

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY  
BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

**Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society**

**Copyright and Photocopying**

© The Australian Rangeland Society 2012. All rights reserved.

For non-personal use, no part of this item may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the Australian Rangeland Society and of the author (or the organisation they work or have worked for). Permission of the Australian Rangeland Society for photocopying of articles for non-personal use may be obtained from the Secretary who can be contacted at the email address, [rangelands.exec@gmail.com](mailto:rangelands.exec@gmail.com)

For personal use, temporary copies necessary to browse this site on screen may be made and a single copy of an article may be downloaded or printed for research or personal use, but no changes are to be made to any of the material. This copyright notice is not to be removed from the front of the article.

All efforts have been made by the Australian Rangeland Society to contact the authors. If you believe your copyright has been breached please notify us immediately and we will remove the offending material from our website.

**Form of Reference**

The reference for this article should be in this general form;  
Author family name, initials (year). Title. *In*: Proceedings of the nth Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference. Pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

For example:

Anderson, L., van Klinken, R. D., and Shepherd, D. (2008). Aerially surveying Mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.) in the Pilbara. *In*: 'A Climate of Change in the Rangelands. Proceedings of the 15<sup>th</sup> Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference'. (Ed. D. Orr) 4 pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

**Disclaimer**

The Australian Rangeland Society and Editors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information obtained in this article or in the Proceedings of the Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conferences. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors, neither does the publication of advertisements constitute any endorsement by the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors of the products advertised.



*The Australian Rangeland Society*

# SOUTH WEST STRATEGY AND SUSTAINABLE RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

*L.K. Pegler*

South West Strategy P.O. Box 224, Charleville Qld 4470

## INTRODUCTION

Significant areas of South West Queensland have been affected by major natural resource degradation (Mills *et al* 1989). This has contributed to economic and social problems, and has been compounded by unsustainable natural resource management practices, a lack of understanding of the capability of the land, inadequate property size, declining rural infrastructure and escalating debt (Childs 1974, Anon 1993). Although initially the problem was addressed through adjustments to property sizes, it became apparent that other issues (economic, social and environmental) needed to be addressed simultaneously if more permanent solutions were to be found (Anon 1993).

From 1991 to 1994, State and Federal governments worked with the south west Queensland community to identify integrated initiatives with the aim of regional recovery, and developed the South West Strategy (SWS). Four integrated components encourage a holistic approach to recovery:

- **Enterprise Reconstruction** - to facilitate rural adjustment, through financial assistance packages aimed to improve enterprise sustainability.
- **Natural Resource Management** - to promote and facilitate sustainable and profitable land and water management, in balance with nature conservation.
- **Regional Development** - to encourage local and regional economies to achieve sustainable growth.
- **Information and Technology** - to identify and address the challenge of improving telecommunications and associated services.

## DISCUSSION

The SWS is an integrated regional adjustment and development initiative managed by a partnership between community and government. The program primarily aims to facilitate resource sustainability by influencing attitudes of producers and improving government policies. The SWS aims to facilitate the attitudinal change that is required in the rangelands through raised education and awareness. Long-term environmentally and economically sustainable development in the rangelands will only be achieved through the willingness of government and rangeland communities to cooperate in implementing policies and projects that facilitate attitudinal change in these areas.

The approach of the recent Federal Government discussion paper for developing a national policy 'Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future' supports the role of regional strategies to develop strategies that suit local circumstances (AFFA 1999). The SWS, and other regional partnerships, provide a model for delivery of community based programs.

Attitudinal change has been the greatest success of the SWS, particularly in natural resource management. This change is exemplified in projects such as the Safe Carrying Capacity Project and the Bore Drain Replacement Project (BDRP). These projects were not initially widely supported, but now have strong community participation and have led to on-ground changes in property management that are leading to more sustainable natural resource management.

The Safe Carrying Capacity Project provides an objective means for graziers to accurately estimate the long-term carrying capacity of properties, and it increases the ability to interpret, measure and monitor changes to their land. The project uses a model, developed by the Department of Primary Industries in conjunction with the Department of Lands (now DNR) and local landholders (Johnston *et al* 1996a), based on rainfall use efficiencies in relation to different land types, average rainfall, management history and landholder perceptions of land capability (Johnston *et al* 1996b).

The Safe Carrying Capacity assessment is intended to guide decision-making for long-term sustainable grazing, rather than to set short term stocking rates. The estimate can also provide property purchasers with the ability to assess land capabilities prior to purchase. The issue of assessed carrying capacity initially divided the local community; involvement of local landholders in model development helped to assuage some of the angst, and led to acceptance of the model by the grazing community.

The SWS was instrumental in establishing the Bore Drain Replacement Project (BDRP) in south west Queensland. The process of assessment and installation has since become a model for the remainder of the Great Artesian Basin (GAB). This project ensures sustainable use of land and water resources by the replacement of bore drains with pipe systems. The aim is to conserve water, to increase pressures in the GAB, decrease land degradation and improve nature conservation and biodiversity outcomes. Bore drain replacement provides previously unavailable management options to landholders allowing improved property management practices to be employed. These practices decrease operating costs, increase enterprise viability and lead to improved natural resource and livestock management. A critical component of the success of the BDRP is the monitoring of completed projects to evaluate the social, environmental and economic outcomes and changed attitudes that result.

To encourage environmentally sustainable management practices, projects such as BDRP, which educate and raise producer awareness of the economic and environmental benefits associated with changed management practices, are required. To ensure sustainable natural resource management practices are implemented, government incentives should be provided at a level that will encourage change. In many cases, the private economic benefits to graziers do not outweigh the private costs and in these instances, financial incentives may need to be provided to ensure that public benefits are addressed with public funds.

## **CONCLUSION**

Community empowerment programs, such as the South West Strategy, can be powerful agents for changed management of natural resources in Australia. Co-ordination, facilitation and integration of all levels of Government in cooperation with the community, can lead to considerably enhanced outcomes over the traditional Government top down approach.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

AFFA (1999) Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future: A discussion paper for developing a national policy. Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – Australia, Canberra.

Anon (1993) Mulga Region Position Paper: A Study of the Inter-dependence of the Environment, Pastoral Production and the Economy. Department of Lands, Brisbane.

Childs, J.R. (1974) Sheep Industry Survey - S.W. Qld. Property Management in Soft and Hard Mulga Country. Part 2. Queensland Department of Primary Industries, Charleville, Mimeo.

Johnston P.W., McKeon G.M., and Day K.A. (1996a) Objective 'safe' grazing capacities for south-west Queensland Australia: Development of a model for individual properties. *Rangeland J.* **18**(2):244-58.

Johnston P.W., Tannock P.R., and Beale I.F. (1996b) Objective 'safe' grazing capacities for south-west Queensland Australia: Model applications and evaluation. *Rangeland J.* **18**(2):259-69.

Mills JR, Turner EJ, and Caltabiano T. (1989). Land Degradation in South-Western Queensland. Department of Primary Industries, Brisbane.