

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY  
BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

**Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society**

**Copyright and Photocopying**

© The Australian Rangeland Society 2012. All rights reserved.

For non-personal use, no part of this item may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission of the Australian Rangeland Society and of the author (or the organisation they work or have worked for). Permission of the Australian Rangeland Society for photocopying of articles for non-personal use may be obtained from the Secretary who can be contacted at the email address, [rangelands.exec@gmail.com](mailto:rangelands.exec@gmail.com)

For personal use, temporary copies necessary to browse this site on screen may be made and a single copy of an article may be downloaded or printed for research or personal use, but no changes are to be made to any of the material. This copyright notice is not to be removed from the front of the article.

All efforts have been made by the Australian Rangeland Society to contact the authors. If you believe your copyright has been breached please notify us immediately and we will remove the offending material from our website.

**Form of Reference**

The reference for this article should be in this general form;  
Author family name, initials (year). Title. *In*: Proceedings of the nth Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference. Pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

For example:

Anderson, L., van Klinken, R. D., and Shepherd, D. (2008). Aerially surveying Mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.) in the Pilbara. *In*: 'A Climate of Change in the Rangelands. Proceedings of the 15<sup>th</sup> Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference'. (Ed. D. Orr) 4 pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

**Disclaimer**

The Australian Rangeland Society and Editors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information obtained in this article or in the Proceedings of the Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conferences. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors, neither does the publication of advertisements constitute any endorsement by the Australian Rangeland Society and Editors of the products advertised.



*The Australian Rangeland Society*

# **RECONCILING ON-GROUND ACTIONS AND SCIENCE: OBSTACLES FACING A REGIONAL NRM ORGANISATION**

*M. Fletcher*

Western Catchment Management Authority, PO Box 692 Broken Hill NSW 2880

Email [Melinda.Fletcher@cma.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Melinda.Fletcher@cma.nsw.gov.au)

## **ABSTRACT**

The Western Catchment Management Authority is the regional body responsible for implementing positive natural resource management change over a large geographic area of Western New South Wales (approx. 230 000 sq km). Currently, this authority (and the other 12 CMA's in NSW) has an emphasis on distributing financial incentives to encourage its stakeholders to participate in this change. To date, this emphasis has been extremely positive and led to significant levels of on-ground activity (especially the provision of new infrastructure such as fencing, pipelines, water points, goat traps etc). However, there has been little research to determine whether these funded activities have in fact produced the desired positive outcomes outside their initial action.

## **OBSTACLES TO EVALUATING SUSTAINED CHANGE**

The obstacles facing the Western CMA in determining the success of its incentives programs in initiating and sustaining positive on-ground change are by no means unique to the agency. Organisational change and restructures, changes to foci, loss of corporate rangeland knowledge and experienced staff, gaps in ecological knowledge and baseline data hinder a large majority of NRM agencies. The shift from employing or retaining permanent "recurrent" staff to project-based temporary positions also reduces spatial and temporal continuity. In addition, the current structure of government and non-government funding programs that prefer to support activities with short time frames (1-3 years), also does not allow for on-going monitoring and evaluation, especially when such short time frames cannot possibly capture a representative snapshot. Despite there being obligatory monitoring requirements for those landholders receiving incentives funding, there is currently no one rigorously measuring whether the various rehabilitation, revegetation and infrastructure improvements are in fact effective (beyond their initial action) in improving the natural resource base across the broader landscape.

## **WHAT IS CMA DOING?**

The Western CMA has recognised in its risk assessment that not achieving sustained change is high risk (Western Catchment Plan 2006-2016). Although, the Western CMA is not the only state government agency responsible for the management of our natural resources, they are indeed a key player, especially when they are the main vehicle for distributing investment funds. To address some of the obstacles mentioned above, the Western CMA has included mandatory pasture assessment sites in their contractual obligations, employed a full-time Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, is conducting a Research and Coordination and Support Project and proposes to build a knowledge platform to allow for a web query and answer function. They also need to produce a substantial number of reports to various committees, boards, governments and the community. So is this enough to determine that the CMA'S investment in projects and activities do improve or maintain natural resources? Maybe quantitatively, in terms of reporting 'outputs' such as areas and numbers, but not qualitatively to describe 'outcomes' or the type or degree of on-ground change.

## **ROOM FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT?**

In addition to the measures the Western CMA have already taken, further partnerships with universities, cooperative research centres and other science-based agencies would be extremely valuable, not only in providing independent peer reviews but would enable science and ecological principles to be even further integrated into the CMA's activities. Whilst there is an excellent literature and research base that has formed the basis of NRM activities, there is a continual need to re-invest in research (especially in response to current infrastructure investment), to evaluate the activities that are being funded across the catchment. The Western CMA does not have the capacity or resources to conduct this research itself, but by forming cooperative partnerships with research bodies, it will enable a broader-scaled assessment of whether the Western CMA's funded activities and programs are achieving their original objectives. In addition to not having the capacity or resources, the Western CMA are currently prohibited from supporting research projects itself, due to funding guidelines that consider research not to be an on-ground activity. This must be changed as more involvement in research will not only improve the capacity of its stakeholders and CMA staff, but research is one very important part of the basis to which we can evaluate past, present and future on ground works.