Jo Miller, Grazing Best Management Practice Coordinator for the Burdekin region with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, worked with fellow researchers Dave Smith, Mick Sullivan and Geoffrey Fordyce to develop a new set of standard photographs which more accurately demonstrate BCS in tropical cattle breeds.

“The importance of body condition to breeder production and animal welfare is well known. The five-point BCS system is well regarded by industry and was used in two large research projects, the Beef CRC and CashCow (both MLA funded),” Jo said.

“However, the photo standards previously available to industry were inconsistent across breeds, which meant they weren’t as useful as they could have been.”

Condition scoring is a valuable tool for assessing animals and planning management. Poor body condition is a primary risk factor for cow performance, especially if pregnant while lactating. Jo said another benefit of more consistent guidelines is improving the transfer of information between industry groups.

To create the two new sets of photo standards (Brahmans and Bos indicus content), Jo photographed a range of animals of similar breeding lines but in varying condition. Identifying features, such as brands, were then removed from the photographs.

BCS can be assessed by looking at key areas on the animal (Figure 1) in conjunction with the BSC photo standards. This information can then be used to guide management decisions.

Figure 1 Location of key assessment sites (Blackwood et al 2013)

Check out the new photo standards at www.futurebeef.com.au and search ‘body condition score for beef cattle’

Watch a video demonstrating how BCS underpins one northern beef enterprise www.futurebeef.com.au and search ‘body condition scoring key to breeding’