



AgForce Projects

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Graziers contribute \$14.3M to barrier reef

Queensland graziers have invested \$14.3 million in property projects that protect the Great Barrier Reef, more than matching \$10.3 M the Australian Government Caring for our Country Reef Rescue initiative delivered, a new report shows.

Between June 2008 and December 2010 the Australian Government invested a total of \$41 million in voluntary on-ground grants to support land managers implementing best management practices, increasing sustainability and working toward reducing sediment, nutrient and pesticide losses from paddocks.

Graziers were provided \$10.3 M of this and in-turn gave \$14.3 M of their own funds, labour and equipment to projects that improved grazing land management practices across a total of 650,000 hectares, the Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective report stated. Grazing is just one industry which has contributed to improved land management over more than 1.5 million hectares since Reef Rescue commenced in 2008.

Bowen graziers Andrew and Jill MacNicol of Birralee Station located 30km southwest of Collinsville were two of the 608 graziers so far involved.

The MacNicol, helped by son Gordon and daughter Hayley, run a cross-breeding operation on the 100,000 acre leasehold property connected by a 30km picturesque stretch of the Bowen River. The property is two-thirds forest country which runs 4000 head of breeders, with the remaining one-third of scrub country and buffel grass under cell grazing for 5000 dry cattle.

“When we first arrived in the early 1980s, cattle had to go direct to the river for water as there were very few dams on the property,” Mr MacNicol explained.

“The long dry spell of the 1980s and 90s prompted us to think about securing the future water infrastructure and supply on the place.”

The MacNicol embarked on an ambitious plan to install an underground reticulation system on Birralee, at a cost of almost \$1 million over eight years. It was stage one of a bigger plan to fence off the entire river.

“We identified fencing the river as a need,” Mr MacNicol said.

“The cattle were knocking the river banks around. By fencing the river we can control access and ground cover. The river provides a good bank of feed so by locking it up we are returning the favour.”



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY

Delivered by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country Reef Rescue initiative with support from NQ Dry Tropics and AgForce.

Through AgForce, the MacNicol's heard about the Australian Government's Reef Rescue program, part of the Caring for Our Country initiative. They grabbed the opportunity to undertake further land management improvements with a 50 per cent subsidy support administered by local Natural Resource Management group NQ Dry Tropics.

In 2009, the MacNicol's used their Reef Rescue subsidy to subdivide the breeder paddocks on the western side of the property into smaller areas, fencing them with 8km of three-barb wire and 12km of single electric fence. Last year, they undertook 9km of fencing, to complete the fencing of the eastern side of the property from the river.

A record wet season earlier this year halted their attempts to continue the work but plans are afoot to lay a further 5km of poly-pipe and 12km of fencing next year. Once completed, the entire 30km of river bank will be protected.

Mr MacNicol said the Reef Rescue program had helped deliver better cattle and pasture management on Birralee.

"We don't lose cattle during the floods because the river is fenced off," he said.

"We get the cattle maximising every square of the property and that's our goal. The rotational breeding system and smaller paddocks means cattle can be shifted every six to eight weeks and the land gets a rest. Mustering is easier because the cattle know they are going to a fresh feed of grass."

Pasture regeneration has also been significant since the land management improvements were undertaken.

"In earlier years, we had country that was unused," he said.

"But since the fencing improvements have been made, we get shorter, sweeter feed. Perennial Flinders grass has also come back after many years."

To find out if you are eligible for a Reef Rescue grant, call NQ Dry Tropics on (07) 4724 3544.

Pic captions:

001/003: Bowen grazier Andrew MacNicol and fencing contractor Tom Little – two of the 608 grazing representatives to have spent \$14.3 million improving their properties and protecting the Great Barrier Reef since June 2008.

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