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## ACRIS – TRACKING CHANGE IN AUSTRALIA’S RANGELANDS

*Gary Bastin and the ACRIS Management Committee*

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### INTRODUCTION

ACRIS is the Australian Collaborative Rangeland Information System. It is a coordinating mechanism that brings together rangeland information from State, Northern Territory and Commonwealth agencies and other sources. Funding is provided by the Australian Government through the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT2) as well as contributions from the participating agencies in the States and NT.

ACRIS grew out of the Rangeland Monitoring theme of the first phase of the National Land and Water Resources Audit and its detailed report *Rangelands – Tracking Change* (NLWRA 2001, [http://audit.ea.gov.au/ANRA/atlas\\_home.cfm](http://audit.ea.gov.au/ANRA/atlas_home.cfm)). It has a Management Committee comprising representatives of Australian and State/NT Governments (membership listed at the end of this poster paper) and a small Management Unit co-located with the Desert Knowledge CRC in Alice Springs.

### OBJECTIVES

It is intended that ACRIS:

- Deliver improved understanding of monitoring outcomes of management strategies and policy at the regional to state and national scale.
- Facilitate cross-jurisdictional and national reporting based on integrating and aligning the separate monitoring activities of States, the NT and Commonwealth.
- Assist NRM managers at regional scale to assess the outcomes of their activities.
- Allow improved scrutiny of returns on government investment within regions e.g. by predicting the impact of new developments and policy initiatives.
- Support improved priority setting for government, community and industry investment.

The Management Committee has an agreed workplan and terms of reference. ACRIS reports to the ministerially appointed NRM Programs and Policy Committee (formerly the Land, Water and Biodiversity Committee) on the development of a policy framework for reporting. It reports to the NLWRA Advisory Council on progress and issues with implementation.

### ACRIS ACTIVITY

Each State and the NT has established procedures for monitoring, particularly of the pastoral estate, but the different attributes assessed, methods of data collection and densities of data will likely provide early challenges in reporting in a consistent and coherent manner across jurisdictional boundaries. The Management Committee has set itself and the Management Unit the initial task of reporting on management-oriented issues using existing data for a specified region in each State / NT. This will test our ability to report (addressing a set of nationally relevant focus questions) using readily available monitoring data. From there, the task will be expanded to more comprehensive reporting on the condition of natural resources across the entire rangeland area of each jurisdiction using existing data. These expanded reporting criteria could include:

- surface and groundwater,
- vegetation change on pastoral land,
- seasonal climate outlooks and satellite-derived change in seasonal characteristics (as contextual information),
- change in land use and tenure, and

- extent of tree clearing.

ACRIS will progressively implement more comprehensive reporting of change in Australia's rangelands. For example, a recent national workshop addressed methods for monitoring change in biodiversity (Smyth *et al.* 2003) and we now need to consider how suitable methods can be included in expanded monitoring programs. Other work will examine how best to monitor change in the social and economic wellbeing of regions. The ultimate challenge for ACRIS is to develop the full suite of products described in *Rangelands – Tracking Change* that will allow comprehensive and timely reporting on the condition of natural resources in the rangelands. The expanded reporting criteria could include:

- biodiversity monitoring and analysis,
- trends in socio-economic status,
- landscape assessment at larger scale,
- extent, timing and frequency of fire,
- resource condition,
- locations and status of exotic plants and animals, and
- periodic assessment of total grazing pressure.

Watch the rangeland literature (and National Land and Water Resources web site) for some ACRIS outputs.

#### **MEMBERSHIP OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Annemarie Watt & Deborah Foulcher (secretariat), Dept. Environment & Heritage, Australian Government

Jim Donaldson / Warwick Jones, Dept. Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry, Australian Government

Blair Wood, National Land & Water Resources Audit

Margaret Friedel, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems

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Daryl Green, Dept. Infrastructure, Planning & Natural Resources, NSW Government

John Chappel & Brendan Lay, Dept. Water, Land & Biodiversity Conservation, SA Government

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