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## Buffalo Research Project

The Animal Industry Branch of the Department has established a Buffalo Research Project at the Sepik Plains Livestock Station, Urimo. The project is part of an overall programme to study the grazing potential of the Sepik Plains using Urimo as the basis of the investigations. This programme is supervised by John Schottler, the acting O.I.C. of the Beef Cattle Research Centre at Erap, and is being carried out by Livestock Officer, Ruki Kalaing and Urimo Station Manager, Rob Shaw.

The object of the research project is to see whether buffalo can be successfully grazed on the natural pastures of the Sepik Plains and, if so, the level of performance which can be expected. The research staff will measure parameters such as growth rate, calving rate, the area of pasture required to support each animal and labour requirements for a small herd. With this information they will then be able to decide whether smallholder farms based on buffalo are likely to be economically successful.

Different management systems for cattle are also being examined at Urimo and the results obtained from the buffalo experiments will enable direct comparisons to be made between cattle and buffalo under the different management systems. It is known that buffalo can digest very poor quality pastures (such as those occurring on the Sepik Plains), but they grow more slowly than cattle and take longer to mature, so that under good pasture conditions cattle are more efficient. The work now being carried out at Urimo will help us to decide whether it will be best to fertilize the ground and plant improved pastures for cattle, or whether we should graze cattle on the natural pastures and supplement the cattle with protein and phosphate, or whether we can simply graze buffalo on the natural grasses without supplementation of any kind.