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## NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANNING IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RANGELANDS

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Developing an Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan and Investment Strategy (IS) for the South Australian Rangelands region presented some interesting challenges. The general environment during the ten months of 2003/04 taken to develop the Plan and IS, presented some interesting challenges.

The region is large, 538,577 sq km, almost 55% of the state, equivalent to the percentage area of NSW or 7% of Australia. The environment and local conditions at the time were characterised by:

- Ecosystems that are relatively intact from a state perspective. Due to the climate and land capabilities no extensive areas of vegetation have been cleared. This is in stark contrast to the majority of the rest of the state. The 2,250 km dog fence separates sheep country to the south, mainly chenopod shrublands, and cattle country to the north, more varied ephemeral grasslands and Acacia woodlands. While vegetation may be largely intact, the region has exhibited some alarming fauna species extinction rates.
- The greatest ecological diversity in the state - 11 bioregions are represented. The area includes Lake Eyre (the lowest point of the Australian mainland at around 15 m below sea level), mound springs of the Great Artesian Basin, the Flinders Ranges, floodplains of the Channel Country, parts of at least five deserts, significant wetlands such as the Ramsar listed Coongie Lakes etc.
- Harsh climate. Rainfall around Lake Eyre is less than 150 mm per annum while temperatures for Oodnadatta have recently been recognised as the hottest in Australia.
- Vast distances – from north to south the distance is around 850 km, from east to west slightly less at around 800 km.
- Many neighbours – the SA Rangelands has boundaries with four other INRM regions in SA, the Northern Territory, Desert Channels Queensland, and the Western Catchment Management Board and Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Board in NSW.
- Extreme size of pastoral leases and other management units, for example National Parks. The region includes Anna Creek Station, the largest cattle station in the world at 34,000 sq km, National Parks such as Lake Eyre at 13,500 sq km and Conservation Parks such as Tallaringa (which abuts the SA Rangelands) at 12,700 sq km.
- A sparse population which is declining in numbers. Estimates for the Rangelands INRM region put the population at less than 13,000, which is less than 1% of the state population and equals a density of one person every 41.5 sq km.
- An Indigenous population which constitutes around 18% of the total population for the region, often living on their land, and with particular issues of relevance. These people generally have a very different outlook on NRM that is far more inclusive than more contemporary views.
- A changing economic base. The biggest employer in the region, in terms of both revenue and numbers is the mining/petroleum industry. Tourism, which is growing significantly as people want an “outback” experience, is now worth more to the region than pastoralism. Pastoral enterprises have been present in the rangelands for over 140 years and returns continue to be generally variable and unpredictable depending on seasonal conditions. Employment in the pastoral industry is declining.
- Local government is only present in the townships of Coober Pedy and Roxby Downs. The Outback Areas Community Development Trust, a defacto form of local government present in the rest of the region, supports communities by providing subsidies that contribute to local fundraising efforts to address the communities’ priorities.
- Boundaries inconsistent between Government Departments and other interest groups, adding unnecessary complexities to negotiations.

- Pending new legislation. During the planning stage of the SA Rangelands INRM Plan, a new concept for South Australia, a much-anticipated NRM Act, was released for an extensive period of community consultation and finally debated in Parliament. This new Act involved combining three current Acts into one. Given the NRM part of the Act is similar to the INRM title of the Plan, there was enormous confusion in the community as to the purpose for both and what overlaps there were, if any.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED	SOLUTIONS
Developing an NRM Plan and Investment Strategy (IS) in a tight timeframe.	<i>Utilise existing regional planning documents and incorporate results from previous consultation. (Fortunately relevant plans were readily available and current.)</i>
Concurrent development of the Plan and IS. Actions in the IS cannot address targets in the Plan when the Plan is not formulated.	<i>Again, use the existing information and consult widely. Where issues are known the IS can broadly address these and, time permitting, be adjusted to more specifically address targets when developed.</i>
Ensure the community is adequately consulted.	<i>Plan the consultation well; fit it around existing events wherever possible; give plenty of notice of planned activities; promote activities widely and often; use local champions to raise interest.</i>
Ensure the Indigenous community is adequately and appropriately consulted Lack of understanding of the message.	<i>As for above, and also get advice on most appropriate methods from local Indigenous people. Ensure that appropriate language is used for the audience and avoid acronyms and jargon. Provide definitions for clarity - use the KISS* principle.</i>
Community overload. A small population means people are often over-committed to be effectively involved in too many initiatives.	<i>Keep communications clear, relevant, targeted and efficient and use the best method for the intended outcomes. Encourage the involvement of "new" participants. Provide support where possible.</i>
Confusion in the community due to apparently similar activities occurring.	<i>Raise the capacity of the community to be able to differentiate between the concurrent activities by providing clear information that highlights the differences. Use local champions to raise awareness and promote the activity. (During consultation the INRM Group had to provide clear information and be persistent to separate the Plan from the Act and other significant regional issues.)</i>
Maintaining or developing effective partnerships with neighbouring regions	<i>Instigate and encourage dialogue with neighbours, especially in relation to mutual issues. Utilise and support existing mechanisms that work effectively across borders. (Through the Lake Eyre Basin process a good relationship already existed with Qld and this was used to mutual benefit in the planning process.)</i>
Maximise community ownership to ensure strong community adoption	<i>Keep the community involved at all stages of the process and encourage and use their feedback and suggestions. Emphasise the positive aspects and relevance for the community.</i>

\* KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid!