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The CODLine

Incorporating NEWS of the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee

A dream coming true at "Bellbird"

by Dick Barnes
Landholder, Cooroy

Farming is a new career for us. It all began when the family 'epicentre' moved to near the beach at Noosa to a delightful house which, when grandchildren came along, we realised was quite 'child-unfriendly'. 'Let's build a nice family home in the Hinterland,' we said. So started our dream – a sustainable farm with conservation projects alongside a wonderful family home.

Over 18 months from September 2007, we bought our ideal house site at Ridgewood and some 570 acres of land – 400 acres of hill pastures and 170 acres of river flats. The land presented some exciting conservation opportunities. We wanted the farm to be economically viable as a sound farming base would allow us to undertake the desired environmental work. The farm operations also had to cover the costs of a farm manager who we would work with whenever we could, given our other commitments.

My wife, Kim, is an environmental education academic and I have experience in finance, planning, and managing large projects, but we had little direct knowledge of farming! I hired an agricultural consultant, Barry McNamara, to review our strategy and make sure we were heading in the right direction. With Barry's assistance, we recruited our Farm Manager, Peter Dare. All these people and their families, along with Kim's parents (who have a farming background) have helped us immensely and are now very much part of the dream.

The site of our first major project – fencing and revegetating the western gully at "Bellbird", Ridgewood near Cooroy. [Photo: Dick Barnes]

I spent the first six months mulching to get paddocks back in shape, repairing dams, and putting in fencing and water pipe. Then in January 2008 heavy rains washed away most of the roadways. We slid around in the mud a great deal before we were able to repair the roads and crossings. By that time, we had so much grass growing in the restored paddocks that we were desperate for some cattle.

We started with a commercial herd of 100 Droughtmaster cows with a Charolais bull. We then added a Droughtmaster stud and purchased 85 cows and two bulls from top breeders. We are building the commercial herd up to 200 breeders and the stud herd up to 100 breeders. We believe these numbers will meet our financial objectives and are possible because we use the flatter areas for winter forage oats and summer sorghum. As insurance, we have invested in baling equipment, a hay shed, and some basic irrigation equipment to ensure we can get crops going when a dry spell arrives at the wrong moment.

We have now filled the hay shed, sold our first steers, and had our first school group around (through Landcare). We really do feel we have a working farm on our hands and a sound base for the future.

Alongside this, we have put a lot of effort into conservation which we believe goes hand in hand with sustainable farming.

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Dream coming true ...

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Previously the land had been farmed in traditional ways – large paddocks with cattle watering directly off the creeks. We have fenced off the creeks and gullies from the cattle, repaired the dams, and installed off-stream cattle watering through pumps, pipes, tanks, and troughs. With regular mulching and by reducing the size of the paddocks, we have been able to utilise rotational grazing techniques to improve the pastures. We are steadily replanting the fenced-out areas to build more effective riparian buffers. We agonised for some time about organic farming but we feel we still need to spray the weeds and treat the cattle for ticks and parasites, at least at this stage.

The gullies on the property feed two branches of Blackfellow Creek which links into the Mary River system. These creeks are classified as Regional Ecosystem 12.3.1 – 'endangered Gallery rainforest (notophyll vine forest)'. They are very beautiful and we are excited to have them. So far we have seen turtles, a platypus, water dragons, many birds and many frogs. We undertook a water quality survey on one of the major gullies to start a 'before and after' case study and were very encouraged by the macro-invertebrates there. A friend, Greg Hunt, did an initial survey of the bird species on the property and found over 30. It will be good to measure progress on many such aspects over the coming years.

So far we estimate 'the team' has rebuilt 2 kilometres of roadways; repaired 8 crossings and 12 dams; installed 9 kilometres of fencing, 1 kilometre of water pipe, 15 troughs, 5 tanks and 3 pumps; and planted 2000 trees.

These projects have been partly funded by grants and with assistance from Noosa and District Landcare Group (who planted the trees), MRCCC (who helped fund revegetation), and BMRG (who helped finance fencing, revegetation, and a major creek crossing). We are very grateful for this help which has enabled us to keep up the pace of the projects. We have received especially useful advice and support from Paul Sprecher and Phil Moran of Noosa & District Landcare Group and they have linked us to other experts as needed. By this time, of course, 'the team' includes a growing list of advisors, neighbours, and contractors who we now regard as friends.

There is much left to do. We hope to finish the fencing during 2009. We have learnt that revegetation is time consuming and expensive to do properly. It will take us some years to complete this as finances and energy (and grants!) allow. We have about 70 acres of remnant forest, some of which is rainforest. So far we have only done limited maintenance in these areas although Landcare has introduced biological control of cat's claw creeper.

Our main lesson has been to prioritise and be realistic about what we can achieve. Thankfully we have found there are many sources of good advice readily available. I have learnt to get over feeling like an idiot and to ask the question anyway! An outline management plan is a very useful tool for helping set the priorities and review progress but you need to be prepared to change this as experience with the property grows.

We feel we have achieved a great deal in less than two years. However, we are still only just starting to build the family home which, after all, is where the dream all started. I work on the farm most days but we just cannot wait to live there permanently.

Best wishes to John Cutmore

John Cutmore, an enthusiastic and valued contributor to the *CodLine* and supporter of the Mary River Cod and Turtle, suffered an unfortunate accident on his Obi Obi property in September 2008.

We wish John well during this period of recovery and challenge, and look forward to more of his merry tales!

A Mary River Turtle from the Obi that thought it was a fish with broodstock potential.
[Photo: John Cutmore]

BB vine treasures

by Eva Ford, MRCCC

Over the last 12 months, Vanessa Bugg of the Richmond Birdwing Recovery Network has looked at many sites in the southern Mary River catchment to verify the presence of the Birdwing Butterfly Vine *Pararistolochia praevenosa*. When she assesses that a vine is indeed *P. praevenosa*, Vanessa enters a record into the National Database of the Richmond Birdwing Recovery Network.

Maps of the butterfly and vine sightings in this database can be viewed at:

www.richmondbirdwing.org.au

The most significant finding so far has been the largest and oldest vine system ever seen by Don Sands (President of the RBRN). This vine, estimated to be 300–400 years old, was found on Walli Creek during an expedition into the area lead by a local resident.

Records of vines and butterflies along nearby Belli Creek increase the local significance of this sub-catchment, proving it to have extremely high environmental value.

Butterfly sightings have recently been reported at Curra (north of Gympie) and Bauple. A butterfly has even been reported at River Heads where this species hasn't been seen for decades. These northerly sightings are significant and indicate there may well be linkages through areas where the vines occur naturally extending northwards from the established Eumundi/Kenilworth line of occurrence. More vine hunts are planned, including in the Glastonbury and Bauple areas.

Vines continue to be provided to those who wish to take up the challenge of planting and caring for them with the view to providing a stepping-stone for butterflies in the future. More than 1000 vines have been given to land owners over the last two years.

The work to recover the Richmond Birdwing Butterfly is supported by the Sunshine Coast and Gympie regional councils and the Burnett Mary Regional Group.

For more information, contact Eva Ford at the MRCCC on 07 5482 4766.

'3P' or '2P' – that is the question!

by Brad Wedlock, Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee

You may have heard people muttering something about '3P' grasses out in the paddock and wondered if they belonged to a Star Wars cult or were smoking something they shouldn't be. Put simply, grasses in Queensland are rated according to how many 'P's they score, the more 'P's the better the quality of grass. But what does 'P' stand for?

3P grasses are those that are:

1. Palatable
2. Perennial
3. Productive.

Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) is a common native grass found in the Mary River catchment. Kangaroo Grass is:

- very palatable – we know this because stock will eat Kangaroo Grass and leave other less desirable species alone
- perennial – it doesn't die out in summer or winter
- productive – stock gain weight feeding on natural Kangaroo Grass pastures.

Therefore Kangaroo Grass is considered a 3P or desirable grass species.

All pasture grasses, both native and naturalised, can be assessed from the 'P' perspective. Native species such as Black Speargrass and Forest Bluegrass are considered 3P and naturalised grass species such as Rhodes Grass and Paspalum also score as 3Ps. However Pitted Bluegrass and Wiregrass, also commonly found in the Mary River catchment, are good examples of 1P grasses: they are perennial but are not considered palatable or productive, and so they score only 1P out of 3.

The 3P classification of grasses can be subjective. Some graziers classify Barbed Wire Grass (a common native grass in the catchment) as 2P (palatable and perennial) whereas others rank this grass as only 1P (perennial). This is entirely acceptable for a number of reasons because there are no rules in this classification.

Maintaining a high density of 3P perennial grasses on your property is the key to good land condition. 3P perennial grasses tend to be deep rooted and are more resilient to extreme climatic conditions. Managing pasture condition to maintain 3P grasses has the added benefit of maintaining soil carbon reserves. At the paddock scale heavy utilisation of pastures greatly reduces soil carbon reserves.

Once graziers can identify and assess their grasses according to the 'P' system, they can then assess the composition (or biodiversity) of their pastures over time and monitor the effect of changes in their grazing practices.

The MRCCC's SuperGraze project has developed a 'Grazing Land Condition Monitoring Sheet' which is an easy-to-use self assessment tool that graziers can use to monitor changes to their pastures over time. The 'Grazing Land Condition Monitoring Sheet' assesses three key grazing land condition considerations:

- Pasture condition
- Soil condition
- Vegetation in the landscape.

For more information about the SuperGraze project, please contact Brad Wedlock at MRCCC on 07 5482 4766.

White-faced snapping turtle: nesting nearby?

by Marilyn Connell, Tiaro Landcare

This large freshwater turtle is about to start laying eggs on river and creekbanks. Adult females can be distinguished by their creamy white necks.

The breeding females and their freshly laid eggs are vulnerable to dogs, foxes and other predators. Fencing nests to protect them will benefit this species.

Tiaro Landcare is keen to hear from anyone who thinks they may have this species nesting on their creek or riverbank. We may be able to assist with providing nest protection materials.

For more info, contact 0427 293 221 or tiarolandcare1@bigpond.com

Tiaro Landcare members inspecting fencing to protect turtle nests.

Wildlife Friendly Fencing

Fencing is often integral to good land management, but many fences that aim to improve biodiversity, by fencing off tree plantings and riparian areas from cattle, have been responsible for entangling the very wildlife they seek to promote.

Barbed wire is a major hazard for wildlife, usually the top strand. Over 70 species of Australian wildlife have been identified as occasional or regular victims of barbed wire fences, especially nocturnal animals such as bats, gliders and owls.

Wildlife friendly fencing (WFF) is fencing design that is safe and effective for wildlife, people and livestock. WFF does not entangle or harm wildlife, allows the appropriate free movement of wildlife across rural and urban landscapes, and in some situations can mean 'no fence'.

Barbed wire in hotspots – ridgelines, new fences, wildlife corridors, near/over waterways, and areas with a history of wildlife entanglements – can be covered or replaced. It's worthwhile monitoring barbed wire fences in your area.

The WFF website provides comprehenisve advice and information:

www.wildlifefriendlyfencing.com

Report entangled animals to your local wildlife rescue organisation for rescue. Do not attempt to handle flying foxes.

The Wildlife Friendly Fencing project has been funded mainly through the WWF Threatened Species Network. Other sponsors include RSPCA Qld and Bat Conservation Int. The project is being administered by Tolga Bat Hospital.

New stock, hatchery – all go!

by Dr Peter Kind
Principal Scientist, Freshwater
Department of Primary
Industries & Fisheries

2008 was a busy yet highly satisfying year for all those involved in operation of the Lake Macdonald (Gerry Cook) Fish Hatchery. Efforts to rebuild the hatchery following storm damage in 2006 continued into the early months of 2008, and soon became a race against time.

In order to complete the rebuilding process, the precious broodstock had been moved off site and into plush surrounds at the nearby Suncoast Native Fish Farm. Plans to expand and revitalise the breeding colony also had to remain on hold until the new hatchery facilities were ready.

When the rebuilding process was completed, it soon became clear that all the time and effort had been worthwhile. The new hatchery complex is a vast improvement on the original and the shed is fitted out with industry standard tanks and equipment.

Availability of the new holding tanks enabled plans to expand the breeding colony to be implemented and 14 new fish were collected in late June from locations including Obi Obi Creek, Six Mile Creek and the Mary River proper. These new fish and the existing breeders were returned to the hatchery ponds within weeks of the expected breeding season.

No one was really confident that the fish would settle in time for a successful year, but we were proved wrong yet again. Five successful spawning events in September yielded almost 45 000 healthy fingerlings. These fingerlings were distributed during December to complete a hectic year for the tireless volunteers who have made the hatchery such an ongoing success.

Having spent the best part of summer and autumn relaxing in their holding facilities, the breeding colony will soon be returning to the ponds to prepare for the 2009 breeding season. Fingers crossed for even bigger spawning events this year.

On frogs & messy rooms

by Eva Ford,
Mary River Catchment
Coordinating Committee

'Bring on the rain!' In amongst the squeaks, warks, bonks and warbles of the night-time frog congregations, this is their key message.

This spring/summer season has been exceptional for frog breeding. Most frogs around south-east Queensland will be hunkering down for winter with a warm glow of satisfaction that they've had the best chance in many years to reproduce.

Frog calls

In SEQ we have an incredibly high diversity of frog species, all having their particular habitat needs, breeding strategies and calls. Only male frogs call, and their calls vary depending on individuals, areas, weather conditions, and their mood at the time!

To learn the calls of our frog species, record the calls you're hearing (perhaps with your mobile phone or camera) and compare them to the calls on the CD 'Frog Calls of the Sub-tropical East' by Davis Stewart of Nature Sounds. Expect to hear small differences between the calls you've recorded and the CD.

Frog survey findings

Surveys this season have targeted the tributaries of the Mary River from Gympie south and the 'Wallum' country to the east. This is where the acid specialists live, as well as some species that also occur away from the coast. MRCCC has been able to conduct extensive surveying in these areas with funding assistance from the WWF Threatened Species Network, the Burnett Mary Regional Group, Sunshine Coast and Gympie regional councils, and Coastcare.

Thanks to the recent deluges, it seemed that wherever there was free water in coastal sections of the Mary and around Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach. at least one of the threatened 'acid' frog species would be in residence and sometimes up to three.

These are the Wallum Froglet (*Crinia tinnula*), Wallum Rocketfrog (*Litoria freycineti*) and Wallum Sedgefrog (*Litoria olongburensis*), all vulnerable under Queensland legislation (*L. olongburensis* is also listed federally).

Wallum Sedgefrog

[Photo: Eva Ford]

Unfortunately vast swathes of this area are now under pine plantation which offers reduced habitat quality and changed hydrology.

The stream-dependant frogs also require high quality habitat areas that consist of complex structured riparian vegetation with abundant leaf litter on the ground and variable in-stream structures such as deep pools, riffles, debris and under-cut banks.

It always surprises me how particular species choose a calling site according to the 'furniture' and conditions we don't always recognise. We know that male Giant Barred Frogs, for instance, love to call from beside deep pools but seem to pick very specific locations and will be found in the same spots year after year.

Messy rooms

If you are seeking to attract frogs and other fauna, I suggest making the habitat as complex as possible and certainly not tidy! If you can't get through it then it's probably a good place for small animals.

But vegetation is only part of the solution; the canopy provides the outer shell of the 'house' but the furniture inside is the logs, sticks, leaves, rocks, holes, slopes, small plants, vines, shrubs and fallen trees that provide places for refuge, feeding and breeding.

Clearing and burning does away with many of these structures and reduces the habitat options for many small species.

So if you want to provide 'rooms' for frogs on your property, you need to keep them messy!

Noosa Festival of Water 2009

Lake Macdonald and the Noosa Botanic Gardens will provide a stunning setting for the fifth annual **Noosa Festival of Water,** taking place on **Sunday 7th June** from 10 am until 3 pm.

It's hard to imagine a better way to spend a Sunday than sitting at the Greek style amphitheatre enjoying top quality entertainment with Lake Macdonald as the backdrop.

The Festival commemorates **World Environment Day**, aiming to raise community awareness of the need to conserve water supplies and protect water quality and aquatic biodiversity. This year the Festival will also highlight the Noosa Biosphere, incorporating activities which will help the wider community better understand the relationship between humans and the Biosphere.

Martin Fingland from **Geckoes Wildlife** will be displaying some of his diverse collection of Australian native animals. The Geckoes Wildlife team has a long-term commitment to conservation, contributing many of their animals to captive breeding programs.

Free boat tours across the Lake to the recently refurbished Noosa District Hatchery, where fingerlings of the endangered Mary River Cod are bred for release throughout the catchment, and the Noosa Water Treatment plant will operate throughout the day from the boat ramp.

Renowned **Bush'n'Beach journalist**, Dave Whelan, will conduct the '**Take a Kid Fishing**' clinic. Last year's participants proved freshwater fish can survive in the Cabomba-infested Lake with a number of delighted kids catching a range of species.

Try **kayaking** on one of eight supervised 30-minute trips with a qualified instructor, who will give you a taste of the beauty of Lake Macdonald and the Paddle Trail. A land-based briefing and skills drill will be given prior to each session, and children must be accompanied by adults. All kayaking equipment will be supplied but make sure you bring adequate sun protection and footwear.

Or bring your own kayak or canoe for an exploratory paddle on the lake. Enter from the jetty at Mary River Cod Park (adjacent to the fish hatchery), Collwood Drive, Lake Macdonald.

Martin Fingland introduces a friendly carpet snake to an avid audience. Martin's creatures are a special attraction at this year's Noosa Festival of Water.

The Pomona Acapella Choir perform their clever harmonies with Lake Macdonald providing a stunning backdrop.

TravelSmart are offering a prize to people who travel to the Festival by **public transport or by pushbike**. A free bus transfer service from Cooroy will connect with the local bus service which leaves Noosa Heads at 10.35 am. To enter the competition, visit the **TravelSmart** display with your bus ticket. A courtesy bus is also provided for Festival patrons from the car parking area.

Top local bands including the Celtic/Irish bluegrass of the Jimmies and the 30 piece Noosa District Concert Band will also get your toes tapping in the Amphitheatre.

Dedicated local artist Lyn McCrea will be encouraging kids to help save Lake Macdonald from Cabomba weed with her **Arting About** team and their massive mural of Lake Macdonald. Arting About is a monthly feature at the Noosa Regional Gallery, encouraging kids and their families to be involved in artistic activities.

Displays at the Festival include Noosa Landcare who will be giving away **two free trees** to Biosphere residents upon presentation of a rate notice, the MRCCC who will be offering a **free basic water testing** service for landholders who bring a sample from their dam, creek or bore, and Noosa Parks who will be asking '**What bird is that**'!

A range of **refreshments** will be available and entry to the Festival is **FREE**. The Lake Macdonald Catchment Care Group gratefully acknowledges the support of the Sunshine Coast Council and the Burnett Mary Regional Group, as well as the large number of volunteers whose contribution ensures a successful event.

NOOSA FESTIVAL OF WATER

Noosa Botanic Gardens

Sunday 7th June 2009 from 10 am

For more information or the Festival flyer, visit the MRCCC's website at

www.mrccc.org.au

or call the MRCCC Resource Centre on

07 5482 4766

Top turtle experts visit Tiaro

Marilyn Connell, Project Officer
Tiaro & District Landcare Group

Four leading international turtle zoologists spent three days investigating the endangered Mary River turtle and habitat of the Mary River following the International Sea Turtle Symposium held in Brisbane in February 2009.

Dr Peter Pritchard, who has studied turtles worldwide for 40 years and been named a 'Hero of the Planet' by *Time Magazine*, said, 'The Mary River Turtle is an absolute Australian treasure.'

'There is quite a large international interest in this turtle. It's important we don't mess up the river as the world community can't afford to lose this extra ordinary creature,' said Dr Pritchard.

Other visitors included Dr Peter Paul van Dijk of the International Union of Conservation of Nature, which has included the Mary River Turtle in its list of the top 25 most threatened freshwater turtles in the world; Dr Gerald Kutchling of Western Australia, an authority on chelonian reproduction; and Chuck Schaffer, a member of the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialists, who commended Tiaro Landcare Group on their efforts to conserve this turtle and its habitat.

International turtle experts discussing the Mary River Turtle with Tiaro & District Landcare members. From left: Dr Peter & Sibille Pritchard, Dr Peter Paul van Dijk, Dr Gerald Kutchling, Chuck Schaffer, and Landcare members Vicki and Adrian Ross. [Photo: Marilyn Connel]

Tiaro Landcare has been invited to give a presentation about the Mary River Turtle at the largest freshwater turtle symposium in the world to be held in St Louis, Missouri in August 2009.

For more info contact Marilyn Connell, Tiaro & District Landcare Group, on 0427 293 221 or via tiarolandcare1@bigpond.com or www.maryriverturtle.com

Tiaro Farming & Lifestyle Field Day

11 July 2009

Tiaro Farming and Lifestyle Field day is emerging from its cocoon and starting to shape up as a really exciting day. We received such positive feedback from previous years that we have kept a similar format of workshops, demonstrations, community group and business displays/stalls.

The target audience is anyone who lives on acreage. We expect to attract a crowd of at least 1000 people.

By providing so many opportunities for local businesses and community groups to promote their activities and share their knowledge and expertise with others, Tiaro Chamber of Commerce and Tiaro Landcare hope to help build a brighter future for our community.

So Tiaro is the place to be on Saturday 11th July for loads of practical information and entertainment.

For more information, contact Toni at B&H Rural in Mayne Street, Tiaro, on 07 4129 2107 or Marilyn (Tiaro Landcare) on 0427 293 221 or via www.maryriverturtle.com

The Mary River turtle – yesterday, today, tomorrow...

by Samantha Flakus & Marilyn Connell

Dive into the amazing world of the endangered Mary River Turtle through the wealth of information, insights and full colour images in this inspirational 34 page booklet. An easy read suitable for upper Primary students to adults.

Available from:

Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee

and

Tiaro Landcare Group

Price: $10 plus postage and handling

or download for free from **www.maryriverturtle.com**

Water weed management options

Phillip Moran
Natural Resource Manager
Noosa & Dist. Landcare Group

'Management' of aquatic weeds is a very tricky subject. First you have to decide if your plant *is* a weed. Many native aquatic plants do behave like weeds, such as *Hydrilla verticillata* (Hydrilla) and *Azolla pinnata* (Red Azolla). Populations of these plants can increase in response to seasons and nutrient inputs. Azolla, for example, can easily cover a dam, but it will not impede wildlife or clog pump inputs, being a small free-floating fern.

So firstly indentify your plant of concern. The sooner you do this, the better your *chance* of dealing with it. And perhaps it might be a new weed in your area, in which case your quck action may help avert a far greater problem for the wider community. Local Landcare or Catchment groups or your local Council can usually help out with identification.

Once you know your weed, you can access a vast array of information on the Internet – particularly of you have a Weed of National Significance: *Cabomba caroliniana* Fanwort, *Salvinia molesta* Salvinia, or *Alternanthera philoxeroides* Alligator weed. The State Government has Fact Sheets providing information on controlling various weed species. You can also contact your local council's Weeds Officer for advice. In our region, these guys are all pretty knowledgeable and happy to help out.

Above: A Salvinia-covered dam in the Gympie area in January 2008, on the day it was 'introduced' to the Salvinia weevil Cyrtobagous salviniae. *Below: The same dam one year later. Go the weevil!*

[Photos: Barry Hardingham]

Management options include: physical removal, draw down of the waterbody, biological control, herbicides, and mechanical harvesting.

Mechanical harvesting is expensive and long-term, and is only suitable for larger water bodies. Some aquatic weeds (Salvinia, Water Hyacinth and Water Lettuce) can be managed with herbicides.

Check with Council regarding which chemical is registered for use with which weed, and *always* read the label.

For Salvinia, biological control with the weevil *Cyrtobagous salviniae* is particularly effective in certain situations. This sub-aquatic weevil is 2–3 mm long, dark in colour, and has an elongated 'snout'. The Burnett-Mary Regional Group (BMRG) is running a project to increase aquatic weed awareness and help set up a Salvinia weevil rearing facility in Gympie, planned for spring 2009.

If the weed outbreak is not too big, physical removal will likely be the most reliable, cheap and valuable method. A rope can be used to drag free-floating weeds to shore where it can be forked out. You may need to climb into a boat or canoe!

Whichever method you choose, aquatic weed management is not a 'one off' activity (even biological control, despite the pictures). You will have to keep the management going at regular intervals or you will be back where you started very quickly.

Phil Moran can be contacted at nrmanager@noosalandcare.org or on 07 5485 2155.

Save our Mary

by Steve Burgess
Save The Mary River
Coordinating Group

April 26th 2009 marked the third anniversary of the shock announcement of the proposal to dam the Mary River at Traveston Crossing. Hundreds of canoeists converged on the stretch of the Mary upstream of Traveston Crossing for the third mass canoe 'floatilla' since the launch of the grass roots public campaign to Save the Mary.

In spite of the rhetoric in 2006, three years later the project has still been unable to gain the approvals needed under State and Federal planning and environment laws. Since 2006 much more has been discovered about the environmental, social and economic costs of the project and public attitudes towards water efficiency and the plight of our rivers have evolved rapidly. As a result, public acceptance of the project has fallen dramatically.

One of the features of this year's flotilla celebration was a recognition of the work that local landholders and community groups have put into the restoration and rehabilitation of the Mary over the last 15 years. In that time the river banks on the western side of the river downstream of Kandanga Creek (at the start of the floatilla) and just upstream of the Traveston Crossing bridge (at the end of the canoe trip) have been transformed from sheer eroded cliffs of bare alluvium to well-protected and vegetated riparian zones that have stood up to the flooding events of the last two years magnificently. These were simple, grass roots projects with community environment groups, local families, landholders and local government working together to make a real difference to the state of the river.

This is the sort of future that all of us should strive for in all our rivers – productive and sustainable catchments that we hand on to the next generation in better condition than they were in when we were born.

If this project is ever sent for Federal Government approval, (anticipated to occur in the middle of this year), then the most important direct action we can all take is to participate vigorously in letting the Federal Government know that this project does not have public acceptance. The independent scientific advice commissioned by the Federal Government and the Senate Inquiry into the proposal has already shown it is not a scientifically, financially or ecologically defensible project. What is needed is the political motivation for the federal minister to do the right thing in his assessment.

Canoeists took to the river on 26th May 2009 to celebrate three years of concerted community action to Save the Mary River.

[Photo by Arkin Mackay, courtesy of Stop Press. More images of this event can be viewed at www.stoppress.com.au]

Better Catchments in the Mary

By Dale Watson, MRCCC

The aim of the Better Catchment program is to improve catchment health in high priority subcatchments and areas of high conservation value, by funding projects such as rehabilitation and revegetation works, weed and pest management and wetland protection and enhancement.

The Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee (MRCCC) has been managing the new Better Catchments program within the Mary River Catchment since November 2008. Better Catchments is an initiative of the Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG) funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments through the Caring for our Country Program.

The Better Catchments program started in the Mary River Catchment by building upon the existing work undertaken by landholders and MRCCC under the Rivercare program. The priority areas for the Better Catchments project were identified as the Upper Mary Conondale Area, the Amamoor Kandanga and Yabba Area, the Gympie Area and the Six Mile Creek Area.

During late 2008 and early 2009 the MRCCC worked with interested landholders in the priority areas to develop property project plans that assisted in identifying any potential projects that may be needed to improve natural resources on these properties. Project sites were assessed and ecological information (such as species lists) and advice needed to undertake the project were provided. Project applications were then developed with the landholders and submitted to the BMRG for approval. All of the projects submitted were found to meet the selection criteria and some exciting on-ground actions have been happening in the Mary River catchment in 2009.

Landholder contribs

Thirty-one projects are currently running under the Better Catchments program, with $167 000 in project funds. The in-kind contribution, that is, the amount of time and cash contributed by the landholders to their projects, is a massive $327 000. This is almost double the

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Better Catchments

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original amount of government funding and again demonstrates the huge amount of time and energy landholders contribute to these projects.

The majority of projects have a riparian streambank focus, involving the MRCCC core activities of streambank fencing, providing off-stream watering points, revegetation and weeding.

Other projects include wetland rehabilitation, corridor linkages, bush regeneration, and landslip rehabilitation.

However the one thing that all of the projects have in common is that at some stage weed control is necessary.

Help with weed control

A tactic that appears to be working well for the Better Catchment project participants is using local weed control contractors to give them a 'leg-up' or 'head-start' in their weed control efforts.

Many landholders are faced with very daunting weed control projects, often having to deal with mountains of Lantana, forests of Privet or Camphor Laurel or seas of smothering Cat's Claw Creeper.

Landholders facing these very overwhelming areas of weed infestation are often disheartened and feel they will never win the battle on their own.

Local weed control contractors can be rays of light for these landholders, coming in and breaking the back of the weed infestations. The weed contractors can undertake the difficult and specialised weed control work that landholders either do not have the time for or are physically unable to perform.

It is however important for landholders to ensure that contractors have a good knowledge of bush regeneration techniques, plant identification, and herbicide application accreditation.

In many cases the landholder spends time with the weed control contractor to glean some knowledge from them, such as plant identification and future weed control actions that will be needed to maintain the project. After the weed contractors do the initial work, the project becomes far more manageable for the landholder.

Landholders often comment they feel able to stay on top of their weed problem after this initial assistance, improving our precious areas of natural ecosystems.

Work in progress

by David and Rosemary Burnett, Landholders, Sexton

We have a small property (143 acres) on the Mary River at Sexton, north west of Gympie. We purchased this place about seven years ago, a beautiful spot with good soil and a lovely aspect. Our son and daughter-in-law dairy further downstream, also on the Mary, and we work together growing feed and rearing replacement heifers.

About three years ago we fenced off about a kilometre of the river to keep the cattle away from the banks and allow vegetation to grow and hold the soil together. We are very happy with the result but it does make it a bit harder to control the cat's claw! Many of the native trees are growing well now and we have good grass cover as well. We put in extra off-stream watering points which has been a real bonus for the cows! We had funding assistance under the QDO's Dairying Better project to do this work.

We completed a land and water management plan with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines in 2006. This has identified key areas and allowed us to plan further projects, especially in regard to water quality and nutrient run off.

Our next small project is to fence off a small area of wetland, allow for regeneration, and also grow some extra native trees and sedges. This is still in the developmental stage; the fencing will restrict the cattle and the nutrients they introduce. This will be a real place of beauty in a few years' time.

Gympie District FarmFLOW

Producers encouraged to share their own experience with the latest science via the Gympie Region FarmFLOW project are taking the opportunity to do so, attending best practice groups, workshops and study tours on a range of topics both within and outside their local areas.

Mixing local and expert knowledge is proving a successful way to demonstrate best practice in the locality. Local primary producers are currently involved in trials and demonstrations across all major industries including:

- slow-release fertiliser for winter pastures in dairy
- soil testing to reduce fertiliser use in beans
- geotextile lining of drains to reduce erosion in pineapples.
- liming and fertiliser application in high rainfall beef fattening country to reduce soil acidification and improve pasture growth
- innovative zero-till systems in green bean production
- wetlands rehabilitation.

There is strong interest amongst producers to identify practices which can increase soil carbon levels, which may lead to improved soil health and water holding capacity, reduced erosion, and reduced climate change impact. A kit is available that provides producers with indicative levels of 'labile' carbon in their soil. Testing of a variety of soils types and farming practices is currently underway to provide a benchmark for the district.

The Gympie Region FarmFLOW project aims to achieve the growth of primary production through the adoption of good soil and water management practices.

The Queensland Government funded partnership between primary producer groups, MRCCC, QDPI&F and various co-funders (eg. National Landcare Program, BMRG) aims to improve farm profitability while reducing sediments and nutrients in local waterways.

If you would like to know more or to get involved, leave your contact details at MRCCC on 07 5482 4766.

No-till horticulture: Button squash direct-drilled into a grassed plot pre-treated with herbicide.

Sustainable Schools opportunity

by Steve Burgess, Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee, &
Mark Cridland, Barambah Environmental Education Centre

School participating in the Queensland Environmentally Sustainable Schools Initiative (QESSI) are:

- establishing water efficient native garden areas to improve biodiversity
- building composting systems to reduce waste being sent to landfills
- harvesting storm water to irrigate the school grounds
- conducting energy/water audits and involving staff, students and parents in reducing consumption
- upgrading facilities for efficiency
- implementing shared transport strategies to reduce CO2 emissions.

The Barambah Environmental Education Centre has recently become the Regional QESSI Hub for the Wide Bay Burnett. The Mary River Catchment Coordinating Association is an active partner in the hub and will start working with interested schools and the Barambah Environmental Education Centre in term 3 of 2009.

QESSI Hubs work with schools and their local communities in developing School Environmental Management Plans (SEMPs) with the aim of promoting environmental sustainability throughout all aspects of school life. SEMP strategies focus on the areas of energy, water, waste and biodiversity.

The Wide Bay Hub will work with interested schools in the South Burnett and Gympie areas. The intent is to begin developing specific school-based projects for implementation in the 2010 school year. The key to success is getting students and their community actively involved and embedding these activities into school curricular, so such projects might include:

- incorporating WaterWatch into regular school activities such as RiverSmart to get schools directly involved in 'looking after' stretches of local waterways
- arranging for Science students to support scientists in the field in the Noosa and Great Sandy UNESCO biosphere reserves
- developing resources that promote the extraordinary biodiversity of the region to support the curriculum.

Staff at the Barambah Environmental Education Centre have been working hard to establish the Centre as a model for sustainability. The centre has reduced its dependence on groundwater extraction by 75% by harvesting rain water, minimised waste through recycling and compost systems, reduced energy through the installation of a 2 Kw solar voltaic array and actively involved students in removing invasive weeds and establishing wildlife corridors to improve biodiversity and stabilise creek banks.

If you wish to get involved in the QESSI initiative, please contact Mark Cridland at the Barambah Centre on 07 4168 8190 or admin@barambaheec.eq.edu.au

Cod's away!

by Eva Ford, Catchment Officer
Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee

On a hot and humid day in December 2008, the year 3, 4 and 5 students and teachers from Kenilworth Community College joined the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee on a fishy escapade to release 400 fingerlings into the Mary River (kindly funded by the 'old' Maroochy Shire Council's Environmental Grants).

A fallen tree in the water nearby was probably the fingerlings' first port of call before heading off to find their destiny. The students already knew a great deal about the Mary River cod and water quality issues but it was a good opportunity to go over old ground and maybe even learn something new. It was also a fine excuse to get our feet wet (and some other parts for some members of the group!) and carry out a good environmental deed for the day.

The fish had been raised at the Gerry Cook Fish Hatchery in Cooroy. Each year the hatchery, in conjunction with the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, releases tens of thousands of fingerlings (about 40 mm long) into the Mary River waterways at various locations.

While it is all very well to release the fish to help build up numbers, success of the program depends on the availability of suitable habitat. The cod is an endangered species which prefers to inhabit areas of deep, slow-moving water with good cover (trees, undercut banks, rocks). Fallen wood in the water is essential; the cod hide and hunt around snags, and also lay their eggs on the timber (and also underwater rock ledges). Cod are very territorial, often remaining within the same underwater complex for most of the year.

Kenilworth Community College students helped release Mary River Cod fingerlings to enhance the species' future in the upper reaches of the Mary River. [Photo: Eva Ford]

Long stretches of the Mary River have few or no trees along the banks. As live trees produce dead trees which eventually fall into the water to provide the vital living quarters, this lack of riverside trees has dire implications for the cod population.

So it is with hope in our hearts and a chorus of 'Good luck!' that we bid farewell to each batch of fingerlings released into the waters of the Mary River catchment.

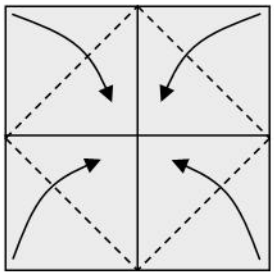
Fold yourself a turtle

by Harmony Douwes, Student

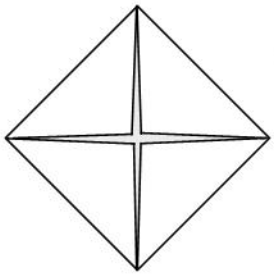
Reproduced with kind permission from 'The Dambusters', March 2009
(Newsletter of the Save the Mary River Coordinating Group Inc.)

Mary River Turtle

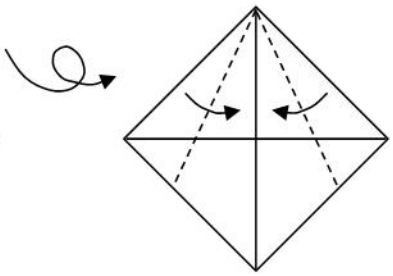
1. Start with coloured side up. Fold all corners into middle.



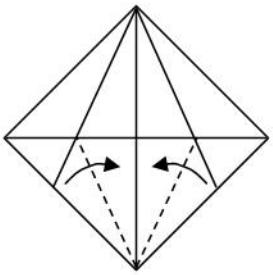
2. It should look like this. Turn over.



3. Fold and unfold the top two sides to the middle, ready to make rabbit ear fold.

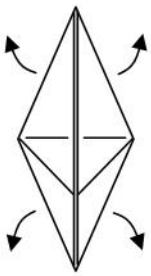


4. Only fold the bottom sides to the middle crease.

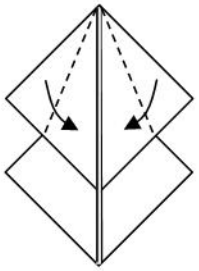


5. Rabbit ear fold.

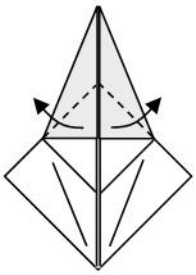
6. Unfold the back flaps.



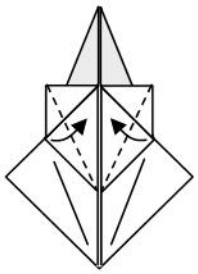
7. Fold in the top two sides.



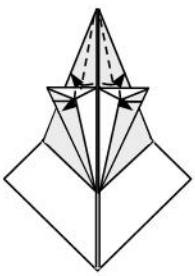
8. Fold corners out.



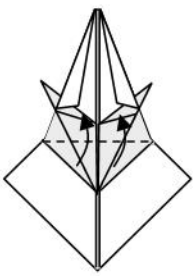
9. Fold.



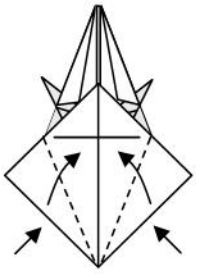
10. Fold in the sides underneath flaps.



11. Fold corner up.

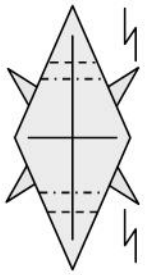


12. Repeat steps 7 to 11.

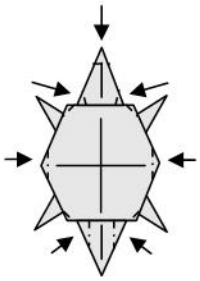


13. It should look like this. Turn over.

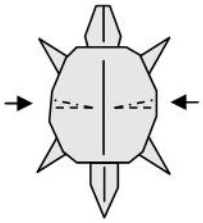
14. Crimp fold to create head and tail.

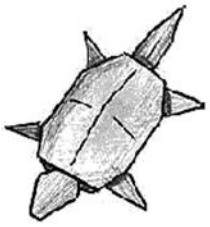


15. Shape by folding in corners.



16. Make darts in shell for 3D effect.





Finished Mary River Turtle

Harmony Douwes

The CODLine

Good news for the Mary River Cod and the Mary River Turtle

is hosted and suported by

Barung & District Landcare Group

and the

Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee

WORKING FOR OUR FUTURE

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www.mrccc.org.au/newsletters.html

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