

# Coastal grazier's creeks running clear a sign of PRODUCTIVE PASTURES



## Tangora at a glance

Location: 30km north of Mackay

Property size: 172 ha

Average annual rainfall: 1500mm

Enterprise: Trading



For North Queensland beef producer Gordon Clarke, the benefits of introducing rotational grazing to his former cane farm could not be clearer.

Since introducing the management system to his 172 hectare home property 'Tangora', which sits 30km north of Mackay, carrying capacity has been lifted, the persistent onslaught of coastal weeds has been curbed, and he has watched the creeks leaving his boundary run clean throughout the recent wet season.

However, beyond transforming his business Gordon also knows he is doing his part to not only improve the land for the next generation, including his daughters Andy (6) and Pippa (4), but he is reducing the sediment run-off reaching the Great Barrier Reef.

*"I do think about everything we are doing on the land being for the next generation," Gordon said.*

"I personally hate working with chemicals and the less I have to use them the better. It's remarkable how rotating our cattle has reduced the weeds, which has increased the

grass cover, and that's why I think our water is sinking into the country and being filtered before moving into the creeks.

"It's rewarding to think the work we are doing here, even if it's only playing a small part, is helping the Reef."

In late 2020, Gordon's regenerative journey began after attending the Grazing Clinic at Charters Towers, as part of Resource Consulting Services (RCS) Grassroots project (Grassroots).

Grassroots is funded through the Queensland Government's ReefWater Quality Program and has supported more than 37 grazing businesses within the Fitzroy, Burnett-Mary and Mackay-Whitsunday regions. It is designed to help producers make practice change to simultaneously reduce sediment run-off into the Great Barrier Reef, while increasing grazing profitability.

### Humble start

Gordon, who has extensive experience working in the cattle industry, was familiar with some regenerative practices prior to buying Tangora in 2005, alongside his wife Tanya, and had ambitions of eventually rotating stock.

In the beginning the land was bare, having been used predominately for cane production, and had no water or power infrastructure, cattle yards or a house.



*“The grass I have here at the movement is incredible and it has allowed me to not use chemicals, which is good for me and good for my family. Anything that flows on from that is terrific, whether that be my business or the Reef.”*

Gordon set about installing drastic change, including establishment of eight paddocks, planting a diverse range of grasses and legumes and daily rotation of stock. At that time, Gordon took valuable advice from his brother who runs a high-density rotational grazing operation in Far North Queensland.

However, Gordon said it was the RCS clinic that fine-tuned his knowledge and left him feeling confident more productivity could be gained on Tangora, which is currently running about 100head.

“I went to the clinic wanting to know if there was anything I could improve on and came home with the knowledge there was an awful lot to be done,” he said.

“The science behind the methodology was clearly explained and I received some new tools to monitor, not only the grazing side of it, but the overall business.”

### **Weed worry**

Being a coastal property, Tangora benefits from 1500mm annual rainfall, which can swell to 2000mm in a wet year, but is also at the mercy of tough, tropical weeds.

Sicklepod and lantana are two predominant pests graziers in the Mackay region face, but the Clarkes have had success tackling them with regenerative methods.

“We had a really dry year where we kept the cattle too long, and the country was damaged. After the first rain, all that came back quickly was sicklepod.

“By rotating the cattle, it has allowed the grass to fight through. The thing with sicklepod is it will only grow where there is bare ground, so keeping the grass coverage high prevents it.

“Also, with the cattle grazing in a higher density, we have noticed they are trampling the weeds. Even with the lantana, they pushed it down and thinned it out, and it reduced by half the following year.”

Gordon said he will utilise RCS grazing charts to ensure his property is stocked in alignment with seasonal conditions to prevent the weed problem rearing its head.

### **Bright future**

As part of its holistic approach to the management of grazing businesses RCS prioritises human relationships, and Gordon said the Clarke family unit had been strengthened since moving to regenerative agriculture.

“I would say this has happened without me realising it, as myself and Tanya are now on the same page when it comes to the business,” he said.

Both Tanya and Gordon also work off-farm, so rely on each other to keep the wheels of the regenerative plan turning. “Tanya will remind me when we need to rotate the cattle, or she will be out there shifting them herself,” he said.

Gordon is eager to see what the future holds on Tangora for his family.

“I think we have five more years of building to do, and it could go beyond that,” he said.

This project is funded through the Queensland Government's ReefWater Quality Program.

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