



Burnett Mary REGIONAL GROUP

Practical Solutions for Natural Resource Management

ANNUAL REPORT 2017/2018



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*Front Cover:
CEOs and project managers from BMRG,
Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) and
Fitzroy Basin Authority (FBA) meet at
Gidarjil Development Corporation's
Thornhill Station to discuss future
collaborations.*

Our Vision

“ To protect and enhance the agricultural and natural environment of the Burnett Mary region for future generations ”



WELCOME

Welcome to the Burnett Mary Regional Group's (BMRG's) 2017/2018 Annual Report.

Covering approximately 56,000km² of land and 11,000km² of sea, the Burnett Mary region is internationally renowned for its ecological diversity, extensive primary production and rich cultural heritage.

The region also supports Queensland's largest regional population outside of the South East corner.

This year, BMRG successfully completed several natural resource management (NRM) programs on behalf of both the Australian and Queensland governments. These programs have been a collaborative effort with a range of community and NRM groups, indigenous organisations, Traditional Owners and landholders throughout the Burnett Mary region and beyond.

This Annual Report celebrates the many successes that BMRG and the Burnett Mary community have achieved together during 2017/2018.

Message from CEO and Chair

On behalf of the BMRG Board of Directors, management and staff, we are pleased to present the Burnett Mary Regional Group Annual Report for 2017/2018. We thank our members, research partners, Landcare groups, industry groups, Federal, State and Local Governments and the community for their involvement in making 2017/2018 a very successful year. We could not have achieved these results without your valuable support.

For the second consecutive year, BMRG received a 100% performance assessment from the Australian Government across the 56 NRM groups throughout Australia. We will endeavour to maintain this position by our continuous improvement process.

BMRG represents one of the most diverse natural resource regions in Australia and together with our partners and the community we continue to achieve meaningful outcomes to improve and protect the region's natural assets. We understand that to achieve constant improvement and lasting results, we need to nurture a partnership-focussed culture whilst remaining nimble and adaptive to climate change and funding opportunities. With season variability linked to climate change, this will continue to feature within our region and BMRG is continuously adapting plans and strategies to intelligently manage our region's environmental systems.

There has been greater collaboration with the 56 NRM groups across Australia with a number of collaborations and agreements in the pipeline to share resources and data that will benefit all regions whilst reducing costs. These include Geoscience Australia's use of spatial data, the Biosecurity strategy and a national approach to environmental economic accounts.

Programs and project details are included throughout this annual report and the following is a brief overview:

TOTAL FUNDED PROJECTS 2017-2018
\$7,639,381

TOTAL FUNDS EXPENDED
\$5,823,694

CONTINUED & COMMITTED PROJECTS
\$1,815,687

These funds cover programs that include:

- ◆ *Water Quality*
- ◆ *Climate Change*
- ◆ *Sustainable Agriculture*
- ◆ *Biodiversity*
- ◆ *Indigenous Engagement*
- ◆ *Communication & Engagement*

Looking ahead, the 2018/2019 year promises to be both exciting and challenging. The new Australian Government 5-year National Landcare Plan Phase 2 program will continue the long-standing commitment to deliver on-ground natural resource management projects for sustainable NRM and agricultural priorities across the regions. The Queensland Government's new 4 year Natural Resource Management Investment Program will deliver funded projects for Water Quality, Paddock to Reef and Building Best Management Practices to improve communities and landscapes and the regional co-ordination, monitoring and engagement of programs.

Finally, we would like to thank our members, Landcare groups, research partners, Federal, State and Local Governments, the community, Board and staff for their dedication in delivering the many positive outcomes over the last 12 months.

We look forward to working with you all on the many challenges ahead in the coming years.

Kind regards,

Sheila Charlesworth Chief Executive Officer

Tony Ricciardi Chair



Financials at a Glance

To view BMRG's 2016-2017 full audited financial statements, please visit www.bmrg.org.au

**TOTAL FUNDS
AVAILABLE IN**
2017/2018

\$7,639,381

**TOTAL FUNDS
EXPENDED IN**
2017/2018

\$5,823,694

**TOTAL FUNDS
COMMITTED ON
CONTINUAL WORK IN**
2017/2018

\$1,815,687

PROGRAM WATER QUALITY

PROJECTS Burrum / Baffle Riparian Improvements; Grazing Best Management Practice; Reef Trust III; Paddock to Reef; Wetlands; Soil Conservation; Better Beef for the Reef; Pilot Ag Extension

**2017/2018
EXPENDITURE (\$)**

2,545,260

PROGRAM CLIMATE CHANGE

PROJECTS Carbon Farming Solutions; Recovery to Resilience

**2017/2018
EXPENDITURE (\$)**

274,757

PROGRAM SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

PROJECTS Better Catchments

**2017/2018
EXPENDITURE (\$)**

669,528

PROGRAM BIODIVERSITY

PROJECTS Healthy Habitats; Keeping it Great; Nest to Ocean; Litter and Illegal Dumping; Shorebird Monitoring

**2017/2018
EXPENDITURE (\$)**

1,442,267

PROGRAM INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

PROJECTS Building Indigenous Capacity, Working with Traditional Owners

**2017/2018
EXPENDITURE (\$)**

756,343

PROGRAM COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

PROJECTS Beyond Boundaries

**2017/2018
EXPENDITURE (\$)**

135,539

Back L-R: **Boyd Paton, Michelle Chicken, Lindsay Chicken**
 Front L-R: **Drew Paton and Caitlyn Paton**

Better Catchments

BMRG's Better Catchments program invests in improved land management practices. Since its inception, the program has assisted 56 landholders in implementing voluntary practice change over 17,314 ha of native forestry, grazing and broad acre cropping land. Practices are aligned to grazing Best Management Practice (BMP) modules and benchmarked against native forestry and cropping practices. BMRG partners with Burnett Catchment Care Association (BCCA) for the cropping and grazing practice component and with Private Forestry Services Queensland to undertake the Native Forestry engagement and extension.

More than 180 landholders have also been supported to improve their knowledge and skills through a series of workshops and field days. Topics included grazing land management, native forestry management, soil health and data management.

Mundubbera graziers and pecan growers Boyd Paton and Michelle Chicken are keen advocates for the Better Catchments program. After attending a two-day workshop, Michelle benchmarked the family's grazing practices and with the assistance of BCCA extension officers, developed a project to improve these practices.



"We were challenged on our existing beef production methods," explains Michelle, "and in a brief time, were able to enhance the efficiency and productivity of our trading and fattening operation."

Boyd and Michelle also participated in additional training on soil health and grazing land management and were successful in receiving a small grant to implement a cell / rotational grazing system. They have seen excellent, almost immediate results with pasture diversity and quality. *"Our stock is healthier and soils have been maintained through healthier constant groundcover,"* says Michelle. An unexpected benefit of the program has been the application of BMP principles to Boyd and Michelle's pecan nut operation – a great example of holistic farming!

Paddock to Reef

The Paddock to Reef program is a collaboration between NRM groups, government, industry, research organisations and landholders. The program adopts an innovative approach to collecting and integrating data on agricultural management practices, catchment loads and the health of the Great Barrier Reef. Information provided through the program facilitates the measurement and reporting of progress towards targets outlined in the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan.

This year, BMRG managed the collection of regional data on agricultural management practices, fertiliser and pesticide use and wetland condition and extent. BMRG also led the annual Reef Report Card roadshow which provided a platform for Paddock to Reef scientists to present program development and results back to regional organisations.

"The oceans deserve our respect and care but you have to know something before you can care about it"

SYLVIA EARLE



Photo: Presenters at the 2018 Paddock to Reef Roadshow in Bundaberg

John Day inspecting gully erosion with workshop participants

Soil Conservation

This year, BMRG's soil conservation officer, John Day continued to maintain a busy schedule of extension services including on-ground projects, training, mentoring and dissemination of technical information.

Collaborative arrangements with nine landholders directly targeted erosion control over 140ha of grazing land. In addition, nine soil conservation and water property management plans were completed with graziers and croppers over almost 3,900 ha.

More than 100 additional landholders were directly engaged through workshops and one-on-one extension. The workshops focused on practical soil conservation measures including farm infrastructure, contour bank maintenance and farm dam by-washes.



John Day demonstrating a dumpy level to Fitzroy Basin Association officers

John's experience and knowledge-base continues to be acknowledged beyond the Burnett Mary region. This year, he was engaged by North Queensland Dry Tropics group to assist with Reef Trust sediment control and facilitated a soil conservation training program for Fitzroy Basin Association.

Participation in various mentoring programs, such as the Queensland Farmers Federation's Agricultural Extension Trainee program, continues to be an important part of John's role. These programs aim to address the shortage of agricultural extension services throughout Queensland.

In response to ongoing requests by landholders for practical soil conservation information, John has prepared a major report summarising projects undertaken over the last five years and published a practical landholder guide on gully rehabilitation.

BMRG is proud of the achievements and commitment of its soil conservation officer and will endeavour to continue this critical service into the future.

Soil Health

Understanding and managing our soils is vital to ensuring the long-term sustainability of agriculture. Good soil health is about creating a robust soil that can withstand impacts such as agriculture, without loss of fertility, structure and biological activity.

In 2017/18, BMRG was excited to manage a project aimed at improving soil health within the Burnett Mary region. We partnered with independent agronomist David Hall to deliver a series of field days and workshops under the theme, "Improving Soil Health - Practical Answers on Use of Organic Amendments for Land Managers."

The team also prepared a series of fact sheets, technical notes and case studies to support the workshops. Free soil testing and on-farm technical advice was provided to ensure that land managers can optimize the results from any soil amendment. These amendments focused on the use of manures and composts.

Participant feedback indicated that the practical nature of the program was valuable because it provided "real processes in realistic scenarios."

Photo 1: BMRG's Dominique Hinchliffe [far left] and Ann McKenzie [far right] with from left, agronomist David Hall, host Jim Viner and Rob Kerle at the Glastonbury field day

Photo 2: Glastonbury workshop

Photo 3: David Hall addressing participants at the Tansey field day

Photo 4: Dominique with Biggenden workshop participants





Participants at a grazing BMP Workshop at Kybong

Grazing Best Management Practice

BMRG's Grazing Best Management Practice (BMP) program enables graziers to benchmark their practices against industry-developed standards. The program consists of five modules: Soil Health; Grazing Land Management; Animal Health & Welfare; Animal Production and People & Business. Program participants are encouraged to identify and implement changes to achieve BMP accreditation.

In 2017/18, 85 landholders participated in six Grazing BMP workshops. An additional 22 follow-up training events supported 966 people with BMP information. Topics included hands-on property mapping, pasture management, low stress stock handling, soil health, farm safety, legume establishment and biosecurity.

Feedback from Grazing BMP participants has been unanimously positive and includes the following comments:

- *"The group discussion and sharing of ideas have great mutual benefit."*
- *"The self-assessments were good to reflect and check that your business is meeting the standard and what to do if it is not."*
- *"Nothing bad ever comes from open discussion because everyone has different experiences and knowledge that can be shared."*
- *"Motivation and incentives to do the right thing are really important for farmers – we all need to recognise and acknowledge good progress."*

Reef Trust III

The Australian Government's Reef Trust program aims to improve water quality, restore ecosystem health and enhance species protection in Great Barrier Reef catchments while also improving the productivity and profitability of agricultural businesses.

Within the Burnett Mary region, BMRG collaborated with the Burnett Catchment Care Association (BCCA), Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee (MRCCC), Bundaberg Sugar Services Ltd and Canegrowers Isis Ltd to deliver the Reef Trust Phase III projects.

In 2017/2018, the program continued to focus on investing in water quality, through reducing nutrient runoff from intensive agriculture and reducing sediment runoff from grazing practices. The program also provided on-ground extension support to landholders.

A total of 32 projects were contracted to enhance the performance of agricultural businesses and improve water quality outcomes in both the grazing and Sugarcane industries. More projects will be contracted and completed during the 2018/19 period thanks to the ongoing extension efforts from all of our collaborative partners.

Tony and Sheila with members of the Reef Trust III Working Group (Sugarcane) L-R Cathy Mylrea, Angela Williams, Ryan Trott and Dale Holliss



BMRG's Regional Landcare Facilitator (RLF) is funded by the National Landcare Program to promote the Landcare ethos and principles of sustainable agriculture to landholders throughout the Burnett Mary region.

This year, the RLF facilitated a range of networking and educational opportunities and contributed to a suite of media aimed at informing and supporting landholders. A total of eight RLF workshops attracted over 200 participants including Landcare and industry group members. Topics focused on best management practices, improved soil health and ground cover management.

Under the RLF program, BMRG also provided financial and in-kind support to various events throughout the region, including field days, agricultural showcases and community meetings.

A highlight of the RLF's 2017/18 calendar was a series of "Women in Agriculture" (WAG) workshops convened throughout the region. Women play a key management role within most farming enterprises and it is important that they remain engaged and informed. The workshops were supported by a range of community groups and businesses and addressed various agricultural and social issues.



BMRG's RLF Kay Enkleman, Landcarer Steve Burgess, the Hon. Luke Hartsuyker MP and Mr Llew O'Brien MP discuss a Landcare project at Dagon

BMRG acknowledges the region's RLF Steering Committee for its longstanding support. Committee membership is drawn from: BMRG; Three Rivers Beef Plan Group; Noosa and District Landcare Group; Lake Baroon Catchment Care Group; South East Burnett Landcare Group; Queensland Water and Land Carers and the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Committee members have provided invaluable guidance and advice to the RLF, particularly in evaluating and reporting on the program's many achievements.

Under the Australian Government's Regional Land Partnership program, BMRG will continue to maintain a strong and vibrant Landcare facilitation role throughout the Burnett Mary region, focussing on the protection and improvement of natural resources on agricultural lands.

Better Beef for the Reef

BMRG's "Better Beef for the Reef" project is funded through the Department of Environment and Science. The project aims to accelerate the adoption rate of improved grazing management practices and contribute to better water quality outcomes for the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. The project amplifies BMRG's extension activities by targeting graziers who have not previously participated in Natural Resource Management programs. Priority areas include the Lower Baffle, Lower Kolan, Lower Burnett and Lower Burrum Basins.

Participating graziers are provided with a suite of one-on-one extension and support measures to assist them in benchmarking their current management practices and developing

plans to improve their farms' profitability and sustainability. The project will also fund the establishment of 6 demonstration sites and showcase optimal grazing practices through a series of workshops and field days.

This year, direct support has been provided to 18 grazing businesses and applications for demonstration sites have been received from interested landholders. Four workshops have been delivered and 16 people from 10 different businesses received support to undertake BMRG's Grazing BMP program.

Looking ahead, the project will continue to focus on best management practices activities currently undertaken by graziers and highlight areas for improvement. Demonstration site applications will be assessed and contracted to highlight the value of integrating new technology and

sustainable agricultural practices into grazing businesses.



Photo Left: Grazing Land Management Instructor David McLean.

Photo Right: Participants in a Grazing Land Management Workshop.



2018 BMRG Scholarship Winner

The experience of growing up on her parents' beef property at Brooweena, 50km west of Maryborough, and working on farms in Central Queensland and the Gulf of Carpentaria, has instilled in Emily Rockemer a passion for working in the agricultural sector.

This passion was a key factor in Emily winning the inaugural 2018 BMRG Scholarship for students enrolled in Central Queensland University's (CQU's) Bachelor of Agriculture course in Bundaberg.

BMRG manages a range of programs that support innovative farming practices throughout the Burnett Mary region. This scholarship reflects BMRG's commitment to the agricultural sector and supports a young person who shares this same commitment.

CQU's Associate Professor Simon White said that the course aimed to equip students with the knowledge and skills that are required in today's technology-driven agricultural sector. The scholarship will help greatly in achieving Emily's educational goals. Looking to the future, Emily sees herself in an agricultural extension role, providing practical assistance to farmers in maintaining their productivity and profitability.



Agricultural Extension Trainee Program

This year, BMRG was delighted to host Dominique Hinchliffe as an extension trainee under the Queensland Government's pilot Agricultural Work Placement Program. The program aims to improve the capacity of trainee extension officers by enhancing their skills in delivering agricultural and NRM projects in Great Barrier Reef catchments.

During her 12-month traineeship, Dominique was exposed to various BMRG programs including Grazing BMP, Better Beef for the Reef, Soil Conservation in the Western Burnett and Improving Soil Health.

She particularly enjoyed her time spent with BMRG's soil conservation officer John Day, travelling throughout the region to experience first-hand the issues affecting soil erosion and its management.

Dominique was also responsible for organising a series of field days and workshops on the use of manures and composts. *"There has been plenty of interest in these concepts throughout the region,"* Dominique says, *"so it's been a wonderful opportunity to put my extension skills to work."*

A highlight of Dominique's year was the relationships she forged with landholders throughout the region. *"I love getting out and about and believe that lasting relationships are vital in agricultural extension,"* she says. *"I also love seeing how much farmers really care about their land and businesses."*

As part of their traineeship, Dominique and the five other trainees were treated to a two-week bus trip from Gympie to Mossman. This trip enabled trainees to spend a few days in each other's region and gain exposure to local industries and issues.

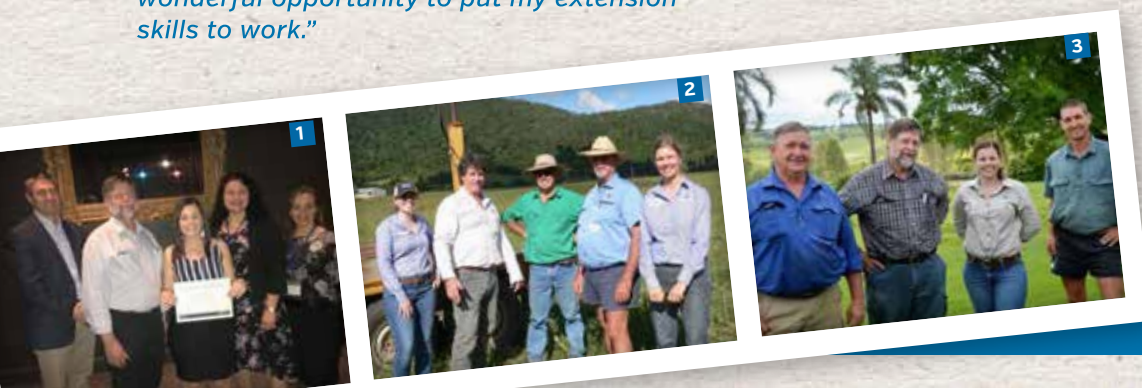
If Dominique thought 2017/18 was a big year, the next one is going to be even bigger. She will be working full-time from BMRG's Wondai office in a split soil conservation / extension role.

Congratulations and welcome aboard Dominique!

Photo 1: Dominique at her graduation ceremony with (L-R) QFF CEO Travis Tobin, mentors John Day and Cathy Mylrea and QFF's Diana Saunders

Photo 2: Dominique Hinchliffe with agronomist David Hall, host Jim Viner, Rob Kerle and Ann McKenzie at the Glastonbury

Photo 3: Tex Burnham, John Day, Dominique Hinchliffe and Lance Burnham at the Burnhams' property in the North Burnett



Carbon Farming comes to the Burnett Mary

This year, in a vote of confidence for the Burnett Mary region's agricultural sector, BMRG joined forces with Australia's largest carbon project developer. The partnership between BMRG and Greencollar is an Australian first and seeks to enlist eligible landholders into the Australian Government's Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF).

Carbon Farming projects can generate income for landholders through changes in land management practices which reduce greenhouse gas emissions or store carbon in soil and vegetation. The ERF allows landholders to implement carbon storage or emissions abatement activities to generate and sell carbon credits.

Eligible activities that landholders can undertake to produce carbon credits include: changes to livestock management; protecting native vegetation at risk of clearing; regeneration of native vegetation and improving soil carbon. For many of the region's farmers already undertaking these activities, carbon farming can provide an additional income stream that is not dependent on commodity prices.

“The environment and the economy are really two sides of the same coin. If we cannot sustain the environment, we cannot sustain ourselves.”

WANGARI MAATHAI

Laura Sutton, Mark Lincoln (Greencollar) and Tony Ricciardi discuss the new BMRG Greencollar partnership

Through the partnership, Greencollar has established a team within BMRG's Bundaberg office to undertake a number of property assessments throughout the Burnett Mary region. The first collaborative project will soon be registered on the ERF Project Register.

Looking ahead, the focus will be on bringing together a range of carbon projects and partnerships to underpin a larger scale of investment and assist Australia meet internationally agreed emissions targets while improving productivity on the land.



BMRG

Out and About...



Above: Wokka Wokka dancers perform a smoking ceremony for Bonye Fire Workshop Participants



Left: Laura gets "beastly" at Oceanfest



BMRG Board Director Beth takes a break at the old Dagun Rail Station



Alluvium's Mishko Ivezich chats with Participants at BMRG's Fluvial Geomorphology Workshop

Left: Vietnam veterans remember the fallen at Camp Gregory



Below: BMRG Team - Emma, Cathy, Tess, Ryan, Dominique and Laura

Left: Bundaberg Regional Council's Eric Dyke and Guy Hancock "blooming" at Oceanfest

Right: The "boys" enjoying BMRG's Kids' Activities Marquee at Oceanfest

Below: Sheila with Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation Director Christine Royan and rangers Corey Currie and Conway Burns. BMRG assisted in the provision of ranger vehicles for use on K'gari (Fraser Island).





Above: Sheila and Go-Rental's Fay Gough (2nd from Right) celebrate the purchase of BMRG's offices with new owners (L-R) Andrew, Janelle and Luke Gerry



Dean addressing members of Canada's North Bay Friendship Force



Below Standing: Tony Farewells Former Board Director Tanzi Smith

Below: BMRG Board Director Mike chats with John "Batman" Parsons at Oceanfest

Chip off the Ol' Block - Ryan with his grandpa, Russ Tyler



Left: Ryan and young BMRG friends are all smiles at the Noosa Festival of Water

Right: Selina shares a story at her Farewell



GBR Wetland Monitoring

In 2017/18, BMRG continued its support for the Queensland Government's Great Barrier Reef Wetland Condition Monitoring Program. A BMRG project officer worked in collaboration with the state's Wetland Science Team to provide operational support for condition monitoring at randomly selected wetlands in the Fraser Coast and Bundaberg regions.

BMRG coordinated repeat condition assessments at 7 sites between November 2017 and May 2018. This included acting as the primary liaison between landholders and the Wetland Science Team, obtaining permission and permits to access sites, coordinating site inductions and assisting in field data collection.

This ongoing collaboration between the Wetland Science Team and BMRG contributes directly to the management and protection of the iconic Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

BMRG's Emma- Kate Currie Monitors Wetland Condition



“A good river is nature's life work in song”

MARK HELPRIN

Improving Wetlands and Fish Habitats in the Burnett Mary

In 2017-18 BMRG continued to invest in the rehabilitation and protection of priority coastal wetlands in the Southern Great Barrier Reef Catchment under the two separate projects - Improving Wetlands in Burnett Mary and Improving Fish Habitat Networks in the Burnett Mary.

Improving Wetlands in the Burnett Mary targeted priority wetlands in the Susan River Catchment which is an important lowland sub-catchment of the Mary River and Great Sandy Strait. The project delivered rehabilitation and protection of 150ha of priority palustrine and estuarine wetlands. This result was achieved through collaboration with project partners to exclude stock, improve grazing practices and control aquatic pest plants, leading to improved water quality entering the

Great Barrier Reef. The project incorporated a combination of workshops, on-ground extension, construction of stock exclusion fences and eradication of the aquatic pest plant *Hymenachne* in an important wetland reserve.

A key component of this project was a “Walking the Landscape” workshop held at Susan River Homestead. Landholders and experts from industry and government agencies came together to share their knowledge and expertise in identifying key threatening processes and potential management interventions.

BMRG's Maree Prior and JCU's Nathan Waltham retrieving fyke nets as part of the NESP monitoring project at Round Hill Wetlands.



Walking the Landscape Workshop Participants





Noosa and District Landcare trainees Jane and Erin undertaking site preparation

Healthy Habitats

BMRG's 5-year Healthy Habitats program was successfully completed this year.

Under the program, on-ground management strategies have been implemented over 4000ha of terrestrial and coastal environments, for the protection and conservation of threatened ecological communities and species.

A key to the program's success has been the strategic partnerships developed by BMRG with established organisations.

Lowland Rainforest of Subtropical Australia, a Threatened Ecological Community, in the Mary Valley, was selected as a high priority site to undertake riparian restoration and weed control works. This site plays host to extensive habitat potential for species including the giant barred frog, Mary River cod and regent honeyeater and also supports a roost of grey head flying foxes.

As a riparian and aquatic habitat, the site was also of importance for migratory species including the white-throated needletail, black-faced monarch, spectacled monarch and great egret/white egret.

Conservation projects such as this not only enrich the habitat values for threatened species within the Burnett Mary region, but foster closer working relationships with our region's dedicated volunteer groups. This year, BMRG facilitated a range of extension and educational workshops on conservation, weed identification and control methods to assist with skills development and capacity building within these groups.

Improved fire management was another priority delivery area for the 2017/2018 Healthy Habitats program. The 2000ha project site selected for fire management included numerous threatened or endemic species that benefit from controlled fire regimens, including *Eucalyptus beaniana*, *Eucalyptus virens*, *Eucalyptus broviniensis* and *Eucalyptus curtisii*.

Under the Healthy Habitats program, ongoing support was also provided to the volunteers of Turtle Care and Lady Musgrave Island Study groups to continue their invaluable monitoring works with endangered marine turtles (see articles on Pages 17 and 18).





Nest to Ocean

The coastline of the Burnett Mary region is internationally renowned for its marine turtle nesting sites. These sites support significant breeding populations of endangered loggerhead turtles and vulnerable green and flatback turtles.

These iconic species experience a range of serious threats to their survival. The main threats are pollution and changes to habitats. Other threats include predation of eggs and hatchlings by foxes, feral pigs, dogs and goannas.

The Nest to Ocean Turtle Protection program is an ongoing commitment by the Australian and Queensland Governments to protect marine turtle sites from such feral predators.

In 2017/18, BMRG's Nest to Ocean project continued to target the region's fox population. The use of conservation detection canines to locate fox dens has been a highlight, with approximately 160 dens located. The dogs indicated that 84 dens were active and these dens were subsequently fumigated by the project team. All located dens were in sandy soils; foxes regard this soil type as "prime real estate" and foxes dispersing into the area from adjacent habitats will use these old dens in subsequent seasons. As these dens are now mapped, it will enable Gidarjl ranger teams to revisit the dens and implement control actions prior to future turtle nesting seasons.

The use of soft-jaw foot hold traps outside fumigated dens to intercept returning and subordinate foxes was also very successful with a total of 18 foxes removed.

Short term outcomes through the deployment of individual in-situ nest protectors were achieved and a total of 79 at-risk nests were protected from predation during the project. These predator exclusion devices will also be able to be deployed over nests in future nesting seasons.

The continued involvement of Traditional Owners and the Gidarjl ranger team in the project has enhanced the sense of community stewardship. Local communities, particularly school students, are always keen to interact with rangers and learn about their contribution to preserving one of our region's greatest natural assets.



Monitoring Sea Turtles on Lady Musgrave Island

The 2017 / 2018 marine turtle nesting season marked Jim and Annie Buck's 31st consecutive season of monitoring sea turtles at Lady Musgrave Island. The island is located off the coast of the Burnett Mary region within the southern Great Barrier Reef. This year, during the months of December, January and March, eleven volunteers participated in on-site monitoring with other volunteers providing support on the mainland.

The size of the Green turtle 'nesting population' visiting the island rookery during the season was above average, with data collected from over 730 individuals. The size of Green turtle nesting populations fluctuates from year to year and is believed to be influenced by weather patterns, and the availability of food in the feeding grounds.

The size of the Loggerhead turtle nesting population using Lady Musgrave this season was also pleasing, with 25 individuals identified on site. Over the last few seasons, Jim and Annie's team has witnessed a significant increase in the number of this endangered species nesting.

Monitoring of the Lady Musgrave turtle nesting populations contributes to the broader annual 'turtle nesting population' census undertaken by the Department of Environment and Science through the Queensland Turtle Conservation Project. Public education is also a significant activity undertaken by the team whilst on Lady Musgrave. Jim believes that community engagement is critical to developing a broader understanding and awareness of both the turtles and their environment and is one of the keys to their conservation. Excited members of the

island's camping and yachting communities join the team each evening to learn about the animal's biology and life cycle and witness the prehistoric spectacle of sea turtles emerging from the sea and nesting.

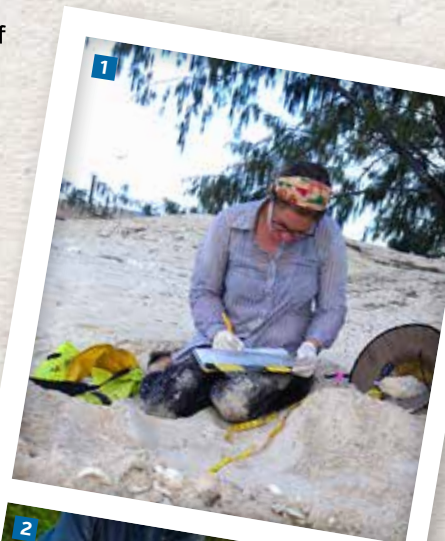
In February, Jim returned to the island with a small team to assess the success of the season's turtle nesting. After the eggs have hatched and the hatchlings have departed, the team collects data from material left behind. These assessments provide a robust perspective on the nesting success on the island.

Jim cannot speak highly enough about his dedicated team of volunteers and acknowledges the support of government, private sector businesses and organisations such as BMRG.

BMRG looks forward to continuing its support of Jim and Annie Buck's wonderful work in conserving one of our region's truly iconic natural assets.

Photo 1, 3 and Below: Volunteers monitoring turtle nests on Lady Musgrave Island

Photo 2: Jim Buck getting up close and personal with an old lady of the sea



Turtle Care

For the past 41 years, Bev and Nev McLachlan have celebrated Christmas and New Year's Eve monitoring the migration and nesting patterns of our endangered marine turtle population on an isolated 22km stretch of coastline at Wreck Rock, 100km north of Bundaberg.

Nev has volunteered since 1969, and in 1977 persuaded his then new wife Bev to join him. Each year after that, from the end of November to the beginning of February, the couple has packed up their lives and children and headed to Wreck Rock beach. This commitment puts them among Australia's longest-running turtle volunteers

As the founders of Turtle Care, Nev and Bev have made an immeasurable contribution to marine turtle conservation by collecting decades of information on population dynamics, nesting patterns and migratory routes. By analysing this information, we have learnt so much about the physiology and habits of marine turtles. One example is the mass of data supporting the theory that marine turtles' gender is determined by sand

temperature during hatching – a theory that was once scoffed at by science and research communities.

The combined efforts of Turtle Care and other volunteer marine turtle monitoring groups throughout the Burnett Mary region, including Moore Park Beach Turtle Monitoring Group, Lady Musgrave Island Study Group and the Sandy Cape Group, have been instrumental in identifying and mitigating predatory threats to turtle populations. The groups also play a key role in informing local residents and tourists of the turtles' plight while also raising awareness through local and social media.

BMRG applauds the outstanding efforts of Nev and Bev and will continue to support Turtle Care's invaluable contributions to the marine turtle research community.



Nev and Bev McLaughlan in their favourite habitat

“Wherever there are wild animals in the world, there is always an opportunity for caring, compassion and kindness.”

WANGARI MAATHAI



Nev and Bev McLaughlan Showing Signs of Dedication



Keeping it Great

2017/18 was the final year for BMRG's 5-year "Keeping it Great" program. Under the program, BMRG has successfully engaged a range of community groups to undertake activities aimed at preserving the ecology and outstanding natural values of the Great Sandy Ramsar Site and Fraser Island World Heritage Area.

The **Reef Check Foundation** continued its "citizen science" project, engaging community members to collect and analyse data on coral populations to determine reef health in the Great Sandy Strait and for input to the "Great Barrier Reef Report Card"

The **Lower Mary River Land & Catchment Care Group** (LMRLCCG) hosted a Bush Regeneration Workshop to raise awareness and provide training in appropriate regeneration of islands within the Great Sandy Strait. LMRLCCG also continued its excellent work protecting and monitoring loggerhead turtles at Sandy Cape.

Fraser Island Defenders Organisation (FIDO) and LMRLCCG partnered to co-ordinate an extensive pest weed removal program on Fraser, Woody and Round Islands. Much of this work is conducted around the townships of Happy Valley and Eurong and is a much acknowledged and appreciated contribution to the beautiful natural settings of these popular areas.

The **Cooloola CoastCare Association** engaged an underwater photographer to edit and publish

footage of marine habitat and species taken within the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site. The footage will be collated into a short video for publication and showing at community events. It will be an invaluable tool for community education.

The **University of Queensland** concluded its 3-year study of the threatened water mouse (also known as the false water-rat). The aim of this project was to understand the range of the water mouse and develop a greater understanding of its distribution and density and the factors shaping its populations.

As part of the project, Conservation Detection Dogs were used to locate and subsequently fumigate 19 fox dens. Foxes are key predators of the water mouse. This project is part of a National Water Mouse Recovery Plan. The overall objective of the Recovery Plan is to improve the conservation status of the water mouse and its habitat through habitat protection, reducing threats to species' survival, research and increasing public participation in recovery activities.

“Some of nature's most exquisite handiwork is on a miniature scale, as anyone knows who has applied a magnifying glass to a snowflake.”

RACHEL CARSON



A Water Mouse nest at Tandora



BMRG is proud to have shared in many of the achievements of our region's Traditional Owners and Indigenous organisations and is looking forward to forging even stronger collaborative partnerships through our Indigenous Engagement program.

Bunya Mountains Murri Rangers

Building on their successes in reviving traditional fire management practices on the Bunya Mountains, BMRG's team of Bunya Mountains Murri Rangers (BMMR) has continued to promote these practices to other indigenous ranger teams and the broader community.

Aboriginal people traditionally used intensive and strategic fire management practices in the Bunya Mountains and surrounds to facilitate access to meeting places and create ideal habitat mosaics for hunting. The absence of such active Aboriginal fire management practice on the mountains and throughout Australia

has resulted in the recession of Indigenous ecological knowledge of fire management.

In collaboration with a range of groups including Indigenous organisations, land management agencies and universities, BMMR is sharing their cultural burning revival with other indigenous rangers throughout South-East Queensland and Northern NSW. The BMMR's achievements this year were acknowledged and celebrated when they won the 2018 Rio Tinto Indigenous Land Management Award at the Queensland National Landcare Awards.

Conway Burns (BAC) and Marc Dargusch (QPWS) proudly wear the Butchulla badge on their ranger uniforms

Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation

The Butchulla people are the traditional owners of the land and sea around Maryborough and Hervey Bay, including K'Gari (Fraser Island). The Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) represents the Butchulla people in relation to native title and cultural connection. This year, with support from the state government and BMRG, BAC has established its own Land and Sea Ranger program. Under the program, Butchulla rangers will undertake a range of activities throughout Butchulla country. Through on-country surveys, rangers will work with Butchulla knowledge holders and elders to identify and record sites in a cultural database.

A key achievement of the program has been the integration of rangers within the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, to preserve conservation and cultural links with K'gari. In honour of these links, all rangers on K'gari now adorn their uniforms with a "Working for Butchulla Country" badge.



"Working for Butchulla Country" Badge





Bunya Peoples' Aboriginal Corporation

The Bunya Peoples Aboriginal Corporation (BPAC) continues to contribute to the conservation of cultural heritage and biodiversity values across the Toowoomba, Western Downs and Burnett regions.

This year, the BPAC ranger team focused on four key projects:

- » prickly pear management, fencing and track upgrades at Cattle Creek, which is a significant cultural place and pathway at the base of the Bunya Mountains
- » weed management and cultural burning to protect threatened Poplar Box ecological communities in the Western Downs
- » parthenium management in the Burnett region, including Cherbourg
- » fire management for cultural site protection and to encourage the health of local ecosystems, including open eucalypt woodlands.

“ This earth, I never damage. I look after. Fire is nothing, just clean up. When you burn, new grass coming up. That means good animal soon, Might be goanna, possum, wallaby. Burn him off, new grass coming up, new life all over. ”

BILL NEIDJIE

Gidarjil Development Corporation

This year, BMRG continued its close working relationship with the Gidarjil team on a range of collaborative projects. An excellent example has been Gidarjil's participation in BMRG's Nest to Ocean program.

Traditional Owner representatives have been involved in the project from its inception through participation in the steering committee and ensuring that traditional ecological knowledge is incorporated into the associated activities.

The Gidarjil Land and Sea Ranger team has also been directly involved in the project through the tagging and data recording of nesting marine turtles and fumigation of fox dens. This year, six rangers undertook training and were certified to undertake den fumigation. They also worked closely with the dog handlers to become proficient at relocating dens using GPS technology.



Tom Garrett demonstrating fox trap-setting to Gidarjil rangers

NRM Prioritisation Workshops

This year, the Queensland Government convened a series of workshops throughout the state to identify and analyse changes that have occurred in community and institutional practices, as a result of NRM investment since 2003.

Building on these workshops, BMRG engaged Alluvium Consulting to facilitate two regional workshops in Bundaberg and Gympie. The purpose of these workshops was twofold:

- » to develop a shared understanding of the current and future natural resource management needs in the Burnett Mary region and
- » to identify priorities for local community groups to help deliver the region's vision

“To protect and enhance the agricultural and natural environment of the Burnett Mary region for future generations.”

The regional workshops focused on five key NRM outcome areas: soil stabilisation and condition; riparian corridor management; water quality and waterway health; threatened species and habitat management and capacity building. Workshop participants identified activities required to achieve local outcomes in the areas and then prioritised these activities.

Left to Right: Participants at BMRG's Gympie NRM Prioritisation Workshop, (L-R): Peter Stevens (Lake Baroon Catchment Care), Fiona Chandler (Alluvium), Jonathan Waites (Barung Landcare) and John Sinclair (Fraser Island Defenders' Organisation)

The top three prioritised activities identified at each workshop, in descending order, are:

GYMPIE

1. Develop a regional strategy to better resource Landcare groups.
2. Quantify the cost-benefit of sustainable land management activities to local communities – “Tell the story of NRM”.
3. Facilitate strategic investment of resources and clearly identify cost-benefits of NRM activities.

BUNDABERG

1. Expand cultural burning practices (landholder training and demonstrations).
2. Provide resources and support to schools through State education curriculum to promote NRM practices and principles.
3. Implement a regional extension program promoting Voluntary Conservation Agreements (VCAs) and Voluntary Declarations (VDecs) under the Vegetation Management Act.

Thank you to all workshop participants for your commitment and contribution to this process. Outcomes from the workshops will inform BMRG's future regional planning and provide opportunities to continue building the local networks and relationships essential for effective collaboration and use of limited resources.





Board of Directors

Left to Right: **BMRG Board of Directors** Vanessa Elwell-Gavins,
Professor Phil Brown, Tony Ricciardi (Chair), Mike Moller,
Elizabeth Shanks

“ We would like to thank our members,
Landcare groups, research partners, Federal,
State and Local Governments, the community,
Board and staff for their dedication in delivering
the many positive outcomes over the last 12 months.

We look forward to working with you all on the
many challenges ahead in the coming years. ”

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