

## Managing Southern Speargrass — A Grazier's Guide

By IAN PARTRIDGE. Published by Queensland Department of Primary Industries, 1993. 42 pp. ISBN 0 7242 5389 0.

"The guidelines for managing speargrass pastures can be summarised in just a few words — Burn every three or four years." This, in a nutshell, is the key to sustainable management of southern speargrass pastures according to the author of the booklet. The booklet gives the pasture manager in speargrass country the necessary information to ensure that this goal can be achieved.

This booklet is the second in the series being produced by DPI through the Queensland Government Information Series, as part of a project within the National Soil Conservation Program, aimed at sustainable management of our native pastures. It is a very attractive publication and follows the same question-and-answer format as the first in the series — *Managing Native Pastures — A Grazier's Guide*. Typical questions which might be asked by pasture managers are posed and answers are provided.

The Native Pasture Manual was quite general in content, whereas the Southern Speargrass Manual contains much more detail and is much more specific in its recommendations. The style is simple and easy to read and the booklet is well illustrated with colour photos and a few line drawings.

The booklet opens with a description of the southern speargrass region, emphasising the variability of rainfall, in particular the frequency of droughts. Property management planning is stressed along with a description of the major land management types in the region. The second section presents guidelines for the following management options: clearing or thinning trees; adjusting stock numbers to the feed supply; spelling pastures; burning; and introducing legumes.

The good pasture manager monitors his pastures regularly by estimating available dry matter and checking for the presence of key indicator species. The third section in the booklet provides a series of colour photos of pastures carrying differing amounts of dry matter, to be used as guides for assessing the level of pasture on offer. These photo standards would have been improved if an indication was provided of the height of the pasture in each case.

A list of indicator grasses, broken into desirable, intermediate value and undesirable grasses, is given. These are supported by colour photos of 20 of the more important grasses. The quality of most of the photos is quite good and they should be a useful aid in familiarising pasture managers and others interested in pastures with the key species.

The final page contains a list of further reading for those who wish to pursue the subject in greater depth. Decision support packages as an aid in property management are listed along with contact organisations.

This field guide is essential reading for all those involved with property management in the southern speargrass region. It might not satisfy all queries of a manager but will provide a sound knowledge base which can be augmented through discussion with friends, neighbours and extension officers, further reading on the topic and personal experience.

If I have any concerns about the booklet, it is with its size. As a field manual, it should be a permanent resident in the glove compartment of the farm utility. The A4 format is not ideal for this purpose and a smaller format would have been more suitable.

*Lyle Winks*