

Wetherby Station

1. Property description

Property name: Wetherby Station

Location: Rural Number 421 Wetherby Rd, Mt Molloy

Lot on Plan Number: Lot 4427 SP 167725, L63 SP 143045, PTO 6470, L23

AP 11281 (pending) State Land Asset Management, Parish of Garioch,

County of Dagmar, Tablelands Regional Council

General location, climate, landscape and vegetation types present:

The property is located on the western edge of the Great Dividing Range. The township of Mount Molloy lies immediately to the west, at the northern end of the property. The Mulligan Highway between Mareeba and Mount Molloy runs north-south, again on the western side of the property, and dissecting the “Wetherby West” block from the remainder of the property. A high voltage power line runs parallel to the Mulligan Highway before it swings north and east through Wetherby. The landscape is characterised by rolling metamorphic hills. The entire eastern boundary is the Kuranda National Park (and World Heritage Area) which extends all the way to the coast.

Wetherby ranges in an elevation between 400m and 520m. It has a slightly drier monsoonal climate than coastal regions with an average annual rainfall of 950 mm. This falls predominantly in the wet season, which commences in November/December and continues until March/April. It rains reliably at this time of year but the amount of rain varies from year to year. There is a corresponding dry season from April/May to December.

Temperature is relatively warm throughout the year. The average summer temperatures are 31°C (max) and 24°C (min), while winter averages are 22°C (max) and 14°C (min).

The majority of creeks in the northern part of the property flow into Rifle Creek and then west into the Mitchell River. Other major creeks from north to south include Spear Creek, Dairy Creek and the Little Mitchell River. They also flow west into the Mitchell River. There are dams and waterholes near the eastern boundary and in the north around Rifle Creek.

The predominant soil types are cleared alluvials (formerly used for sugar cane production), old alluvials and yellow duplex soils derived from the metamorphic bedrock. The rocky metamorphic substrate is exposed on the hills, while the lowlands consist of old loamy and sandy plains, and alluvial river and creek flats.

The property straddles two bioregions, the Wet Tropics and the Einasleigh Uplands. (The Mulligan Highway approximately follows the bioregional boundary, with the Wet Tropics bioregion to the east and the Einasleigh Uplands to the west). The majority of the property is dominated by eucalypt woodland with ironbarks, bloodwoods and boxes.

The property has a typical savannah landscape – open woodland with a grassy understorey. It supports relatively large patches of Molloy Red Box woodland to open-forest and Clarkson's bloodwood. This gives way to white mahogany and lemon-scented gum woodlands in the southern half of the property, east of main road. Patches of iron bark open forest also occur in this area. On the western side of the road, the Molloy Red Box and bloodwood community gives way to a poplar gum and iron bark community. A large patch of ti-tree, she-oak and cypress low open woodland occurs west of the main road. Other vegetation types of interest include Cadaji open forest with vine thicket elements in two patches in the south; patches of ti-tree (*Melaleuca viridiflora*); riverine communities with vine forest and closed forest species; a small sedgeland/ grassland on an inundated swamp at the northern end of the

property. There are small patches of forest red gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*) associated creeks and waterholes along the eastern boundary of the property. The dominant understorey grasses are kangaroo grass, giant spear grass, kerosene grass, white spear grass and blady grass.

Current management practices:

The property is currently managed for:

1. Beef cattle production – The property runs approximately 500 head of Droughtmaster cattle which are grazed on native and improved pastures. Steers bred on the property are fattened, but the main enterprise is selling weaners. Pasture is available all year round and supplemented with lick subject to season. Phosphorous blocks are supplied in the wet season, while molasses and urea blocks are given in the dry season. The aim is for sustainable grazing by reducing cattle numbers in parallel with improving the cattle quality.

The practice of seasonal mating has commenced, aiming for pre-Christmas calving and single sire-herds. Bulls are with cows from January to August, with a bull:cow ratio of 1:40 or 1:50. The intention is for early weaning from first calf heifers, wet season spelling and a plan to turn off cattle at an older age. The main mustering times are April and May.

There is some improved pasture. *Brachiaria decumbens*, *Brachiaria humidicola*, *Hamill grass*, and *seca stylo* have moved into the understorey. There are also areas of para grass and hymenachne.

2. Ecotourism – Wetherby has a relatively well established income stream from ecotourism. Tourists are bussed in from Port Douglas and/or Cairns and presented with a cattle show, information on the pastoral industry and the history of the property and its owners. There is no overnight accommodation although there is a restaurant capable of seating 100 patrons that operates from the original homestead. This also caters for weddings and similar parties.

Other groups access the property such as local wildlife enthusiasts and historical groups. The intention is to grow this aspect of the business.

3. Sustainability - Employing sustainable land management practices is a high priority on Wetherby. It is intended that this will result in improved farm productivity as well as ensuring that biodiversity values are retained. Substantial tree planting has occurred on the property and it is intended that the tree planting effort be continued. More intensive development is not planned – rather, the approach is the reverse, with some areas being ‘de-developed’.

Management intentions:

The long term aims are to:

- improve the herd quality,
 - increase the attention given to biodiversity management and,
 - build the tourism aspects of the venture.
- 1) Previously, planned burning has not been undertaken on the property. It is intended that fire be used in conjunction with changed grazing practices to reduce timber thickening and promote 3P (Perennial, Productive, Palatable) grasses.
 - 2) There are small isolated pockets of weeds that are being managed successfully at present. Weeds present include Giant Rats Tail grass (in a very small area), lantana (in Spear Creek and the northern part of Weaner Creek). There is no rubber vine and a very minor occurrence of sicklepod.
 - 3) The Bullock paddock has been recently subdivided and some riparian fencing is soon to be erected. The driveway is now a laneway for stock movement and stock control; there is additional sub-divisional fencing for a holding paddock and stock management.
 - 4) Drovers’ Camp holding paddock fences reinstated.

- 5) Keyline program of progressive deep ripping on the Keyline has commenced and will be developed further to increase productivity in improved country.

Additional information:

There have been significant changes in management practices in the last several years. Cattle were previously run in the Little Mitchell paddock in the wet, with no wet season spelling. New fences have been erected in Wetherby West and repaired in the Little Mitchell. Fencing has occurred as above principally to subdivide paddocks and create laneways, making it easier to move stock.

Northern Gulf Resource Management Group in conjunction with Landcare is conducting a 3 year Compost Tea trial in Weaner paddock and application may be extended to other areas.

For fire management, there is an imperative to undertake fuel reduction burning on Wetherby to provide fire protection to the nearby township of Mount Molloy. The main wildfire threat comes from the south east. Fire will also be used as a tool to reduce encroachment and timber thickening.

Power lines run through the property. Timber under the lines is managed by Ergon/Powerlink contractors. They need to be notified befo