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# QUEENSLAND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES- THE SOUTH WEST AND THE DESERT UPLANDS - PAST AND FUTURE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the strategies and achievements of the two Rural Partnership Program Schemes in Queensland rangelands, which are nearing completion, viz the South West Strategy and the Desert Uplands Scheme. These triple bottom-line strategies have addressed economic, environmental and social challenges faced by landholders and their communities. Special emphasis has been given to enterprise reconstruction. And while a significant number of enterprises have been assisted in the allocated time and important rural adjustments have been initiated, prior influences that reflect the decisions of governments, market pressures and climate variability with episodes of degradation over the past century, have been generally beyond their scope. Notwithstanding this, the important community led initiatives and people capacity building that has resulted, provides a foundation for coordinating future regional NHT2 and associated activities. This social capital should not be lost and plans should be considered regarding how to allow these groups to transform, facilitate succession and adapt their programs to optimise scarce people resources to contribute to processes seeking pathways to sustainable futures in these regions. It is critical that these opportunities are facilitated by all parties in a participatory environment and allocated adequate funding support.

*The views expressed are those of the author and do not represent a policy position of the Queensland Government or the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.*

## INTRODUCTION

### **The national context**

Rural development schemes in rangelands have been initiated a number of times in Australia during the past century with varying degrees of success. These have ranged from Soldier Settlement Schemes to more recently Rural Adjustment Schemes and Rural Partnership Programs. The constitutional imperative, which gave the general powers related to land administration to the states at Federation consolidated in Queensland, a history of land use decisions that has seen phases of denser settlement leading to smaller property sizes in a number of rangeland regions. The Mulga dominated areas of SW Queensland and the southern and western areas of the Desert Uplands (DU) are no exception. For instance, here following both major 20th Century Wars, 'soldier blocks' were allocated particularly in the SW, by the then Lands Department usually with a limited appreciation of what, in such variable rainfall areas, would constitute a sustainable living area. Both regions have experienced patterns of prolonged drought associated with a fall in wool and stock prices, with some graziers retaining stock that in turn has led to episodes of land degradation. The greater severity of drought and climatic variability of SW Queensland have more frequently exacerbated the impacts of these degradation events. Those especially relevant to these regions are described by McKeown *et al* (in press 2002)--particularly to the 7th (1960/70s SW) and 8th (1980s DU) degradation episodes.

The Rural Partnership Program initiated by the Commonwealth in the mid 1990s did not clearly articulate its aims. The programs in both SW Queensland and the Desert Uplands were established in a community and administrative environment that did not specify other pre-conditions that may have shown an in depth appreciation of the community issues, which would have assisted in minimising both business and environmental risks (pers. comm., Geoff Edwards 2002). Governments were however, aware of significant levels of average enterprise debt. Notwithstanding this, they showed little understanding of the complex social issues existing at land manager, family and community levels. (See Kelly 2001). The Commonwealth Working Group on Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for Sustainable Futures (1999) emphasised community engagement and

empowerment, human capability development and adequate regional group resourcing to enable enduring commitment. The density of people throughout Australia's rangelands is amongst the lowest worldwide and is usually less than one person/sq.km. Consequently the continuing availability of human resources with the capacity to service strategic regional schemes for sustainability is an ongoing challenge and a limiting factor in achieving successful outcomes. It is in this setting that the Rural Assistance and Development Schemes of these regions are reviewed.

### **Case studies**

The two schemes examined in this paper are based on biogeographic regions. The South West Strategy (SWS) encompasses the Mulga and much of the Channel Country bioregions. The Desert Uplands (DU) covers a single bioregion. Refer Figures 1 and 2 (Maps 1 and 2). The two Schemes have three themes in common viz. Enterprise Reconstruction, Natural Resource Management and Integrated Regional Development. Whereas the SWS has a fourth theme i.e. Information and Technology, this area is addressed under Integrated Regional Development in the DU Scheme. The SWS was initiated largely as an outcome of government perceptions of a need for rural change, while the DU Scheme recognised the potential value of the model established by the SWS and was initiated by a local Landcare Group.

There is a policy direction being fostered by government of empowering communities to take responsibility for the sustainable management of their regions. The communities discussed here are accepting this responsibility towards greater self-reliance. However, this policy direction is presently not matched by formalised policies and associated funding mechanisms. They are evolving in government (Anon 2000).

The activities of the SWS and the DU relate particularly to following Queensland Government priorities viz: building Queensland's regions, better quality of life, and valuing the environment. NR&M has a program aimed at strengthening community-based natural resource management. This is based around the NHT Regional Boundaries. This role has been two pronged. One has nurtured the SWS and the DU through the Rural Partnership Program (RPP) and the other has been involved with other communities through Landcare, River Improvement Trusts, Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) local government and industries initiatives. It has also been involved in regional planning schemes- Regional Framework for Growth Management (RFGM).

## **THE SOUTH WEST STRATEGY**

### **Background.**

As a result of investigations and scientific work undertaken by the Queensland Government in the Mulga lands in the 1970s and 1980s, the issue of land degradation was recognised by Government as a priority needing attention. A consultation group consisting of industry and government agency members was set up in 1991. This became known as the *Mulga Land Use Advisory Group*. The group developed a Position Paper on the Mulga Region in January 1993, in which the natural resource issues were identified. The Paper also recognised the interrelationship of social, economic and environmental issues (Anon 2000).

As a result of the Position Paper the then Department of Lands was able to negotiate with Treasury for the formation of the Land Degradation Voluntary Property Build-Up Scheme to address the small property size problem which was seen as contributing to the degradation problem. The scheme was to be made available to other regions where degradation was associated with small property size. A local consultation group was set up to assist with its implementation. Soon afterwards lead agency responsibility for the Mulga lands passed to the Department of Primary Industries where funds were made available through the Commonwealth's Rural Partnership Program (RPP). This was the commencement of the South West Strategy (Anon 2000). The 1994 Commonwealth-State Agreement under the RPP provided for \$16.7 million mainly for enterprise reconstruction. Funds were derived from the Rural Adjustment Scheme (RAS), Natural Heritage Trust funds (NHT) and state New Initiative. The state was to contribute \$ 8.071m and the Commonwealth \$ 8.629m (Anon 2000).

The 1997 Commonwealth State Agreement effectively turned the carryover funds at the end of the first Agreement into a second agreement. At the end of the first three-year program (1994 - 1997), \$5.3 89 million was still unspent, consisting of \$3.6 M from the Commonwealth (RAS) and \$1.8 M from the State (new Initiative Reviving Rural Pastoral Regions). This second Agreement (1997-1999) ceased in December 1999 (DNR 2000). The amount of carryover from the second agreement was approximately \$800,000; both Governments approved a 12month extension of the Agreement to expend the carryover funds. Progress during and since this period has been thoroughly documented (Anon 1993, SWS Group 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000, ACNielsen.McNair 1997, CIE 1997, Macarthur Agribusiness 1999a and b, CMP a and b, Anon 2000, DU and SWS IDC 2002).

The South West Strategy covers an area of 323.491 square kilometres (18.5% of the State). There are approximately 9,000 people living in the area and around 1,100 rural enterprises (Price Waterhouse Coopers 2000). Figure 1 (Map 1) shows that the smaller parcels are located in the eastern 'soft' Mulga zone and to a lesser degree in the central 'soft—hard' Mulga zone of the region. An analysis of the state of vegetation cover in the two bioregions making up the region is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: State of Vegetation Cover in the bioregions of the South West region

Regional Ecosystem	% of Bioregion with remnant vegetation cover	% Bioregion cleared per year	Number of Regional Ecosystems (REs)	% REs 'endangered'	% REs 'of concern'
Mulga Lands	81%	0.457%	67	3%	9%
Channel Country	100%	0.002%	56	0%	5%

(NR&M 2002, Wilson *et al* 2002)

However these figures are not indicative of pasture sustainability where for example only 20% of the Mulga shortgrass pasture communities are rated as being in sustainable condition while 29% is considered degraded and 51% deteriorating (NR&M 2002).

Notwithstanding this, the SWS Group's attempt to negotiate a \$10M package third Agreement with the Commonwealth was not successful. However, the administration and distribution of funds resulting from contractual arrangements with applicant landholders will continue over the next 3 years.

Additional State funds have been made available for the implementation of other components of the Strategy. These were Treasury specials through the New Initiative "program". Table 2 summarises these funds.

Table 2 Additional State Treasury New Initiative Funds – NR&M Funds

Item	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02
DNR funds				323 000*	250 000
Treasury funds	1 184 000	1 277 000	1 192 000		
Carry-over Previous year	0	423 000	489 000	0	
Total Available	1 184 000	1 700 000	1 681 000	323 000	250 000
Carry-over	423 000	489 000	127 000**		

\*Funded by DNR (now NR&M) from Recurrent Funding sources

\*\* Actual estimated carryover was in the order of \$142 000 (DNR 2000).

In addition the SWSG has also sought and attracted funds from other sources (including NHT) to undertake various programs. Now an incorporated body, it can now actively seek funds from outside sources. The South West Strategy was the first community/government initiative in Australia to seriously address the long-term recovery of a "problem" region and has been recognised as a pilot program for regional recovery programs. The Strategy has been steered by the SWS Group whose

membership reflects a community/government partnership. With the completion of Enterprise Reconstruction funding program, this business area has now been changed to the Rural & Regional Initiatives Group (NR&M 2002).

### **Challenges**

The major issues facing the group are:

1. *Certainty of funding* to maintain the administrative capability of the group. This is especially crucial since it seems unlikely that there will be further funding from NR&M funds after this financial year.
2. The survival of the group in its present form is of concern since it has had difficulty filling key positions at the AGM 2001. The fragility of community groups in general can be associated with burnout through overwork, dealing with many wider issues concerning the community and the lack of sufficient remuneration to allow an adequate commitment to the issues.
3. The Group has been seen as mostly dealing with rural reconstruction and adjustment issues and consequently success in the dealing with the general community and economic and social matters has by comparison been limited (NR&M 2002).

### **Achievements**

#### *Enterprise Reconstruction.*

Subsidies have been made available for property build up, land trading, land leasing, property development, particularly where enterprises have good economic prospects, and exit. This has been supported by compliance measures such as requirements for land management plans, amalgamation of titles, *Safe Carrying Capacity* assessments and annual inspection.

Financial Assistance has been approved to ~ 90 enterprises for restructure, resulting in 190 titles being consolidated into 90 saleable units. Assessment has covered approximately 2,580,455 hectares with 2180 photo monitoring sites established (NR&M 2002). In summary:

- There has been over \$6M paid out to date with over \$1.3M in forward commitments.
- There are currently 46 active files.
- 108 applicants have been assisted with development type activities.
- Regarding inspections, 23 are planned for 2002/03 and 11 for 2003/04.

#### *Natural Resource Management*

Various programs have been implemented, including bore capping, bore piping, assessment of safe grazing capacity, nature conservation, monitoring of natural resources, resource economic analysis and property management planning. *Safe carrying capacity* assessments have been completed on more than 270 enterprises covering 50% of the properties in the 5 major shires in the strategy area. Some 1800 km of bore piping has been installed to replace open bore drains, already saving some 42 megalitres of water a day in the Great Artesian Basin. Some seventy-seven landholders have benefited, 840 watering points have been installed, replacing 1300 km of drains (SWSG 2000, NR&M 2002).

#### *Integrated Regional Development and Information & Technology*

The South West Regional Economic Development group has fostered investigations of alternative industries e.g. goat meat production, industry diversification, regional development and tourism. Measures have been implemented to improve communication, Internet access, investigation of an information system based on a geographic information system (GIS) containing natural resource information, infrastructure, carrying capacity data and other spatial data (NR&M 2002).

### **Future funding and Group focus**

Main points:

- Funds made available this year are being transferred to the SWS account, for use in 2002-2003, under an agreement between SWS and NR&M.
- The SWS has some additional funds from various savings over the years.
- The community is still keen to see the SWS continue. They have recently advertised for a project officer for 12 months to revitalise the SWS and seek to secure funding.

- To date the main support has been from the rural community rather than from town communities. The present working group with two local business people aims to increase support from the urban community.
- Funding for this 2002-2003 is adequate and there is also some administrative support being provided by NR&M. However the SWS will need to be largely self reliant in 2003-2004, (DU and SWS IDC Minutes 2002 after F. Walker).

SWSG are positioning to maximise their chances of getting funding support, by linking in with the Queensland Murray Daring Committee and being recognised as a regional strategy group. A possible outcome could be that the SWS as an integrated strategy dies and becomes a NRM group. That would be a serious loss since the SWS has always taken a more comprehensive and integrated approach that has dealt with whole community issues not natural resource management alone. Unfortunately, a whole of community approach makes it easy for issues to fall outside the mandate of certain agencies. The NRM group of the SWS has not been in the same situation as the DU with regard to administration funds, since they have not been using the new initiative Treasury funding. The group has been getting the matching funds in the same way as other NRM strategy groups.

## **DESERT UPLANDS COMMUNITY SCHEME**

### **Background**

Following what was seen as the success of the community in the Mulga region (SWS) concerning the degradation problem, the Aramac Landcare Group on 18 February 1994, resolved to seek an extension of the Mulga Land Degradation Voluntary Property Buildup Scheme to the Desert Uplands. The Group wrote to the then Ministers for Lands and Primary Industries seeking support for the extension.

Following several public meetings, a joint stakeholder / departmental committee was formed. This committee was known as the *Desert Uplands Buildup and Development Committee* (DUBDC), ("Strategy" was added later). It held its inaugural meeting on 5 April 1995 (DUBDC 1996). The Committee gained widespread support and endeavoured to define the nature and extent of the various issues facing the community. At the time, there was a dearth of scientific research and other information for the region and this became one of the main challenges facing the Committee. For this reason, it was recognised that before adequate solutions could be developed, there was a need to substantiate and quantify the problems. The studies needed to complete an integrated resource management and regional development strategy for the region, were expected to take several years. Assistance was received from the National Landcare Program for the employment initially of a research officer, and then a coordinator to assist in the process of assembling existing information and identifying gaps in the knowledge base (Anon 2000).

Treasury approval was given in September 1996 for the Desert Uplands to become a designated area under the *Land Degradation Voluntary Property Buildup Scheme*. This Scheme is a component of the Primary Industries Productivity Enhancement Scheme (PIPES) administered by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority (QRAA). It provides concessional finance to facilitate the buildup of properties to economically viable units and to enable landholders to adopt sustainable land use practices. This was meant to be an interim measure until a more substantial scheme (similar to the SWS) but focussing on to the needs of the Desert Uplands could be justified and funded (Anon 2000).

The Committee developed a Position Paper in October 1996, which outlined the studies and information necessary to develop strategies to address the key issues. This Paper was presented to Cabinet via an Information Paper and the support received was a basis for New Initiative funding to undertake the various studies identified (DUBDC 1996). The new Initiative funding approved for the Desert Uplands was respectively \$132,000, \$303,000 and \$184,000 for the 1997-98, 1998-99 and 1999-2000 financial years (NR&M 2002).

Stakeholders agreed that ideally the studies needed to be completed to allow the justification of a buildup scheme. However, because of the availability of Federal funds through the Rural Partnership Program (RPP), an opportunity arose to access funds for a buildup scheme. Between May and September 1997 the now *Desert Uplands Build Up and Development Strategy Committee Inc*

(DUBUDSC) successfully negotiated with Canberra, a \$4M Scheme for property reconstruction over a three year period, subject to matching funds from the Commonwealth and the State. This was significantly less than the original estimate. Even so, this enterprise reconstruction strategy formed a key component of the DU Scheme 1998-2004, which also incorporates other strategies known as Natural Resource Management and Integrated Regional Development (Hynes 2000, NR&M 2002). A Commonwealth State Agreement signed on 20 August 1998 supports the structural adjustment component of the Strategy. The Agreement was for 6 years with the expenditure or commitment of funds limited to the first 3 years. The second three year period allows for the expenditure of contractually committed funds. Unexpended funds of approximately \$2M in 2001 were rolled over into a one year extension of the Agreement (Anon 2000). A unique feature of the Agreement was that any interest earned on Commonwealth and State monies could be used for implementing the Structural Adjustment Component of the Strategy. However, the State government reversed this agreement in September 2000 (NR&M 2002). Progress during and since these achievements has been thoroughly documented (DUBDC 1996, Hynes 1999, Anon 2000, Hynes 2000, Hynes et al 2000, DUBDSC Inc 2001, CMP-Economists 2001 a and b, CMP 2002, DU and SWS IDC 2002, Bray 2002). Under the Agreement, NR&M has an obligation to constitute an interdepartmental committee (IDC) to facilitate involvement by other State agencies. This IDC has assisted the Committee with advice on technical and policy matters (NR&M 2002).

The Desert Uplands Scheme covers approximately 75,000 square kilometres (around 4% of the State). There are approximately 6,000 people living in the area and around 320 grazing-based, rural enterprises (DUBDC 1996). The mean size of these properties is 22 500 ha (Hynes 1999). Figure 1 (Map 1) shows that the smaller land parcels are mainly clustered around the south and southwest areas of the region.

An analysis of the state of vegetation cover in this bioregion is summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3:** State of Vegetation Cover in the bioregion of the Desert Uplands.

Regional Ecosystem	% of Bioregion with remnant vegetation cover	% Bioregion cleared per year	Number of Regional Ecosystems (REs)	% REs 'endangered'	% REs 'of concern'
Desert Uplands	86%	0.582%	77	3%	34%

(NR&M 2002)

Regarding pasture sustainability, slightly more than 50% of the range of pasture types in the region are rated as being sustainable with between 9% and 24% being degraded depending on grassland type (NR&M 2002, Wilson et al 2002).

#### *Funding*

Since the DUBDSC is an incorporated body it has been able to attract funding from various sources. Besides the \$4M for Enterprise Reconstruction, the Committee has been able to attract other funds, mainly through NHT, to undertake other programs associated with the social, economic and environmental components of their strategy. Overall the Committee has been able to leverage funds of over \$6.5M over three years. Other funds that have gone into the Desert Uplands community through the DUBDSC are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4. Additional Funds Made Available to the DUBDSC\***

Item	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02
State New Initiative		132 000	303 000	184 000 <sup>1</sup>		
C/wealth NHT		482 403		139 840	485 013	*
Landcare	60 000					
NR&M	5 000	140 417	165 400	50 000	85 000 <sup>2</sup>	120 000
Total*	65 000	754 820	468 400	373 840	570 013 <sup>3</sup>	

\* Information not available at this time

<sup>1</sup> = Actual amounts made available to DUBDSC were slightly less as these were negotiated allocations made available under the New Initiative Programs (Reviving Queensland Pastoral Regions). Note that the Reviving Queensland Pastoral Regions new initiative was for the 1998/99 and 1999/00 years.

<sup>2</sup> = \$65 000 was made available from DNR budget, this was increased by \$20 000 for matching funds for the NHT project 'On ground nature conservation', the total amount being \$85 000. A further \$132 000 was made available to fund the DNR resource officer.

<sup>3</sup> = A further \$55 000 was made available towards the mapping project (NR&M 2002).

## Challenges

Issues challenging the DUBDSC Inc are somewhat similar to those of the South West Strategy.

1. Certainty of funding to maintain the administrative capability of the group. This is especially crucial since it seems unlikely that there will be any further allocations from NR&M after this financial year. The committee sees the situation as akin to being abandoned when they are delivering the desired outcomes.
2. Although the Group is in a more robust condition than the SWS, it is nevertheless showing symptoms of burnout in some members. Having adequate community representation on the committee is an issue. A new DUBDSC Inc Chair has been appointed since early 2002. Complementing this, the past Chair is acting coordinator to enable the Committee to continue to operate.

## Achievements and activities of the DUBDSC

### General

- The Committee has attracted approximately \$6.5 m in project funds since its inception including the \$4M for enterprise reconstruction and approximately \$2m from NHT.
- Agreement was reached with the Barcaldine Shire Council and the Barcaldine Tourism Association to build a joint Information Resource Centre. Construction commenced in August 2000. The Centre now provides an opportunity to build regional alliances for sharing information between private industry and government agencies.
- Indicators and the process for the monitoring and evaluating of the DU Strategy are in place.
- The template for the 'Desert Festival' developed by the DUBDSC for the year of the Outback 2002, was distributed around Australia, as a model for other communities and organizations. The Desert Uplands Festival, 3-19 May 2002 has been recognised as making a positive contribution the regional community and establishing a valuable link with the Central West Aboriginal Corporation (Bray 2002, DUBDCSC 2001, DU and SWS IDC Minutes 2002).
- The Committee conducts a range of workshops for the community e.g. a Decision Support System for sustainable scenarios. The latest being a Taxation Spreading Workshop.
- A web site has been developed.
- A GIS has been developed and has produced some 160 maps and is being constantly updated.
- NHT funding of \$40 000 was received over two years to develop an interpretative centre in the display area of the new Resource Centre. This is now open to the public.
- A part-time person has established a "one stop shop" process to promote the Scheme and to deal with prospective applicants. This is now to be funded by QRAA. The DU Scheme Communications Officer was appointed in May 2002 and is already making a significant contribution (DUBDSC Inc 2001, DU and SWS IDC Minutes 2002).



### *Enterprise reconstruction and other projects*

- There has been 31 formally approved applications and 7 conditionally approved.
- \$2.77M has been committed out of the \$4M, \$1.3 M has yet to be committed.
- The Scheme has been extended until August 2003.
- Of the 38 approvals, 7 are for stock build-up, 5 for partnership restructure, 20 for water & fencing, 5 for build-up, 1 for tree clearing, 1 for irrigation (Minutes DU and SWS IDC, Tony O'Dea, QRRRA 2002).
- \$60 000 has been distributed towards 5 diversification ventures. Activities include Boer goats, flowering eucalyptus, preserving and drying of native foliage and red claw ponds.
- DUBDSC contributed \$20 000 towards studies that identify and promote alternative uses of unique native hardwoods. Exhibits were displayed at the Timber Exhibition at the Royal Showgrounds Brisbane mid 2000 (DUBDSC Inc 2001).
- Natural Resource Management
- Development and implementation of a regional land resource assessment project that identifies limitations and potential uses of vegetation and soils. This Land Resource Mapping project was recently completed using \$1.2M from NHT. The results will be available on the GIS and will provide an essential foundation for regional property management planning.
- Over the past three years, 52 projects have been funded totalling \$345 000, using devolved grants from the Advancing On Ground Conservation program. Activities included management enhancement of natural resources and ecosystems e.g. fencing riparian areas to protect regional ecosystems through controlled grazing pressure. This has been a successful program.
- Approximately 1000 copies of the Desert Uplands Weed Identification "deck" have been printed and are being distributed throughout the area.
- A Carrying Capacity model has been developed with 16 representative properties.
- A Carbon accounting project has been finalised and submitted to the Australian Greenhouse Office (DUBDSC Inc 2001).

### **Future funding and the Committee focus**

The DU Committee has been actively progressing its programs. However, the Committee is frustrated by the situation they find themselves in every year regarding funding. There is no identifiable funding for a coordinator after the June 2002. This was because DU has been funded differently from other regional strategy groups. The funding model should be similar. Recent lobbying with senior NR&M executives and the Minister has sought to provide interim funding for the next 12 months until funding from NAP and NHT2 may become available (pers. comm. Lesley Marshall 2002). The DU Committee has numerous projects in progress involving substantial funds. They have completed the second year of monitoring and evaluation. Currently the DU is seeking: \$55 000 for administration for the committee, \$15 000 to make up a shortfall in the new position (Communications Officer) funded by the Commonwealth's Regional Solutions Program and \$20 000 to carry on with the monitoring and evaluation program. It will access supporting funds from QRAA to complement with this amount. Total sought is \$90 000.

Originally there were 15 landholders in the Committee out of 25 members. Presently there are nine landholders and an attempt is being made to increase the landholder representation. There has always been high community support throughout the Desert Uplands. L. Marshall has advised that whilst relations with the Fitzroy Basin are good, those with the Burdekin Dry Tropics could be better. She expected that the Desert Uplands would not obtain funds through the NAP since the DU was not classed as a high priority salinity hazard area, although water quality is important. . The DU has formed loose partnerships with these regions and they are planning to use the same consultants to do the management plan so that all the regional plans match. She anticipated that the DU would do most of its work under NHT2 on water quality. The Committee has received \$38 000 from local governments towards the resource mapping project, and \$30 000 from the Barcaldine Shire for the Festival. Barcaldine Shire has allocated \$4000 for the Communication Officer. All shires support the Committee in other ways e.g. free venues for meetings (DU and SWS IDC Minutes 2002).

L. Marshall further advised that the DUBDSC has been down this difficult budget track before. They are not seeking a big budget--last year it was \$120 000. NR&M seems to convey an attitude that there

would be no more funding because the Committee does more than natural resource management. Government is probably achieving more NR outcomes per person than many other regional strategy groups throughout the state. This will always be a problem with groups that address Environmental, Economic and Social issues in regions. Ironically if natural resource programs are not part of a triple bottom line approach, it is unlikely they can be sustainable. An integrated approach should be the most effective way for the future (pers. comm., Lesley Marshall 2002). The future looks challenging but problems are now better understood and adjustment processes will continue to seek sustainable land management pathways (Hynes 2000).

## CONCLUSION

### *Funding support from Government*

There are four major ways that funds flow to these regions:

1. **Foundation funding:** This comprise funds to establish a group and for the preparation of NRM and Investment plans, and is made available from the Commonwealth Government. (Comment: The SWS and DU already exist and should be optimised).
2. **Priority funding:** This is for regions to continue to undertake working in high priority areas. These are projects currently underway and should not stop as a consequence of the transition to NHT2, or for projects that are so important that they have to be commenced before there is an accredited plan in place. (Comment: Further genuine opportunities are present to maximise the NHT activities in both regional strategies).
3. **Facilitators and Coordinators:** There are 650 being funded, 450 by AFFA and 200 by EA Australia wide. It appears that in future only half this number is going to be funded. The number for Queensland is presently unknown. (Comment: Rangeland Regional Groups will need to mount strong arguments for 'Sustainability' or 'Landcare Levy' funds to ensure fair allocations are made to these groups.).
4. **State level funds:** Government is reviewing avenues to assist at the regional level, however the quantum available needs clarification (DU and SWS IDC Minutes 2002 after T. Stanley). (Comment: Urgent action is needed to ensure base funds are provided to support the administrative capacity of these groups)

The first three sources are from Commonwealth funds. Each region will only need to put in a single bid. Timelines will be tight. The Commonwealth funds only become available when the bilateral agreements are signed. The Commonwealth is seeking State matching funds and institutional policy reform. There are clearly still a lot of negotiations to be undertaken. A move towards regional whole of government type funding would be one option. This seems to be the policy direction. However there are concerns on how to establish effective arrangements in terms of accountability and service delivery.

### *Possible future directions--funding of community groups and the policy framework*

- Both the Desert Uplands and the South West Strategy committees will need to be funded for their administrative functions, since empowering communities to undertake NRM of resources is both a Commonwealth and State policy.
- The Committees need certainty and adequacy of funding to be able to function efficiently and attract appropriate officers to key positions.
- There are ongoing NR&M funding responsibilities and obligations in areas under the Agreements with the Commonwealth concerning enterprise reconstruction.
- The future source and quantum of funds to support the administrative functions of the committees and the implementation of their strategies is not clear and await emerging policies from both governments (Anon 2002).
- There are some concerns expressed regarding the effectiveness of the enterprise reconstruction especially regarding the long-term economic and resource sustainability. Part of the issue seems to be the use of short-term measures to address long-term problems.
- There is uneven focus on enterprise reconstruction caused by a lack of an overarching government policy and an absence of information to support policy development

- Government is beginning to acknowledge that sustainability of natural resources means that land types need to be matched with their capability. This may mean that certain lands need to be taken out of production or their use changed (pers. comm. Tony Caltabiano 2002). Policies need to be developed to support this concept.
- Holmes (2000) has emphasised that the case for flexibility is strongest on marginal lands where economic returns are less predictable. Actions are in progress in NR&M to link these issues with a major phase of leasehold renewals which will address both diversification and/or optimisation of land use under renewed leases.
- This policy direction must be complemented by appropriate policies regarding social issues and regional development.
- Strategies need to be developed to emphasise regional development that assists with social and economic issues.
- Future submissions for Commonwealth funds should explore the acceptability of aligning land use with economic and resource sustainability and associated policies (Anon 2000).

The forgoing recognises the need for triple bottom line strategies and funding bases.

### **Administrative arrangements**

There is growing recognition that the economic, social and environmental issues need to be addressed simultaneously. The communities from both the SWS and the DU have been instrumental in developing the required Regional Strategies. Whilst the presence of two groups (RSGs and the RPPs) has been accommodated by NR&M in the past, changing funding situations in the future (i.e. for NHT and RPP) will necessitate a reappraisal of funding and other arrangements for community groups in general.

In a press release in 2001, the Queensland Minister for Natural Resources expressed an ongoing commitment by NR&M in supporting community groups and the direction of that support. He said "I want the department to engage communities and individuals more effectively, equipping them with the information and skills needed to avoid land degradation from a diminishing resource base."

There is also an ongoing responsibility regarding the Agreements signed with the Commonwealth concerning the SWS and the DU. These include compliance inspections of properties and land resource condition reporting. At stake is the extent to which achievements are "built on" or forgotten. In the latter case it may mean a waste of past-invested resources (Anon 2000, DU and SWS IDC Minutes 2020).

### **Commonwealth Government approach and policies**

The Commonwealth Government has been developing a new national policy for natural resource management. A Discussion Paper was developed (Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for Sustainable Futures, December 1999) for public comment. Further assessment includes the Natural Heritage Trust Mid-Term Review, The Productivity Commission report on Ecologically Sustainable Land Management, and various dryland salinity reports. Submissions on the Paper showed strong support for devolving authority and empowering regions as well as the notion of capacity building of individuals and communities. This reflects current Queensland government thinking and policies. Support for regional strategy or community groups would seem likely. These Groups are now underway, but they have presently left strategies like the DU in limbo.

### **Key Issues**

#### *The Success of the Schemes*

One of the key questions concerns the level of success being achieved by the programs in the Schemes. Whereas the success of the schemes needs to be judged against the outcomes sought by the community and government this needs to be done in a realistic way. These matters need to be directed towards both urban and rural communities. This allows a focus on prosperity for all. A prosperous healthy community is more likely to adopt sustainable management practices. Information suggests that these community schemes are delivering NRM outcomes within their limitations, and given that they are dealing with long-term problems this is an important first step.

### *Future Role of NR&M*

Five policy issues are being addressed:

- The rationale for the Government's involvement and to what extent it should get involved.
- The communities' role relative to that of Government.
- The role and responsibilities of NR&M.
- The level of financial commitment by Government in protecting its interests and those of the general and local communities.
- The mechanisms for the delivery of the Government's interests.

Part of the problem confronting government is that little suitable information has been available on which such policies can be developed. Although, there is ongoing annual assessment, the timely availability of appropriate data is a problem. A detailed assessment will be carried out at the conclusion of the Schemes (Anon 2000).

### *Future organisational boundaries and community engagement*

Comment has been made that both the DU and the SWS have boundaries, which reflect bioregions as opposed to catchments and as a result, the boundary overlaps has created issues, which needed to be resolved. The issue of regional strategy groups and boundaries is complex. Even though the communities in the DU and SWS are comfortable with the overlapping boundaries, some at the government head office are not. However, the key is having a community of interest that makes it work. Consequently boundaries should not be the important factor. In any agreement with the Commonwealth there will be a need to explain and convince them regarding the acceptability of overlapping boundaries (DU and SWS IDC Minutes 2002).

The fundamental frustration expressed by the SWS and DU is symptomatic of a problem within government and how government works. Whilst there are good times with individual programs, which build a genuine whole of community approach, these individual programs are never big enough to support their business in the future. This is why there is a tendency to go through a cycle statewide of building something up and letting it collapse. As such, we tend to destroy the capital built within these communities. It is critical that actions are taken to break this unproductive cycle (DU and SWS IDC Minutes 2002).

Alan Dale defines community engagement as "mutual communication and deliberation between government and its citizens, effective to the point where both mutually participate in the development of policy and delivery of services, with the final responsibility being with the elected government". The fundamental issue for regional engagement is how to maintain ongoing coordinated investment to build a cohesive infrastructure for community engagement. There is a multi-million dollar investment by government in community infrastructure in these two groups and this could be easily lost if the right actions are not taken. Further, the return that the government has been getting from that infrastructure has been high. Nevertheless, the DU and SWS show that there have been impediments in implementing this approach. These have been largely created by a solely program-based approach (pers.comm. Alan Dale 2002).

The DU and SWS IDC can be used as a vehicle and facilitate research to address this problem under the following points:

- There is pressure in government to deal with community engagement with a political shift towards establishing better relationships with communities to deliver outcomes.
- The other program driving this thrust is ASAP – aligning services against priorities, to gain efficiencies across agencies.
- The other policy shift is towards devolved regionalism, and the devolution of responsibilities towards communities through mechanisms like NAP and NHT and social and economic programs. This has not been matched by community capacity building.
- There are two processes going on at present, which give an opportunity for possible long-term solutions. These are:
  - o That Premiers Department is driving the community engagement improvement strategy.

- o The land and resources CEO's committee involves three key agenda, one of which is this issue of community engagement. The thrust for that is NAP and NHT2 (pers. comm. Alan Dale 2002).

### *Participatory approaches*

In Australian rangelands, the trend in policy and governmental guidelines has been to promote participatory approaches. Landholders usually appreciate opportunities to have a say and seek to influence government policy and regulations. Government decisions can benefit from the input of local knowledge. Kelly in research in the SWS and the DU (2001) found that although landholders and agency staff agreed on the broad issues, misunderstandings were rife where subtle meanings and underlying motivations were involved. Non-participants often think they cannot influence government decisions through participation. Landholders who participated regularly with government were motivated by both positive and negative factors. One key motivation was the desire to learn.

*Key priorities* identified at a Future Directions Workshop convened in Charleville in July 2001, which complement a participatory approach were:

- Develop and maintain strong and effective links between SWS subgroups, community and government, and
- Encourage involvement from people with enthusiasm, leadership so that a new SWS continues to evolve (Stanfield 2001).

Power and the level of power sharing are key aspects of participatory activities. The importance of these factors is often misunderstood or unrecognised by facilitators. Landholders did not always want to be involved in decision-making, as sometimes simply receiving information is appropriate. Examination of government programs in SW Queensland highlighted that the level of power sharing fluctuated over time. Several levels could operate during any one project (Kelly 2001). In highly participative projects the level of power sharing would frequently be negotiated, even though the levels between landholders and government were likely to vary. Some dissatisfaction about participation, revolved around inaccurate expectations and confusion over power sharing. Facilitators may assume simple strategies are adequate. Many institutional arrangements hinder effective participation (Kelly 2001). Context, Purpose and Scale need to be taken into consideration. As a result, the regional scale is likely to have fewer people involved, and more will be interested in learning about management practices at the local scale. Lack of clarity about why participation was undertaken, short term funding cycles, frequently changing staff, increasing regulations and politically motivated changes between approaches to community involvement reduce the building of trust between government agencies and landholders. Recommendations were:

- Encouraging greater coordination between government agencies to reduce over consultation
- Building trust between landholders and agency staffs
- Fostering new alliances between groups with different perspectives
- Clearly different participatory approaches are needed in different contexts (Kelly 2001).

### **Concluding remarks**

The triple bottom-line strategies of the SWS and DUS have addressed economic, environmental and social challenges faced by landholders and their communities. Special emphasis has been given to enterprise reconstruction. And while a significant number of enterprises have been assisted, prior influences that reflect the decisions of governments, market pressures and climate variability with episodes of degradation over the past century, have been generally beyond their scope. Notwithstanding this, the important community led initiatives and people capacity building that has resulted, provides a foundation for coordinating future regional NRM strategies. This social capital should not be lost and plans should be considered on how to allow these groups to transform, facilitate succession and adapt their programs to optimise scarce people resources to contribute to processes seeking sustainable futures in these regions. It is critical that all parties, in a participatory environment and with adequate funding, facilitate this imperative.

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