

STATE SUMMARY

As part of the Bushcare Support contract, Greening Australia was contracted by Environment Australia to develop regional vegetation management summaries for six of the fourteen natural resource management (natural resource management) regions in Queensland. Each summary provides a snapshot of the 'infrastructure' currently available that region to assist in the technical on-ground management of native vegetation in light of 5.5 years of Natural Heritage Trust investment in the regions. The snapshots have been prepared by Greening Australia staff in consultation with key regional stakeholders. This document, *Native vegetation management: A Needs Analysis Of Regional Service Delivery In Queensland* represents the conclusions of this process.

Key vegetation management issues

Population expansion is placing substantial pressure on existing remnant vegetation in the Burnett/Mary, Moreton and Wet Tropics regions, resulting in higher areas of vegetation loss, degradation and fragmentation. Although this population expansion involves the entire Moreton Region and the Burnett/Mary, it is especially pronounced within a 100 kilometre strip along the coast and concentrated in the coastal lowlands of the Wet Tropics Region. The genetic integrity of plant populations in these regions is being reduced due to the fragmentation of the landscape, causing continued genetic pool loss of local provenance seed creating difficulties in rehabilitation. In other regions broad scale vegetation clearing and a loss of genetic diversity is considered one of the major vegetation management issues.

The introduction and presence of pest plants and animals is impacting on biodiversity through the invasion of intact and semi-intact vegetation as well threatening the viability of rural properties. The changes to ecosystem structure and function of these vegetation communities, as a result of these pest plant and animals, is also increasing their susceptibility to fire and erosion.

Declining water quality is a major vegetation management issue in all regions. Riparian and in-stream degradation from encroaching adjacent land use and clearing and changes in the quality of a surface water through the increase in excessive levels of sediment, nutrients and pesticides, magnifies the problems.

Key gaps in resources and infrastructure

A similar trend exists across all regions in resources and infrastructure gaps. The lack of, and fluctuation in, technical expertise due to the irregularity of funding is clearly providing regional staff with major difficulties. The delay of Natural Heritage Trust (Phase Two) funding has seen a dramatic loss in the field of skilled natural resource management extension officers and has lead to a breakdown in community goodwill because of the lack of direction and funding for actions. This has been exacerbated by a substantial decline in existing extension networks by the State Government through the withdrawal or direction change of departmental extension officers at a time when landholders and community groups are being asked to make changes necessary to improve management.

Further to this local governments are being given more responsibility under Integrated Planning Act for managing natural resources however in all regions except Moreton, local government staff lack the appropriate technical skills to make informed natural resource management planning decisions. In particular, in the Wet Tropics and Burdekin, the inaccurate regional ecosystem mapping has lead to a lack of faith and misunderstanding in vegetation management planning processes.

In all regions, the lack of training and education delivery and resources is highlighted, especially within whole of landscape management, integrated vegetation management and nature conservation methodologies. The suggestions for training include increasing volunteer's, community members, land managers and extension person's technical expertise. This includes the use of GIS packages, database software, weed modelling programs and general information technology training on the use of hardware.

Further to this, a gap in monitoring and evaluation framework was recognised consistently across all regions. The need for long-term, robust, reliable and standardised methodologies for monitoring and evaluation was highlighted, including the lack of capacity (knowledge, time and money) within many groups to undertake monitoring and evaluation work and training.

Although protection of existing vegetation is seen as a higher priority throughout Queensland, in those areas where rehabilitation is required seed collection and resource supply in all regions was highlighted as a gap. The lack of knowledgeable seed collectors and therefore the limited supply of local provenance seeds reduce the ability for staff to conduct rehabilitation programs. In addition, there is a lack of direct seeding infrastructure in all regions except Moreton, although in the Wet Tropics this is not considered a gap as the technique is considered difficult in rainforest plant communities.

Key recommendations

To address the gaps in resources and infrastructure, regional staff have again highlighted fairly consistent recommendations across all regions.

1. Long term funding should be sourced to retain skilled regional extension staff to preserve the local knowledge and experience within a region and to meet community needs.
2. Existing extension networks need to be maintained and expanded to provide services demanded by the community.
3. Local governments need to provide training to relevant employees in natural resource management skills.
4. Complete and revise existing Regional Ecosystem mapping for each region.
5. An organisation of biophysical natural resource management data at a regional level to be undertaken and made available to all users.
6. Targeted rigorous training opportunities should be regularly provided for the community and other natural resource management staff focussing on whole of landscape processes and specific revegetation techniques.
7. Develop and implement a long term multidisciplinary, rigorous and standardised program for monitoring and evaluation methodologies across all programs and regions. Include training and assistance to project workers with analysis of their monitoring and evaluation data.
8. Establish the regional coordination of the collection of local provenance seed. This includes the development of a regional seed bank database to improve the coordination of local provenance seed collection in each region.