

GRAZING MANAGEMENT OF THE LOWER LAKES LAKE EDGE

Background Information

Historically, the Lower Lakes provided graziers with an ideal opportunity to establish their properties, as the lake edge supplied a valuable source of feed and reliable water. Pasture plants grew aided by the freshening of the lake water, creating optimal conditions for pasture grasses such as Water and Salt-water Couch (*Paspalum distichum* and *vaginatum*) and Kikuyu (*Pennisetum clandestinum*). Today, these plants dominate much of the lake edge, areas are often characterised by dense mats of pasture grasses where very few other plants can survive where previously there was a diversity of reeds, sedges and other native plants.



Water and Salt-water Couch (*Paspalum distichum* and *vaginatum*) and Kikuyu (*Pennisetum clandestinum*) dominate much of the lake edge (photo J. Reseigh)

Why should grazing be utilised?

Grazing of lake edge vegetation is recommended for various purposes including:

- Management of pasture grasses such as water and salt-water couch and kikuyu, where these plants dominate grazing management will help manage biomass build up;
- Promote better feed quality (Earth Tech Engineering 2003);
- Create greater diversity in native plants (Tesauro 2001); and
- Range of habitats for fauna (Tesauro 2001).

Lake edge that has not been grazed in the past or where vegetation is predominantly healthy, diverse native vegetation in near pristine condition should remain ungrazed.



Healthy, diverse native vegetation (photo J. Reseigh)

Timing of grazing periods

Summer grazing is the best option with stock excluded for all of the winter and spring period (Earth Tech Engineering 2003). Summer grazing is recommended for a number of reasons including:

- Reduction in pugging
- Many native plants have already set seed during their reproductive phase which is predominately in spring without grazing pressure (Earth Tech Engineering 2003)
- It avoids grazing around the lake edge during spring when fauna may be utilising the area for breeding.
- Exclude stock from lake edge when it is wet, as they will have more of an impact on the lake edge when conditions are wet.

Duration/length of grazing periods

Summer grazing must be stopped after the higher quality parts of the plant are eaten to avoid overgrazing and excess damage to plants from eating and trampling (Earth Tech Engineering 2003). The exact length of time stock is allowed in the lake edge area will depend on the number and type of stock.



Grazing of the lake edge (photo J. Reseigh)

Possible issues with grazing

- Potential land degradation issues may develop if adequate ground cover is not maintained and/or animal impact is over utilised. A minimum ground cover of at least 40% should be maintained at all times.
- Some species, such as native species sensitive to grazing, may decrease in abundance or be removed due to an inappropriate grazing regime.
- Tree and shrub regeneration is generally not compatible with grazing.
- Integrated management may be required for perennial and some exotic plants, as they may not be completely controlled under a grazing regime.



Pugging of the lake edge (photo B. Gunn)

References

Earth Tech Engineering (2003). Sustainable Grazing & Land Management to Promote Ramsar Values around the Lower Murray Lakes. Melbourne, Victoria, Earth Tech Engineering Pty Ltd.

Tesauro, J. (2001). "Restoring wetland habitats with cows and other livestock: A prescribed grazing program to conserve bog turtle habitat in New Jersey." Conservation in Practice 2(2): 26-31.

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