

# Lake Baroon Catchment Care

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*The Sunshine Coast Environmental Council (SCEC) is the umbrella organisation of more than 50 community groups. In this issue of ECO, we feature the Lake Baroon Catchment Care Group and its role in supplying a vital asset – clean water.*

## Caring for the Catchment

“Water water everywhere ...” – not in Australia unfortunately, this is the dry continent, water worries are predicted to worsen with climate change and managing this most precious of resources is a must.

Much of the Sunshine Coast relies on Lake Baroon, also known as the Baroon Pocket Dam, for its water supply.

The dam, with a catchment area of 74 square kilometres, was built on Obi Obi Creek in 1988. Big problems soon surfaced. Excessive clearing had removed protective vegetation from the banks of many streams and gullies in the catchment. As a result, large quantities of sediment and nutrients from built up areas as well as farmland found their way into the lake with dire consequences for water quality – an outbreak of the potentially toxic blue green algae in 1990.



*Lake Baroon*

Another outbreak in 1991 prompted action, and community members got together to set up the Lake Baroon Catchment Care Group (LBCCG) in the following year – one of the first catchment care groups in Queensland.

Only a small percentage of land in the catchment is “locked up” for conservation, so not much can be done to restore the environmental health of the catchment unless farmers and other private land owners are on side.

Developing good relationships with landholders is crucial, according to LBCCG President Peter Stevens.

“We need a proactive approach in catchment protection. Our current policy is to identify the most pressing problem areas and target landholders accordingly.

“We supply funding and resources to help landholders with on ground projects such as re-vegetating riparian areas, weed removal, fencing waterways to keep cattle away, helping with dairy effluent disposal, and hardening stock laneways and dairy aprons.

“Many of the farmers in the catchment operate on slim profit margins, they recognise how their land can become degraded, but need financial help for the remedial work which we promote.”

Funding is a perennial problem for community groups. Seqwater, the government body which manages catchments and water storage areas, saw the advantages of working closely with a well-supported community group such as LBCCG, and in 2007 agreed to fund a ten year program enabling the group to employ a full-time Catchment Coordinator and to subsidise on ground projects.

“Sometimes we can fully fund a project,” said Mr Stevens.

“We’ve found that once farmers become involved in a particular project, they tend to continue with other projects which are also beneficial for catchment health.

“More and more farmers realise the value of a partnership with LBCCG – as well as good environmental outcomes, our on ground projects help farmers become more efficient, thus more profitable.

“For example, clean watering points for dairy cattle reduce stream bank erosion as well as reduce contamination of milk from mud.”

“While we target particular farmers, we also find that others are voluntarily approaching us as the benefits of catchment care become clear.

“We make it easy for land owners by minimising paperwork for project funding and looking after documentation and accountability.”

LBCCG has completed almost 100 individual water quality improvement projects over the years.

The group also helps land owners develop property plans.



*President Peter Stevens (left) with Catchment Coordinator Mark Amos. Photo by John Burrows*

“We advocate a whole-farm approach to managing the business, taking into account economic, social and environmental factors. We’re committed to supporting large landholders who want to keep their soil and nutrients in the paddocks where they belong,” said Mr Stevens.

Controlling weeds in the catchment is important too – LBCCG is working with the CSIRO in developing a biological control programme to deal with mistflower, potentially a major threat in riparian areas.

Community involvement is also part of business for LBCCG, operating a Green Jobs Corp programme which provides local unemployed youth with work that gives them bush regeneration skills and helps them gain a Diploma in Conservation and Land Management. They've done environmental work on three properties so far.

LBCCG operate from offices in a refurbished house on a 40 hectare property adjoining Lake Baroon. The property was purchased by Seqwater, who provided the house as well as guaranteeing funding for the group – the sort of partnership which LBCCG hopes will be a template for the public utility to work with other community catchment care groups.

For more information about LBCCG, contact Catchment Coordinator Mark Amos on 5494 3775 or visit the [Lake Baroon Catchment Care Group](#) website.