



History of the Pastoral Board of South Australian and the *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989*.

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Abstract

South Australia's Pastoral Board (the Board) has a vital role in overseeing the sustainable management and conservation of the state's pastoral lands for a diverse range of uses, which continue to evolve over time as new markets and industries emerge, as the climate changes and communities evolve.

Pastoralists and other land managers play a critical role in managing and conserving vast areas of the state's land which holds both productive and ecological values as well as cultural and social values.

Originally formed under the Pastoral Act of 1893, the Pastoral Board of South Australia has a long history and extensive experience in the administration of pastoral land (Donovan P. 1995). The current *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989* enables the Board to manage land in a contemporary context.

The Act aims to:

- ensure that all pastoral land in the State is well managed and utilised sustainably;
- provide for monitoring of land condition, prevention of degradation and rehabilitation of the land;
- provide a form of tenure suitable for the pastoral industry (42-year leases reviewed every 14 years);
- recognise and provide for the rights of Aboriginal people to follow traditional pursuits on pastoral land; and
- enable community access to and through pastoral land.

The Board aims to achieve the world's best managed pastoral country, by working with pastoral land managers and communities to develop, adopt and promote practices that sustain the state's pastoral lands for current and future generations.

The Board's immediate priorities include delivering an effective and fit for purpose land condition assessment program, effective compliance, and sound policies informed by community input, to support certainty for pastoral lessees, and reduce risks of degradation that affects the long-term sustainability of pastoral lands. It works closely with other regulators to achieve aligned management for a range of outcomes, including complementary legislative regimes for new industries.

Introduction

The *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989* (the Act), and the establishment of the Pastoral Board of South Australia, mark transformative points in the history of land management and conservation in South Australia. Together, they represent a governmental commitment to addressing the complex demands of pastoral land use in one of the world's most arid and ecologically sensitive regions. South Australia's pastoral industry, a cornerstone of the state's economy since the mid-19th century, has historically centered on grazing in vast, arid and semi-arid landscapes. While pastoralism contributed significantly to economic growth and settlement, the expansion of grazing activities into semi-arid and arid regions led to severe environmental consequences, including soil erosion, vegetation loss, and ecosystem disruption (Donovan 1995).

In response to these challenges, the Act introduced a comprehensive legal framework aimed at balancing economic interests with sustainable land use and environmental conservation. This landmark legislation empowered the Board with responsibilities that include overseeing land leases, monitoring ecological health, and ensuring compliance with sustainable practices. The Act was notable for its emphasis on conservation principles, promoting practices that would protect biodiversity and preserve the natural resources critical to both the pastoral industry and regional ecosystems.

Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989

The *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989* represents a significant legislative milestone in South Australia's efforts to manage its arid and semi-arid lands sustainably. This Act was introduced as a comprehensive response to the unique environmental, economic, and social challenges of pastoral land use in a state where extensive grazing is a critical economic activity but one that often conflicts with ecological preservation. Prior to this Act, pastoral land management in South Australia was governed by earlier regulations that largely focused on promoting agricultural expansion and economic development, often at the expense of environmental sustainability. Over time, however, it became clear that these policies had led to issues such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, and the depletion of essential resources.

The Act reshaped the legislative framework, introducing measures that prioritised both economic viability and ecological integrity. By emphasising sustainable land use, biodiversity conservation, and responsible resource management, the Act sought to address the long-term health of South Australia's pastoral regions. It established the Board as a key regulatory body with authority over land leases, monitoring, and the enforcement of sustainable practices. The Act also promotes collaboration between the government, pastoralists, and environmental organisations, fostering a more holistic approach to land management. The advent of renewable energy has seen amendments to the legislation allowing for establishment of other land uses such as wind and solar farms and hydrogen projects.

Pastoral Board Establishment

The Pastoral Board (the Board) has played a pivotal role in shaping the state's pastoral landscape, evolving in response to environmental, economic, and social changes since its inception. Established in 1895, the Board was initially appointed to manage the allocation, leasing, and regulation of vast tracts of land used for grazing in South Australia's arid and semi-arid regions. As settlers expanded into harsher, less hospitable areas, issues of land degradation, overgrazing, and water scarcity began to surface. The creation of the Board was a government initiative aimed at addressing these challenges by overseeing land use, ensuring sustainable practices, and balancing economic interests with environmental stewardship. Over time, the Board's responsibilities expanded, adapting to changes in agricultural technology, environmental policy, and indigenous land rights. Its policies and regulations have had lasting impacts on South Australia's land use patterns, biodiversity conservation, and rural communities.

Pastoral Board Today

The Board consists of six members from diverse backgrounds appointed by the Minister under the Act for a 3-year term, which can be renewed. Each member brings a distinctive skill set to the Board's deliberations.

Collectively the Board has an extensive knowledge of the administrative, environmental and economic issues of the South Australian pastoral lands (Pastoral Board of SA, 2023).

The Board administers pastoral leasehold tenure on 322 pastoral leases over 40% of the state (approximately 422,000 km²). The Board is a statutory authority responsible to the Minister for Climate, Environment and Water in administration of the Act for:

- managing and enforcing lease terms and conditions
- supervision of the pastoral lease system
- defining management conditions, including the number and types of stock to be managed
- assessing and reporting on the condition of leased land
- implementation of property plans and other measures to prevent land degradation
- managing and recording submission of annual stock returns
- producing an annual report
- assisting the Valuer General in determining pastoral lease rents
- administration of the Pastoral Land Management Fund
- administration of alternative land uses for pastoral land
- providing advice to the Minister on policies and other general advice.

In discharging its responsibilities, the Board must have regard to plans or guidelines of other relevant government bodies, and to the terms of any Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) on pastoral land. The Board has established a Strategic Plan which guides its direction and priorities to meet its legislative responsibilities, and community and industry expectations (Pastoral Board of SA, 2023). The plan outlines the Board's vision, goals and strategic outcomes and was developed through consultation with key stakeholders. The work of the Board is supported by the Pastoral Land Management Unit (Pastoral Unit) based in the Department for Environment and Water. The Strategic Plan provides guidance for the Pastoral Unit in supporting the operation of the Board.

One of the Board's primary responsibilities is to oversee the lease agreements, which outline sustainable land use practices and set conditions for grazing activities on state-owned pastoral lands. This is achieved through regular inspections and assessments carried out by the Pastoral Unit. The Act requires that the Board must conduct land condition assessments at least once every 14 years for each pastoral lease.

The Board ensures that leaseholders adhere to environmental standards, helping to prevent overuse and degradation of land. The Board also collaborates with stakeholders, including pastoralists, environmental agencies, and indigenous groups to foster a cooperative approach to land management. The Board works closely with other regulators to achieve aligned management for a range of outcomes, including complementary legislative regimes for new industries (Pastoral Board of SA, 2024).

In addition to its regulatory functions, the Board serves an advisory role, providing resources and support to pastoralists to promote conservation practices that align with both economic productivity and environmental sustainability. This includes facilitating relevant research, advocating for land management innovation, and promoting best practices that enhance landscape resilience in the face of climate variability and other pressures. By focusing on sustainable practices, the Board aims to maintain the ecological health of South Australia's pastoral lands, ensuring their viability for future generations, and aspires to achieve the world's best managed pastoral country.

Acknowledgements

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