



RIRDC Board dines 'Top End style' down among the buffalo



ABOVE: The 'audience', BELOW: The lunch.
BELOW FAR RIGHT: Barry Lemcke gives his talk.



The RIRDC Board choose Darwin for its annual general meeting in July - and the Northern Territory buffalo industry attracted plenty of attention while members were in the Top End.

The board's 18 members flew in from all around Australia for a hectic program that included the formal meeting and visits to inspect local primary industry activities in the areas of crocodile farming and Asian vegetable production. But much of their time was also spent checking out the latest developments in the local buffalo industry.

On a visit to the Beatrice Hill buffalo research facility on the Adelaide River, board members were treated to a barbecue lunch of buff burgers, sausages and scotch fillet, and actually dined in the re-

search yards surrounded by curious buffalo in their pens.

During the bus trip on the way to Beatrice Hill, NT Buffalo Industry Council executive officer Neil Ross gave board members a comprehensive overview of the Territory industry's current status.

During the tour of Beatrice Hill, Buffalo production specialist Barry Lemcke gave a talk on proposed new buffalo research directions. Neil Ross reported that the board members were 'very impressed' with the quality of the Beatrice Hill buffalo, and the meat products cooked up for lunch.

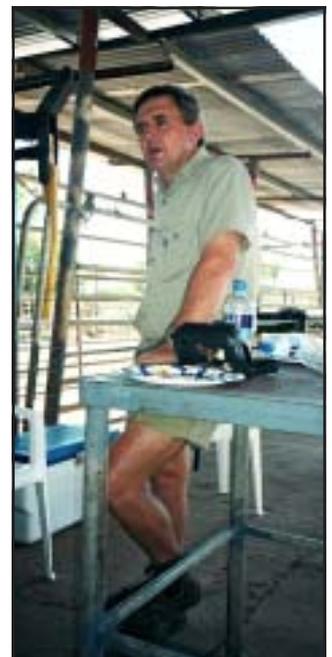
South Australian buffalo industry on the show trail

The drought might have decimated buffalo herds in southern states but South Australia's buffalo farmers are keeping up the promotional pressure on local consumers to taste and buy their products.

With the help of some top-up meat supplies from the Top End, ABIC President Bob Cook has been doing the rounds of local shows, offering his delectable mettwurst and other lines for locals to try.

Bob and Chris Cook, trading as Gulf Buffalo, presented their smallgoods for sale at this year's Kadina and Port Lincoln shows, and reported a good response. They have received orders from a number of Port Lincoln hotels for buffalo products including beers sticks, jerky and meat.

At the time this newsletter was going to press, Bob was also preparing to present Gulf Buffalo products at the annual Adelaide Show from 29 August until 6 September. The Adelaide Show promotion will include a cook-up of buffalo meat products by a celebrity chef.



NTBIC checks out potential market for draft buffalo in Sabah

The Malaysian state of Sabah could be in the market for large numbers of Australian buffalo for purposes other than meat in the future, as NT Buffalo Industry Council Executive Officer Neil Ross found out during a recent visit there.

Neil went to Sabah to gauge demand for buffalo as draft animals in palm oil plantations, and also for grazing below the palms for grass and weed control.

"It has been proven that buffalo are the most economical method for carrying palm oil fruit bunches from the trees in the plantations to the roadside transport," Neil said.

"But there is a shortage of buffalo for this purpose in Sabah so we thought it was a good idea to go over and have a look at their needs.

Neil visited one plantation which grazes 94 head of buffalo for weed and grass control under its palm trees on a two-hectare-per-day rotation.

The buffalo are held behind a single strand electric wire fence and are rotated on a 40 day cycle to cover 90 hectares of the plantation.

"This plantation also used about 30 buffalo pulling sleds to cart palm oil out to the roadside," Neil said.

"Palm oil is big business in Sabah and this plantation is looking at expanding its grazing operations.

"Buffalo have an advantage over cattle in that their progeny can be used as draft animals as well as for breeding and meat purposes. Cattle can only be used for breeding and meat.

Some Sabah palm oil plantation owners harness the buffalo to wheeled carts for haulage across flat country, and sleds for use in high country.

"The alternatives to buffalo are expensive machinery which has largely been abandoned, and wheelbarrows which struggle under the weight of several 20-23 kg bunches of palm oil fruit," Neil said.

"People we spoke to did not realise that good quality Australian buffalo were so readily available. Some were concerned about the temperament of the buffalo, but if they were supplied with farmed animals, the temperament problems would be solved."



Asrif Bin Mahmud from Sabah Mas Plantations (left) with Dr Mohd Azid Kabul

"One local veterinary officer I visited was responsible for an area with 288 plantations. Only 35 of them used buffalo, and they owned 2600 buffalo between them.

Of that number, 70 per cent are working animals and are harnessed for work every day.

"This just goes to illustrate the potential requirements for buffalo in Sabah's palm oil sector."

Neil also accompanied District Veterinary Officer Dr Mohd Azid Kabul, on a tour of the Tawau and Sandakan plantations, supermarkets and wet markets. About 95 per cent of Sabah's domestic meat supply is made up of frozen product, and is mainly Indian buffalo meat and offal with some New Zealand beef and neck bones.

NTBIC is presently assisting an exporter to quote on three inquiries resulting from the Sabah visit, and Neil hopes to return to the Malaysian state in September to finalise some orders.



Buffalo are harnessed to sleds (above) and carts (below) for palm oil fruit haulage on Sabah plantations.



BUFFALO News

Contributions on any matter of interest to Australia's buffalo industry are most welcome and can be sent to, or discussed with:

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Seeing the light from low stress handling

Buffalo producers, researchers and other industry representatives have been highly impressed by the techniques displayed at a series of Low Stress Stock Handling workshops conducted in the Northern Territory.

Even the most experienced in the business gained much from the workshops, conducted by Jim Lindsay and tutors from the Queensland-based Low Stress Stock Handling Pty Ltd.

“It was for me an event similar to the old story on the ‘road to Damascus’ where a light sud-

denly shone very brightly,” was how long-term Darwin-based buffalo research specialist Barry Lemcke summed up what he had learnt from the workshop he attended earlier this year.

“This school will radically change the way you handle stock in the future, providing you don’t go back to the ‘old ways’.



Tutor Chook Kealey imprinting calves during the workshop

A GRAZING SUCCESS STORY



ABOVE: Buffalo start grazing duty on tall grass and weeds under a Sabah palm oil plantation. BELOW: A job well done! Just 24 hours later the buffalo are moved on to the next plot, leaving little behind. (DETAILS OPPOSITE PAGE).



“I thoroughly recommend this school as the best investment you have ever made for your property. You will save on labour, stress and heartache, as well as reaping productivity benefits in the long term. It is a must for exporters, property owners, abattoir operators and anyone involved in regular stock handling.”

The most recent workshop was conducted at Beatrice Hill Farm and focused specifically on handling buffalo.

NTBIC Executive Officer Neil Ross was among local industry representatives who attended, and described it as extremely worthwhile.

Top End producer Ernie Schluep put what he learnt into practice when he

went home, and found he was able to herd up his buffalo on his own with very little effort.

The two-day courses followed similar principles for cattle and buffalo.

They involved theory and practical sessions.

Barry Lemcke said he learnt from his course how cattle could be mustered on foot to any place they were required, without getting out of a walk and without being pre-trained.

He has since used the principles in working with buffalo and found they reacted in the same manner, “though flight zones are somewhat different and you need to be more mindful of the cranky ones”,

FarmBiz subsidised half the cost of the course for NTBIC members.

Buff Industry represented on Government committee

ABIC Vice-President Michael Swart has been selected to represent the buffalo industry on a Northern Territory Government committee set up to look at the National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS). The committee is endeavouring to work out a practical and reliable system which will meet the Territory’s national identification obligations in relation to NLIS.



STATE by STATE

Buffalo news from around the nation

NEW SOUTH WALES

Buffalo Producers NSW (BPNSW) President Doug Robertson reports that the NSW winter has brought little change to difficult drought conditions, except a drop in temperatures.

Despite weather bureau predictions of average rainfall for Autumn and Winter, little has eventuated.

The lack of pasture growth, coupled with the high cost of straw, hay and grain, has seen buffalo herd numbers further diminish in this state.

Doug says the Industry Development Specialist's lack of success so far in locating any reasonable or viable markets on the eastern seaboard has seen the accelerated dispersal of several herds.

Heavy losses of animals in a southern herd, due to cold weather and reduced body condition, has again highlighted the vulnerability of buffalo to climatic condi-

tions when feed supplies are less than adequate.

The potential Japanese export market mentioned in the last edition of *Buffalo News* failed to materialise due to the lack of the essential driving ingredient - money.

By mid-August, some rainfall relief was offering hope that things might be changing for the better, but it will need months of above average rainfall before confidence in those areas west of the Great Divide recovers from the past two or more years.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ABIC state rep John Starr reports that the buffalo industry is continuing at a very slow pace in WA, though there are some encouraging signs for the future.

These include a growing awareness of buffalo meat among the state's fast food outlets.

Only a couple of farmers are persisting with buffalo

herds in WA at this stage. John describes the industry as being more a hobby situation with little return. However, John is marketing chemical free beef and including samples of buff which is at least getting the product to the public to try

"The Riverine cross males look great and we will be trying some of them in October," John says.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

NTBIC held its annual general meeting recently and Michael Swart was re-elected president and Graham Michell re-elected as vice-president.

The new executive includes Alan Fisher, Ernie Schluep and Dallis Wilschefski.

NTBIC has also been on the promotional run with its traditional buffalo barbecue at the Darwin Show in late July.

A good roll-up of industry members and supporters

were on hand this year to cook and serve showgoers with the popular buffalo burgers and sausages.

The money raised from the stall goes towards advancing buffalo industry activities in the Top End.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

As reported on the front page of this newsletter, Bob and Chris Cook of Gulf Buffalo in Port Lincoln have been actively promoting their products and the industry in general, at shows in their district and in Adelaide.

In another initiative, the Cooks have been supplying buffalo meat for cookery workshops at TAFE Colleges in Adelaide, Port Augusta and Wyalla.

Cooking students at the colleges are learning the art of creating tasty smallgoods such as kranski and pate, using buffalo meat instead of other traditional meats.

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