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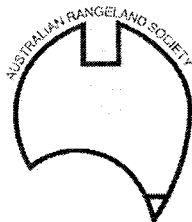
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# LANDCARE IN THE RANGELANDS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

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## ABSTRACT

*The development of landcare in the rangelands of South Australia has been an evolutionary process. It began with both an awareness and a recognition that natural resource management is as much an issue for the community, as it is for the government.*

*This new co-operative venture started with a focus on small, localised issues. Successful achievements in this area resulted in greater community confidence and involvement in tackling broader issues. It also encouraged interest in looking at the effects of management practices on the resource base. To complement and support the community landcare initiatives the government, in collaboration with the community, developed a structure which could assist the landcare process and also give the community better access to the funding and power base of the government. Hence the formation of Soil Conservation Boards. The development of larger, regionally focussed groups enabled the next phase of landcare to evolve.*

*Focussing on the future of landcare in the rangelands is certainly encouraging. The development of a new landcare project which aims to further equip the community with skills and confidence to take greater responsibility for natural resource management is a step in the right direction.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the past, natural resource management has tended to be viewed as primarily a government agency responsibility. The late 1980s saw a number of events which contributed to a change in attitude towards natural resource management (NRM). These included a change in vision by the management of government departments, the introduction of the Soil Conservation and Landcare Act (1989) and the establishment of the landcare movement in northern SA.

## DISCUSSION

Under the terms of the Soil Conservation and Landcare Act, Soil Conservation Boards have been established across the rangelands. The Boards draw together individuals with an interest in the long-term management of the rangeland resource. These groupings of local people with an aspiration to improve their own 'part of the world' provided a ready-made cluster with which other people with a similar outlook could associate. Making contact and forming networks was the beginning of the 'landcare process'. The rangeland landcare groups are often sub-committees of the Soil Conservation Boards, bringing together the local knowledge and practical experience of land managers in the community.

Most rangeland managers accept that it is important to make the most of opportunities to work together. With resources and time at a premium, it makes good sense to share knowledge and learn from other people's successes and mistakes. It has also been recognised that to involve as many people in the community as is possible is a good strategy. This will assist with sharing and allocating tasks, ensuring that the most appropriate tasks are given to those who feel confident and comfortable about contributing.

It is also essential to ask for help, and there are a number of organisations and individuals offering support. These include SA Rural Network, Rural Counselling, government agencies such as Primary Industries and Environment and Natural Resources, other rangeland Soil Conservation Boards and landcare groups, landcare consultants and technicians.

A landcare group has the ability to start on a small, localised resource management problem and to progress at its own pace. For example, the group could begin working on a small-scale revegetation trial on a few properties. It is important for the success of the group and its projects that the group is clear about what it wants to achieve. The group should also be realistic about what it can achieve, adding to the project and expanding it over a period of time. As confidence builds and the commitment of a greater number of community members develops, then it can tackle some of the more difficult and long-term resource management problems, such as feral animal control and total grazing management. The co-ordinated goat control program operating in South Australia, which involves four soil conservation districts across a large area of the State's rangelands, is a good example of groups working together to achieve a regional landcare objective.

Keeping records, both photographic and written, is very important. It gives the group a sense of achievement and it provides valuable information for others interested in the project outcomes. If funding has been secured from an organisation such as the National Landcare Program (NLP) then regular reporting on progress is required. It is all part of being accountable.

All landcare projects funded through the NLP are assessed by a regional panel. The panel is made up of community representatives with knowledge and experience in soil conservation, vegetation management, water resource management, revegetation and rehabilitation, Aboriginal land management and regional development. The aim of the panel is to consider each application for adherence to the guidelines and to determine whether it fits into regional priorities. All eligible projects are ranked in order of priority and recommendations are made to the State and Commonwealth Assessment Panels. The process has been in operation for the past three years and has been extremely successful. It provides yet another opportunity for valuable community input into natural resource management and decision making regarding the future of landcare.

Promoting the landcare message and sharing it with other practical land managers is an important role of soil conservation boards and landcare groups. There are a number of ways of getting your message across to the wider community. It can include inviting similar groups to view the project and to encourage debate on what has been achieved and how. Utilising the media but ensuring that it is **your** message that gets printed, is another valuable communication tool.

Conferences are another medium for presenting the group's 'story'. It may be a good idea to start with addressing groups of similar interests and visions, but as confidence develops, it may be appropriate to talk to groups that have differing opinions on the state of the rangeland environment and the management that is currently in place in the region. The rangelands in South Australia have been host to a regional landcare conference in 1993, the State Landcare Conference in 1995, and now in 1996, the national Australian Rangeland Society Conference. This further demonstrates the growing confidence and ability in this area.

## **CONCLUSION**

Landcare promotes an integrated and big picture view of natural resource management. Initially this can be a daunting task. A balance must be found between community and government agency responsibility for natural resource management and include the principle of community and agency partnerships. Future training and support needs of community members should be considered in our focus on the future. It is vital, however, that the practical skills and 'down to earth' approaches (part of the success of landcare) are retained.