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The Australian Rangeland Society

HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS – HOW THEY MAY HELP US DISCERN FUTURES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELANDS

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It is a sign of maturity in the rangeland community that our conference begins with an examination of the past 200 years. History tries to tell us of the past not only because what happened is fascinating in its own right, but also because we might discern something of the mists of the future from the trajectory of prior events. I review what I believe to be the major social and economic trends emerging in the rangelands over the past 200 years. I particularly emphasise the wider cultural forces that appear now to underlie the changing expectations of the wider society in which rangeland residents are embedded. Shifting patterns of commodity markets, the search for niches for outback products, mutual misconceptions between the urban and outback communities, and the uncertain pathway to reconciliation all emerge as issues with deep-seated historical currents. Whatever the next few decades bring, they will unquestionably reveal currents intimately connected to those of the past 200 years.