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The Australian Rangeland Society

THE MARREE SOIL CONSERVATION BOARD

Marree Soil Conservation Board

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ABSTRACT

The Marree Soil Board District is located in the far north-eastern corner of South Australia. It covers an area of over 200,000 square kilometres, equivalent to the size of Victoria. Members of this dynamic, highly motivated team of land managers include pastoralists, parks staff and petroleum industry representatives dedicated to building a shared landcare ethic for community benefit and survival.

The Board, through its involvement in, and promotion of, landcare activities, is working towards raising awareness in the local and wider community regarding landcare in the Soil Conservation District. There is a recognition that communication is a vital key to success so a great deal of emphasis is placed on establishing broad networks of people, within and outside of the district, for communicating and sharing information.

*However, the board members believe that landcare and the sustained health of the land rely on maintaining viable industries and improving the **quality** of production. Partnerships with agribusiness and government agencies are essential for gaining access to and promoting the most current information.*

Record keeping is fundamental for any successful business. The Board is also keen to encourage producers to maintain relevant records on land condition.

INTRODUCTION

The Board began its first term in August 1990. Establishing themselves at the outset as committed to communication and consultation with the community, the Board sought information on the following points from the landholders in the district:

- the three main landcare concerns on each property, in priority order;
- a rating of the type and number of vermin on each property.

Results of the survey enabled the Board to more effectively target their efforts in promoting and encouraging sustainable land management in the district.

DISCUSSION

Overall grazing management rated highly in the survey, including the effect of stock but focussing on feral animals such as rabbits, donkeys and goats and native animals such as kangaroos. As a result of this community input, exclosures have been set up on different properties in different land types across the district. This project has resulted in the accumulation of 5 years of data on the impact of domestic stock and rabbit grazing on the vegetation resource. The landholders involved in the regular monitoring of the exclosures have gained a great deal of knowledge and insight into the pasture dynamics in these areas.

Another project has been initiated in this area as a consequence of the widespread recognition that the ecological basis of the pastoral industry relies on maintaining the vegetation resource. The group has identified the need to undertake a community-based inventory of the vegetation. The ongoing project will result in land managers and the general public being better informed on the management of the district's vegetation. The local community is involved in collecting the plants for the inventory,

as well as data on seasonal and grazing conditions at the time of collection, thus contributing to the growing amount of information on the dynamics of the resource.

Education is also recognised as a key issue in the district. The Board and other land managers in the area realise the value of telling their story to the wider audience. Lack of information can be very dangerous because if there is a void of information something is usually put in to fill the gap, which may be a very narrow point of view. Accordingly, the Board has embarked on a number of educational projects aimed at providing information to land managers in the district as well as to visitors and the wider community. This includes a land condition booklet for the whole district, introducing the major characteristics of each type of country and the implications for management. The project has been a co-operative venture between pastoralists, mining companies, government agencies, rangeland scientists and consultants.

The Board has been involved with the formulation of a comprehensive district plan. Raising awareness in the local and wider community regarding landcare in the district has been one of the aims of the three year plan. Other projects include developing educational material for schools and for insertion in the National Park Service's *Desert Parks Pass*. A major new project will be developed to focus on the production of an educational kit appropriate for inclusion in the primary and secondary school curriculum. The plan also sets out to establish and maintain broad communication networks. Newsletters sent out at regular intervals and attendance at relevant conferences assist in achieving this aim. The 'managed' use of the media is both a skill and an ally that the Board has utilised to the benefit of the whole district.

Field days which demonstrate the relationship between viable stock production and good land management are a regular event. These are often combined with social get-togethers to maximise attendances. The Board has hosted such events in partnership with government agencies, other community organisations and agribusiness. These have included the demonstration of assessment and land condition rating techniques, the monitoring of soil, vegetation and native animal populations, feral animal control, geological history and landscape formation in the area.

CONCLUSION

Board members have allocated much of their personal time and effort to managing the resources in the district. This is demonstrated by their strong commitment to sustainable land management and the range and number of activities they and the whole community are involved in. If the Board is given both support and recognition by government agencies, funding bodies, researchers, scientists and the wider community, it will continue to have a major role in responsible land management in the area.