Sustaining the functions of natural areas, wetlands and forests on properties
- Running a business that is resilient to natural and economic variability.

Many Reef Guardian Farmers and Graziers are already changing to more sustainable land management practices including:

- Installing global positioning systems in tractors to streamline planting
- Installing trickle irrigation technology to reduce water use
- Changing fencing configurations to manage sensitive areas of properties.

The participants are playing a pivotal role in designing the Reef Guardian Farmers and Graziers programs and have indicated their willingness to initiate change and facilitate the sharing of information amongst producers.

Many FRCC members will be aware that Jeff has been associated with FRCC for several years and FRCC President Michelle Hanrahan and Executive Assistant, Janeen Whiting attended the official launch in recognition of his achievements.

Congratulations to Jeff and Karen.

Small Landholders Information Day

Shelly McArdle

As members would be aware, FRCC hosted an Information Day for more than 100 small landholders at the Rockhampton Showgrounds on Saturday 20 August 2011.

The day provided a chance to hear from industry experts and to learn about resources, support and incentives available to help people better manage their land.

Topics covered on the day included managing small blocks, advice on grazing land management, horticulture and water use efficiency, fire management, weed identification, native species identification and conservation management, animal health, native bees and their benefits for crop production. A variety of trade displays were also onsite including Centracks, Landmark, Coopers Animal health, Thinkwater, Selected Seeds, Savage Barker and Backhouse and Lance Jones fencing.

Michelle Hanrahan, President of FRCC said, "Participants enjoyed a great day with access to many high quality presenters. Particular thanks are extended to the Rockhampton Regional Council Showgrounds staff for their support and to the Caves Lions Club who provided excellent catering for the event."

Presenters include representatives from: Rockhampton Regional Council, Australian Lychee Growers Association, Agforce, Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority, Capricorn Pest Management Group, DERM, DEEDI, Fitzroy Basin Association, Rural Fire Service, as well as community groups such as Envirolink, Neighbourhood Watch, Society for Growing Australian Plants, and a local native bee producer.

FRCC is very pleased to advise that we have secured grant funds to deliver follow up workshops based on participant feedback to continue to support small landholders again next year.

Stocktake Workshop in Retrospect

Shelly McArdle

FRCC recently partnered with FBA and DEEDI to host a Stocktake Workshop aimed at helping landholders achieve a better understanding of methods available to them to monitor their land, leading to improved management decisions.

Some of the subjects covered include how to assess your current land condition using the ABCD method. Joe O'Reagain from FBA said "Posing the question of what is the capacity for the grazing land to respond to rain to produce useful forage is the starting point for assessing land condition."

The workshop then went on to cover the role of vegetation, nutrient cycling, soil health and how these can be improved. Workshop participants were provided with software that allows simple data to be entered that estimate carrying capacity and also acts as a valuable monitoring tool.

These workshops are extremely useful for land managers, providing the tools to assess land condition and the impacts of stocking.

FRCC looks forward to continuing to work with the presenters Joe O'Reagain and Bronwyn Roberts to provide opportunities for people to participate in these workshops in 2012.

Farewell to Kristy Byers

Jeff Krause

It is with mixed emotions that we wish our vacation student, Kristy Byers farewell from the FRCC team. Kristy has recently completed her Bachelor of Science (Biology) at CQU and has been appointed as an entomologist with DEEDI in Toowoomba.

Her studies allowed Kristy to develop an interest in freshwater systems, water quality and entomology which she has been able to put to good use in her role with FRCC.

Kristy moved to Rockhampton from Childers at the beginning of 2010 in order to undertake studies full-time at CQU as opposed to the longer part-time FLEX option. Kristy said that the position at FRCC has enabled her to acquire great industry experience and with a love for water quality issues, she has been able to see first-hand the bigger picture and the impressive work being done by FRCC.

We thank Kristy for her valuable contribution to FRCC over the past 12 months. Congratulations on a great achievement and we wish Kristy and her son Declan all the best for their new adventure in Toowoomba.

Financial Incentives available

Rhys Kellow

A reminder that financial incentives (up to 50%) through the Reef Rescue program are still available to landowners to assist with funding infrastructure improvements aimed at improving ground cover and reducing soil erosion.

Projects include:

Grazing -

- Fencing along rivers and creeks to better manage grazing pressure

- Provision of off stream water points (eg troughs)
- Provision of land type fencing to better manage grazing pressure

Horticulture –

- Efficient spray equipment
- Methods to minimise pesticide application
- Efficient fertiliser application
- Infrastructure that reduces erosion

Incentives also apply to graziers who wish to enter into longer term Voluntary Land Management Agreements.

Thinking about better managing or protecting an area of regrowth or remnant vegetation (big or small) on your property? Why not call to find out more.

FRCC staff are always available to discuss project ideas, so please give our office a call.

FRCC launch of Grazing BMP

John Rodgers

Landholders in the FRCC region, who graze livestock on their country, will have their first opportunity to take part in a Grazing Best Management Practice workshop on the 14th December in Rockhampton. This day will cover the first module of the program, 'Managing soils and soil health'. This program is a web based self assessment of where an individual business sits in relation industry best practice. Any landholders who consider they aren't computer literate will be assisted by the training staff to complete the surveys.

If landholders decide they need training or assistance to lift their business to, or above, what are considered Industry standards, FBA and FRCC will endeavour to supply assistance or training to achieve this. The most likely forms of assistance will be training workshops and funding assistance under our existing programs funded by Caring for Our Country.

This is the start of the program and in the coming year it is expected that all landholders in this region will have an opportunity to participate. In the long run, the environment and industry as a whole will benefit, as well as those individuals who take part.

Any questions or enquiries to 07 4921 0573 and we will endeavour to assist you.

FRCC Community Action Grant Success!

Rhys Kellow

Back in August we submitted an application under the Caring For Our Country Community Action Grants program to run a series of workshops targeting both large scale producers and landholders on smaller blocks. FRCC are delighted to announce our success, and will now look at rolling out these workshops throughout next year.

Three workshops will support the new Grazing BMP program and assist those landholders who are interested in improving their long term profitability and achieving Industry Best Management Practice. Three additional workshops will address the issues facing managers of small blocks, focusing on animal health and nutrition, managing exotic species, and conservation management.

Keep an eye out for further email updates on when and where these workshops will take place.

FRCC Photo Competition

Shelly McArdle

Local photographers have continued to impress us with the quality of entries into FRCC's 'Our Backyard' photography competition. CEO Jeff Krause said "The aim of the competition was to share and celebrate the beauty of our local area and we believe the project is already achieving this well above our expectations." Entry subject matter which ranged from cicadas emerging from their shells, native animals, birds and coastal landscapes to local families was very challenging to judge. The winners of the Harvey Norman prize pack were Bethlea Bell for her photo of the New Holland Frog and for the under 15 section Maddy Hooper took out the prize for her photo of Lily. To view more photos visit the website: www.frcc.org.au and please keep your entries coming. Winners for November will be posted on the website in the first week of December.

Thanks to Harvey Norman for their support!

Best Fitzroy River Project 2010/11

John Rodgers

This year's finalists for 'Best project in the Fitzroy' were all VLMA's which will greatly benefit the environment and the landholders.

The winner was "Apis Creek VLMA stage 1a", which aims to improve groundcover on 355 hectares of C and D condition land to a stage where most of the paddock will be in B condition. Tim and Lynette Olive are committed to improving the sustainability of Apis Creek to ensure a viable future for the property and their family. An earlier project has re-enforced their enthusiasm for spelling and strategic fencing and that has become the backbone of this project. 3.6Km of land type fencing has been constructed to excise the treatment area from the original 947 Ha paddock. 1.2Km of poly-pipe, 2 tanks and a trough will deliver water from a bore to be drilled to the hilly end of the old paddock. These improvements will enable better grazing management of the whole area.

Last summer's wet season delayed ripping and seeding of the 355Ha degraded area but this has now been carried out and with the SPOTA1 forecasts predicting another above average season the Olive's are looking forward to establishment of a good pasture mix across the treated area. The resulting pasture will not be stocked through the wet season until it has a good chance to mature and set seed. Forage budgeting will then be used to determine how many cattle will be run and for how long so as to maintain and improve the new pasture.

Congratulations to Lynette & Tim for their win.

Ergon Energy Envirofund

Rhys Kellow

FRCC has been advised of our success in the Ergon Energy Envirofund. Our application built upon a recent Ergon Energy audit into our energy consumption, and also contact with Ergon's Energy Education Advisor. The grant involves FRCC updating our office lighting with the most efficient LED globes; creating a garden for office use – including compost bins and worm farms for our waste, and a small water tank. The grant also funds the development of an energy monitoring pack for schools and local community groups to assess their own energy usage. We aim to create a practical model of what people can do in their own home, business, or school, while still working within our own needs as a business.

We anticipate the garden will be operational by early next year, so keep an eye out on the website for further details, and feel free to drop in and see what we have created.