

On the ground: Managing salinity near Barmoya

Jagged, ghostly trunks point sharply at the sky – it's obvious why locals dubbed this spot the "Dead Sea". Several properties surround this area of badly salt-affected land, including "Henderson Park", in the Hedlow Creek catchment near Barmoya. The Barrett family and their neighbours have been working tirelessly for years to manage and rehabilitate this and other salinity-affected areas on their land.

Annika Barrett represents the fifth generation of Barretts on this land. She manages "Henderson Park" alongside her parents, David and Marie Barrett. Parts of the property have been in the family since the late 1800s, with the majority of the land taken up during the lease/clearing schemes in the early 1900s.

The 2225ha grazing property runs about 1000 head, with 300 breeders, mainly Brahman cross. The cattle go straight to the EU market. In 1997 the Barretts branched out into ecotourism.

Salinity affects about 20% of the property, brought on largely by vegetation clearing in the early 1900s. 'A lot of water sits in the low country. During clearing they left a lot of blue gum and other trees in the low country and cleared the hills for cropping and production. When the higher country was cleared, the water table began to rise. On the lower flats you can dig down a metre and you'd end up with salty water seeping in.' (Annika Barrett)

By 1915 the land was cleared, and scalding started to appear by the mid-1930s. The Barretts and other landholders in the area recognised the problem and quickly planted varieties of salt-tolerant species such as marine couch and saltbush gathered from the Capricorn coast. Annika is grateful, 'This has saved a lot of our property, since these have spread across the salt-affected areas since then.'

Taking a whole-of-property approach

Although dryland salinity is the greatest land management challenge on "Henderson Park", the Barretts take a broad approach to looking after their land. This includes fencing and re-vegetating most of the frontage of Hedlow Creek to protect water quality, and using conservative stocking rates and rotational grazing to maintain good ground cover for healthy paddocks.

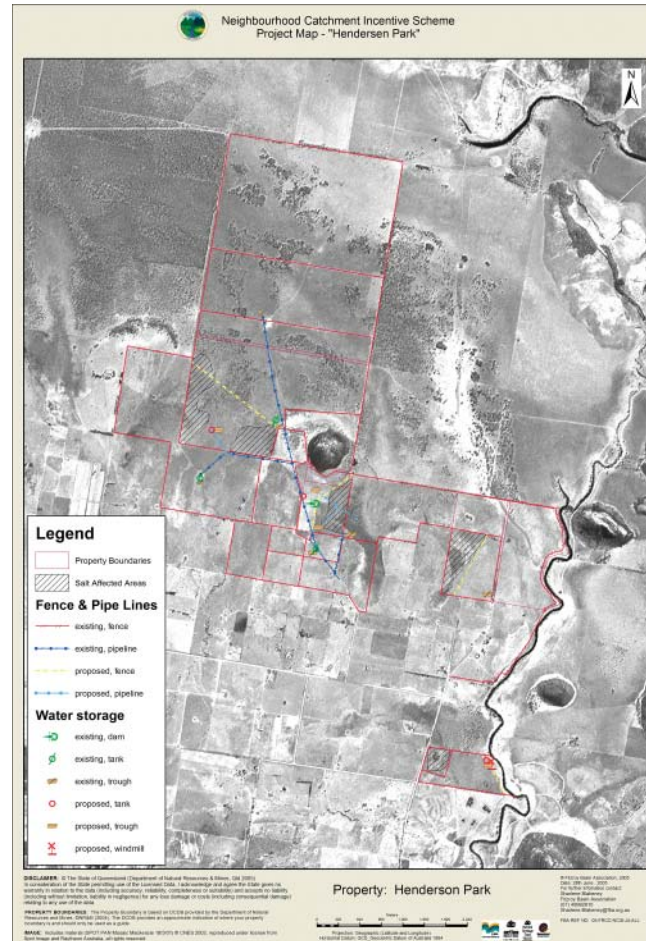
Fencing and planting to manage salinity

Over the years, the Barretts have undertaken several projects aimed at salinity mitigation. The first project was funded by The Caves Landcare Group, for salt fencing.

About four years ago, major funding for riparian fencing along Hedlow Creek was provided by the Lower Fitzroy Catchment Action Project. In late 2003, The Barmoya Salinity Action Project was a partnership with The Caves Landcare Group and funded by the Federal Government's Envirofund. The group planted native timber on 13ha of the slopes surrounding the spot, to reduce deep drainage, increase biodiversity and provide shade for cattle.

"Henderson Park" has planted over 1200 trees in association with the project, and the group as a whole has planted about 5000, with another 5000 ordered to be planted over the next season.

"Henderson Park" received additional salinity-mitigation funding in 2005, organised by Fitzroy River and Coastal Catchments, Inc. (FRCC), through the Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) Neighbourhood Catchment Incentive Program.



Annika Barrett, "Henderson Park", describes how saltbush and other salt-tolerant plants are helping to rehabilitate salinity-affected areas of the property.



One of the worst salt-affected areas on Henderson Park.

Their current projects, funded partly by FRCC, will address the worst salt-affected areas on their property. Annika explains, 'There's lots of samphire but not much marine couch. We've chosen to fence these areas off from cattle. It is currently locked up to help the couch spread and provide some ground cover.'

'It's fantastic to get help with it. Eventually we would have gone ahead, but the funding has allowed it to happen much sooner, when it needed to.' (Annika Barrett)



Connecting remnants for biodiversity

"Henderson Park" has remnant stands of important vegetation. 'We still have iron bark, blue gum and vine scrub so we are connecting these remnants with new plantings and with other remnants in the rest of the neighbourhood catchment.' The Barretts and their neighbours are building a 5km wildlife corridor.

Fencing and controlling weeds to protect Hedlow Creek

Hedlow Creek supports 20 properties in the district. **'It's obviously a waterway we need to protect. Installing bores and dams is limited since they salt-up from the bottom.'** A current FRCC-funded project is enabling the Barretts to fence the last unfenced section of Hedlow Creek frontage on their property, excluding cattle to protect water quality and reduce bank erosion.

Annika has already seen the results of excluding cattle from the banks, 'the eucalypts especially have come back really strongly'.

There has been one drawback to the fencing. Cattle along the riverfront previously grazed the hymenachne (*H. amplexicaulis*) weeds growing there. Limiting or removing cattle access to the creek reduces the ability to control the weed through grazing. "Henderson Park" is now using bio-degradable chemicals to control hymenachne, through another FRCC-supported project for their neighbourhood catchment.

Annika appreciates not only the funding "Henderson Park" has received from FRCC, but also the support. 'Support from FRCC field officers has been important. It's important that funding is there for people, not just the projects.'

FBA and groups like FRCC are working together for a sustainable Central Queensland

Fitzroy Basin Association provides financial and technical support to sub-regional groups like FRCC to initiate, support and fund projects across our region..

If you'd like to know more about this project or others in the Fitzroy Basin region, visit our web site, www.fba.org.au, or contact our office (details below).

Further information

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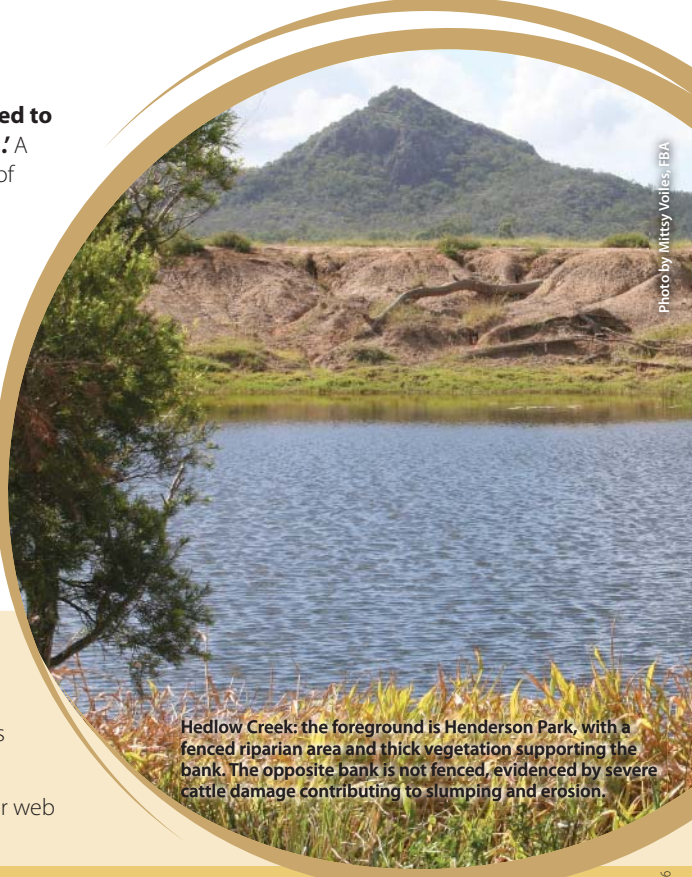
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Hedlow Creek: the foreground is Henderson Park, with a fenced riparian area and thick vegetation supporting the bank. The opposite bank is not fenced, evidenced by severe cattle damage contributing to slumping and erosion.