

**Monday 7 April 2008**

## **Protecting ancient rainforest remnants for the future**

For fourteen years Jason Mobbs had his eye on the hilly Belbora property with patches of ancient rainforest. Growing up in the area he had always enjoyed exploring the rainforest gullies or taking in the stunning views from the eucalyptus-covered ridge tops.

'Since the age of about five I wanted to have my own rainforest – there's something so enchanting about it all.'

So when the property came up for sale about seven years ago he jumped at the chance and is now the proud owner of the 146 hectare property about 10 kms west of Krumbach.

At 37, Jason sees himself more as a custodian of the land, rather than a property owner. He's keen to see the rainforest and other native vegetation on his land preserved, so he contacted the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) for some advice.

After speaking with staff at the Taree office including vegetation officer Andrew Paget, Jason decided to enter into a Property Vegetation Plan (PVP). He signed the agreement in January this year.

While individual PVPs vary to suit the landholder, Jason has decided to protect or 'set aside' 82 hectares of his property in perpetuity which includes the stunning rainforest patches he has long admired. The plan comes with an incentive payment to assist Jason with management of the vegetation.

As well as rainforest, Jason's property features ridges dominated by Ironbark Forest, lower slopes with some Grey Box Forest, and southern slopes with shrubby Tallowood and Bluegum Forest.

'This property is a great example of the rich diversity to be found in our catchment and setting it aside for perpetuity (continuing forever) represents a significant contribution to the community,' CMA Project Officer Andrew paget said.

'It also contains a rainforest tree not known previously south of the Hastings River and a grass not known south of Kempsey.'

And then there's the array of animals that call the forest home. There's the ones you can see like the goannas, kookaburras and occasional echidna and ones you hear including frogs and lyre birds. Some trees bear the tell-tale scratch marks of the more shy types including koalas.

But PVPS are not just about setting aside land and landowners like Jason are required to work closely with CMA officers to develop a long-term plan for the entire property.

Most recently Jason has been tackling the weeds which have flourished on the cleared section of his property including lantana and crofton weed. The CMA has provided both funding, technical advice and training in this regard and Jason will continue managing weeds as part of his obligation under the PVP.

'It's all about CMAs and landholders working together to better manage the land - it's a win-win situation. In Jason's case he needs help with clearing weeds and fencing while other landholders may be looking to revegetate degraded areas,' Chairman of the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA Dr WEJ Paradise said.

In fact, several other landholders in the area are now interested in protecting sections of their properties to form a continuous stretch along the ridgeline. A PVP is a legally binding document and under his individual agreement Jason has committed to fencing off this section of his property to cattle. Allowed to roam cattle can trample vegetation, spread weeds and affect water quality.

Along the way Jason will document his progress with photographs and notes.

'Sure there's work involved but I'm not concerned about that. What's more important to me is that it's enabled me to save all of this.'

Probably his greatest challenge right now is finding the time to dedicate to his private patch of paradise. He works on average six days a week in the combined Krambach Service Station and Chainsaw business he owns with his parents Lib and Ian.

But the business is now for sale and after more than 20 years on the job he's ready to leave the chainsaws behind and immerse himself into the business of conservation.

**ENDS**

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