

Palmer River dam still an option for Lakeland farmers

Just before the Federal election in mid-May a news item circulated by the Regional Development Australia (RDA-FNQTS) suggested that \$10M in funding had been secured to pursue the Palmer River dam proposal to a “shovel-ready” stage.

Chair of the RDA-FNQTS, ex Member for Cook David Kempton, was quoted as saying “This facility will open up employment, business opportunity and substantial benefit to indigenous cattle producers in the region and provide substantial economic, social and cultural outcomes and opportunities including 1200 FTE construction jobs and 1144 FTE long term employment positions.”

That’s a big claim. Anyone with real estate within 50km of Lakeland ought to be pretty excited at this point. And indeed, some are.

However, the \$10M cheque hasn’t cleared the bank (just yet), so the project is still an enticing thought bubble. As with Mossman’s “Green Energy Precinct” promised by Member for Leichhardt, Warren Entsch, the devil is in the details.

We contacted Kempton’s office for an update but have been unable to get an update yet.

Western Yalanji is the Native Title organisation for this area and CEO Brad Grogan has been quoted as supporting the proposal, even though the details are still largely unknown. But the TOs who actually speak for the affected


country are more reserved. Elder Eric Rosendale says he wants proper consultation and to better understand what impacts the inundation will have on his country as sacred sites could be flooded and heritage lost.

Pastoralists Dave Collie (Bonny Glen) and Johnny Ahlers (Maitland Downs) are concerned about increased public access on the roads and across the proposed lake. “Who is going to be paying for the additional rubbish removal, fire protection, and biosecurity risks?” Dave asks.



(above) The tiny community of Byerstown will be inundated by the proposed irrigation dam.

(below) Promotional material promises benefits.




Benefits



- ❖ Secure year round water for Lakeland district
- ❖ Mitigates flood damage along the river
- ❖ Eliminates the devastation of drought
- ❖ Minimises ongoing running costs of water supply
- ❖ Opportunities for carbon farming
- ❖ Cares for fish and wildlife
- ❖ Creates eco tourism
- ❖ Renewable and sustainable





(Palmer River dam, contd)

Everyone can agree that long-term, sustainable livelihoods would be most welcome in the district. We can imagine a future in which Lakeland is a vibrant little community providing secure jobs to locals year-round.

Cook Shire would welcome a boost to the economy, with new settlers and profitable businesses contributing to the rate base and supporting good public amenities.

Small scale, resilient farmers could be cleaning up water flowing to the Reef, reducing erosion, and promoting native biodiversity through regenerative, conservation-focussed practices. And making a profit to support their families. Is all that possible?

Perhaps. Lakeland is home to a couple of very innovative farmers who are serious about sustainability.

At the moment, however, the Palmer River dam proposal has a narrow goal of providing “water security for agricultural production”. The feasibility and promotional material does not make any commitments to water efficiency, sustainability targets, farming practice, living wages, or other benefits to the community.

As with most such projects, the assumption seems to be that whatever is good for private profit is automatically good for the public at large. But that argument carries less weight than it once did. People have seen too much “public good” being routed to Cayman Island tax havens and watched with dismay as environmental commitments dissolve into dodgy data prepared by crafty attorneys.

How will the Palmer River dam story unfold? Time will tell. Let’s stay engaged and constructive. Resources should be put to good use, and perhaps some water can come out of the Palmer without undue negative effect.

Many people are keen to support a proper development. That is, they want something better than a “business as usual”, private-profit deal. People these days expect that proper development starts by

putting people, community, and country first. When the land and people are healthy, private profit can be collected as a dividend. But if the whole show is driven forward by private profit as the primary motive, then the outcome is likely to be concerning indeed.

For more information on the proposal and its progress, contact the major proponents:

RDA-FNQTS: Danielle Carey, CEO 07 4041 1729

New signs for the catchment

Around 2011 Mitchell River erected 7 roadside signs to offer a welcome and indicate where this huge watershed commences. Over the years the signs have weathered severely, been burned in fire, and used as target practice.

We are pleased to say that the group has set aside sufficient funds to replace these signs. Between now and the end of August you can expect to see a fresh new design as shown below.

The Mitchell River supports acknowledgment of the First Peoples of the region. By featuring the main clan names we hope that more people will be inspired to ask questions and learn about the long history of the region prior to colonisation. These signs are a small step toward cultivating a more respectful and inclusive landscape.

Entering the Mitchell River Catchment

<i>FIRST PEOPLES</i>	<i>WATERS</i>
Kokoberra, Yir Yoront, Kunjen	Alice
Olkola, Wakaman, Bar Barrum	Palmer
Djungan, Tableland Yidinji	Mitchell
Mbabaram, Western Yalanji	Walsh
Koko Muluridji	Lynd

Mitchell River
WATERSHED MANAGEMENT GROUP

Allan Holmes: Letter from the CHAIR

Hi to members of the Mitchell River Catchment group and to all those who have an interest in this wonderful part of North Queensland.

This newsletter contains information on quite a few very informative projects across the Mitchell catchment. I would like to comment on two in particular.

Firstly the Palmer River dam and possible financial support from the federal government.

This project has exciting potential and we need to keep the pressure on appropriate people to ensure that momentum is maintained. Projects of this nature take years to pass the required approval processes and this is right and proper. But too often political footballs are created and the end result is nothing happens.

Appropriate consultation with native title holders, with land managers, with regulatory agencies and with the people of North Queensland are essential.

Final development can only occur after thorough assessments are completed so we should not get too far in front of reality. There are always costs and benefits and we can be sure of much vigorous debate before any on-ground construction work can begin.

I simply ask all parties to consider the whole picture when being part of the debate.

Secondly a brief comment on the Property Specific Action Plans for 16 grazing enterprises

within the Joint Management Area of the catchment.

For much too long this important area has been neglected in terms of its role in the north's economic contribution and the importance of managing the region's Natural Resources.

This project will focus on a vast area which is primarily used as an extensive grazing resource to document and to improve land management and to help pastoral land owners and managers to better financial returns.

This area of the north is underdeveloped when compared to similar regions. But we have an obligation to maintain landscape and water quality and to derive economic benefit within a framework which will ensure environmental sustainability.

This project is timely and we must do all in our power to make it a success. Our people and our natural resources deserve no less.

Organisation such as ours require two essential components. Funding and people.

We are seeking funding to undertake a couple of new projects and to support existing commitments. We need more members who take an active interest in long term land use in the region. Please consider becoming a member.

Best wishes. Safe travelling.

Allan Holmes

Allan Holmes, Chairman
chair@mitchell-river.com.au

General Meeting

Saturday 03 August - Mount Molloy

Markets and info tent: 08.30-11.30

General Meeting and light lunch: 11.30-13.00

Palmer River Dam proposal - Local Indigenous news - Update from the Chair

Streambank Erosion

Streambank erosion is a dynamic and natural process as streams meander across the landscape. In many places, however, the rate of streambank erosion has increased markedly, in excess of natural processes. There are two primary reasons for this increase.

The first is extensive clearing of deep-rooted natural vegetation from catchments for agricultural and urban development. This has resulted in rainfall flowing off the land surface at a much faster rate. These increased flows put pressure on stream channels that can no longer contain flood peaks, and bank erosion is the result.

The second factor is the widespread removal of native vegetation from the riparian zone, either through clearing for development, or the combined effects of stock or fire.

There are three main processes at work in stream bank erosion. They may occur singly or in combination, in different parts of a river catchment.

It is important to identify and understand which of these processes is dominant in a particular location because the management responses are often very different. The three processes are:

1. Sub-aerial erosion: This involves processes that loosen the soil of the streambank, which is then vulnerable to being carried away by the water flowing past.

Trampling by stock, rain impact, wind acting on bare soil, can all loosen the soil of a streambank making it vulnerable to being washed away.



Protecting the bank surface from the action of loosening processes, and also reducing the speed and erosive force of the water flowing along the bank are key actions in reducing this cause of erosion. Riparian vegetation can play a critical part in achieving both.

2. Scour: This occurs when the force applied to a stream bank by flowing water exceeds the resistance of the bank's surface to withstand those forces. This often happens at the toe of the bank where suspended particles in the flowing water scour away the bank soil. Again protecting the bank and reducing flow speed are critical actions to reduce this form of erosion.

3. Slumping: This occurs when blocks of the bank collapse as a result of undercutting or other structural weakness within the streambank. The reinforcing effect of plant roots and removal of moisture through plant use, can assist in reducing slumping processes in many situations.



If you would like to find out more about STREAMBANK EROSION, contact me!

Ian Adcock

0408 603 316 |

iansyl@bigpond.net.au

Property-specific Action Plans in development for 16 northern producers

A sustainable land use project is underway in the top of the Mitchell Catchment, targeting 16 grazing properties which will receive customised assistance. The four-year project aims to improve soil stability, lift native vegetation condition, and improve water quality over 800,000ha of grazing lands.

The origins of the project stem from work done by Allan Holmes and Ian Adcock in 2018. This was supported by Cape York NRM and Northern Gulf RMG, who secured funding from the new Queensland Government Natural Resources Investment program (NRIP).

The project delivers activities in the “Joint Management Area” (JMA) which includes a section of Mitchell River’s territory.

The project is being delivered jointly by Cape York NRM and Northern Gulf.

This cooperative approach has been developed to ensure that the most efficient delivery is possible and more support is provided for on-ground actions. The project is designed to achieve these outcomes:

- implementation of on-ground natural resource condition improvement actions;
- land managers in the Mitchell River Catchment have improved capacity and skills to manage native vegetation and soil erosion; and
- land managers have improved awareness and understanding of NRM best management practices in the Mitchell River Catchment.

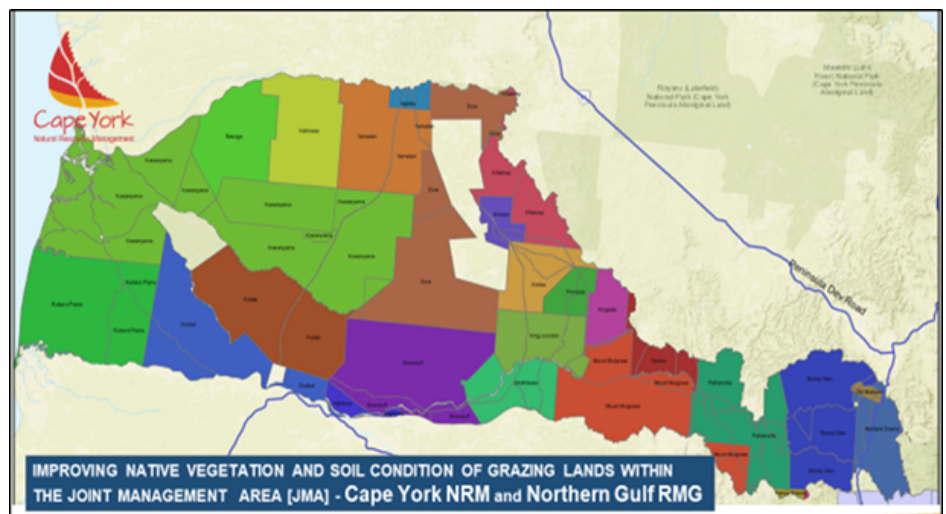
The project will develop “Property Specific Action Plans” in consultation with each

participating property. These plans will be based on the Water Quality Stewardship Framework and the ABCD Land Condition Framework.

In addition to the Plans, land managers also have access to a small works budget for undertaking works that directly improve land condition.

One of the participants, Amber and Travis Hatfield of Spring Hill, discussed the positive impacts that the project has had:

The grant has lifted a huge financial burden from our shoulders. Spring Hill is fairly undeveloped, and unable to be fenced on the main road due to lack of water on the western side of the highway. We have lost



a lot of cattle on the main road crossing for water. Now that there are three extra watering points on the western side of the highway, we have sufficient water to enable us to fence the highway and improve that side for grazing. This in turn will create ease of mustering, stock handling, movement from paddock to paddock, as well as control the stocking rates per hectare. This will enable us to spell country that has been stocked for years, and to promote regrowth of pasture.

By being able to increase the watering points we can control grazing which will lower the fuel load and decrease the chance of a wild fires in drier months.

Controlled aerial burning allowed us to reduce the risk of a late year hot fires, reducing damaging effects to the atmosphere.

For more information, please contact:

Cape York NRM: 1300 132 262

Northern Gulf RMG: (07) 4092 1088



Long Wet delays water quality testing at Abattoir Swamp

In mid 2018, with support from Mitchell River, the Northern Gulf made a grant to the Julatten & Molly Association of Ratepayers and Residents (JAMARR) to undertake water quality testing at the Abattoir Swamp environmental area.

Abattoir Swamp is an 8ha block located on the Mossman-Molloy Road. It is one of the few publicly accessible wetland reserves in the area. Over the years 2004-2014 the wetland suffered a fair bit of neglect. From being a very popular bird-watching destination to being a hymenachne-choked biological desert, the reserve was on the brink of collapse until JAMARR started an active campaign for re-vitalisation in 2015. Although progress has been slow, and there is a long way to go, things are on an upward trend. Mareeba Shire Council has facilitated a re-build of the boardwalk, negotiated grant funds to repair the fences, and provided funding last year to dig out sections of the wetland to establish permanent water.

A Management Plan was adopted in 2018. One of the key pieces of information needed is a baseline survey of aquatic health and water quality. This will help understand changes over time.

However, the extended Wet meant that the wetland has been very wet indeed! Practically inaccessible, even to the cattle that normally agist on the site to help control the hymenachne.

Brooklyn, Northern Gulf explore drone options

In June we helped connect Brooklyn Station General Manager Andrew Francis and Northern Gulf CEO Zoe Williams for a discussion over what drone equipment might be the most useful investment for the region.

The discussion was powered by the considerable technical expertise of Guy McCaldin, a licensed commercial pilot and physics lecturer just returned back home to Julatten after several years working in China.

Guy noted: “The key challenge is to match up the platform with the job you need to do. That means finding the right combination of aircraft, sensor payload, size, and performance.”

The range of jobs that drones can do is increasing as technology advances and costs come down.

With the right configuration drones can undertake surveys of wildlife, weeds, ferals and fire. High resolution cameras and LiDAR deliver excellent topographic results, applicable to erosion surveys, road mapping, and forestry inspection.

Andrew has been experimenting with multi-rotor devices and thinks there may be a number of remote inspection tasks suitable for an aerial platform.

Zoe says she is keen to put some new gear to work in the region and has thanked Guy, Andrew and Mitchell River for their input.



Feral pigs caught on thermal camera (photo: Air-Scan)

Funding desperately needed for Siam weed on Sandy Creek

Mareeba Shire Council has issued an urgent appeal for funding assistance to get on top of a Siam weed infestation that has been identified on a tributary to Rifle Creek, which is the first major contributor to the Mitchell.



The land manager has been treating the weed for several years, not knowing what it was. All they knew was that the plant was a pest.

The extended Wet this year has seen the weed blow out and the land manager finally called Sid Clayton's weed response team at Mareeba Shire Council. One look was all it took: Siam weed.

MSC immediately kicked into high gear and started an extended survey, harvesting, bagging, and deep burying the immature seeds along the way.

Sid's team mapped as much as they could on non-existent funding. They gave training to the land manager and staff who have since carried on control works using best practice.

It does not appear that the land managers introduced the weed. Sid's team located the upstream terminus at an Ergon creek crossing. This spot is also used by hunters who illegally sneak onto the property. So it is not clear who brought this ferocious weed into an otherwise clean section of the catchment. In any event, it is now a problem the rest of us are forced to deal with.

Northern Gulf, Mitchell River, and the Mareeba Shire Council have joined up to put an urgent request for funding to get on top of the incursion before it has a chance to set seed this season.



Siam weed (*Chromolaena odorata* and *Chromolaena squalida*) is amongst the world's most invasive weeds. Siam weed threatens the grazing industry, agricultural production systems (particularly horticultural crops such as bananas, pawpaw and sugarcane) and forestry plantations.

Siam weed also has the potential to seriously degrade large areas of the wet tropics, dry tropic savannah grasslands, subtropical and coastal regions, and ecologically important conservation areas.

More info: <https://tinyurl.com/weed-siam-2019>

We depend on the fine work and support provided by our State Landcare network. Thanks!

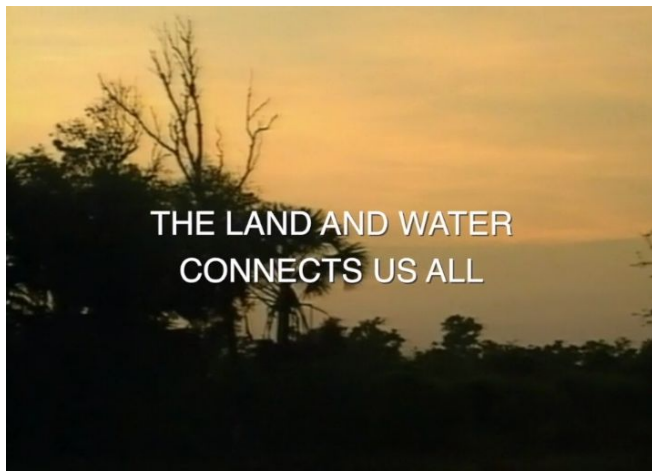


QWaLC
QUEENSLAND WATER & LAND CARERS

Running the River re-issued by Kowanyama cultural process

The evergreen Viv Sinammon and his band of merry Make-It-Happen folk have pulled off a great festival down at Kowanyama. Although the event was a bit quiet due to unexpected sorry business, it was another step along the journey to transform Kowanyama into a cultural hotspot.

Amongst a whole range of works achieved for the festival, Mark Butler managed to re-issue the Running the River video from 1990.



His comments relate to our lead story in this edition:

Produced for the people of Kowanyama in 1990 (*Running the River*) was a clear message about river management and its impact on the people of this remote Australian indigenous community. They live at the mouth of the Mitchell River whose catchment has an area of 72,000 square kilometres. This is larger than Tasmania. It starts from above the Coral Sea in the Wet Tropics until it eventually funnels in to the Gulf of Carpentaria after having reached across four diverse bioregions. This river is life to the people of Kowanyama.

There is currently discussion at the federal level about a dam in this region of Cape York. This dam would be heartbreaking news for those elders that put this meeting together. Their message then was strong and straight forward: the land and water connect us all. Let's talk about this, again, and with urgency it would seem.

See more at: <https://vimeo.com/287761949>



Climate Week “Dialogue over Dinner” a tasty success

About 30 folk gathered for the Climate Week Dialogue over Dinner in Mount Molloy on Sunday, 09 June. Dinner was scrumptious and the conversation was free-flowing and constructive.

Thanks to Ying Tee and her faithful companion Vicki Cherry for their delicious talents.

It was noted that as a community we could be more open and inclusive of people as they transition toward lower-impact lifestyles. This needs to be done while respecting the people who currently make their living from things like beef production, coal mining, and money management.

And the first public rendition of “The Apple, the Egg, and the Smile” was presented. See below for the slideshow:



<https://prezi.com/view/xATFtWm0cAOqRBH2jkHM>