

DONKEYS: PROBLEM OR SOLUTION?

Kachana monitor site 13: 1992



Kachana monitor site 13: 2002



What is “healthy”?

Rather than getting into that debate, we could agree that something that does not function (perform in accordance with its design) cannot be altogether healthy. It could be a footy player, a cow, a mango plantation or a landscape.

To get some sort of a handle on what is going on in any situation involving landscape function (eco-system function) we first ask three questions:

- What is happening to the sunshine? (Approx 12 hrs/day of free readily available energy.)
- What does the biological component of the water-cycle look like?
- What can I say about the mineral cycle?

(These three things are a requirement for all life on Earth.)

The fourth question leads me closer to the subject of “health”.

- Community Dynamics: What organisms are acting out what roles? What age distributions do we notice? Are individuals looking/acting as expected or not? Do we detect any trends? Is there anything that we may need to learn more about before we make conclusions? What all seems to confirm our assumptions? In this particular situation do we need to err on the side of caution or can we be confident about our assessment?

These four questions give us a basic indication of “where we are” at a functional level. They give us some insight to the “program” that determines the “form” of our landscape.

As Manager my position is:

- We are now producing feed faster than we can produce herbivores to cycle it and we only have three options do deal with this trapped energy: cycle it, store it or exhaust it into the atmosphere in the form of pollution.
- Because cattle cannot breed fast enough, we are now purposely leaving cattle out there to selectively graze with the donkeys to minimise fuel build up in areas that are currently not financially feasible to manage back to a reasonable level of health.
- Cattle purchase is not an option
- With regard to fire being worse than poor pastoral practices... you heard our regional head of the Ag Department on TV: "The jury is still out."

Our suggestion is:

- While "the jury is still out" let us leave this population of donkeys in this pocket.
- Help us contain it
- Let us monitor what is actually happening
- Let us see if we can use the "problem" to be a part of the solution.
- That the APB approach the OBP program to look into this matter as a part of their mandate to come up with useful information in its range-land sub-program

However if the APB is of the belief that blowing out large herbivores will enhance Australia's biodiversity and is not prepared to endorse the KPC suggestion, we have no intention to stand in the way.

Chris Henggeler, Land Manager, Kachana, September 2002