

Healthy Country

managing the land for healthy waterways

Sustainable grazing

FarmFLOW
growth through good practice

Grazing management in riparian zones

Riparian areas border watercourses, waterholes or wetlands. These areas service a wide variety of plants and animals, both in and alongside the water, as well as the animals that visit to drink from the waterhole.

Riparian areas are generally the most productive areas of a grazing system for a number of reasons, including:

- proximity to water—stock typically graze close to a water source
- better pasture growth—due to higher moisture levels
- longer growing season—moisture is retained longer in the soil in riparian areas, sustaining pasture growth further into the dry season
- providing shelter—waterways often provide stock with shelter from the elements and so the adjacent land is usually heavily utilised.

While riparian areas are of great importance to individual landholders, their health is also vitally important to the whole local ecosystem.

A healthy riparian area:

- Reduces erosion. Riparian vegetation slows and filters runoff from hillslopes so reducing sediment loads entering the waterways.
- Maintains biodiversity. A healthy riparian area supports a wide range of plant and animal species due to the soil's higher

fertility and moisture-holding capacity and proximity to drinking water.

- Reduces the spread of weeds. A healthy riparian area with few weeds will reduce the spread of weeds further down the watercourse.

Uncontrolled grazing of riparian areas presents a number of possible degradation issues including soil loss, gully erosion, loss of desirable plant species and increased sediment and nutrient loads.

Controlled grazing of riparian areas, however, has many benefits to the landholder and the entire catchment including:

- Better utilisation of some of the most productive grazing land in the catchment.
- Increased growth of desirable pasture and plant species can reduce or control weeds and prevent the spread of weeds.
- A reduction in fire hazard by preventing the build up of dry grass.
- Adequate levels of grass cover and tree numbers that strengthen the stream banks and reduce erosion.



To improve riparian area grazing management try these 'best practice' management options:

- **Fence off riparian areas to manage stock access.** Erect the fence roughly 5 m plus the height of the creek bank away from the creek bank. This will provide a safe buffer zone between the fence and the bank.
- **Install off-stream watering points.** This will reduce the traffic of stock near the waterway and lead to better utilisation of the entire production area.
- **Ensure periods of rest to allow plants to set seed.** It is possible to graze the riparian areas provided there are frequent periods of rest (spells) throughout the growing period to allow plants (especially grasses) to set seed to maintain strong growth of desirable grass species to out-compete undesirable or weed species.
- **Control weeds.** Weeds in a riparian area quickly spread downstream after rainfall events and can invade other riparian zones, greatly reducing their productive value.

Healthy Country partners:

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