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## WHAT IS THE EMU EXERCISE?

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### A SYNOPSIS

The Ecosystem Management Unit's (EMU) primary purpose is to introduce pastoralists (and other managers of land) to the ecological management of landscapes and habitats in the outback. Ecological management involves reading and recognising landscapes (the terrain elements), internal and linking processes (function), condition and trend.

This is achieved by working with pastoralists to record their station knowledge in a baseline mapping exercise, followed by ground and air traverses of key areas identified. A simple landscape and habitat monitoring technique is demonstrated during ground traverses augmented by ground and aerial photographs. This is summarised on clear overlays on the station map annually as a permanent record.

A range of issues can also be brought into the management system, including key areas for grazing, conservation of nature, cultural heritage, harvesting for craft woods and oils, ecotourism, and so forth.

The fact that a landscape changes, evolves and develops both singularly and in relation to other landscapes is central to the EMU approach. Furthermore, the movement of water through landscapes is pivotal. Wind is equally important in certain landscapes, such as coastal dunes.

Recognising drivers of change, mapping them and then summarising them on a station map has generally had a profound effect on EMU participants. The distillation of their knowledge allows them to quickly see their station land as a whole system of interconnections. This holistic perspective of the outback allows pastoralists to identify and design "best fit" ecological management; a key outcome of this project.

Though initiated and guided by the EMU ecologists, the exercise engenders the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and experience between all participants. The mutual respect that is built in doing so, coupled with a rich diversity of ideas, can build the capacity and enthusiasm for ecological management at an enterprise and local community level.

### SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

Hence the primary purpose of the EMU Exercise on pastoral stations is to:

1. Help pastoralists recognise landscape and habitat patterns and processes and the changes in them on their stations.
2. To develop a positive attitude to ongoing landscape change - that despite the vastness of stations and few hands, it is possible to manage effectively by:
  - i) focusing on the key areas and drivers of change,
  - ii) reorganising grazing management to "fit" landscape patterns and processes, and
  - iii) exploring alternative and complementary land uses.
3. Persuade pastoralists that though they are sometimes managing a legacy of degraded landscapes, substantial landscape restoration is entirely feasible, particularly in key areas.
4. Appreciate that by working with natural patterns and processes they can improve feed on offer and its use, and hence productivity.
5. Motivate pastoralists to take responsibility for managing change using a variety of response decisions, depending on the situation, and providing them with the skills to do so.
6. Provide participants with the fundamentals for an accredited Environmental Management System, demonstrating that pastoralism and active conservation can coexist successfully.

7. Leave each participating group with a sufficient understanding of landscape ecology for them to trial and monitor various management methods, and exchange information with each other regarding outcomes.
8. To activate a level of capability in pastoralists to mutually support each other towards self-reliance and a viable triple bottom line.

In summary, the EMU Exercise identifies and analyses the constraints and opportunities that will make a real difference in pursuit of more effective management of the outback. It aims to empower the people who manage land and can make the difference they and the wider community desire. The EMU Exercise is a simple yet profound way for developing competence in land literacy and to work with, not against, the natural processes. It is an exercise and technique that engenders adaptive and innovative management, and other creative ways of seeing and doing in landscapes of diverse resources.