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The Australian Rangeland Society

RANGELANDS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM - TOWARDS MAINTAINING A SUSTAINABLE BALANCE

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SUMMARY

This paper proposes that the elements necessary to achieve a sustainable economic and ecological balance in the rangelands are already available. With some helpful intervention and a directed vision for the future, we could be at the beginning of a period of accelerated economic gain. This gain will be concurrent with similar gains in achieving ecological sustainability as desired by society as a whole.

Community and government interaction with the rangelands and rangeland managers has in the past been characterized by regulation, penalties and hand-outs - poor drivers of positive change. More proactive approaches are needed which reward those delivering the desired outcomes. The advantage of reward is that the wider community gets to satisfy its well justified expectations of rangeland management and a graded marketing system based on sustainable use of resources attractively lures producers rather than attempting to push them towards sustainability.

In the wool industry, the cost price squeeze has out dated the philosophy of “filling bales and cutting costs”. Filling bales is no longer economically viable and never was ecologically sustainable. The top producers in the pastoral zone are now characterized by production of finer wool of a consistently high quality. By removing the emphasis on numbers and placing emphasis on quality and production per animal the trend is towards reduced pressure on the rangelands, making use of the rangelands for wool production more sustainable into the future. The top wool producers in the pastoral zone are also placing more emphasis on management. They manage for sustainability in both the ecological and economic senses and see their operations as businesses rather than as a lifestyle. Low performers are unlikely to survive present wool prices and the balance will have to favour more viable and more skilled managers.

I believe that the time is right for a lunge towards the ever moving sustainability goal posts . Economically we must do it but we must do it with a view to being able to use the rangelands well into the future. Now more than ever we have the means available to increase productivity . Excellent technologies are available to producers in terms of monitoring, breeding, harvesting and communication, these are important inputs to successful sustainable production.