



Grassland Society of Southern Africa

Advancing Rangeland Ecology and Pasture Management in Africa

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Secretariat of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) of the
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153
Rome
Italy
Email: fao-hq@fao.org

Dear Sirs/Madams,

RE: Support for the request from the Government of Mongolia for an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

The Grassland Society of Southern Africa (GSSA) is a non-profit organisation that was established in South Africa in 1966 with the aim of promoting and advancing the study and sustainable management of rangelands and pastures in southern Africa, based on sound scientific principles.

Grassland and savanna rangelands cover almost two thirds of South Africa's surface area and represent a remarkable and irreplaceable asset of global significance^{1,2}. Plant and animal diversity are high in these biomes and they provide significant ecosystem services that people rely on for health and well-being. Grasslands are critical for water production and provide natural resources and ecological infrastructure that supports most of South Africa's important economic activities, and millions of rural livelihoods. The estimated global value of ecosystem services provided to humans in 2011 by natural ecosystems was \$125 trillion/yr³. However, these rangelands are coming under increasing pressure from a variety of competing land-uses ranging from agriculture, growing human populations, mining, unsustainable and poor rangeland management and climate change amongst others. This is echoed across rangelands globally.

A proposal has been submitted by the Government of Mongolia to the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations to declare an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. The aim of this initiative is to highlight the critical resource base and the people whose livelihoods depend on rangelands and pastoralism.

The GSSA would like to express its support of the request by the Government of Mongolia to declare an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. This designation would provide an opportunity to raise awareness and support the profile of rangeland and pastoral management across the world so that the challenges facing these systems can be understood and mitigated. Similarly the opportunities presented by these systems can be highlighted to enhance their sustainable utilisation.

Please accept the GSSA's full support for the request of the Government of Mongolia for an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists.

Yours sincerely

Dr Debbie Jewitt
President of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa

1. SANBI. 2013. Grasslands Ecosystem Guidelines: landscape interpretation for planners and managers. Compiled by Cadman, M., de Villiers, C., Lechmere-Oertel, R. and D. McCulloch. South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.
2. SANBI. Draft. Ecosystem Guidelines for the Savanna Biome. Compiled by CEN Integrated Environmental Management Unit. South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria.
3. Costanza, R., de Groot, R., Sutton, P., *et al.* 2014. Changes in the global value of ecosystem services. *Global Environmental Change*, 26: 152-158.