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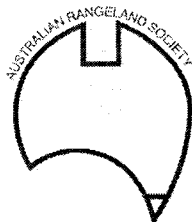
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STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND THE WEST 2000 AND WEST 2000 PLUS PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

WEST 2000 was one of the initial 12 rural partnership programs based across regional Australia. The program was a partnership between the Commonwealth and NSW Governments and the pastoralists of the NSW Western Division.

From 1997 to 2001, WEST 2000 invested \$17.5M Government funds. Landholder funds more than matched the government contribution to the program, demonstrating a significant commitment by landholders to achieve profitability, self-reliance and enhanced natural resource outcomes.

The success of WEST 2000 resulted in a \$12M follow on program called WEST 2000 Plus.

This paper describes the programs, their outcomes and experiences, as part of the journey of Shifting Camp in a rangelands of the Western Division of NSW.

THE PREVIOUS CAMPSITE

- The Western Division of NSW covering 325,000 square kilometres, or 42% of NSW, was identified to be in a time of crisis in the early 1990s.
- Environmentally, impacts were being felt through woody weed encroachment, excessive total grazing pressure by rabbits, kangaroos, goats and domestic stock, surface and groundwater quality and quantity concerns, the normal extremes of climate variability and questioning of long term impacts on biodiversity.
- Economic impacts included sheep and wool commodity price crashes, small property sizes, lack of enterprise diversity, high interest rates, rapidly increasing costs of production, globalisation and government red tape.
- Social impacts included lack of employment and educational opportunities, declining services, a changing population base, the uncertainty of native title implications to both indigenous and non-indigenous people, and a decline in social capital.

WHO WAS IN CAMP?

- Landholders:
 - most of whom were in very depressed states, unable to see a positive future, and many of whom were signalling they wanted to be supported to do what they always did.
- Agency Staff:
 - some of whom wanted to radically relocate the campsite, others wanted to use any resources to support their own endeavours, whilst others wanted to start with a clean sheet of paper.
- Movers and Shakers:
 - a small number emerged from their swags to become both leaders and team players to assist in shifting camp, using WEST 2000 as the mechanism.

WHY SHIFT CAMP?

- WEST 2000 and WEST 2000 Plus sought to contribute to a competitive, viable and self sustaining Western Division through the provision of measures to enhance productivity and natural resource management.

- Expectations were to provide something for every pastoralist, but never to provide everything to each pastoralist.
- The WEST 2000 and WEST 2000 Plus programs were designed to be catalysts for change, to add value to existing strategies and to focus on areas of perceived market failure.
- The programs focused on delivering practical solutions directly to landholders, and not on providing employment to third parties or on servicing management overheads.

DESTINATION FOR THE NEW CAMP

- WEST 2000 was looking to achieve:
 - profitable, self reliant and adaptable rural industries;
 - sustainable management of natural resources; and
 - robust, equitable and prosperous communities.
- Starting in February 1997, WEST 2000 was to be delivered initially in three years, but was subsequently extended to four years.
- In the early planning, a more realistic timeframe suitable for the Western Division was nine years, but this did not suit the Government financial supporters.
- A number of opportunities were identified in WEST 2000 which totalled 19 measures and 45 projects. These fell into basic areas of:
 - natural resource management 40%
 - Rural restructuring 37%
 - Training and skills development 5%
 - Program management 9%
 - Other 9%
- The natural resource management predominantly related to on-ground grants for rabbit and woody weed control, management of total grazing pressure and capping and piping artesian bores.
- The program management included staff support, a management board, communications, consultation and evaluation.
- Opportunities identified in the follow up program, WEST 2000 Plus were purposely trimmed and more focused from those in WEST 2000. The six measures in WEST 2000 Plus are:
 - Training and skills development – to improve the business management and technical skills of landholders in the Western Division 16%
 - Alternative industries – to provide information, support and incentives to landholders to establish viable non-traditional activities in the Western Division. 6%
 - Natural resource sustainability – to improve the state and management of the natural resource base in the Western Division. 28%
 - Managing the natural resource base – to investigate alternative methods for managing the natural resource base. 5%
 - Rural restructuring – to facilitate rural restructuring in the Western Division and to ensure landholders have access to adequate counselling support. 37%
 - Managing the WEST 2000 Plus Program – to implement, manage, promote, evaluate, coordinate and administer the WEST 2000 Plus Program. 8%
- For WEST 2000 Plus, the significant increase in percentage of funds contributed to training and skills development and the development of alternative industries reflects the recognised benefits of these measures. A sizeable proportion of rural restructuring is specifically for social counselling.

RESOURCES NEED TO SHIFT CAMP

Money:

- The total for WEST 2000 was \$17.5 million. NSW provided \$5.2 million and the Commonwealth \$12.3 million over duration of the program (1997-2001). Cost sharing requirements meant that landholders contributed well in excess of \$17.5 million in cash contributions to the program.
- The additional \$12 million for WEST 2000 Plus was provided in an equal split between Commonwealth and NSW Governments over three years commencing in December 2000.

Direction:

- Governments agreed with a landholder based negotiating group to a Memorandum of Understanding.
- Governments in consultation with landholders then developed guidelines.
- A management board provided overall governance to ensure the journey did not lose sight of its destination.
- A very small group of enthusiastic staff, comprising an Executive Officer, a Project Officer, and up to two “technical experts” made it all happen.

Trust:

- Development of trust was one of the single greatest ingredients leading to the success of the journey.
- Trust was developed between Commonwealth and State Governments and community representatives, within the management board, between the management board and the staff, and between the program and the beneficiaries. Importantly, while the WEST 2000 Management Board comprises a majority of landholders, votes on important were rarely, if ever, taken. Consensus decision making and frequent consultation within the wider Western Division community ensured the “high-trust” environment thrived.
- Decisions were firm, transparent, objective, and able to withstand scrutiny.

Ownership:

- All stakeholders claimed and displayed a high degree of ownership.
- Decisions made by the diversely based management board were frequently firmer and less compromising than may occur from a Government run program.
- The final evaluation of WEST 2000 identified that the program had a positive impact, particularly on environmental objectives, and to a lesser extent on economic and community objectives.

THE ENVIRONMENT WHILST SHIFTING CAMP

- The WEST 2000 program coincided with:
 - ongoing low wool prices;
 - variable impacts of long running drought across different parts of the Western Division;

- limited access to disposable income by pastoralists;
- a significant period of government reform, particularly relating to natural resource and environmental agendas;
- the “Kerin Review” into administration of the Western Division initiated in 1998 and unresolved by the end of the WEST 2000 program.;
- shrinking front line advisory and extension services;
- increasing emphasis on natural resource planning;
- increasing acceptance of words and concepts relating to conservation and biodiversity;
- a willingness by pastoralists to seek and adapt to change;
- increasing access by pastoralists to technology, particularly regarding electronic delivery of information;
- ongoing challenge of native title.

The WEST 2000 Plus program coincided with:

- improved wool and cattle prices and cash flow availability;
- initial favourable seasons in most areas, followed by rapidly deteriorating seasonal conditions across the whole of the Western Division;
- progressive sign-off by government of planning documents, including catchment blueprints, and regional vegetation and water plans;
- amendments to Western Lands Act in 2002;
- ongoing challenge of native title.

SURVEY PEGS BETWEEN CAMPS

- A number of survey pegs were marked as WEST 2000 and WEST 2000 Plus shifted camp.
- The relationship between woody weeds and biodiversity was documented. An outcome is the conclusion that to maintain biodiversity values, a mosaic of vegetation communities needs to be maintained, rather than a monoculture of woody species.
- A new survey technique to monitor the numbers of kangaroos was researched, established and adopted by National Parks and Wildlife Service. An outcome is the realisation that far more kangaroos exist in NSW than were previously estimated.
- Rabbits were proven to have a negative impact on the diversity of vascular plants.
- No practical techniques were established to allow application of biological control of woody weeds.
- The attitudes, aspirations and awareness of youth from throughout the Western Division were energised through a highly successful YouthLink West Forum, which will result in the emergence of future leaders, initiators and caretakers of the Western Division.
- A paper arguing for major taxation reform in rangeland areas was published and presented to Commonwealth and NSW governments. The State Government accepted a major policy shift as a result of this paper by agreeing to forego stamp duty for land transactions in the Western Division where a leaseholder sells an extension block and purchases land adjoining the primary property. This policy position continues beyond the life of WEST 2000. The Commonwealth Government indicated the paper was to be considered within their GST taxation reforms. No discreet changes were evident at Commonwealth level.

REFLECTIONS IN THE CAMP FIRES

- By the end of WEST 2000:

- Twenty-two artesian bores were reconditioned, and 300 km of bore drains replaced by 700 km pipe, saving 5,250 ML/year water in the GAB, and leading to increased water pressure in many bores. This was estimated to have a benefit : cost ratio for the government investment of between 1.4 and 8.5 to 1.
- 52,000 rabbit warrens were systematically ripped in an area covering 200,000 hectares, resulting in enhanced ability to withstand droughts, increased sheep productivity, removal of the impacts of rabbits on total grazing pressure (TGP) and on plant diversity. The benefit cost ratio of the government investment was mostly positive, but ranged between 0.5 and 2.1 to 1. This was influenced by country type and density of rabbits. The benefit cost analysis does not include benefits to the value of the natural resource.
- Seventy-eight grants covering 450,000 hectares were involved in various TGP projects. A further nine property scale TGP demonstrations were conducted. Outcomes for TGP investments are likely to be resolved long term, but should be positive in natural resource management and invaluable in knowledge and skills development.
- Control efforts were made on 120,000 hectares of woody weeds. This was aimed to return land to a more open grazing environment. Major emphasis progressively became focused on management burns and on keeping open areas open, through use of both differential proportions of grants, and increasing standards of property management plans. The benefit cost ratios varied between 0.1 and 4.8 to 1, with lowest ratios for all forms of mechanical control, and highest ratios for burning.
- 110 families were connected to the Internet via state of the art two-way satellite technology. This represented a major change for those families and included benefits such as children remaining home for secondary schooling rather than shifting to a very remote camp with big smoke, and increased use of the Internet as an information and property management tool.
- A very high proportion of Western Division people, perhaps 75% to 80%, gained benefits from individual or group training. This low cost measure has had a very large regional impact, the scale of which cannot be measured either short or long term.
- Fourteen families re-established, 40 property buildups (allowing a further 25 families to leave pastoralism) and 34 recipients of productivity investments were assisted through WEST 2000.
- A comprehensive evaluation was completed of the WEST 2000 program despite the fact that performance indicators were not determined at the commencement of the program.
- There remained a need to shift camp again, to be called WEST 2000 Plus.
- A number of goals were not kicked, or games not played. No final outcomes report was ever prepared for the investment given to biological control of woody weeds. Institutional reform and business management objectives were not effectively completed through the WEST 2000 program, and re-establishment support, as predicted, did not drive structural adjustment.

Part way through WEST 2000 Plus:-

- A relatively seamless transition has occurred between the two programs, allowing WEST 2000 Plus to build on the positives of WEST 2000.
- Some criticism has been given to the new Management Board of WEST 2000 Plus, because of the more streamlined and focused program with less projects than were covered by WEST 2000.

- Particular criticism relates to WEST 2000 Plus not funding either a range of requests to improve watering facilities, or mechanical control of dense woody weeds, activities with low public benefit and a low benefit cost analysis.
- A looming, widespread drought is anticipated to limit landholders' potential to have time, finance, flexibility and optimism to proceed with a number of projects in the short term.

THE EXPERIENCED CAMPERS

- The knowledge and wisdom of experienced people should never be dismissed lightly. A some of their messages include:-
 - A characteristic of rangelands is the long cycles and unpredictable nature of the main driver in rangeland management - climate.
 - The consequences of climatic influence creates opportunities. Programs such as WEST 2000 and WEST 2000 Plus must work in harmony with these opportunities, rather than attempt to override or ignore them. To their credit, Governments agreed to the flexibility and adaptability which was necessary within WEST 2000.
 - The importance of having trust within the team cannot be over-emphasised. The consequences of the alternative are disaster, failure, perishing, inefficiency and ineffectiveness.
 - In shifting camp, there are always choices between taking the easier or the more difficult route. Depending on the circumstance, either may have merit. Importantly, focus on the destination. Then make decisions and take the first and subsequent steps. Keep the task as simple as possible, continually moving forward, with the occasional glance in the rear vision mirror.
 - Recognise that there is a readiness within most people to accept and implement change, provided they are a willing party to the process, rather than compulsorily involved. The high uptake of the various projects and opportunities is proof of the preparedness for change when non-compulsory opportunities are offered and appropriately packaged.
 - The input of the diverse skills and experiences of the Management Board members ensured the elements of the programs are practical and relevant, rather than theoretical or idealistic.
 - A number of people who were recipients of various benefits of WEST 2000 subsequently became part of the team in helping to shift camp. Their inputs were used in numerous subcommittees, particularly in peer reviews for assessing future rounds of applications, and in using newly acquired skills in organising a diverse range of events. This was an outstanding example of value adding.
 - Admit to failure, but use it as a learning experience. Further, don't be afraid to repeat tasks where there is demonstrated value in doing so.
 - Have clear differentiation of tasks and responsibilities, particularly between the Management Board and the Executive staff. The Management Board provided governance and direction, but never became involved at case level in any voluntary project.
 - Accept that shifting camp is only part of a journey, it is not establishing a new destination. There is no finishing line.
 - Never undervalue or take for granted the essential support systems. In this regard, the ongoing role of both Commonwealth and State Governments, and importantly, individual

politicians within Parliament, including the responsible Ministers and the Local Members, played unsung, critical contributions. Similarly, behind the scenes staff within the respective Government Departments made significant contributions.

- Do not expect to be able to place a dollar value on the benefits, outputs or outcomes of every activity. In everyday life, every one of us uses some of our time, or performs some type of activity which cannot be effectively measured. Evaluating “health” weather of our mind, body or natural resources in impossible to measure effectively in financial terms. Hence, benefit cost analyses should never be the essential criteria for evaluation.

VIEWS ALONG THE JOURNEY

Whilst WEST 2000 and WEST 2000 Plus were shifting camp, some interesting views occurred along the way. These are not necessarily unrelated to WEST 2000 or WEST 2000 Plus, as the WEST 2000 journeys had many indirect influences.

- The degree of interest in various forms of diversification of land uses in the Western Division has never been greater. Feral goats are now firmly established as a resource rather than a pest. Constructive research and debate is ongoing to recognise kangaroos as a renewable resource. Several new sheep breeds, particularly for meat production, are now well established. Bush tucker, tourism, farm stay, aquaculture and essential oils are all being considered. Progressive expansion of dryland cropping is inevitable.
- Natural resource planning through Catchment Blueprints and Regional Vegetation Plans is closely integrated with experiences gained through the WEST 2000 and WEST 2000 Plus programs. Linkages between planning processes and WEST 2000 Plus continue to strengthen and coordinated investment is now a reality.
- A contemporary new rental system for Western Lands Leases has been adopted, based on principles of natural resource impacts. Future rents per land holding will reflect a combination of a base rental to reflect the grazing right, with added debits per hectare for areas approved for each of cultivation and irrigation, and credits for areas approved for managed rehabilitation. This replaces a rental system based on assessed sheep carrying capacity, or the commonly used alternative of a land value basis.
- There is an increasing recognition and acceptance that not all land in the Western Division is suitable for agricultural productivity. Various initiatives, including a managed conservation/stewardship-style pilot program in WEST 2000 Plus can be expected to offer constructive approaches to address this longstanding dilemma.
- The quest by landholders for knowledge and information, and preparedness to use the skills gained to enhance business and personal planning, management and decision making, will provide invaluable rewards for the future.

LET THE JOURNEY PROGRESS BY CONTINUALLY SHIFTING CAMP.