

Putting our heads together

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Abstract

The National Rangeland NRM Alliance (The Alliance) combines thirteen (13) rangeland NRM organisations and represents 80% of Australia's land mass. The Alliance aims to improve the delivery of NRM in the rangelands at a national level to improve sustainable land management in the rangelands of Australia. The driving force behind this group is the recognition that many rangeland issues require a national approach and that competition for funding around those issues is counterproductive. The members see the Alliance as a solution to the difficulties associated with implementing large-scale action across regional and jurisdictional boundaries. The combined resources of the Alliance provide investors, policy makers and partners with services beyond the scope of the individual organisations. This includes strategic planning and partnerships that result in much greater impact and the ability to tackle issues, which individual groups may find overwhelming and have difficulty managing in the long term. The Alliance members, and partners, use their existing governance and project implementation structures to achieve on-ground results at a national scale.

Introduction

The National Rangelands NRM Alliance (The Alliance) began when a small group of people from different natural resource management bodies decided that competing for funds was

having an adverse effect on the implementation of large-scale natural resource management activities in the Rangelands.

This disquiet developed over time beyond mere accord to developing a scope, purpose and method of operating. This growth took a number of years, as the remote nature of the bodies involved meant that members needed to build trust in each other and have confidence in the approach and operation if they were to form a functional Alliance. All of this was done without dedicated resources. Once the group knew its purpose and had confidence in its operational guidelines it needed to implement its ideas to begin to have the impact it desired. This required dedicated resources to take action in a timely manner. To this end a Caring for Our Country application was submitted and funded to provide support and coordination to the Alliance, the resources from this have allowed the Alliance to employ a coordinator and have a central contact, develop a terms of references and undertake communication in a coordinated way.

The result of this long development period is an Alliance which provides a forum for Rangeland NRM Bodies to meet, share and collaborate for better NRM outcomes. Details of membership are given in Table 1 and Fig.1. This collaboration also provides a single coordinated point of contact for external organisations to be able to get a collective response or input from these diverse members representing some 80% of Australia's land mass.

Table 1. Members of the Rangelands NRM Alliance

SA Arid Lands NRM Board	Southern Gulf Catchments
SA Murray Darling NRM Board	NSW Western CMA,
Alinytjara Wilurara NRM	Lachlan CMA,
Desert Channels Queensland	Central West CMA
NRM Northern Territory,	Lower Murray Darling CMA
WA Rangelands NRM	Northern Gulf Resource Management Group
South West NRM	

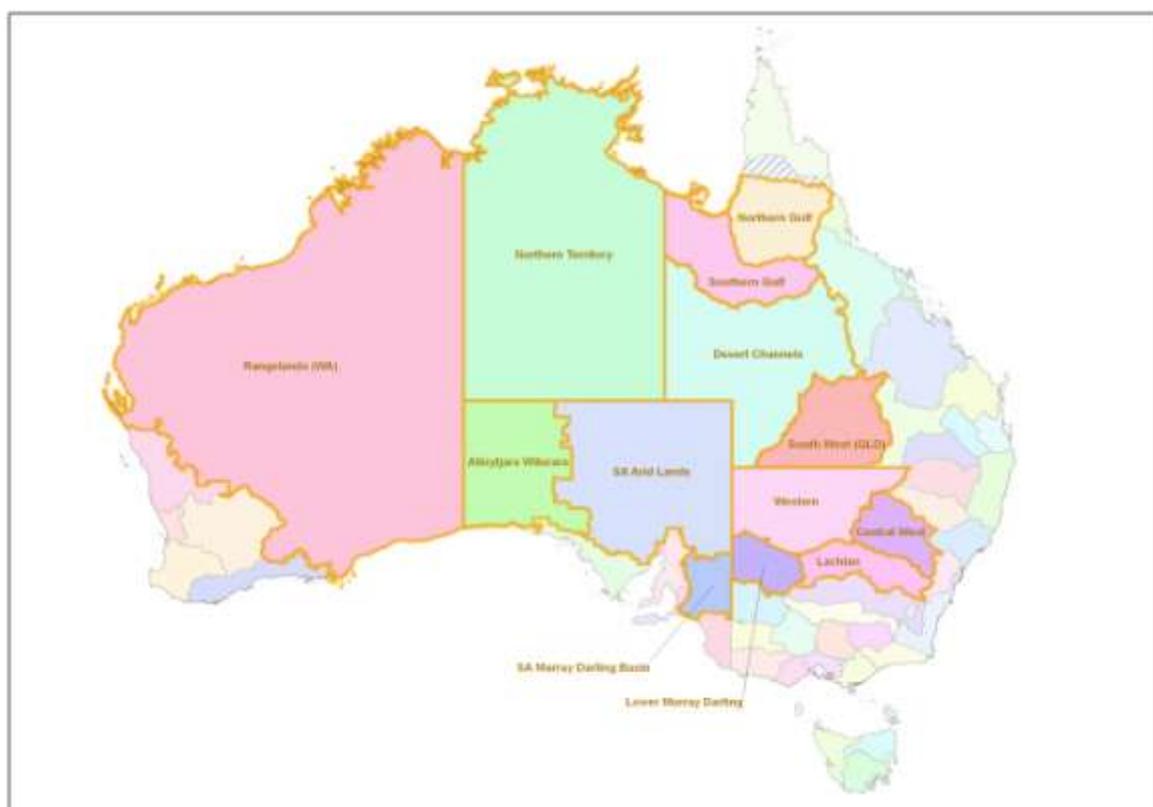


Fig. 1. Map of National Rangeland NRM Alliance membership.

Governance and Management

The terms of reference for the Alliance were developed to cover three core areas of Policy, Projects and Process with the underlying theme to increase effectiveness and efficiency in all areas.

The policy theme is designed to promote a coordinated Rangelands policy approach for NRM. This includes the policies of the member organisations and those of other organisations and Government. The terms of reference states that the intent of the Alliance is to:

- Develop and influence a national approach to rangelands NRM
- Collaborate and share information among the Regional NRM Bodies with a Rangelands focus to continually improve practice, performance and outcomes in natural resource management
- Highlight rangelands specific issues and programs for the State/Territory and Australian Governments as they relate to NRM and as a result, influence relevant policy and programs.

The project's theme is designed to enable better cross border project design and delivery. This is essential to address the issues facing the Australian rangelands. While this was occurring prior to the Alliance formation, further improvement with better identification and coordination of opportunities were required. In addition the terms of reference highlight the clear intent to tailor national projects to suit the rangelands. An ongoing issue for rangelands based NRM is the disadvantage created by requirements of funding programs not recognising the need to fund programs across large areas with very few land managers, with costs that may far outweigh the productive value of the land.

The third theme of the terms of reference is set at the operational level. This highlights the improvements that can be gained in operational arrangements through sharing ideas, information and knowledge. This is further enhanced through developing the opportunities and frameworks for sharing resources and delivering programs and projects across borders.

The Alliance is not an incorporated body. This is a deliberate strategy to avoid becoming another level of bureaucracy. The focus of the Alliance is not to build itself into yet another organisation, rather it is to use members' and partners' existing governance and project implementation structures to achieve on-ground results more efficiently. This is evident with the development and implementation of the National Camel Project.

Pest animals and plants are considered a high priority by the Alliance. Alliance members undertook to raise the profile of the impact feral camels are having and the scale of management required controlling populations in the rangeland areas of Australia.

A number of NRM bodies and other organisations were working on camel management across Australia but none were large enough to have a significant impact on the national camel population. These parties joined forces and the profile of camel impact in the Rangelands was raised at the national level. Cross border activities also started to be implemented. This resulted in camels being targeted in the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country Business Plan 2009/10. The parties then united and developed a collaborative cross-border, cross-regional and cross sector application to Caring for Our Country resulting in funding to \$19 million. This project is being managed by Ninti One Pty Ltd, a partner of the Alliance.

Partnerships

The Alliance is dedicated to partnership approaches both within its membership and with other agencies/organisations working to improve the natural resource management of Australia's rangelands. Many of these partnerships exist and have produced successful cross-regional and cross-jurisdictional projects to meet priority NRM issues.

The Alliance offers a single point of contact and a very efficient way of raising an issue or collecting information from rangeland regional bodies. An example of this is the Australian Invasive Cacti Network.

In early 2009 concerns were raised regarding the spread and impact of invasive cacti in the rangelands of Australia. There was a lack of data to support any action regarding these species. The Alliance coordinated the collection and collation of information on location and extent of invasive cacti. This data showed that cacti were widespread and impacting across large areas of the rangelands, prompting a move to achieve a national approach. A National Invasive Cacti Forum was held in December 2009 resulting in the formation of the Australian Invasive Cacti Network. The network is working at improving the understanding of the

impact of these weeds and exchanging information on taxonomy, biology and best practice control techniques.

Future

The Alliance is developing an Australian Rangelands Initiative, (ARI) which will be used to stimulate and influence investment into Rangelands NRM at a national level. The ARI is not a new plan; it is the collation and identification of national priorities from regional NRM plans and other national documents. The main aim for the document is to guide change in the way funding is delivered to the Rangelands.

The Alliance will be collaborating with organisations, agencies, land managers and interest groups working in the Rangelands to ensure that the ARI is relevant and well supported. The intent is to identify a measurable target for the rangelands that can be communicated to the Australian Government to show that the Alliance through implementing the ARI can meet the National Priority for Remote and Northern Australia. The document will also be used to encourage investment in rangeland's natural resource management by State and Territory governments and other funding sources.

Conclusion

The National Rangelands NRM Alliance has developed slowly but deliberately over the past 5 years and can claim some quite substantial successes in bringing rangeland NRM issues to the fore at the national level with good results for on-ground action. These successes have given the members confidence that they have developed an effective mechanism to get their issues recognised at a national level. The alliance is looking forward to developing its relationships further with other NRM partners who want to see NRM in the rangelands more effectively serviced at a scale relevant to the problems to be addressed.

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