LOCH SCALES DOWN QDPI&F RESEARCH ROLE

Eminent Queensland turfgrass researcher Dr Don Loch has stepped down from his full-time position with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (QDPI&F) Turf Research Group.

Dr Loch has scaled down his involvement at the Redlands Research Station, finishing up his full-time role in late January 2008. He will continue to be actively involved with the group as part of the QDPI&F's alumni programme and will work three days a week.

In 2000 Dr Loch initiated and led the QDPI&F's Turf Research Group at Redlands. Prior to this appointment, he worked with tropical grasses for 30 years at Gympie DPI during which time he bred two new Rhodes grass cultivars and registered several other new pasture cultivars. He was also instrumental in developing technology to support the commercialisation of many new tropical herbage grasses and legumes for northern Australia.

With over 37 years of research experience in pasture and ornamental grasses, Dr Loch is recognised as Australia's leading scientist within his field. He has built this reputation through academic excellence, extensive knowledge of tropical grasses, in particular turf and industry development.

Since the inauguration of the turf research programme at Redlands, turf collections and plots were planted for observational purposes. In an attempt to contain the ever-growing collections, the concept of turf demonstration plots was conceived and construction/planting started five months after the group was formed.

The site currently contains 138 (3mx2.5m plots) unreplicated warm-season turfgrass varieties from 24 taxa, providing homeowners, the turf industry, educational institutions and researchers alike with a 'living turf library'.

This display of predominantly vegetative turf cultivars growing in a subtropical location has been sourced from breeders and other research groups from within Australia and internationally. With an ever-growing quantity of turf varieties being released, Dr Loch has been instrumental in importing turf genotypes that have demonstrated potential in a number of areas (eg: salt and shade tolerance) and are of educational significance.

"If you have had the privilege to meet Don, or held a 'quick' conversation with him over the phone or in person, you must be mistaken and we are obviously speaking of different people," quips fellow QDPI&F research scientist Matt Roche.

"Don has never been one to shy away from a lengthy conversation or debate particularly when turf is the topic of conversation. There is no such thing as a 'quickie' on turf with Don.

"If you were visiting Redlands and were under the impression you could quickly check out the turf plots and obtain a quick overview of the history of selected turfgrasses, Don was always willing to correct that misconception.

"Don's passion and enthusiasm is quickly realised by the touring person(s) while on one of his walk and talk fests. One such occasion that instinctively comes to mind is when Don was showing a sod producer and his wife around the plots.

"The group had been walking and talking for several hours and I'm sure all was going well until the clouds opened and the rain set in. This would generally have most people ducking for cover, grabbing an umbrella or calling the tour off. Not this time. Neither Don, the sod producer nor more importantly his wife had an umbrella in reach… but the show kept on going."

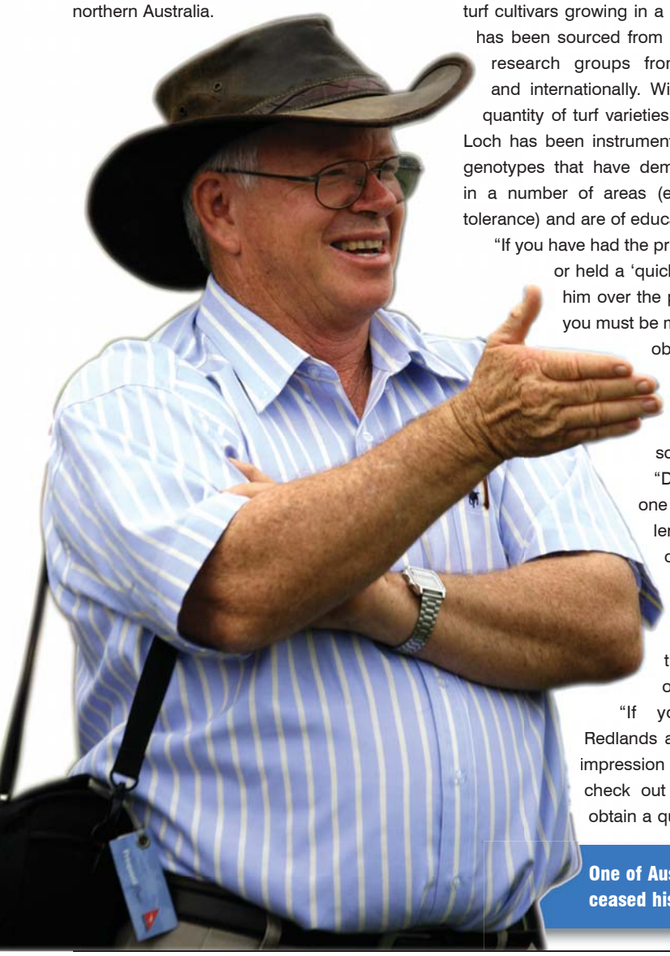
Dr Loch has been an integral part of the forward direction of the turfgrass industry within Australia over recent years and his knowledge, global networks and research skills have enabled him to position the QDPI&F Turf Research Group as Australia's leading turf research body.

The group currently consists of 10 members (principle turf scientist, four scientists, three technicians, an extension officer and a qualified greenkeeper) that have the ability to undertake research activities and provide extension on a multitude of turf disciplines critical to the turf industry and the amenity and lifestyle horticulture sectors. Such expertise was achieved by Dr Loch's forward thinking, interstate and international (NZSTI, Uni. Georgia etc...) collaborations and linkages with the wider turf industry.

Since 2000 Dr Loch has been largely involved in successfully obtaining numerous Horticulture Australia Limited funded projects, a number of Australian Research Council grants and has negotiated with many government agencies and companies selling turf related products to undertake independent research activities with their support.

"Don has requested that he still be actively involved within the QDPI&F Turf Research Group and the undertaking of such a transitional role has been widely supported by management and its staff," says Roche.

"Both welcome the opportunity and look forward to the future working relationship and how this can strengthen the activities of the Queensland-based research team."



One of Australia's leading turfgrass research scientists, Dr Don Loch, ceased his full-time position with the QDPI&F in late January

SATURATED SUPERS BATTLE THE ELEMENTS

Superintendents at a number of Queensland courses have had a start to 2008 they would rather forget following major flooding rains which had nearly two thirds of the state in a state of emergency.

Some areas on the Gold Coast received up to 600mm for the two months to February with a number of golf courses damaged by major floods in both January and February. Ironically, while most of the state was under water, Brisbane's main catchment areas missed out with dam levels rising to just above 31 per cent.

The monsoonal start to the year couldn't have come at a worse time for Royal Pines superintendent Paul McLean. Having taken over from Stuart Laing in late 2007, the former Simplot rep had to get the course up for the 2008 ANZ Ladies Masters which was held in the first week of February. In the five days leading up to the start of the tournament, the course got hammered by 217mm, eventually forcing organisers to call off the first round and reduce the tournament to 54 holes.

In a novel approach, McLean resorted to sending a text message to his turf management colleagues on the Gold Coast asking for assistance in getting the course back in play, particularly the bunkers. The message read: 'U r all invited 2 the first Royal Pines working b just bring a shovel and a hat. Start time 4.30am this Thursday c u there!

The ploy obviously worked as upwards of 40 superintendents and staff from nearby courses turned up to lend a hand, much to McLean's relief.

A few kilometres south of Royal Pines and Mark Hauff and his staff at The Colonial Golf Course had to clean up the course following two major flood events inside of five weeks.

On Friday 4 January substantial rainfall began with just under 200mm recorded in two and a half days. The Colonial runs alongside Mudgeeraba Creek which is fed from the hinterland and surrounding areas to which all run-off eventually runs to the lowest point of the creek adjacent to the golf course. Sitting less than one metre above a normal tide level from the creek, the course copped major damage.

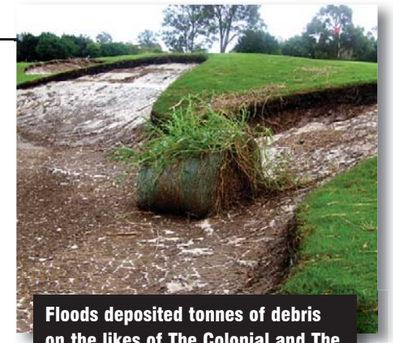
"On Friday afternoon we literally watched the creek tide rise and begin to penetrate the course and ultimately merge with our existing lakes which cover almost 15 hectares of the 60ha property," recalls Hauff.

"It was almost three days until the creek's level subsided enough to instigate our flood pumps. In those three days it gave time for the silt to settle and once the flood waters subsided, this substantially prolonged the clean-up process."

Four greens were partially affected with a 2cm film of silt, with one green totally covered. Several fairways, tees and rough areas were also affected while several tonnes of debris were removed including pot plants, drums, kayaks, a small water tank and a large hay bale. The Colonial course maintenance staff repaired the course and it was reopened a week later on 11 January.

Just over three weeks later, starting on 4 February, the course copped another 200mm in two days and flooded once again. Although silt damage and debris was less severe it took over three days until the flood pumps could be used and the course eventually opened a week later.

"In situations like this it makes you realise the camaraderie, support and respect staff can develop for each other and I couldn't be happier with the way staff handled both these situations with maturity and dedication," says Hauff.



Floods deposited tonnes of debris on the likes of The Colonial and The Glades, including pot plants, drums, kayaks, a small water tank and hay bales

Paul Lierse at The Glades was in a similar boat as the course also backs on to the Mudgeeraba Creek. Water levels peaked around 2am and by around 6am on 5 January water had subsided enough that Lierse could initiate the course's dewatering pumps. These pumps move 1000l/s and within 48 hours the bulk of the water was removed and real story unveiled.

"It was messy," says Lierse. "All the crew came in on Sunday (6 January) and once they picked their jaws up out of the mud they got stuck in. It took four days to remove the bulk of the mud and our crew worked virtually around the clock.

"New techniques were created to get rid of the mud that you will not find in any text books but were highly effective. Constant showers allowed nothing to dry but the crew toiled away and we re-opened the course on 10 January.

"During adversity like that you can really see the true character of your staff and I couldn't be prouder of ours."