Managing northern speargrass — a grazier's guide

By IAN PARTRIDGE. Published by Queensland Department of Primary Industries, 1995. 46pp. ISBN 0 7242 5937 6.

Managing northern speargrass is the third booklet in the series being produced by DPI through the Queensland Government Information Series, as part of a project within the National Landcare Program, aimed at sustainable management of our native pastures.

Like the earlier publications in the series, it is a very attractive publication and is well illustrated with colour photographs and line drawings. The same, simple question-and-answer format has been followed and a wide range of concerns of the pasture manager are addressed.

As the title suggests, the booklet is targeted at the average grazier in Queensland's northern speargrass area. It aims to: bring together existing knowledge; add results emerging from research; and stimulate graziers to take more interest in their pastures. The first 2 aims have been achieved. In an easy-to-read style, the booklet provides a state-of-the-art coverage of knowledge on important issues to be considered in managing pastures in the region. These issues include: determining appropriate stocking rates; pasture monitoring; correct burning strategies; tree management; pasture improvement; supplementary feeding; and weed control. In stressing the over-riding influence of stocking rate on pasture condition, the booklet highlights the importance of increases in cattle numbers in the region, which have occurred in the past 50 years, on the level of pasture degradation which has occurred.

Pasture management is dynamic and regular monitoring and modification of decisions are an integral part of any management program. The set of photographic standards of pasture yields, together with the lists of desirable and undesirable species of grasses and colour photographs of some key grass species, should prove useful to the property manager in making management decisions.

To what extent the booklet will stimulate graziers to take more interest in their pastures remains to be seen. As the *Introduction* states, 30% of pastures in the northern speargrass region are in top condition, and the rest are in various stages of degradation. With appropriate management, many of the degraded pastures can be restored to good health. By applying the principles outlined in this booklet and employing the pasture monitoring techniques described in *Grass Check*, graziers in the area can arrest the decline in pasture condition which has occurred, especially in the last 2 decades. A concerted effort will restore pastures to a more productive state, enabling future generations of beef producers in the northern speargrass to produce a top quality product to meet the protein needs of an ever increasing and more discriminating world population. This will all be achieved with due consideration for the environment we live in.

However, the booklet will be invaluable to a much wider audience than northern graziers. All people with an interest in environmental issues should find the booklet interesting reading and should benefit from the information it contains. It should be especially beneficial to graziers, consultants/advisers, students of agriculture, stock and station agents and finance houses. Readers will be challenged to consider a range of issues and may be stimulated to broaden their knowledge further by obtaining and reading some of the publications listed under *Further Reading*.

The booklet would have been enhanced by including a *Glossary* explaining some of the terms used in the text, for example, earths, duplex soils, granodiorite.

Unfortunately, the booklet describes property management planning in terms of the organised workshop series conducted by DPI. This may offend many graziers who have well developed property management plans, despite never having been involved with any organised activity.

Lyle Winks