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# THE IMPORTANCE OF PASTORALISTS' ATTITUDES

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## INTRODUCTION

Conflicts over natural resource use are often focussed more on personal values than on facts. We therefore need a clear understanding of the values, goals and expectations of interest groups such as pastoralists.

Interest groups also need to recognise and appreciate the values, goals and expectations of each other if they are to have meaningful dialogue.

The importance of understanding the value system of pastoralists is reinforced by observations that primary production is both a way of life and business activity. Consequently, policies directed at influencing the behaviour of primary producers must address those business and personal objectives.

## THE METHOD

Eighty-seven pastoral members of the South Australian Farmers Federation were selected at random in late 1993 for a questionnaire survey. Sixty-seven responses were obtained (i.e. 77% response rate).

The survey compared the value orientations of South Australian pastoralists with those of west Queensland and compared their attitude to the environment with that of Australian primary producers in general.

Their perceptions of the future were also gathered.

## RESULTS

The attitudes of South Australian pastoralists were very consistent with those of pastoralists in west Queensland and of Australian primary producers in general.

Most variations of view related to the strength of a view rather than the view itself.

They are a very cohesive group with a strong sense of identity and self-worth. They are very conscious of their role, not only as producers, but as custodians of the land. They have a strong affinity with the landscape, which helps them manage the land and its resources.

Great value is placed on their independence and they identify strongly with their distinctive, challenging environment and their way of life.

Instances where they had different views to that of primary producers in general were:

- Stronger affinity with their way of life, considering that it provides some compensation for times when earning a living is difficult.
- That the condition of their land was now better than in years gone by and that only relatively minor degradation was now occurring.

## **DISCUSSION**

There are three key points arising from this research.

Firstly, government or other interest groups wishing to influence the behaviour of pastoralists need to recognise their value system, particularly their close alignment with the environment, and their individual role within the closely-knit local community.

These perspectives and their individual business objectives must be accommodated in order to gain the support of the industry for any proposals.

On the other hand, people in the industry must note that the independence and individualism which has been one of their major strengths in the past, may limit their ability to deal with an increasingly complex social agenda which is developing around them.

In the same way that other interest groups need to understand the values and perspectives of pastoralists, pastoralists will also have to endeavour to understand and accommodate the aspirations of interest groups and governments.

A third key point relates to perceptions of the environment. More information is required to quantify the accuracy of the industry's observations that the land is improving in condition and that only relatively minor degradation is now occurring. This is not a view which is promoted by other interest groups.

Science has a role to play in providing information which can be jointly viewed by pastoral and other groups, hopefully, in a forum which promotes the better understanding of each other's values and aspirations, as well as a better understanding of the true nature of the land.