

## Managing Mitchell Grass — A grazier's guide

By IAN PARTRIDGE. Published by Department of Primary Industries, 1996. 42 pp. ISBN 0 7242 5968 6.

QDPI has published, with some care and consistency, guides for the use of various native pastures. Some earlier books in this series have had a mixed reception, regarded as too simplistic and naïve in their presentation by some of the more science-oriented readers, or by some grazing managers as capturing only knowledge that most producers might have regarded as fundamental.

This version has addressed these comments, although I enjoyed some of the graphic/cartoon combinations of the first "Managing Native Pastures" book and did not find this offensive! The subtitle of the present booklet "Managing Mitchell Grass" is "A *grazier's guide*" so my intention is to examine it as being targeted at the stated audience.

The booklet, a soft-cover A4 on semi-gloss paper, is easily handled with a good mix of graphics and photos, mostly well reproduced. The text and column layout is comfortable and invites reading. The only exception is the central bifold "The State of Your Pasture", which attempts too much information, colour and detail in too small a space.

As the booklet is most likely to be used as a reference, it could possibly benefit in any reprint from ensuring the section on "Management" follows the summary, titled "In a Nutshell". I suspect on-farm users will be less interested in the state-wide distribution of the grass and the regional inventory, items that can occupy an appendix, than in answers to basic questions provided succinctly and as early as possible in the publication. The sort of questions they might seek early response to would be:

- What are the best sustainable annual practices for managing mitchell grass for my region?
- What are the risks associated with the management of this ecosystem?
- What is an example annual calendar for the management of the grass?
- How does this differ from my current practices and, why should I change to the recommended management? What is "new" information for me?

These questions are considered and recommendations given in the relevant sections of the book, so the observation is more about presentation than content. There is sufficient coverage of

all aspects of mitchell grass management for practical purposes in the book.

The author also does well by integrating other potential information sources in the text where relevant. For example, there is a reference to the recent pilot computer decision support system *Grazeon* (not yet validated for all mitchell grass regions), and pollfax numbers are provided for SOI-related information. This permits the reader to take action immediately if he or she is trying to follow a thread of information.

Referencing is always a matter of individual or editorial taste. I prefer to see concepts in the text linked to "traditional" referencing, but, the reading list provided is more than adequate to lead more determined readers on a path to some excellent primary source material.

A reflection to close this short review. Considerable effort has gone into the publication of the series of Native Pasture Guides, which have successively improved in layout and readability, obviously in response to informal feedback sought by the author. However, I suspect that DPI has a very poor understanding of the market characteristics of the grazier readers that they seek to reach. Some fundamental research might reveal:

- Whether the booklets are read at all when presented to graziers.
- Whether *any* such booklets are *actively* sought, bought and read by grazier clientele.
- Whether paper formats are the most appropriate — perhaps CDROM or Internet would have more appeal. There is, of course, a rapidly expanding set of options for making this style of information available.
- Whether the information is more successfully presented as part of learning about whole-farm business systems, or as part of property planning or "Future Profit" courses, rather than as a stand-alone bookshelf product.

Perhaps, QDPI and Ian Partridge would benefit from a widespread evaluation of the role of booklets of this type. Good market research could produce information to improve usage of this management information. While I believe the booklets are simple yet comprehensive in their content and adequate in recent information ... their relative utility to the target audience is something that this reviewer would not be well enough equipped to judge.

*Simon Campbell*