

MEDIA ALERT

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QUEENSLAND
MURRAY-
DARLING
COMMITTEE



Graziers embrace benefits of fire and biodiversity

The benefits of biodiversity and burning off to cattle production were key talking points among 40 Maranoa graziers who gathered west of Injune on Wednesday to celebrate two major projects run on their properties over the past five years.

Held at the Tooloombilla Rodeo Grounds, the field day was hosted by Queensland Murray-Darling Committee (QMDC) and EcoRich Grazing with CSIRO and Queensland Herbarium scientists, Rural Fire Service officers, Landcare and AgForce identities featured as guest speakers.

QMDC Climate Change Officer Rhonda Toms-Morgan said the day gave landholders and agencies the chance to reflect on several years of research and learning about fire use and biodiversity against production and landscape health in the Maranoa.

“Our survey showed three out of four landholders in the district use fire and they wanted to know more about how and when to use fire, and to better understand the relationship between biodiversity, land condition and carbon.

“It was rewarding to hear how empowered participants felt by having the biodiversity documented on their properties, and to hear a lot of the uncertainty and fear around using fire as a management tool has eased through the engagement with these projects,” Mrs Toms-Morgan said.

The fire project produced three landscape fire plans across 413,000 hectares involving 70 farming entities – and in a first for the Maranoa, formally documented the way local landholders use fire and the outcomes they achieve.

“People don’t want to feel like criminals when they use fire and they want to get back into a routine of using fire when conditions allow,” she said.

Mungallala grazier Bill Douglas took part in the biodiversity project and said it was important landholders had scientific evidence to back up their management practices which largely reflected the ‘land care’ ethos.

“We now have tangible evidence to prove we really do care for our land at the same time as making a living. We have bio-condition scores for our landscape which we can use to defend ourselves, as well as the warm and fuzzy,” he said.

EcoRich Grazing Director Col Paton engaged ecologists from the Queensland Herbarium and graziers to help with the monitoring and said 52,000 ha of remnant vegetation was now managed for improved biodiversity outcomes.

“This project has shown that graziers managing sustainably for good land health and grazing production outcomes are also managing for healthy biodiversity by retaining some woody vegetation in strategic locations across the properties.”

“Biodiversity condition can be greatly enhanced in paddocks by retaining key habitat features such as trees, fallen logs and shrubs, in fact leaving just one large tree per hectare can double the number of bird species.

“Retaining strips and clumps of trees across paddocks has benefits for production through improved nutrient cycling, slowing wind speeds and reducing temperature extremes with the obvious benefits to biodiversity.

The day concluded with a unanimous show of hands in support of forming a collective of landholders and agencies to continue with the research and to keep the dialogue active and open on fire use in the region.

QMDC's Fire Project (Landscape Fire Planning for Poplar Box Grassy Woodlands) and the Mitchell and District Landcare Association (MDLA) Biodiversity Project were both funded by the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund.

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Visit www.QMDC.org.au for more information.