



Policy for Development and Use of Pondered Pastures

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Version History

Version	Date	Comments
1	June 2001	This policy addresses the need for controls over the location, design, and management of ponded pastures
1.1	6/07/05	Conversion Project – New Word XML Template

Purpose/Scope

DESCRIPTION:

Government Policy approved by Cabinet on the development of ponded pastures in Queensland.

PURPOSE/SCOPE:

This policy addresses the need for controls over the location, design and management of Ponded Pastures and provides guidance to State agencies, local governments, the cattle industry and landholders on how their responsibilities should be exercised. The policy is based on advice from a Steering Committee representing industry groups, community groups and Government

Rationale

The Queensland Government considers that the development of Poned Pastures should occur only in areas that are not:

- Tidal areas, or
- In or adjacent to natural wetlands, or
- Of high conservation or fish habitat value

The development of Poned Pastures in other areas should occur only where proponents can demonstrate that there will be minimal and acceptable environmental impacts.

There is no legislation dealing specifically with Poned Pasture development or management. The controls that do exist for tidal areas are spread across several pieces of legislation, whilst there are no comprehensive controls over such development on land above high tide level.

Policy

Position Statement

The Queensland Government considers that the development of Poned Pastures should occur only in areas that are not:

- tidal areas, or
- in or adjacent to natural wetlands, or
- of high conservation or fish habitat value

The development of Poned Pastures in other areas should occur only where proponents can demonstrate that there will be minimal and acceptable environmental impacts.

1. Purpose of the policy

1.1. This policy addresses the need for controls over the location, design and management of Poned Pastures and provides guidance to State agencies, local governments, the cattle industry and landholders on how their responsibilities should be exercised. The policy is based on advice from a Steering Committee representing industry groups, community groups and Government.

2. Development of Poned Pastures

2.1. Poned Pastures are defined as: *“the practice developed by pastoralists to create an environment by either the construction of banks or the modification of naturally wet areas, in which fresh water is impounded or used primarily to grow suitably adapted plant species and produce fodder for grazing”*.

2.2. Pastoralists in northern Australia have taken advantage of natural wetland systems for grazing since the late 1800s. The construction of artificial ponds in dryland areas commenced in the 1930s. Development of Poned Pastures accelerated in the 1970s with the introduction of new pasture species by the CSIRO and promotion by the Department of Primary Industries.

2.3. Also dating back to the 19th century, banks were constructed in some tidal areas to prevent seawater incursion. Initially these were relatively small structures built across tidal ‘runners’ or small gullies where tidal flows penetrated for some distance inland. With the advent of larger machinery, longer, more extensive banks were constructed parallel to the coast. Although constructed primarily to stop seawater incursion and control erosion, these banks also ponded fresh water and provided opportunities for pasture establishment and more intensive cattle grazing.

3. The need to manage Poned Pastures

3.1 It is recognised that Poned Pastures have been developed and are managed for economic production and have contributed to the beef industry and community development. However, the impact of these developments on tidal areas and natural wetlands through the spread of introduced pasture species and interference with water flow has been substantial.

3.2 The species used for Poned Pastures include both native and introduced plants. The introduced species used in Queensland are Para grass (*Brachiaria mutica*), a native of South America, introduced via West Africa in 1880; Aleman grass (*Echinochloa polystachya* cv. *Amity*); and Hymenachne (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis* cv. *Olive*). The latter two species are native to South America and were introduced in 1970 and officially released in 1988.

3.3 The three introduced grasses used in Queensland Poned Pastures are now regarded as invasive weeds in natural freshwater wetland systems and other waterways, such as cane drains. Para grass is a widespread serious weed of shallow wetlands. Hymenachne and Aleman grass, which can grow in deeper water, are actively spreading and invading natural ecosystems both by natural means and by human endeavour. Hymenachne is now listed as an environmental weed of national significance.

3.4 To control the introduction of new species with weed potential the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service has implemented a Weed Risk Assessment protocol to screen all new plant imports. The application of this protocol aims to ensure that there will be no further import of Poned Pasture material with weed potential. The release of plant material stored in Genetic Resource Centres within the country should be subject to the same protocol.

4. Controls on Poned Pastures

4.1 There is no legislation dealing specifically with Poned Pasture development or management. The controls that do exist for tidal areas are spread across several pieces of legislation while there are no comprehensive controls over such development on land above the high tide level. Below the Mean High Water Springs (MHWS) level the construction of barriers is subject to approvals under S 86 of the *Harbours Act 1955*; and below the Highest Astronomical Tide (HAT) level and where banks act as stream barriers in tidal and freshwater areas, activities affecting marine plants are subject to approvals under the *Fisheries Act 1994*. In reality, very few approvals have been sought for the construction of barriers or destruction of marine plants for these purposes. In other (non-tidal) areas approvals are generally not required for the development of Poned Pastures although Acts such as the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*, *Water Act 2000*, *Rural Lands Protection Act 1985* and the *Land Act 1994* impose constraints in some circumstances. The provisions of the *Commonwealth Native Title Act 1988* may also apply in some circumstances where native title still exists.

4.2 In order to provide effective regulation of Poned Pasture development, amendment to the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* (IPA) to make Poned Pasture works assessable development and to other Acts such as the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995* and the *Rural Lands Protection Act 1985* would be needed.

4.3 Some existing, long-established structures that protect land and infrastructure from seawater incursion are in situations where environmental conditions have adapted and their removal may be undesirable or more environmentally damaging than their retention. In such circumstances there is a need to investigate the legality and function of these structures to determine appropriate action. Until such time as investigations are complete, existing banks constructed to impound fresh water or prevent seawater incursion should remain.

4.4 Due to the impact of Poned Pastures on coastal and wetland environments, further development of Poned Pastures should only occur in areas that are not:

- below Highest Astronomical tide (HAT) level; or
- in or adjacent to natural wetlands; or
- of high nature conservation or fish habitat value.

4.5 Proponents of Poned Pastures in other areas will need to demonstrate that the proposed development will meet ecologically sustainable development principles. Proponents should demonstrate that there will be no impact on natural wetlands or ecological processes; no unwanted spread of pasture species; and no interference with water flows to the detriment of fish movements or fish habitat areas. Criteria for the assessment of proposals will be set out in guidelines (or an assessment code) covering the following core issues:

- location in relation to sensitive areas;
- physical disturbance;
- potential for spread of pasture species;
- impact on water flows;

- interference with fish movement;
- soil erosion; and
- disturbance of acid sulfate soils.

5. Future advice

5.1 This policy addresses only general issues and principles. These will be expanded as necessary in supporting guidelines prepared in consultation with industry and community stakeholders.

Policy Principles

1. The State Government will apply the precautionary principle to the assessment, development and management of Poned Pastures.
2. Due to their unacceptable impacts on values of wetlands and fish habitat new Poned Pastures should occur only in areas that are not:
 - below Highest Astronomical Tide (HAT) level; or
 - in or adjacent to natural wetlands; or
 - in areas identified as having high nature conservation or fish habitat value.
3. Poned Pastures in any other areas will be considered only if proponents can demonstrate that they will be ecologically sustainable. Criteria for assessing proposals for Poned Pastures will be included in guidelines prepared to support this policy.
4. The construction of new or the maintenance or the modification of existing barriers, banks or barrages below Highest Astronomical Tide level for the purpose of control of seawater incursion will be subject to permits under current legislation.
5. Established Poned Pasture infrastructure will be progressively reviewed as to their legality and function to determine whether such structures should be retained, modified or removed.
6. In order to provide adequate controls for the assessment, approval and management of Poned Pastures development, amendments to the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*, the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995* and other Acts will be considered. The application of the provisions of the *Commonwealth Native Title Act 1988* will also be considered.
7. The beef cattle industry will be responsible for the preparation of guidelines for the development, use and management of Poned Pastures in consultation with other industries, interest groups and State Government agencies. State Government agencies will provide a framework for and support the preparation of guidelines.
8. Para grass, Aleman grass and Hymenachne will not be included in pasture mixes recommended by Government agencies for the development of Poned Pastures;
9. State Government agencies will develop a protocol for the pre-release assessment for weed potential of plants held in Genetic Resource Centres by public agencies and private companies and restrict release of potentially invasive plants
10. State Government agencies will use an integrated education, extension, research and regulatory approach to prevent adverse environmental impacts and to control the spread of current Poned Pasture species.
11. All Queensland Government extension material relevant to Poned Pastures will highlight the ecological risks associated with such development, particularly detrimental changes that may occur to freshwater and estuarine ecosystems and the risk of spread of Poned Pasture species beyond the grazing system.

Responsibilities

Implementation of the policy requires cross agency co-operation since it involves industry productivity, environmental and sustainability issues as well as statutory planning requirements.

It is therefore the responsibility of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Department of Primary Industries, Environmental Protection Agency, and Department of Local Government and Planning to ensure that the policy principles are observed.

References

State Cabinet adopted the Poned Pastures Policy, Decision No 02572, on 18 June 2001.

[The Poned Pastures Policy can be viewed at:
http://nrm.dnr.qld.gov.au/land/management/pdf/ponded_pasture.pdf](http://nrm.dnr.qld.gov.au/land/management/pdf/ponded_pasture.pdf)

[The NR&M Fact sheet on Poned Pastures can be viewed at:
http://nrm.dnr.qld.gov.au/factsheets/pdf/land/LM82w.pdf](http://nrm.dnr.qld.gov.au/factsheets/pdf/land/LM82w.pdf)