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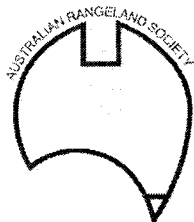
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PROPERTY PLANNING IN THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN RANGELANDS

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ABSTRACT

Property Management Planning (PMP) in the southern rangelands of WA commenced in 1993. From its modest beginnings it has expanded, leading to the development of a one-to-one planning methodology suited to the southern rangelands. During 1996 planning workshops will be introduced as a part of the PMP campaign. Although property planning was received with some scepticism at first, pastoralists are now appreciating the benefits derived from planning.

HISTORY

The nationwide PMP campaign, funded by the National Landcare Program (NLP), was established to improve the pastoral industry's ability to buffer the impacts of the increasing environmental and economic pressures it faces (Commonwealth of Australia 1995). It does this by providing whole enterprise advice in the form of property planning which aims to increase pastoralists' management planning abilities.

Property planning in the Western Australian rangelands formally commenced in 1993 with the appointment of one NLP Officer at the Meekatharra District Office of Agriculture Western Australia (AWA). Although planning was active in the agricultural region and proving to be quite popular, there was some difficulty in applying the methodology to the rangelands. Thus a planning approach more applicable to the pastoral region had to be developed (J. Wright, pers. comm.).

The PMP campaign was strengthened with the appointment late in 1993 of a regional Business Management Adviser (BMA) at the Carnarvon office whose core objective was to develop the business skills of managers. In 1995 two PMP Officers were appointed, one each to the Kalgoorlie and Pilbara District Offices, and a further two are to be appointed, one each to Carnarvon and Meekatharra, in 1996. One of the new appointees takes the place of the expired NLP position in Meekatharra.

CONCEPT

In developing a property management plan, the following three questions are asked: Where are we now?; Where do we want to be?; How are we going to get there? These questions are answered with a combination of:

1. a statement of long- and short-term goals;
2. analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (*SWOT* Analysis);
3. assessment of the physical resources (stock, infrastructure and range resource);
4. financial analysis, looking at liquidity, profitability, efficiency, productivity and solvency; and
5. gross margin analysis of different operating options.

In order to benefit from planning the pastoralist needs to revise the plan periodically. This allows new information and market changes to be incorporated and provides the opportunity to measure success in achieving goals. It should be noted that goals must be practical, otherwise frustration and abandonment of the planning process may occur.

PROMOTION

Planning concepts and workshops are publicised in the regional quarterly publication *The Pastoral Memo*. Land Conservation District Committee (LCDC) meetings are also used for advertising workshops, promoting planning itself and informal discussion with individual pastoralists once a

meeting has closed. Attendance at major pastoral functions, such as field days and stock sales, also provides the opportunity to informally promote planning and consolidate relationships with pastoralists.

INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION

Most station planning in WA has been through station visits. Generally, plans begin with updating station maps, which usually entails some discussion of grazing management and station infrastructure. This provides a good basis to begin answering the 'Where are we now?' question. The concept of goal setting is also introduced at the first visit ('Where do we want to be?').

As the plan evolves, the pastoralist may be interested in looking at financial aspects of the station. A cashflow budget spreadsheet has been developed which incorporates seasonal risk factors, enabling the manager to investigate the consequences of management decisions. Gross margins of different operating options encourage the manager to think critically about his/her management. Options that managers are interested in can then be put through a cashflow projection, helping to answer the 'How are we going to get there?' question.

LANDSYSTEM INFORMATION

A series of rangeland surveys has been undertaken to divide the rangelands into landsystems based on landform, soils and vegetation. For each landsystem, a carrying capacity has been estimated by AWA (Payne *et al.* 1988). This information, when added to the station map, allows for stocking rates of paddocks/grazing areas to be calculated, which can then be presented in table form and as a 'pastoral potential' map. In many cases it has been found that the pastoralist disagrees with the AWA estimated stocking rates. However, the process of discussing stocking rates encourages managers to prudently contemplate this issue. Pastoralists are advised to install and use their own photographic monitoring sites to ascertain the most appropriate stocking rate.

WORKSHOPS

A number of workshops have been run, ranging from pasture management to computer skills. While these have been advantageous in developing managers' skills and promoting planning, they were not intended to lead to the development of plans in a group environment. Working in groups allows managers to learn from each other, an opportunity not available in one-to-one consultations.

Planning workshops are presently being developed in the southern rangelands and they will be a prominent part of PMP in the future. The idea is to provide a set of modules (e.g. bookkeeping, goal setting) at a general level, the finer detail being completed on a one-to-one basis, thus making the plan specific to the manager. The workshops will be presented to four or five neighbouring stations.

CONCLUSION

PMP is relatively new to the southern rangelands and the concept has received varied responses. Momentum is building and as more pastoralists develop functional management plans the planning initiative is gaining wider acceptance.

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