

PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY BIENNIAL CONFERENCE
Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society

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The Australian Rangeland Society

The Western Division Newsletter – An Effective Rangelands Communication Tool

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Keywords: communication; Western Division Newsletter; extension

Abstract

Despite the availability of electronic communication technologies our experience in co-producing the Western Division Newsletter for the last five years, and the favourable comments received from landholders, indicate that this traditional format remains an effective communication tool. The growing willingness of landholders to share their knowledge through the newsletter, and continued advertising support from suppliers and pastoral businesses, support this assessment.

Introduction

Effective communication with landholders living in remote areas is often considered a difficult task by service agencies despite the now common use of electronic media. However, poor Internet access on properties often means there is difficulty downloading larger files, and the “finding time” factor limits the use of this medium.

The Western Division Newsletter commenced as a simple newsletter in the early 1980s put together by Doug Campbell, then District Agronomist with NSW Agriculture in Bourke. Publication and distribution to landholders in the Western Division of NSW has been maintained for nearly next thirty years, establishing a vital and continuing link. The

newsletter has long been identified by landholders as a useful source of information (e.g. Chemke 1991) and is now recognised as such by two generations of landholders.

Continually evolving, the newsletter has moved from a twelve-page matt paper two-toned document that was distributed a few times a year to a glossy multi-toned typically 32-page document with five issues published regularly each year – November/February, March/April, May/June, July/August and September/October.

Funding provided by the Western Catchment Management Authority, Lower Murray-Darling Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, and the Department of Lands, together with the in-kind contribution of Industry & Investment NSW and advertising revenue, has allowed the newsletter to remain a free-of-charge document that is direct mailed to over 1300 recipients. All funding agencies contribute articles to each edition, which is published and distributed by Department of Industry and Investment.

An interactive website on the NSW Department of Primary Industries site for the Newsletter was established in 2009:

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/resources/periodicals/newsletters/western-division-newsletter. This website, as well as listing back copies of the Newsletter and providing details about advertising options, enables direct mail addresses or email addresses to be registered. The Newsletter is currently distributed to over 300 email addresses. The next stage for this site is to develop an interactive column where feedback on the Newsletter can be regularly collected.

Articles published are usually one A4 page in length including photographs, tables or graphs with detailed captions. Boxed pieces of key information, usually with a photograph to create interest areas, and a photography page usually showing recent events and people involved, create diversity. Key topics include western stock and agronomic management issues; climatology topics; CMA-funded events and programs; activities in western national parks; news from the Western Lands Commissioner and wrap-up or promotions of field days and workshops. Summaries of recent research projects appear when available. An important

recent trend is the growing willingness of landholders to share their knowledge through the newsletter.

Conclusion

Our experience in co-producing the Western Division Newsletter for the last five years, and the feedback received from landholders, indicates that it continues to serve as an important communication medium in the Western Division. The continuing willingness of suppliers and pastoral businesses to advertise in the newsletter provides confirmation of this assessment.

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