

Policy

Wet Tropics Management Authority

Grazing in the Wet Tropics WHA

Policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Wet Tropics Management Authority. Policies are not intended to be applied inflexibly in all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require a modified application of policy.

Background

Grazing, under formal tenure, is presently occurring over significant parts of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, predominantly in the northern section.

There are currently 30 grazing properties that make up approximately 8% of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. These include:

- 15 Special Leases issued under the Land Act 1994
- 7 Pastoral Holdings issued under the Land Act 1994
- 3 annual Occupation Licenses issued under the Land Act 1994
- 1 Non Competitive Lease issued under the Land Act 1994
- 2 Stock Grazing Permits issued under the Forestry Act 1959
- 2 freehold properties

Under the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* goats, deer and cattle are classified as 'undesirable animals' and are prohibited within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. However, section 27(h) of the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* allows for the grazing of animals, other than in a rainforest, if the grazing is otherwise lawful. In practice, the exclusion of grazing from the rainforest is often not practical to enforce or implement. For example, on many lease areas there is little in place to keep cattle out of rainforest. The cost of fencing off rainforest areas would be expensive and in many cases not a sound option from a conservation perspective. Also, although rainforest can be damaged by cattle, it is generally not a preferred foraging area. The main areas of concern regarding impacts on the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area are non-rainforest areas such as sclerophyll forests where the bulk of grazing pressure falls.

Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service policies on grazing differ in relation to the relevant tenures which Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service manage. In protected areas listed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* grazing is viewed as a potentially high impact, threatening process and generally an inappropriate activity. The general approach of Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service is to phase out grazing on protected area estate, except in areas where it has a specific conservation (not land management) benefit, or where it is the only feasible land management option. Under section 53 *Nature Conservation Regulation 1994* a stock grazing permit may not be granted for a protected area other than a conservation park or resources reserve.

For leases and licences over State Forests and Timber Reserves, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is the primary custodian. Under the State Forest transfer process in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, as State Forests are converted to Forest Reserves, any grazing leases under the *Land Act 1994* that are due for

renewal are being renegotiated and, where appropriate, replaced with Stock Grazing Permits under the *Forestry Act 1959* (maximum term of 7 years). Where Forest Reserves are dedicated as National Parks in the final stage of the tenure allocation process, any Land Act or Forestry Act leases or permits will become invalid. However, an authority may be granted under section 36 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* to allow grazing to continue for no more than the unexpired term of the previous lease or permit.

On Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service estate listed under the *Forestry Act 1959*, grazing is considered an appropriate secondary use of land where it is compatible with existing forest values and where the activity does not compromise principles of ecologically sustainable forest management.

Department of Natural Resources and Mines are the primary custodians for licences and leases over Land Act reserves such as Camping and Water Reserves. Department of Natural Resources and Mines would need to consider each lease and licence on a case by case basis taking into account a range of planning considerations and the views of any reserve trustees. Department of Natural Resources and Mines are also custodians for Pastoral Holdings. Pastoral Holdings are a primary tenure in their own right and considered a more secure form of land tenure.

Australia's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* regulates activities which are having, or are likely to have, a significant impact on World Heritage values. Should a grazing activity be deemed to be having a significant impact on World Heritage values, this Act may also be invoked to mitigate any impact on World Heritage values.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority's Scientific Advisory Committee has advised that the grazing of stock is generally incompatible with the goals of Wet Tropics World Heritage Area management. The Scientific Advisory Committee also advise that although the most significant problems created by grazing animals within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area are those of feral cattle, the grazing of domestic herds is also causing serious problems in some areas. The potential impacts of grazing on World Heritage values include:

- modification of the structure of vegetation and the floristic composition of the understorey and ground cover,
- loss of habitat diversity,
- initiation and exacerbation of soil erosion and consequent effects on water quality,
- introduction and spread of invasive weeds, particularly exotic pasture grasses and legumes,
- alteration of the amount and distribution of fuel throughout the landscape, potentially reducing the incidence, intensity and extent of fires,
- impacts of fencing, mustering activities, access roads and other infrastructure.

In some areas where grazing is well managed it may be considered beneficial to World Heritage management. This situation is usually attributable to good herd management involving conservative stocking, together with an appropriate fire regime. Removal of grazing management in these circumstances could result in a change in fire regime and adverse habitat change in the absence of on ground conservation management activities. In these circumstances grazing would be a preferable short-term option pending introduction of an active World Heritage management regime.

Policy Statement

(supersedes policy under section 4.6 Protection through Partnerships 1997)

1. The Wet Tropics Management Authority will generally seek to have grazing by 'undesirable animals' (as listed under Schedule 2 Part B *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998*) phased out in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area; except where it can be demonstrated the grazing activity is beneficial to World Heritage management and no prudent and feasible management alternatives are available.
2. The Wet Tropics Management Authority will generally continue to oppose the renewal of grazing authorities or expansion of grazing activities within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, subject to the stated caveats in this policy.
3. The Wet Tropics Management Authority will support the Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service State Forest transfer process and renewal or re-issuing of grazing authorities in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area under this process.
4. Existing as-of-right grazing activities will remain an allowed activity where:
 - the grazing activity was being undertaken on cleared land immediately prior to the commencement of the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998*; and
 - the land is freehold land; and
 - the land is zoned C under the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* (in recognition of this pre-existing use).
5. Under section 27 of the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998*, grazing remains an unlawful activity in a rainforest within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Interpretation

There are 28 grazing authorities current within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. 15 of these will expire before 2010. The longest running authority will expire in 2037.

Of 27 freehold properties within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area with land that was cleared prior to commencement of the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* and is zoned C, only two cases are known where grazing is an activity which was being undertaken immediately prior to commencement of the Wet Tropics Plan in 1998.

Implementation

1. A review of the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* will be undertaken between 2004-05. As part of this review, the Wet Tropics Management Authority will seek to give effect to the grazing policy by amendment to the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998*, where grazing would be regulated as follows:
 - a) grazing will continue to be an unlawful activity in a rainforest within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.
 - b) outside of a rainforest, a permit may be issued to carry out grazing in the World Heritage Area (subject to management conditions as determined by the Wet Tropics Management Authority) where grazing is an existing activity and:

- i) it can be demonstrated the grazing activity is beneficial to World Heritage management and no prudent and feasible management alternatives are available; or
 - ii) a person holds an existing lawful grazing authority under other legislation, in which case a Wet Tropics permit may be issued until the term of the existing grazing authority comes to an end; or
 - iii) the land is freehold or under perpetual lease and the landholder seeks a reasonable period of time to phase out grazing on the land; or
 - iv) if a person would be injuriously affected should issue of a Wet Tropics permit be refused or as a consequence of any permit conditions imposed.
- c) The *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* zoning maps depict some lands as zone C where the land was cleared prior to the commencement of the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* and is subject to some form of existing ongoing lawful use. The Wet Tropics Management Authority recognises these special circumstances and will continue to allow grazing (as of right) where:
- i) the land is freehold land; and
 - ii) the grazing activity was being undertaken on cleared land immediately before the commencement of the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998*; and accordingly
 - iii) the land is zoned C under the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998*.
- Consultation will be undertaken with grazing interests and other stakeholders, as part of the Plan review process, on proposed amendments to the Plan to introduce the above grazing provisions.
2. Prior to any *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* amendment, the Wet Tropics Management Authority will seek to have this policy implemented by agencies responsible for dealing with grazing authorities. The Wet Tropics Management Authority will seek to have appropriate environmental management conditions applied to any renewal or re-issue of grazing authorities.
3. Guidelines will be developed under section 62 of the *Wet Tropics Management Plan 1998* as a basis for assessing permit applications and setting permit conditions. Assessment criteria will include consideration of:
- a) the nature and extent of impacts of grazing on vegetation (eg. vegetation structure and habitat diversity, threatened flora, weeds), water (eg. water quality, riparian zones), and fauna (eg. threatened species, fauna habitat);
 - b) evidence or likelihood of soil erosion attributed to the effects of grazing;
 - c) positive management measures in place to minimise impacts;
 - d) pasture management activities (eg. burning regime, seeding with potentially invasive species);
 - e) feral animal control;
 - f) location and condition of fences, gates and grids;
 - g) stock carrying capacity of the land; and
 - h) any injurious affection likely to result as a consequence of a proposed permit decision or permit conditions.

4. Where a grazing operation is found to be having a serious negative impact on World Heritage values, the Wet Tropics Management Authority will seek to negotiate better environmental management practices, or if this is not possible, terminate the grazing authority.
5. Mechanisms will be put into place to ensure cattle are removed upon the expiry of a grazing authority to prevent stock from becoming feral.

Disclaimer

This policy does not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian and Queensland Governments.

Approval

Wet Tropics Board

Meeting 51
19-20 November 2003

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