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RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE AND LAND - CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES.

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ABSTRACT

The relationships between rangeland people managing natural resources are changing. More people are involved, the objectives for use, once clear-cut and relatively simple are becoming complex, and the management requirements are growing in breadth and sophistication. At the same time that more input to rangeland strategy and policy is being sought from rangeland people, there is a declining justification for public services for the 'how to' of day-to-day management. Some issues are evident – the need for consistency between conversations and decisions taken at policy, strategic and tactical levels, recognition of the growing heterogeneity in the nature of pastoral businesses, building skills in asking 'why' questions, enabling transition from public to private sources of professional support, and the need to build better rewards for uses and management that deliver desired public outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of our paper is to review the relationships in the rangelands – particularly as they relate to the management of natural resources.

This paper presents some personal thoughts about how the relationships between 'rangeland people' themselves, and between these people and the land developed and how they are changing. We are confining our attention to the environment we know best. Thus, by 'rangeland people' we mean the WA pastoral community in the Southern Rangelands and the people providing publicly funded support to that community and land use. By 'land', we mean the natural resources that sustain their pastoral businesses. We bring parallel but different experiences to the paper. One of us (LCB) ran a pastoral business in the North Eastern Goldfields for over 20 years. The other (DGB) was a rangeland management adviser in government for 17 years. For 8 years, we had a close professional relationship around the day-to-day challenges and opportunities facing pastoral management in the region.

THE RELATIONSHIPS – THEN AND NOW

Publicly funded services to the WA pastoral industry

In WA, critical inquiry into the nature of the land and how it works began in the Murchison in the 1930s when pastoralists initiated university research into the value of mulga (*Acacia aneura*) as a fodder. In the Kimberley, the focus was on management of the grasslands and the possibilities for irrigated horticulture. Over the next 20 to 30 years, professional inquiry into pastoral management developed as a branch of agricultural R&D. In 1979, about 45 professional and technical officers employed by the Department of Agriculture serviced 427 pastoral businesses. A further 60 people were employed in leasehold inspection and weed and pest control (Anon 1979). While the numbers have fluctuated over time as a result of budgetary constraints and opportunities, the public commitment to support of the pastoral industry has been at similar levels ever since. In current dollars, the net public commitment to supporting each pastoral business is estimated at about \$10,000 (Dames & Moore 1999).

Changing assumptions in the relationship

We suggest that the thrust of the relationships between people in the rangelands were developed in the 1950 and 1960s around several articles of faith, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Old and new assumptions underlying relationships

Issue	Original assumption	Emerging assumptions
Land ownership	Shared view that pastoral lessees were seen as <i>de facto</i> owners of the land they lease for grazing.	An internal view that pastoral lessees are the <i>de facto</i> owners of the land they lease for grazing. The contrasting external view is that pastoral lessees are principally managing for public good.
Land use	Grazing as the only enduring use.	Other potential uses apart from grazing are recognised as having legitimacy (i.e. multiple use).
Goals and objectives	Shared goal as long-term sustainable production.	Shared goal as long-term sustainable production <i>and</i> ecological sustainability (using the distinction provided by Stafford Smith 1994).
Stakeholders	Pastoral lessees and a few agencies of government.	Anybody who is keen to get involved can argue for a 'stake'.
Relationship focus	Objectives for individual pastoral businesses. Other objectives determined by government agencies.	Regional/ industry objectives captured in strategic planning done through participative processes; community development.
Dominant issues	Lost productivity through overuse at the time of settlement; management should aim at rehabilitation. Pastoral managers need a way of determining long-term trends in the land resource.	The land resource is in sufficiently good condition to support productive grazing enterprises. Regional sustainable development assumes greater importance. Individual enterprises should be focusing on land uses where they have a comparative advantage.
Relationship aims	Pastoral managers needed to be more aware of the needs of the land and vegetation resources, and better animal managers.	Pastoral managers need to be skillful business managers, more aware of beyond farm-gate issues; they need a means of benchmarking total business performance.
Technologies	Principal management tools were level (stocking rate) and timing of grazing use. Other technologies of marginal value.	Principal management tools are business planning, ecosystem planning, total grazing control and increased technology (e.g. solar water pumping).
Source of Research Development and Extension	Government	Government and private
Government intervention	Pastoral lease inspection. Crisis assistance. Where possible, smaller leases encouraged into restructuring making larger ones that are 'more viable'.	Support for 'clean, green' production. New industry development. Regional economic and social development. Multiple enterprise businesses encouraged and more common.

In the original assumptions in the left hand column, the strategic focus was around supporting the pastoral industry; with conservative land management, combined with careful flock and herd management seen as a source of long-term productivity and by implication, enterprise prosperity. Generally, managers of pastoral leases were seen as having all the management skills required. These assumptions dictated the relationships, which were around the fundamental question 'How to graze?'. These underlying assumptions are changing with the rate of change has accelerated since the early 1990s. The altered assumptions that appear to us to be operating now have the features shown in the right hand column. In this changing view of the pastoral environment, the strategic focus is around regional and industry

economic and social development; multiple land use options; attention to whole station business management skills, and beyond farm-gate issues. Managers are encouraged to seek training in business management. Most importantly, the questions being addressed now include 'What uses are best?' and 'Why graze?'

We accept that our analysis in the above table may be somewhat shallow and incomplete. What evidence do we have for these changes? The 1990s saw a rash of initiatives affecting the WA rangelands. At the national level, the Natural Heritage Trust, the National Principles and Guidelines for Rangeland Management Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia 1999), a range of other national strategies, selection of Shark Bay for World Heritage listing and Native Title legislation seriously challenged previous assumptions about how rangeland 'business' should be done. At state and regional level, the regional development agenda (Government of Western Australia 2000), the Managing the Rangelands Policy Statement in 1998, the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy (Government of Western Australia 1998), Rangeways (Friedel et al. 2001), and acquisition of pastoral leases for indigenous and conservation values have all widened the rangeland agenda, and the issues being addressed. Finally, as noted in Kelly (2002), landholders are increasingly required to involve themselves in consultative and participative processes that deal with this wider agenda.

Strategic and tactical relationships

Relationships between pastoralists and service providers have both a tactical and strategic focus. In Table 2, we suggest how these tactical and strategic 'conversations' may be changing.

Table 2: Old and new assumptions underlying relationships

Issue	Original assumption	Emerging assumptions
Land ownership	Shared view that pastoral lessees were seen as <i>de facto</i> owners of the land they lease for grazing.	An internal view that pastoral lessees are the <i>de facto</i> owners of the land they lease for grazing. The contrasting external view is that pastoral lessees are principally managing for public good.
Land use	Grazing as the only enduring use.	Other potential uses apart from grazing are recognised as having legitimacy (i.e. multiple use).
Goals and objectives	Shared goal as long-term sustainable production.	Shared goal as long-term sustainable production <i>and</i> ecological sustainability (using the distinction provided by Stafford Smith 1994).
Stakeholders	Pastoral lessees and a few agencies of government.	Anybody who is keen to get involved can argue for a 'stake'.
Relationship focus	Objectives for individual pastoral businesses. Other objectives determined by government agencies.	Regional/ industry objectives captured in strategic planning done through participative processes; community development.
Dominant issues	Lost productivity through overuse at the time of settlement; management should aim at rehabilitation. Pastoral managers need a way of determining long-term trends in the land resource.	The land resource is in sufficiently good condition to support productive grazing enterprises. Regional sustainable development assumes greater importance. Individual enterprises should be focusing on land uses where they have a comparative advantage.
Relationship aims	Pastoral managers needed to be more aware of the needs of the land and vegetation resources, and better animal managers.	Pastoral managers need to be skillful business managers, more aware of beyond farm-gate issues; they need a means of benchmarking total business performance.
Technologies	Principal management tools were level (stocking rate) and timing of grazing use. Other technologies of marginal value.	Principal management tools are business planning, ecosystem planning, total grazing control and increased technology (e.g. solar water pumping).

Source of Research Development and Extension	Government	Government and private
Government intervention	Pastoral lease inspection. Crisis assistance. Where possible, smaller leases encouraged into restructuring making larger ones that are 'more viable'.	Support for 'clean, green' production. New industry development. Regional economic and social development. Multiple enterprise businesses encouraged and more common.

Our sources for the assertions made in previous sections and in the above table include the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy documents (Government of Western Australia 1998) and from regular reading of the Southern Rangelands Pastoral Memo.

Who will be providing the Research, Development and Extension (R, D and E) services to grazing?

In agricultural development throughout Australia, the long-standing assumption has been that Government will provide R, D and E services. This is changing rapidly with private services very active in broad-acre agriculture – in 1998, about 25 per cent of farmers in WA were using private sources of technical and business management advice (Marsh and Pannell 1998). The pastoral industry has lagged behind this trend. The paper by John Fargher and others presented at this conference highlights the poor returns to national welfare from public investment in the grazing industry. The implication is that there is little to be gained from further investments by the public in grazing R, D and E. The corporate pastoral companies have recognised the limits to public support, and are sourcing their own R,D and E. What about the remainder? Complaints that we have heard from pastoralists who have been accustomed to high levels of personal service in the past suggests that a process of 'strategic withdrawal' is occurring, with a relative shift into regional/industry strategic activities as opposed to local on-ground service.

We are presenting a picture of changing relationships conducted over tactical and strategic objectives at different domains of operation. Table 3 presents this confusion of domains and conversations as a matrix.

Table 3: Service provision in the rangelands

Domain	Discussion question	Decision level	Who has provided the service?	Who is providing it now?	Who will be providing the service?
The paddock	'How to graze?'	Tactical	Government	Mainly government – reducing resources	Private sector?
The pastoral business	'What do we want our future to be like?'	Strategic	Government	Mainly government – reducing resources	Private sector?
The industry	What is the industry contributing?	Industry strategy and policy	Mainly Government	Government and industry	Mainly industry
The region	'What uses should be supported?'	Regional policy	Question not normally asked	Government	Regional Government
The nation	'What is the value of our occupancy?'	National/ State policy	Question not normally asked	Government	Government

The level that many practitioners with a long 'pastoral history' feel most comfortable with is the paddock/pastoral business level. The relationships in the pastoral domain have always been better at considering the 'how to graze' question than the 'what should we be doing' questions. While objectives seem simple

at this level, without considering the regional implications of what is being considered and decided, there can be a serious mismatch between that level and industry/region level decision-making. It is critical that relationship processes operate vertically through the table, so that the decisions at the policy levels inform the relationships at the tactical levels.

If government is getting out of the 'how to' area, what then will it be doing? The public interest is in the collective welfare of the rangelands, not in the performance of individual businesses. Individual industries, be they grazing, mining or tourism will fund their own industry-related R, D and E. Public investment will increasingly be directed into asking the 'what' and 'why' questions in rangeland management, with the 'how to' being left increasingly to private interests.

CONSIDERING THE EMERGING RELATIONSHIP

Some advantages and disadvantages of the emerging relationship and the changing role for the traditional service providers are suggested in Table 4.

Table 4: The 'new', – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships more inclusive of all rangeland people. • High attention to holistic management skills. • Encouraging management to look beyond the boundary fence. • Encouragement and support of multiple objectives. • Better informed and skilled community leaders and members. • More cross-sectoral communication with 'outside community'. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctance by many to discuss the 'why' as well as the 'how'. • Temptation to search for 'quick fix' to poor commodity prices. • Inadequate attention to some of the production basics. • Reduced availability of day-to-day services increasing social isolation. • Regional strategies don't deliver maximum benefit because of blockers elsewhere in the system.
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional context for local actions. • A focus on whole of region outcomes. • Economic opportunities for managing for non-market values (e.g. conservation, strategic habitation). • Building the debate between the 'what', 'why' and 'how' in rangelands. • New means of rewarding good management. • Meeting new niche markets. • Exploiting the IT revolution (e.g. education, access to information). • Remote technology. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative and administrative arrangements that enshrine outdated assumptions. • Government withdrawal leaves vacuum in strategic and tactical advice for individual businesses. • A desire to recreate the past. • Poorly researched new uses that go bad. • The rate of change may outstrip the capacity to change. • Loss of community with increased technology. • Private advice encourages resistance to external imperatives – return to 'us and them'. • Using 'one size fits all' approaches to the relationships.

CONCLUSION - WHAT IS NEXT?

As discussed by Kelly (2001), the changes in how relationships work in the rangelands are not occurring without some pain. It is important that the causes of the pain are addressed. We close by suggesting some issues to be addressed for the emerging relationships to work to the benefit of rangeland people.

- As suggested by John Fargher and others in their paper, legislative frameworks are required that enable these emerging relationships to work better – that help capture the opportunities in Table 4.
- We need market means of rewarding uses and management that contribute to community good.
- Building capacity for the debate about the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ in rangelands in a way that ensures consistency in decisions made across the levels.
- Recognition that we have several ‘pastoral industries’ – from large corporate well-resourced companies, to small enterprises that operate as a base for off-farm activities. The ‘one size fits all’ thinking about how relationships should proceed can be comfortable for some, but not helpful. Very different approaches are needed for different types of operation.
- Recognition of the unique skills sets and personal constructs that may be required for successful rangeland occupancy. How will these be encouraged?
- Determining how the vacuum left by government’s likely withdrawal from the ‘how to’ questions will be addressed? Strategic planning for that transition is required.
- Determining how can the IT revolution in the bush be best exploited.

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