

# Forum raises land issues

Researchers met with members of the community, including graziers, from the Dalrymple, Bowen and Burdekin shires recently for a public forum on water quality

**D**RY season protection of waterholes, and changing the emphasis of grazing management from cattle to pasture were some of the suggested outcomes from an interactive, successful community forum between researchers, graziers, and downstream users from the Burdekin catchment.

A wide breadth of issues and topics were discussed ranging from paddock erosion, suspended solids, sediment deposition in Cape Bowling Green Bay and the impact of land use on the water quality and inshore coral reefs (3 per cent of the total reef area).

General consensus from the 47 participants from across the Dalrymple, Bowen and Burdekin shires was that the water quality forum provided a better understanding of the links between land practices and impacts on the rivers and Great Barrier Reef.

Direct contact with and balanced opinion between the scientific experts from eight different agencies was a valuable experience.

"All industries need to co-exist," said Sheriden Morris, director of Coastal Development and Water Quality for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

"The aquaculture industry has changed practices to recycle discharge water and can co-exist adjacent to the tourism and recreation fishing industries off Hinchinbrook Island."

Ros Kenny, grazier and member of the



**ABOVE: Ros Kenny. RIGHT: the effects of land use on the Great Barrier Reef were raised during the forum**



Burdekin Rangelands Implementation Group, said: "Everyone is concerned about nutrient and topsoil loss, but the economics of grazing, viable property size, and understanding and adopting the appropriate technology for environmentally productive systems can prevent the ideal situation."

"The workshop at the end of the day identified that rebates to managers with property and water management plans in place that meet certain environmental standards would provide incentives." Mrs Kenny said.

Views of scientists varied from sediment causing harm to reef health (Laurence McCook, Cooperative Reef Research Centre) to the main sediment impact on coral is the resuspended sediment from the

ocean floor caused by cyclonic weather (Peter Ridd, James Cook University).

However, everyone agreed good ground cover is the key to minimising run-off and erosion, while maximising infiltration.

In summation, Bob Shepherd from the Department of Primary Industries said: "I urge producers to contribute to peak bodies such as Agforce and Meat Livestock Australia to increase our research knowledge about the impact of water quality, and to follow through with extension and adoption."

"If the aquaculture industry can change to operate in an environmentally friendly way, there is no reason why other industries cannot take the challenge."

The forum held in Charters Towers was

hosted by Burdekin Rangelands Implementation Group to provide an opportunity for graziers and the community to interact with key researchers and to identify how landusers can be involved in on-ground activities to address water quality issues.

"We see and hear a lot in the media about all the bad things the grazing industry is doing, but there are a lot of questions we want to directly ask the researchers. This forum did just that," said Roger Brabon from Glenrowan Station, north of Townsville.

Discussions from the day will be precised to provide community input into establishing on-ground regional priorities for the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.