

Natural Matters

NEWSLETTER FOR BURNETT MARY REGIONAL GROUP

Spring 2016 Edition



Burning the Bunya Balds

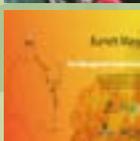
Traditional Aboriginal fire management practices have been returned to the Bunya Mountains to manage the unique and culturally significant grassland balds

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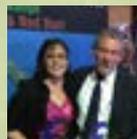
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At the Helm

As the new CEO of the Burnett Mary Regional Group I would like to thank Penny Hall, the previous CEO of BMRG, for her contribution and dedication during her 4 years at the helm. We wish her every success with her new endeavours and future plans.

I am very pleased to be leading a team of enthusiastic and engaged employees who deliver targeted programs across the 56,000 square kilometres of our region. We have a very busy year ahead with an extensive list of programs and projects to deliver and with the help of our valued partners we will accomplish these tasks.

Over the last two months I have travelled across the region to meet many of our partners and members including Agricultural & Industry Groups, Local Government, Indigenous and Landcare groups, Researchers, Universities, State & Federal Government and Community Groups. These meetings gave me the opportunity to discuss each group's priorities within their region and to also seek a more unified communications process for improved engagement with our valued collaborators and research partners. I thank them all for their open and honest discussions and for making me feel so welcome to the region.

I am looking forward to being part of the community and helping to make a difference in sustainable agriculture, Indigenous engagement, biodiversity and our Reef Alliance objectives.

Please call in or give me a call if you would like to discuss any issues or ideas for future projects. Office number is 41812999 mobile 0428087472 or email sheila.charlesworth@bmr.org.au



Sheila Charlesworth - CEO



Brian Muirhead
Reef Trust Coordinator

BMRG Staff Update

BMRG has appointed a coordinator to assist in the delivery of Reef Trust Phase III in the Burnett Mary Region.

Brian Muirhead joined the organisation in August. He has extensive experience in NRM having worked with our sister regional body Southern Gulf NRM.

Brian holds a Bachelor of Science with a major in hydrology and has experience in environmental monitoring and research.

Brian's role as Reef Trust Coordinator will involve working closely with the program's delivery partners on projects that enable landholders to change management practices to improve water quality entering the reef.

Conservation Genetics (Fontainea Rostrata)

Fontainea rostrata is a small tree or medium sized shrub that is listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act. Habitat loss and fragmentation has resulted in its range being increasingly restricted. BMRG has partnered with the University of the Sunshine Coast on a unique conservation project for this species that aims to assist long term survival in known populations and complete reintroduction into new locations.

To best assure the success of the program, work was undertaken to understand the distribution of the species, population size, genetic diversity and structure, current suitable habitat and the availability of suitable future habitat.

Genetic diversity is an important consideration when planning revegetation works for at risk species. For example, if founder plants are sourced from small, isolated populations, genetic bottlenecks can occur. Equally, mixing genetically dissimilar founder stock can also alter population dynamics and may affect long-

term population viability.

On-ground surveys were completed at 26 sites with suitable F. rostrata habitat in the Tinana Creek catchment area, 10 of which were found to contain populations of the species. Leaf samples from 211 individual plants and stem cuttings from a sub-set of these plants were taken for DNA extraction and vegetative propagation, respectively.

Vegetative propagation successfully generated nearly 200 seedlings. Genetic analysis revealed low levels of genetic diversity and a uniform genetic profile across the species range, indicating that implementation of a genetic rescue program be initiated by planting the 200 seedlings into existing populations to increase local genetic diversity and improve reproductive success.

CONTACT

Rod Buchanan T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 182)

E: rod.buchanan@bmrq.org.au



Fruit of the Fontainea Rostrata - a vulnerable species that is the subject of a genetics project that is helping to restore populations in the Tinana catchment. (Image courtesy Glenn Leiper)

Burnett Mary Fire Management Guidelines

In planning for natural resource management in the region, BMRG has identified inappropriate fire regimes as a threatening process to biodiversity as well as the potential for increased bushfire activity as a result of future climate variability and change.

In partnership with the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service (QFES), volunteer rural fire brigades and fire wardens, BMRG has used the best available information on fire management and fire planning to produce the Burnett Mary Fire Management Guidelines.

The guidelines have been put together following extensive community consultation and review which included 14 community workshops and two technical panels.

They are designed to provide a consistent framework for improved fire management practices and reduced wildfire risk.

The layout of the guidelines addresses four main factors:

- **Fire Frequency** - how often should an area be burned
- **Fire Intensity** - how hot does the fire need to be
- **Season** - what time of the year provides the desired conditions for a planned burn
- **Burning Mosaic** - the percentage of ground cover that remains unburnt following a planned burn.

The guidelines are intended to be used by volunteer fire brigades and landholders to plan hazard reduction burning and planned burns for improved production and conservation outcomes.



The Burnett Mary Fire Guidelines provide a framework for conducting planned burns

CONTACT

Rod Buchanan T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 182)
E: rod.buchanan@bmrq.org.au

Great Sandy Biosphere

The Great Sandy Biosphere is a UNESCO designation of a region within the Burnett Mary that encompasses the World Heritage Listed Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Strait, a Ramsar listed Wetland of International Significance.

BMRG supported the nomination which was successful in 2009. Since that time activities involving the Great Sandy Biosphere have concentrated on raising awareness about the three main functions of a Biosphere; conservation, sustainable economic development and building a database of knowledge about successful sustainable activities.



BMRG Chair Tony Ricciardi and CEO Sheila Charlesworth with Gympie Regional Council representatives, Mayor Mick Curran, Gina Vereker and Amy Gosling

In the last couple of months, BMRG's Chair and CEO have met with the Fraser Coast, Gympie and Bundaberg regional councils with the aim of exploring opportunities for closer collaboration and ways of utilising the designation.

A meeting has also been held with the executive of the Noosa Biosphere which shares a border with the Great Sandy Biosphere.

Both councils and the Noosa Biosphere have responded positively to this new initiative. It is envisaged that a new group will be formed consisting of representatives from the two councils as well as other regional stakeholders.

A management plan for the Great Sandy Biosphere will be put together to guide the future direction of the designation.

CONTACT

Chris Stone T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 205)
E: chris.stone@bmrq.org.au

20 Million Trees - Tinana Creek Project

BMRG has been working with HQ Plantations, Queensland's largest plantation timber company, on a conservation project in the Tinana Creek Riparian Corridor funded by the Australian Government's 20 Million Trees initiative.

This riparian revegetation and restoration project aims to protect and enhance a site of approximately 10.8 ha of previously cleared, cultivated and grazed land and a strip of riparian vegetation along 1.7 km of streambank in the corridor.

The site known as "Wedgewood" contains EPBC listed, critically endangered Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Queensland and the shrub *Samadera bidwillii* which is listed as vulnerable. Tinana creek is also habitat for important aquatic species such as the Mary River turtle and the giant barred frog.

Preparations for the project involved the creation of an all-weather access track and the establishment of an extensive plant species list and a comprehensive site plan. Onsite seed collection has been undertaken with the view of future propagation and plantings. An exclusion fence has been constructed to reduce the impact of cattle encroaching into the creek and the adjacent site. More than 10,000 plants made up of appropriate native species consistent with those already in the area have also been planted.



Stock exclusion fencing, funded by MRCCC, is one of the project's activities

The project is expected to produce many significant environmental outcomes. In addition to restoring the connectivity and function of the riparian and adjacent area, the project will provide improved streambank stability and condition, habitat for threatened aquatic species, water quality improvements through reduction of sediment, nutrient and pesticides entering the waterways, resistance to flood damage and the expansion and conservation of the critically endangered Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia.

Future plantings and maintenance are planned for what is expected to be a long term, multi-stage project. The project will also be used to increase community awareness about the value of conservation works with a series of field days conducted by the project participants.

The project is a collaborative effort with BMRG being supported in its delivery by HQ Plantations, Noosa and Gympie Landcare groups and the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee with each playing a significant role.



Volunteers have helped to plant native species as part of the riparian restoration project

CONTACT

Kirsten WortelT: 07 4181 2999 (ext 180)

E: kirsten.wortel@bmrq.org.au

Reef Trust Phase Three

BMRG is part of a unique partnership that has been formed between industry groups and regional NRM bodies to help deliver the \$45Million Reef Trust III. The Reef Alliance will invest the funds to help reduce the amount of sediment and nutrient in agricultural runoff to improve water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

“The Burnett Mary is the southernmost of the Great Barrier Reef catchments”

There are six reef regional bodies and the Burnett Mary region represents the southernmost of these reef catchments.

The Reef Trust Phase III program in the Burnett Mary will work with the canegrowing and grazing industries with an emphasis on innovation and extension for improved land management practices that reduce sediment, nutrient and pesticides entering the region’s waterways.



Meeting with the region’s canegrowing groups. From left to right Trevor Turner (Maryborough canegrowers), Matt Leighton (Bundaberg canegrowers), Sheila Charlesworth (BMRG CEO), Dale Holliss (Bundaberg canegrowers), Cathy Mylrea (BMRG), Donna Sheehy (Isis canegrowers), Wayne Stanley (Isis canegrowers)

BMRG’s senior management recently met with representatives from the region’s canegrower organisations (Bundaberg, Isis and Maryborough) to discuss how funding will be invested to support land managers in the cane industry with their land management practices.

CONTACT

Cathy Mylrea T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 301)
E: cathy.mylrea@bmrq.org.au

National Landcare Awards Nominees

The Burnett Mary region have three nominees in the prestigious National Landcare awards.

The awards are part of the National Landcare Conference which will be held in Melbourne at the end of September 2016.

The three nominees are:

- **Kay Enkelmann** - Landcare Facilitator/Coordinator Award
- **Phil Moran** - Individual Landcarer Award
- **Fraser Island World Heritage Area Indigenous Advisory Committee** - Indigenous Land Management Award



Awards nominees Kay Enkelmann and Phil Moran

Nominee for the Landcare Facilitator/Coordinator Award, Kay Enkelmann, who works from the BMRG Wondai office has been involved in Landcare for the better part of a decade.

Phil Moran is a skilled environmental educator who is highly regarded by private and public landholders. He has a passion for plants and provides advice on conservation, and sustainable land management practices.

The Fraser Island World Heritage Area Indigenous Advisory Committee established the Recognising & Recording K’Gari’s Cultural Heritage project which has developed closer ties between the island’s Aboriginal Ranger team and the local Butchulla elders.

Each of these nominees is also eligible for the People’s Choice Award which will be presented to the finalist who receives the most votes from the public in the lead up to the awards on Sep 22.

CONTACT

Kay Enkelmann T: 07 41690720
E: kay.enkelmann@bmrq.org.au

Taking the Lead on Litter

Litter and marine debris are growing problems across the world its resultant impacts to wildlife, habitats and food chains are now documented in marine, freshwater and terrestrial systems. The problem is driven in particular by the disposable society in many countries, including Australia and the ubiquitousness of plastics in everyday life. While there are strategies and policies in place to reduce these impacts and there is a push for more sustainable practices including the development of biodegradable plastics, the fact is, there is a continuing need to monitor the condition of the environment and change attitudes and behaviours towards littering and illegal dumping.

Regional areas are blessed by lower populations than metropolitan counterparts and generally produce less litter, but they are constrained by a lack of resources and infrastructure to adequately manage the issues when problems do arise. Added problems occur when major highways and tourist venues drive visitors to or through the region. The Burnett Mary region is one of those areas.

Littering and illegal dumping create huge social, economic and environmental costs to our society. In 2015, it cost Queensland councils \$18.7M to manage 10,900 tonnes of illegally disposed of waste. Queensland has been one of most littered states for the past four years.

Socially, none of us like litter. It makes an area look dirty and uncared for, unpleasant to be in and less likely to be used by the public. It reduces liveability and visual amenity and also adversely affects our sense of community pride and place.

Environmentally, litter can smother native plants, contaminate soils and vegetation, entangles, poisons, injures and kills wildlife, creates homes and feed for vermin/vectors of disease and blocks natural water flows causing flooding and erosion. All this before it even enters our water courses where, for example, a discarded plastic water bottle can last over 450 years as it slowly breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic.

More than 600 species have ingested plastic debris – birds, fish, turtles, corals and marine mammals. In 1960, plastic was found in the stomach of less than 5 per cent of individual seabirds, rising to 80 per cent by 2010. In 2015, a study released by the CSIRO predicted that by 2050, plastic ingestion will affect 99 per cent of the world's seabird species.

The scientists estimate that 90 per cent of all seabirds alive today have eaten plastic of some kind.

To help address the issue, the Burnett Mary Regional Group are coordinating a 12-month collaborative project between Bundaberg and Fraser Coast Regional Councils, Central Queensland University (attitudinal surveys) and Macquarie University (litter monitoring) funded through the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection's (DEHP) Litter and Illegal Dumping Partnerships Program. The Taking the Lead on Litter project will support DEHP's approach of changing behaviours using the Community-Based Social-Marketing Methodology to reinforce positive social norms and increase the perceptions of being caught.



Illegal dumping presents a serious environmental hazard. The litter and illegal dumping project aims to change behaviours to help combat this problem

CONTACT

Kirsten Wortel T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 180)

E: kirsten.wortel@bmrq.org.au

Cultural Site & Knowledge Grants

Following on from the success of the first round of Indigenous grants, the Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG) is announcing the successful recipients of the second round of small grant funding under the National Landcare Programme.

Three grants of \$10,000 were available for Indigenous and Traditional Owner groups to implement projects that create a better understanding of the region's significant cultural heritage and the identification and preservation of sites of cultural and environmental importance.

The new funding will assist in the development of unique and innovative projects that raise awareness of the significance of cultural heritage values and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage values.

Gidarjil Development Corporation will be delivering a project recording key Traditional knowledge holders within the Port Curtis Coral Coast group about cultural values that are significant to them or their family and people.

The Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation RNTNBC will capture information directly from several knowledge holders about the traditional management of marine resources such as Dugong, Marine Turtles, Mullet, Tailor, and Shellfish.

The Bunya Wakka Wakka Cultural and Heritage Aboriginal Corporation will be delivering a project involving the repatriation of cultural site remains to the Wakka Wakka community. The project will involve extensive Wakka Wakka community consultation and will culminate in a repatriation ceremony.



Cultural Site and Knowledge grants are being used in the identification and preservation of sites of cultural importance

CONTACT

Paul Dawson T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 325)
E: paul.dawson@bmrq.org.au

Agnes Water Turtle Presentation

Marine turtles are an ancient and iconic species. The coast of the Burnett Mary region includes beaches that are some of the most important marine turtle nesting sites in Queensland – these beaches support significant breeding populations of the endangered loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), the vulnerable Green (*Chelonia mydas*), and the vulnerable Flatback (*Natator depressus*) turtles.



The endangered Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), one of the species of marine turtles that nest on beaches in the region - Photo courtesy Moore Park Beach Turtle Monitoring Group

In recent decades in eastern Australia, one of the most significant predator of endangered loggerhead eggs has been the introduced red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). BMRG invited Agnes Water community members to a presentation about the marine turtles that nest on their local beaches on Tuesday the 9th of August. The presentation was made possible by funding from the Nest to Ocean Turtle Protection Program – an initiative of the Australian and Queensland Governments.

Over 20 interested people attended the presentation given by Nev and Bev McLachlan who have been monitoring nesting turtles and hatchlings at Wreck Rock beach since 1977. Nev spoke about the threats that impact marine turtles, including fox predation and the glow from urban lights and also imparted details about the biology of turtles, their lifecycles and the importance of local beaches to turtle populations.

CONTACT

Saranne Giudice T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 119)
E: saranne.giudice@bmrq.org.au

Marine Debris Cleanup

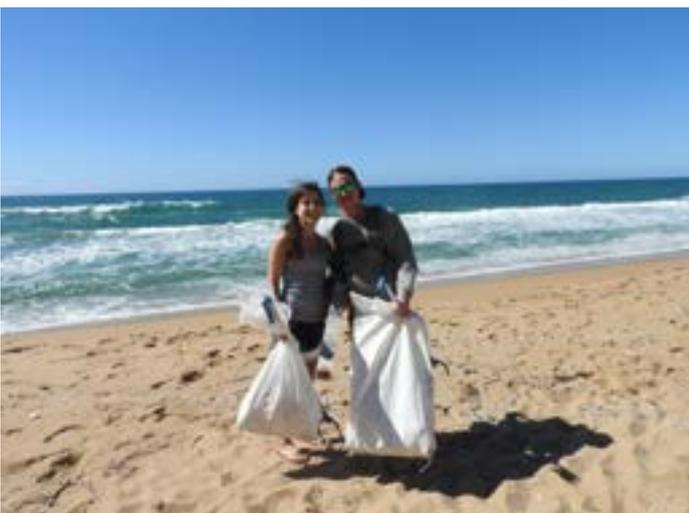
The Discovery Coast Environment group are a community group based in the town of 1770/Agnes Water and the surrounding areas. An extremely passionate and active bunch, they organise and participate in a variety of environmental projects and activities including regular marine debris clean-ups on beaches and along creeks throughout the Discovery Coast region every month and every fortnight during school holidays.

On Saturday the 6th of August over 30 volunteers

“More than 114 kgs of rubbish was collected that day a lot of which consisted of styrofoam and plastic drink bottles.”

came together at Flat Rock to join the Discovery Coast Environment Group for a beach clean-up. Locals and their families, visitors from as far away as Victoria and

several backpackers and BMRG project staff covered over 3km the beach which is a significant nesting beach for the endangered loggerhead turtle and the vulnerable green and flatback turtles. Marine rubbish poses a serious threat to marine turtles; directly through entanglement and ingestion and indirectly through impacting water quality and food resources. Over 114kg of rubbish was collected that day, a lot of which consisted of Styrofoam and plastic drink bottles.



More than 30 volunteers turned out for the marine debris cleanup

Bundaberg Science Expo

In late August, BMRG Project Officer Saranne Giudice held a display at the Bundaberg High School's science expo.

Her display highlighted the issue of marine debris and how rubbish in the marine environment creates a serious hazard for a wide range of marine species.



BMRG's Saranne Giudice with Bundaberg High students

To demonstrate the impacts of marine debris, the display featured a timeline on the lengths of time various common debris items take to break down in the marine environment.

Having a visual representation of how long plastics take to break down in marine environments provided a great perspective for the students about the issue of marine debris.

Students were asked to place particular items on the timeline and many were surprised at how long items such as plastic drink bottles and styrofoam take to break down.

The display also highlighted how species such as marine turtles and birds are impacted by marine debris either through entanglement and the ingestion of plastics.



Saranne Giudice and Bundaberg High Science teacher Bruce Haase

CONTACT

Saranne Giudice T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 119)
E: saranne.giudice@bmr.org.au

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Saranne Giudice T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 119)
E: saranne.giudice@bmr.org.au

Grazing BMP Workshops

The Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG) has hosted a third round of workshops for graziers in the region as part of an ongoing grazing best management practice program.

The workshops are part of the Grazing BMP program which is a voluntary, industry led process which helps graziers to identify improved management practices.

Held over two days, participants were able to work through a series of five modules designed to cover all aspects of a grazing enterprise.

The five modules address soil health, grazing land management, animal health and welfare, animal production and people and business.

The program allows landholders to assess how they are currently operating their businesses against a set of standards developed by the grazing industry for the grazing industry. The workshops are designed to inspire participants and facilitate discussions between producers so that they can learn from each other's experiences.



Grazing BMP workshops have been well received by graziers

Positive feedback has been received from graziers and the workshops we have run to date have proved extremely popular. The current round of workshops was fully subscribed with 26 businesses registered to attend. Given this response there will be more workshops in the future.

The Grazing BMP Program was developed by the Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) in conjunction with Agforce Queensland and the Dept of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and has been supported by the Dept of Environment and Heritage Protection.

CONTACT

Sue Burt T: 07 4169 0720
E: sue.burt@bmrq.org.au

BMRG/Gidarjil Memorandum of Understanding

BMRG and Indigenous group Gidarjil have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to formalise collaborative partnership arrangements that will see Traditional Owner perspectives and Aboriginal values reflected in natural resource management decision making processes in the region.

BMRG and Gidarjil share strong synergies with both working hard to manage natural land and sea resources.

Gidarjil is the nominated Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Body that represents the Gooreng Gooreng, Taribelang Bunda, Bailai and Gurang Traditional Owner groups and was one of the first Aboriginal groups in Queensland to negotiate a Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreement (TUMRA).



Gidarjil Managing Director, Kerry Blackman and BMRG CEO Sheila Charlesworth. BMRG and Gidarjil have signed an MoU to help forge closer ties

The objectives of the MoU are to commit to a collaborative approach for delivering Caring for Country and NRM activities and to establish communication and engagement protocols.

The MOU will also ensure that Aboriginal community representation and values provide a key part of NRM planning and delivery.

Many of the sites BMRG works on in the region have cultural significance and the agreement means that BMRG's responsibilities in terms of cultural heritage matters are appropriately considered.

CONTACT

Paul Dawson T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 325)
E: paul.dawson@bmrq.org.au

Burning the Bunya Balds

In 2009 BMRG received funding through the Australian Government's Working on Country program to establish a team of Indigenous rangers. The Bunya Mountains Murri Ranger team was tasked to help conserve and protect the natural and cultural resources of the Bunya Mountains.

The Bunya Mountains is an area of significant cultural and environmental importance for the region's Indigenous community. For many thousands of years Aboriginal people from across the region gathered roughly every three years in celebration of the bountiful Bunya nut harvest.

The ranger's duties include general wildlife management, fauna surveys, cultural site management and management of the unique and threatened grassland balds which have developed as a direct result of thousands of years of traditional Aboriginal burning practices.

Four fulltime Indigenous rangers and a ranger coordinator are currently employed by the program. One of the program's highlights is a fire management project which is reintroducing traditional fire management practices on the grassland balds. Appropriate burning regimes help to preserve the health and integrity of the grassland bald ecosystems.

The rangers have been working with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Western Downs Regional Council and private consultants to gain skills and knowledge on how to conduct "cool" burns that reduce fuel loads and reduce the risk of wildfire. These burns also encourage new grass growth and play an important role in maintaining the areas biodiversity.

The recent burns in Russell Park on the mountain are the first burns the rangers have conducted unassisted. Plans are in place for more burns on other balds and open eucalypt woodlands on the mountains.

CONTACT

Michael Smith T: 07 4181 2999 (ext 325)
E: michael.smith@bmr.org.au



Fire is being used to manage the unique Bunya Mountains Grassland Balds ecosystem

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Office Address: 193 Bourbong Street, Bundaberg Qld 4670 Mail Address: PO Box 501, Bundaberg Qld 4670
T: 07 4181 2999 F: 07 4154 1427 E: admin@bmrg.org.au

