

BushTender

Grazing for biodiversity outcomes

Information Sheet No. 14

Background

Native grasslands in northern Victoria are typically categorised as 'low rainfall' grasslands. This means they occur in lower rainfall areas and as a consequence are primarily dominated by species such as Wallaby-grasses (*Austrodanthonia* spp.), Spear-grasses (*Austrostipa* spp.), Windmill Grass (*Chloris* spp.) or Spider-grass (*Enteropogon* spp.).

Grasslands in higher rainfall areas can suffer from biomass build up and 'choking out' by robust native grasses. One means of managing this build up is through strategic grazing. In contrast, grazing of low rainfall grasslands is generally not considered necessary to maintain biodiversity values because of the lack of biomass build up in these areas, although grazing may be useful for controlling the cover of annual environmental weeds in some circumstances.

For more information, refer to BushTender Information Sheet No. 13 - *Standards for management - Ecological grazing*.

Grazing for biodiversity outcomes

Recently there has been emerging evidence supporting grazing of 'low rainfall' grasslands for biodiversity outcomes and anecdotal information that some landholders have been doing this for many years while successfully maintaining the biodiversity values of their properties.

In recognition of this evidence, BushTender Northern Plains will provide you with the option of including grazing in your BushTender Management Agreement(s).

The aim of these Management Agreements will be to allow you to use grazing to reduce the cover of high threat weeds while maintaining or increasing the cover and diversity of native plants.

Under these Management Agreements there will be no restriction on the timing or frequency of grazing. However, in choosing this option you must meet certain biodiversity outcomes to be eligible for the majority of your payment.

In particular you must ensure that:

- there is no detectable reduction in above-ground perennial native plant diversity (excludes annuals, biennials and geophytes)
- there is no significant reduction in the ratio of the cover of native perennial plants compared to the cover of non-native perennial plants
- the cover of annual weeds is no greater than that observed in the stock exclusion plot.

Note: Perennial plants are plants with a life span of more than two years (e.g. Wallaby Grass or Phalaris).

Outcomes will be measured and assessed in years three and five of the BushTender Management Agreement. Local and regional climatic conditions will be considered.

Management Agreement

If you choose to include grazing in your Management Agreement the following conditions will apply:

- You will be given a list of high threat herbaceous weeds and you will be expected to manage, control or eliminate them and ensure they do not spread beyond the current level. No management actions will be provided as part of your management agreement as this will give you the ability to judge if grazing is managing the weeds effectively or if additional targeted weed control is needed.
- As required under all BushTender Management Agreements, you will have to target woody weeds with specific management techniques. In general, grazing is not an effective method of controlling these weeds.
- As part of your annual reporting you will be required to complete an additional report on:
 - the methods you have used to actively manage high threat herbaceous weeds
 - your stocking rates including intensity and timing and type of stock (see the additional annual report attached)

Grazing for biodiversity outcomes

- more information on annual reporting is available in the BushTender Information Sheet No. 16 – *Annual reporting*.
- Payments will be weighted towards years three and five, and the majority of your payment in these years will be dependent on you achieving the required outcomes.

Monitoring

To help you monitor your progress against the required outcomes, DSE will establish evaluation plots on your BushTender site(s) and reference sites across the local region.

In most cases, two 25m x 25m (0.0625ha) evaluation plots will be established on each of your sites: a fenced stock-exclusion plot and an unfenced plot.

BushTender may require access to your evaluation plots at several times throughout the year. You will be consulted and given notice before DSE or any contractors access your property.

Reference sites will be established at grasslands sites in varying conditions on public land throughout the project area. These sites will provide data on the impact of regional climatic conditions such as rainfall on the measured biodiversity outcomes.

Monitoring of evaluation and reference sites will occur in spring. Random sampling will establish the cover and diversity of native plants and weeds and the cover of soil crust and bare ground. Climate data will also be collected.

Stock exclusion plots

BushTender will arrange for and fund the building of the fences for your stock-exclusion plot(s). Fencing will be constructed to BushTender minimum standards (see BushTender Information Sheet No. 9 – *Standards for management - Fencing*). The plots will be stock proof but not rabbit or kangaroo proof. At the end of your Agreement you can choose to remove these plots at your own expense.

Weed control in your stock-exclusion plot(s) will be the responsibility of BushTender. BushTender will engage contractors to undertake targeted weed control.

Monitoring results

Each year, DSE will provide you with monitoring results and climate data. It is recommended that you keep a record of your own observations of changes in the diversity and cover of native plants and weeds.

This information will allow you to monitor your performance and adjust your management if necessary while also providing DSE with important information for the future management of “low rainfall” grasslands in Victoria.

Some high threat weeds of the Northern Plains

- African Lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvula*)
- Bathurst Burr (*Xanthium spinosum*)
- Big Heron's-bill (*Erodium botrys*)
- Brome (*Bromus* spp.)
- Cape Weed (*Arctotheca calendula*)
- Gazania (*Gazania linearis*)
- Horehound (*Marrubium spinosum*)
- Mexican Lovegrass (*Eragrostis mexicana*)
- Needle Grasses (*Nassella* spp.)
- Paddy Melon/Melon (*Cucumis myriocarpus* / *Citrillus* spp.)
- Parramatta Grass (*Sporobolus africanus*)
- Paspalum (*Paspalum dilatatum*)
- Phalaris (*Phalaris aquatica*)
- Rye Grass (*Lolium* spp.)
- Spear Thistle (Various species of thistles, mainly *Cirsium vulgare*)
- Tall Wheatgrass (*Lophopyrum ponticum*)
- Thread Iris (*Moraea setifolia*)
- Wild Oats (*Avena* spp.)

Health and safety

You are responsible for ensuring all works required in implementing the management actions are conducted in a safe manner and comply with the lawful requirements of any Authority, and with all Acts, regulations and other laws which may be applicable to the Management Plan.

To determine whether there are any underground pipes or cables on your property, you may wish to consider calling 1100 - “Dial before you dig”. This is a free referral service from anywhere in Australia.

Further information

For further information on BushTender, please contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Customer Service Centre on **136 186** or visit the DSE website at: www.dse.vic.gov.au/nativevegetation. All BushTender Information Sheets are available on the website.

Grazing for biodiversity outcomes

Additional - Annual Report Form - Sample

Document Reference: 4567

Site Progress: Year 2 report

Landholder: John and Mary Smith

Management Agreement: SMI123-2

Site Code: SMI123-002

Zone A

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of stock				200	150	150						12
Days Grazed				5	5	4						10
Type of stock				Sheep	Sheep	Sheep						Cattle
Notes				Grazed for 2 days in early April (4 th & 5 th) then 3 days in late April (23 ^d -25 th)	10 th -14 th	25 th -28 th						10 th -19 th

I hereby declare that the supplied information is accurate and complies with reporting requirements under General Conditions under the Third Schedule of the BushTender Management Agreement.

Signed: Mary Smith John Smith

Date: 4 / 4 / 2010
 day / month / year

BushTender is a registered trademark of the State of Victoria (Department of Sustainability and Environment).

Published by the Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melbourne, March 2009

© The State of Victoria Department of Sustainability and Environment 2009

This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Authorised by the Victorian Government, 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne

Printed by Stream Solutions

ISBN 978-1-74208-941-6 (set - print)

ISBN 978-1-74208-942-3 (set - online)

For more information contact the DSE Customer Service Centre 136 186. This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.