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Case study

Focus on bluegrass at Kestrel Mine

Rio Tinto Coal Australia has worked closely with the North Australian Pastoral Company (NAPCO) to manage the Gordon Downs pastoral property located above the underground Kestrel Mine.

A property management plan has been developed for the land which includes zoning areas for controlled grazing to promote Queensland bluegrass woodland regeneration, which is an endangered community.

Rio Tinto purchased the Gordon Downs property in 2003 and Kestrel Mine general manager operations, Tony Lennox, said the mine has worked with NAPCO to transform Gordon Downs into a thriving pastoral property coexisting with Kestrel's underground mining operations.

"When we purchased the property, the cultivation land was lying fallow and was exposed to both wind and water erosion and weed infestation. The soil was compacted by 20 years of cultivation for grain crops.

"As part of our commitment to the future sustainability of the Central Highlands, we devised a property management plan in accordance with the Rio Tinto Land Use Stewardship standard."

When the property management plan was finalised for the land, Gordon Downs was put up for lease, on the condition that any third parties who used the property had to meet company requirements.

Since obtaining the lease, NAPCO and Kestrel Mine have undertaken a number of actions to ensure the sustainable development of Gordon Downs, including contributing to increasing the area of Queensland bluegrass in the vicinity of the operation.

Other actions undertaken through this partnership include converting areas of land that are no longer suitable to permanent cropping back to pasture, expanding the riparian protection zone along creeks and waterways to reduce bank erosion and improve water quality, fencing off dams to prevent cattle access and allow native vegetation to regenerate, and planting deep-rooted legumes to improve soil structure and control erosion.

"Biodiversity is not something you can achieve overnight, but by working together with third parties, like NAPCO, we aim to promote sustainable land management practices and work towards a shared goal of sustainable development," Mr Lennox said.

"We are delighted with the results NAPCO has delivered at Gordon Downs during its tenure as lessee."