



Managing stock in and around waterways

Many landholders are discovering that managing stock access to their waterways results in long-term benefits.

The following information will help you decide if managing stock access on your property would be good for you and your local community.

Why manage stock access to waterways?

The banks of waterways and the adjacent flats are in many areas prime agricultural and grazing lands. They are often highly productive and have a valuable role in maintaining stream bank stability, good quality water supplies, and the general health of aquatic environments.

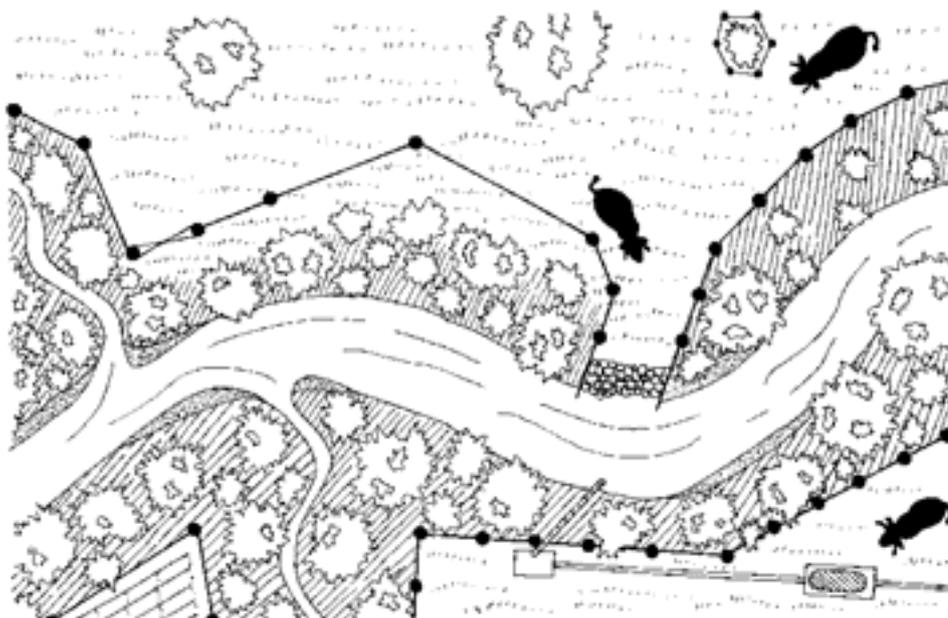
Waterways are also favoured by stock which, if allowed unrestricted access, can lead to considerable damage to the waterway. Bank erosion, water pollution and stream sedimentation are just some of the negative effects of uncontrolled stock access to rivers and streams that cost you, your neighbours and the wider community.

Many landholders are discovering that substantial benefits can be realised through managing stock access to waterways. These benefits include:

- enhanced productivity. On-farm trials have shown improvements of up to 20% in weight gain for stock drinking from piped water sources. Additionally, reductions in Mastitis in dairy herds have also been reported after controlling direct access to streams.
- improvements in water quality and reliability of supply, by reducing nutrient and sediment inputs to the waterway.
- improvements in bank stability.
- creation of a fodder reserve which can be utilized periodically and in times of drought.

Managing stock access to waterways requires both planning and effort. Issues such as the cost of installing and maintaining fences, the potential for weed and pest infestations, and providing shade and alternative watering points need to be carefully considered.

Managing stock access to waterways can be part of an overall property management plan





Managing stock access to waterways

Managing stock access does not mean permanent exclusion of stock from riparian lands. Rather, stock movement and grazing pressure are managed by you to maintain the valuable functions of the riparian area.

The most simple and effective way of managing stock access to waterways is to fence riparian areas from adjacent paddocks, often in conjunction with off-stream watering points. The width of the fenced area should be at least from the water's edge to the high bank. However, it is often beneficial to have twice this width to protect against bank instability and reductions in water quality. Fences allow you to control the timing, intensity and duration of grazing on the banks. Low-cost fencing should be used in flood prone areas.



Low-cost fencing for flood-prone areas

Other options which may also suit your particular situation and needs include:

- where bank stability and water quality are a priority, one or more off-stream watering points can be installed
- where stock access to the watercourse is down one bank only, a restricted access point can be constructed
- where stock are required to cross the watercourse, a bed level crossing, culvert or bridge can be constructed. Contact your local office of the Department of Natural Resources and Water for design guidelines and a permit.

A comprehensive review of options, practicalities and costs of off-stream watering points is provided by the Kondinin Farm Group in issue 54 of the Farming Ahead journal.

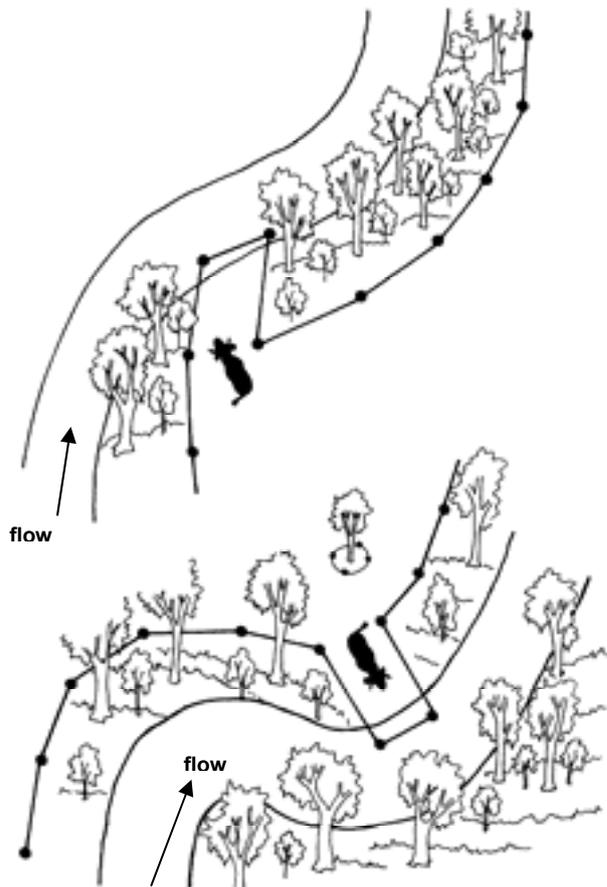
What about stock watering points and shade?

Limiting stock access to watercourses may mean that alternative shelter or watering points will be needed.

Several options are possible:

- limited access to the stream at points that have low risk of erosion, for example on the inside bank on bends (see diagram below)
- piping from an existing supply to troughs in the paddock
- pumping water from a bore or the waterway to troughs. A range of low-cost and low maintenance pump types are available for this purpose.

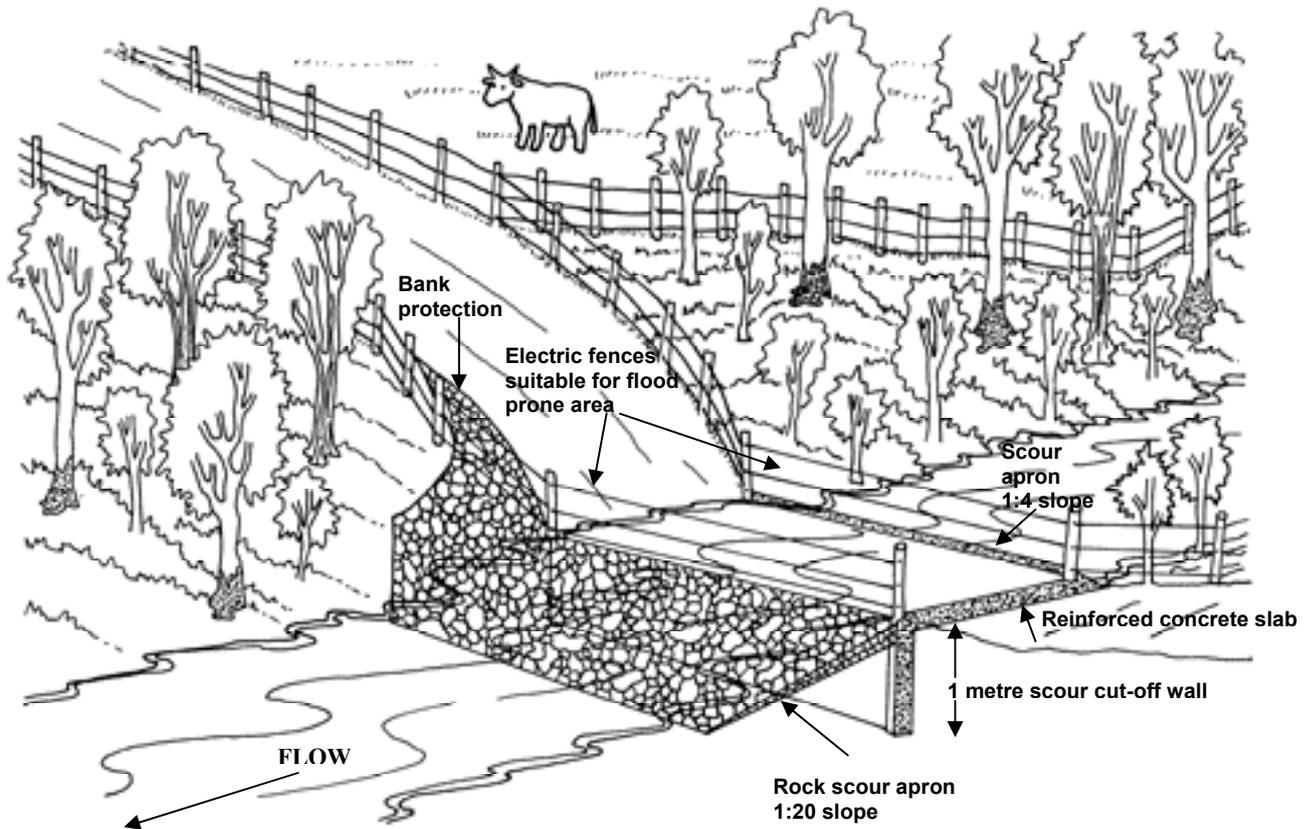
Fencing the banks may mean that stock temporarily lose the benefit of the shade and shelter that was once provided by trees and shrubs on the stream bank. This can be compensated for by growing shade trees in adjoining paddocks. Contact the local forestry office for advice on fast-growing species for your area.



Locating restricted stock watering points



Diagram adapted from NSW DLWC Riverwise advisory note series: 'Livestock Control Near Rivers', 1995



Bed level crossing design details for small streams (vehicles and stock)

What about weeds in fenced off areas?

The rate at which newly fenced riparian areas will regenerate is dependent upon many factors. If native vegetation has been absent from the site for a long period then recovery can be slow and weed infestations can become a problem.

In many cases 'crash' grazing of the riparian land will assist in controlling excessive weed growth. The timing, intensity and duration of grazing should be carefully monitored in the first few years in order to determine the most appropriate grazing strategy for controlling weeds and allowing natural regeneration of native plants on your riparian lands.

Not all weeds will be controlled through strategic grazing. Established woody weeds and problem species should be controlled at the same time as adjacent paddocks are treated.

Offsetting costs

In some districts, assistance may be available through government funding. This is because there is increasing recognition that better management of stock access to riparian lands has benefits for the wider community as well as landholders. Contact your local Department of Natural Resources and Water office, Integrated Catchment Management Committee or Landcare group for information on what's available in your area.

Further information

For further information on managing stock in and around waterways, or for permits for undertaking works within a watercourse, contact your local office of the Department of Natural Resources and Water. Landcare groups, if operating in your area, are also a valuable source of information and may have particular expertise in addressing local issues and needs.



See also in this series

- R02 What causes bank erosion?
- R30 Stream bank vegetation is valuable
- R34 How healthy is your watercourse? Assessing stream bank vegetation

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R33

For further information phone 13 13 04