



The Australian Rangeland Society

RANGE MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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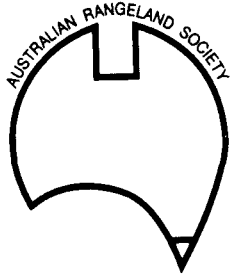
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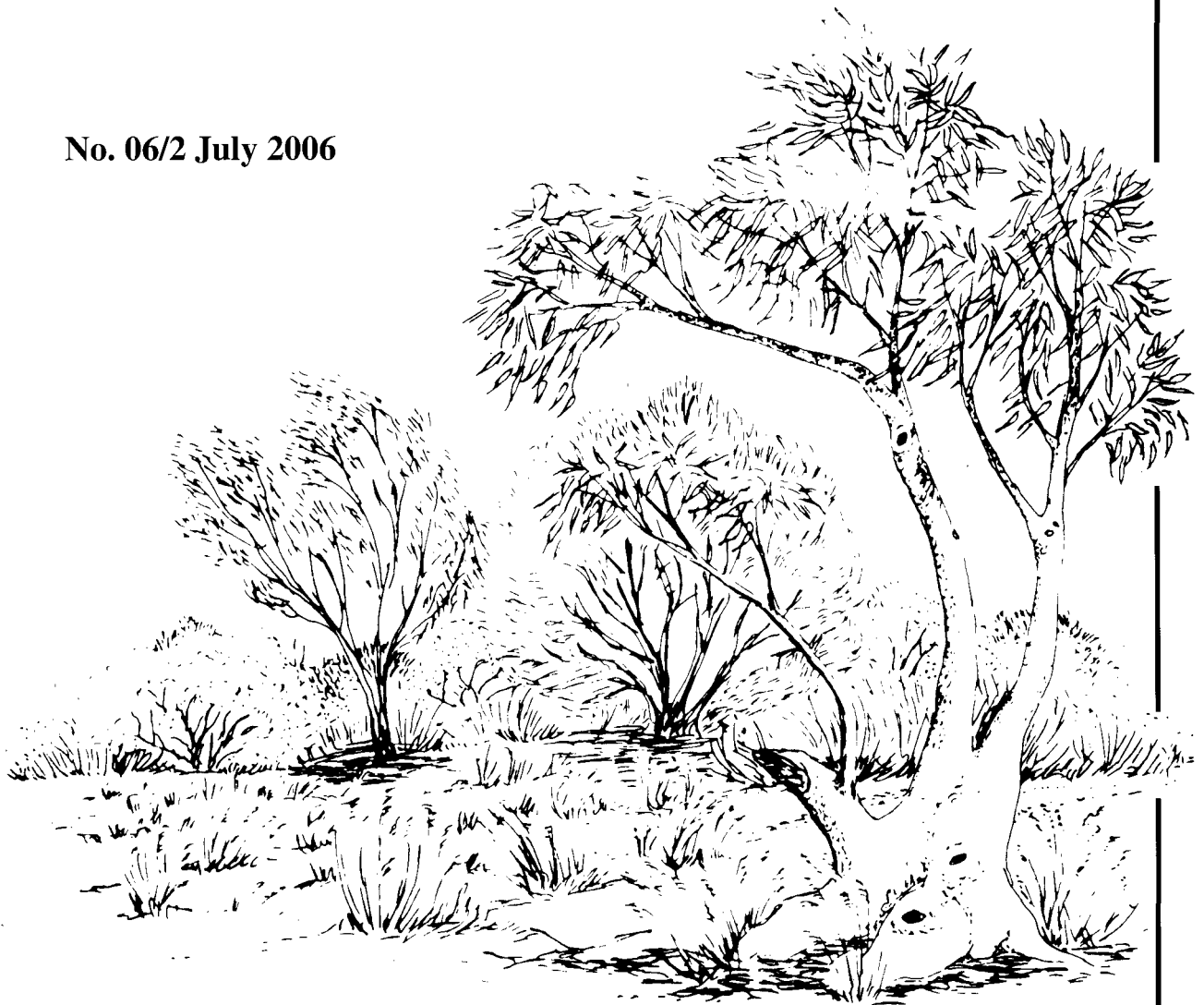
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FROM THE EDITOR

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Welcome to the July edition of the *Range Management Newsletter*.

It is now only a few short weeks until the ARS Biennial Conference. The conference organisers have been working very hard to put together an exciting program which is relevant to everyone involved in the rangelands. They hope you can join them in Renmark in early September. Why not also stay on and enjoy the Lake Eyre Basin Conference which follows straight after?

Speaking of Society matters - Council is also still looking for a new President. If you think you may be that person, or if you would like more details about what is involved, please contact the Secretary of the Society, Sandra Van Vreeswyk, at your earliest convenience. See page 12 of this issue to read what Council has been up to over the last 12 months.

Now to this issue - the newsletter begins with an interesting article from Tony Brandis outlining the challenges involved in the management of Western Australia's conservation reserve system. As Tony points out, there are many environmental issues that need to be considered – in particular it is of great importance to establish good neighbour relationships between all land users. A Draft Good Neighbour Policy has been released for public review – this draft is available for viewing on the Department of Conservation and Land Management's website (<http://www.naturebase.net>).

Following on from this article, Richard Silcock describes the revisiting of old monitoring transects in south-west Queensland. You will want to read this article, not only to read about vegetation changes but also to empathise with some of the logistical difficulties that Richard describes.

Additionally, this *RMN* includes a number of shorter articles describing recent research pertaining to the rangelands, information about the International Rangeland Congress and a letter to the Editor. The Information Snippets section also includes information about other upcoming conferences, a new publication and the availability of Community Water Grants. This section also includes details on how you can contribute to the Jill Landsberg Trust Fund which will be used to help postgraduate students in applied ecology.

Please note that the deadline for the November issue of the newsletter is late September. As this timeline falls just after the ARS Conference, I would be keen to receive comments and stories relating to the conference. You are also encouraged to submit other articles of interest to the wider rangeland community.

For those of you lucky enough to attend the ARS Conference, have fun!

MANAGING PROTECTED AREAS IN THE RANGELANDS: NEW NEIGHBOURS – NEW CHALLENGES

Tony Brandis, Department of Conservation and Land Management, 64 Weir Road, Harvey WA 6220.
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At the conclusion of the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy, around four million hectares of ex pastoral land identified as containing high biodiversity and conservation values have been acquired and will be included in the conservation reserve system.

The key management objective is to ensure the persistence of species, habitats and ecosystems that would otherwise not persist if they remained outside the reserve system.

Defining the boundary of a new protected area, or putting up signage to identify a national park or conservation reserve doesn't provide any surety that biodiversity will persist, or that evolutionary processes will continue. Rather, this is just the beginning of a management regime new in much of the pastoral rangeland areas. It is also important to recognize that the majority of the newly acquired ex-pastoral land brings a legacy of problems from past land use activities, such as pest animals, weeds, and soil erosion. Conservation reserves embedded within a landscape of sometimes conflicting land uses requires new approaches to establishing sound, cooperative and lasting relationships with neighbours, industry, local government and non-government interest groups.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is the lead agency with responsibility for the establishment and management of the conservation reserve system in Western Australia. The increasing area of land managed for biodiversity conservation outcomes in the rangelands requires other land users with different production-driven goals to recognize and accept the legitimacy of their new neighbour and its different land use goals.

The expansion of the conservation reserve system opens up new opportunities for everyone, such as participating in future management of these areas through input into the preparation of management plans, to visit and admire natural wonders, or to assist with research activities. The conservation reserve system can also provide significant regional economic benefits through tourism or employment opportunities.

Management Principles

CALM's mission is to conserve Western Australia's biodiversity and manage the land and water entrusted to it, for their intrinsic values, and for the appreciation and benefit of present and future generation. This will be achieved in partnership with the community.

Management decisions are made on the basis of a number of principles including *inter alia*:

- the restoration and maintenance of diversity of ecosystems and species;
- cooperation, sharing and integration of resources and knowledge within CALM and between communities and agencies will be promoted;
- the adoption of an approach to management that is adaptive to changes in knowledge and understanding;
- planning for management will be based in baseline biological information; and
- future management decisions will be underpinned by sound scientific knowledge.

The 1984 CALM Act directs the Department to prepare management plans for all land vested in the Conservation Commission.

One of the priority actions undertaken by CALM staff is the preparation of Interim Management Guidelines, recognizing that it may be some time before approved area management plans are developed. These guidelines focus on key management issues that pose a need for immediate action.

Key Management Issues

A number of management issues are common to all the land managed for biodiversity conservation and often reflect activities that may have potential impacts on adjoining land.

Fire

Inappropriate fire regimes are implicated in the local extinction of several vascular plant species across Australia, with perhaps 19 plants threatened with extinction due to such burning practices. Indiscriminate burning is considered the major cause of the disappearance of many of our rarer bird species, and is implicated in the decline of 51 bird taxa in Australia.

However, many rangeland ecosystems require periodic burning to maintain stable animal and plant populations, and the maintenance of appropriate fire regimes is necessary to achieve this outcome. Intentional prescribed burning activities must be carried out in the full understanding of the impacts on native vegetation and fauna, and how they recover from the effect of fire.

The need for the protection of life and property on both sides of the boundary from the impacts of wildfire is well understood, requiring the development of wildfire response strategies involving local government and neighbours.

Exotic animals and weeds

Exotic species are considered to be those introduced deliberately or accidentally since European settlement, some of which persist in the wild and become naturalized. It is the naturalized animals and plants that are referred to

as feral animals, which are often considered the primary cause of extinctions in Australia.

Today, feral animals are estimated to make up about 10% of all Australia's terrestrial mammal species. However, the impact of these exotic animals on native species is not well understood and evidence of direct displacement is scarce. The increase in population abundance and distribution of some feral herbivores is the cause of considerable alarm, and, in relation to these animals, there is direct evidence of their impacts on vegetation and soils which may then impact on native animal distribution and abundance.

There are increasing societal demands for the control of feral animal populations including rabbits, foxes, cats, goats, camels and donkeys. The control of introduced plants and animals is a legislative requirement that all land managers must adhere to.

The responses that are planned for the control or eradication of feral animals are varied and relate to their population density and distribution and impacts on the conservation values of the reserve system. Their potential movement across boundaries is an issue that requires a cooperative approach from all land users.

Many plant species, such as buffel grass, have been deliberately introduced into the rangelands, most of which have the ability to invade ecosystems and adversely impact on the survival of native flora. Some weed species are having a significant impact on biodiversity at the genetic, species and community levels.

Australia is a signatory to the 1992 UN Convention on Biological Diversity and is committed to "... prevent the introduction of, control, or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species". If Australia is to protect its remaining biodiversity it will need to limit the impact of extremely threatening species by ensuring that further introductions are prevented in the future.

Recreation and tourism

The attraction of many of the State's natural areas has resulted in an explosive increase in the level of tourism which has the capacity to impact on biodiversity conservation objectives.

Nature-based tourism provides opportunities for fostering greater understanding of the natural environment and the need for biodiversity conservation. Nature-based tourism is synonymous with eco-tourism although the latter is more focused on the provision of interpretive and educative material. Eco-tourism comprises a number of interrelated aspects including:

- it is nature based;
- it is ecologically sustainable;
- it is environmentally educative;
- it is locally beneficial; and
- it generates tourist satisfaction.

Planners responsible for recreation and tourism developments must be cognizant of the potential for adverse environmental pressures including overcrowding, over-development, pollution, disturbance of wildlife and vehicle usage.

One of the key management planning aspects of natural area tourism is the way in which tourism activities are separated from other management aspects, such as rehabilitation or species recovery programs, in space or time. This is often referred to as zoning, where tourism activities are partially or totally excluded from parts of a reserve.

Destocking, dewatering and boundary fences

One of the first issues to be dealt with following acquisition is to ensure the removal of all domestic stock and decommissioning artificial water points. This is necessary to allow the recovery of native plants from the impacts of unrelenting grazing pressure sustained over a long period.

Once destocking is completed it is important that stock from neighbouring properties do not venture onto reserves, requiring the maintenance of boundary fences in a stock-proof condition, and vigilance in monitoring their upkeep.

CALM has had discussions with many of its neighbours over the maintenance of boundary fences and removal of straying stock. Most neighbours have reacted positively and are prepared to play their role in maintaining fences to ensure stock do not move across boundaries.

These types of issues and the way they are dealt with, raises the importance of establishing good neighbour relationships between all land users, so that the potential for conflict is reduced.

Good Neighbour Policy

The desirability of establishing clear and unambiguous relations with neighbours requires understanding, respect, and consistency, leading to productive relationships beneficial to all parties.

While CALM staff have been discussing the topic of good neighbourly relations for some time, only recently has the Department released a formal Draft Good Neighbour Policy for public review. This policy aims to provide clarity in the way the Department sets about dealing with a range of common cross-boundary issues.

However, a policy document such as this cannot hope to provide the solution to all events, and ongoing communication will be necessary by all parties in an effort to arrive at a mutual agreement over the way management issues are dealt with.

The Draft Policy has been distributed widely in WA and is open for comment for a period of 12 months. The

finalization of the policy will be conducted in consultation with primary producers, industry organization, local government, and special interest groups.

Challenges

The completion of initial planning activities allows the careful identification of key, prioritized environmental management issues, some of which have the potential to cause conflict with neighbours managing land for different (usually economic) outcomes. Strategic planning also provides an opportunity to look at the bigger picture in terms of overall nature conservation outcomes, while at the same time focusing on local areas and issues.

CALM faces many challenges including the need to improve knowledge about reserves through biological inventory surveys, research and monitoring. Understanding rangeland ecosystem function has exercised the minds of many eminent scientists over a very long period of time, with some insightful understanding resulting, but much more needs to be done. Coupled with these priorities is the need to address system-wide threats to biodiversity, such as pest animal and weed control, and landscape restoration for some highly degraded areas that result from inappropriate total grazing pressure. Addressing these problems will take time: for some parts of the landscape this may take decades, if not centuries, for recovery to occur.

The reality of conservation reserve management over such an extensive area of the rangelands requires an understanding of the need for additional resources, including appropriate levels of funding in the long term, necessary to properly address conservation objectives. The consideration of ecology and economics, side by side, provides a reality check for those involved in conservation planning, for it provides clarity in evaluating the motives for establishing a conservation reserve system with very long-term management timeframes that are inconceivable to economists and politicians.

Nature conservation will never be taken seriously so long as effectiveness is sacrificed in terms of short-term economic horizons. That is not to say that there should be an open cheque book approach to funding additional resource requirements, but there surely needs to be a greater level of openness in the discussion about biodiversity conservation motives and resourcing. After all, the conservation of our unique biodiversity underpins sustainability, which provides for inter-generational equity and well being.

CLUES TO THE FUTURE BASED ON REAL DATA

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Koonamore Reserve in South Australia is our longevity benchmark for long term rangeland vegetation monitoring, but back in 1965, Joe Ebersohn saw the need to distinguish between climatic and management impacts on the mulga country of SW Queensland. So he got two young 'uns, Bill Burrows and Ian Beale to set about measuring and describing the mulga shrublands of the land where they had been sent to work for the wool industry after graduating with Ag Science degrees. To achieve their goals, they put in place 70 kilometres of belt transects on two commercial properties, one SW of Quilpie and the other west of Wyandra.

The transects were marked with permanent, tagged, steel fence posts every 5 chains (101m). Every woody plant within two metres either side of the 5 chain steel surveyors chain that they ran out was identified and its location recorded to the nearest link (about 20cm) along that chain. Most lines ran roughly north-south and steep jump-ups and dense hophbush did not deter those enthusiastic young biologists from their path! Everything was carted in and done with utes – no 4WDs, GPS and Land System maps in the good old days.

The initial synthesis from the recordings was published in the *Australian Journal of Botany* in 1969 (vol 17: 539-552). A subsequent publication in 1985 (at the International Savanna Symposium) used data from repeat samplings up until 1984 to predict future shifts in populations in the medium term (up to 2060) – see Burrows *et al.* (2005) "Prediction of tree and shrub population changes in a semi-arid woodland". In: 'Ecology and management of the world's savannas' Aust. Acad. Sci., Canberra. pp. 208-212. As the authorship list suggests, these transects were also a training ground for many young scientists and technicians, as well as visiting overseas workers.

No data recordings have been done since 1984 but the lines were surveyed for elevation and for land system classification according to the WARLUS (Western Arid Region Land Use Study) categories that have been widely applied in western Queensland. Photographs were taken from every post along the transects at each recording date to give an extra visual dimension to the story. Recently, I (former DPI researcher at Charleville Pastoral Lab) and my niece Jenny (now working for DPI&F at Longreach) rephotographed much of the lines on the Quilpie property. The aim was to capture some photographic examples of the medium to long term changes, if any, that have occurred over 40 years and to build a case for re-recording the lines once seasons have improved. The country is extremely dry at present with many plants not readily identifiable to species level.

People like myself believe that this is priceless hard evidence of what is really happening in the grazing lands in response to climate, management technology shifts and social change in our rangelands. It was also an opportunity to use modern GPS technology to accurately locate the lines and posts in the face of migrating tracks, creeks, fence lines and property infrastructure. It is only after you have been away for a few decades that you realise just how much a property gradually changes in so many ways.

The assumption was, that because I had participated in the recording of the transects in the 1970s, I would readily refocus and remember where the lines were once back on the ground. I had also recently spent considerable time reviewing the records that are held in the Charleville offices. The assumption proved correct at the Quilpie property but a whole day was spent at the Wyandra one without sighting a single transect post. Even at Quilpie, significant thickening in places by gidyea and mulga made relocation of some pegs difficult despite their being in place, in good order and clearly tagged in most cases.

Peg losses were far more common from seismic survey lines than from mulga scrub pushing or decay. Data losses/misplacements were also encountered in the office, probably because of the rebuilding of the Charleville Pastoral Lab in the 1990s and the upheaval that resulted. Fortunately, earlier efforts by Peter Johnston and John Carter to adequately archive the data and files seems to have allowed most of the data and photos to survive in good condition to this time. Terry Beutel is now acting as custodian of those records and many others at CPL but much more can probably be done to update them with the assistance of local NRM groups and so preserve such long term records that are so pertinent to their region.

The collaboration and hospitality of the families that own or lease the properties involved is crucial also and we are very grateful to them. A couple of shots from Quilpie showing the change or lack of it since the early 1980s are included (see Photo Pairs 1 a-c). The 1965 photos are still in Charleville but my memory (fuzzy as charged) says that some places such as tops of ridges and creek frontages remain virtually the same while other areas have seen significant growth of mulga and gidyea since the 1970s. Mulga growth has been sufficient to provide trees 3-4m tall at densities that have allowed pushing for fodder in the current bad drought.

The less long-lived shrubs such as cassias and turkeybushes (*Eremophila* spp.) have done differing things, as the 1985 Burrows paper predicted. The cassias have been through 2 cycles of death and recruitment as predicted but the grey turkeybush seems not to have steadily increased as predicted. However the thickening of gidyea seems as predicted although all these impressions are data-free statements which may be contradicted when a new recording is done when seasons improve and 'dead' butts or twigs may resprout.

The plan is to revisit the Wyandra site to relocate the lines now that we have a better idea of why we failed to find them last time – new powerlines, seismic lines

and fencing and a chance to discuss tracks with the new manager who was not able to be there when we visited. Other property infrastructure changes there include a new shearing shed, loss of the old homestead by the road, SWER powerlines and radio telephones in place, and renewed boundary fences. It all reflects the ongoing endeavours of the people to live and prosper in the rangelands and to adapt to changing markets, social mores and climate fluctuations.

PS. As an example of how old pastoral monitoring sites can resurface as benchmarks, a small exclosure on

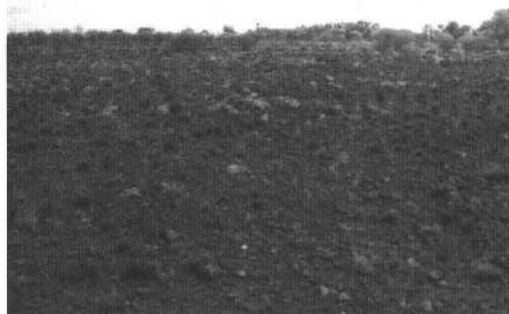
Mitchell grass country near Tambo that was set up in the 1960s and recorded 5 times up to 1982 is now being used by Queensland EPA researchers studying biodiversity. The site was set up on a minimal budget typical of the time (1 short project proposal to head office, 1 roll of netting and 1 bundle of steel posts) but the vegetation recording was rigorous, repeated, reported (Armidale ARS conference – the freezing BBQ one!) and archived. It too looks the same today as it did in 1980 and fits the conceptual model that David Orr and others paint of Mitchell grass country – it needs to be grazed (sensibly) or burnt periodically to remain a healthy grassland.



a. Quilpie run-on area 1980 (left) and 2006 (right) with huge growth of a mulga tree.



b. Quilpie edge of mulga grove 1980 (left) and 2006 (right). Grass eaten in the drought.



c. Quilpie rocky ridge 1980 (left) and 2006 (right). Some taller mulgas on left side. Stones unmoved!

Photo Pair 1 (a-c): Photographs taken from monitoring sites in the mulga shrublands located in south-west Queensland near Quilpie.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS – LESSONS FROM CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN PASTORALISTS

Dionne Walsh, Centralian Land Management
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The Centralian Land Management Association (CLMA) is the Central Australian pastoral industry's landcare group. Formed in 1988, it is one of Australia's most awarded landcare groups and enjoys a very high level of industry membership. In 2002, the CLMA canvassed its members to determine the interest in trialling Environmental Management Systems. Thirteen producers, representing 15 properties, volunteered to pilot EMS and the CLMA successfully applied to participate in the National Pilot Program for EMS in Agriculture (see Figure 1). This three year project is coming to an end and we are now finalising our findings.

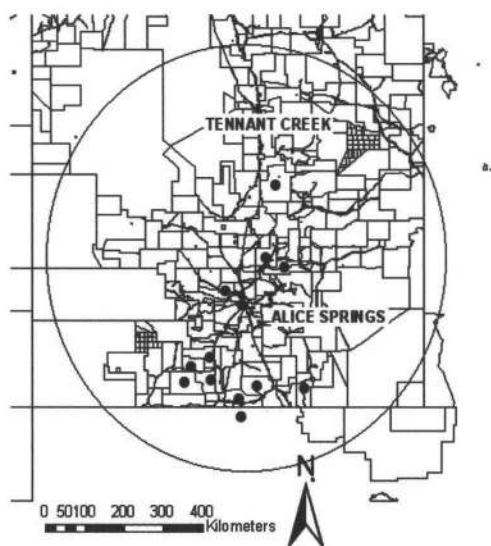


Figure 1: Locations of the participating properties in Central Australia (indicated by black dots).

The lessons we learnt are relevant to rangeland regions that have the following features:

- Family owned businesses rather than company owned businesses;
- Arid to semi-arid climates, with high climate variability;
- Large catchments with complex natural resource management issues;
- Extensive, low input production systems based on native vegetation; and
- Remoteness from the consumer, both physically and in the supply chain.

What we found:

- Our producers were motivated more by improving their environmental awareness and record keeping than market or regulatory benefits;
- Participants felt that future EMS work would be motivated by the need to deal with increasing red-tape and regulation;
- At this time, a third party audited EMS (e.g. ISO14001) would be overkill for the majority of family-owned pastoral businesses;
- Government agencies hold vast amounts of property-specific natural resource information and maps that are useful to producers;
- The complexity of EMS and the challenges of remoteness and distance in the rangelands require a high level of one-to-one extension support when developing an EMS;
- Group extension processes (like workshops) are appropriate for only a fraction of the development and implementation of an EMS.

The CLMA has developed several down-to-earth EMS workbooks and other aids. Please contact Dionne Walsh at the CLMA in Alice Springs for more information on (08) 8953 4230 or ems@clma.com.au.

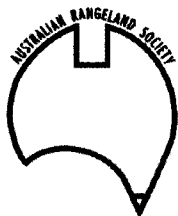
LOOKING FOR A CHALLENGE?

HOW ABOUT BECOMING THE ARS PRESIDENT?

The ARS Council would like to hear from anyone who would be interested in becoming the President of the Society. The current President, David Wilcox, is looking to stand down at the ARS Conference in September. David has done a fantastic job over the last three years but now feels that it is time to hand over the reins.

Council requires a person to hold the President's position from the Conference until the elections at the AGM in May 2007. Ideally the person holding the position would then nominate in 2007 to take on the role on a longer-term basis.

Anyone with an interest in taking over this role, or who wishes some further details about what the job entails, should contact the Secretary of the Society, Sandra Van Vreeswyk (Ph: 08 9347 5120 or email: Sandra.VanVreeswyk@dpi.wa.gov.au).



A “Cutting Edge” program at the Australian Rangeland Society 14th Biennial Conference September 2006.

The Australian Rangeland Society Conference in Renmark, South Australia from the 4th – 7th of September 2006 is an official Australian event for the “International Year of Deserts and Desertification”, to be followed on the afternoon of 7th and 8th September by the Lake Eyre Basin Biennial Conference, titled ‘LEB Today and Tomorrow’.

The design of the ARS conference program is aimed at the “Cutting Edge” with the main fabric being *People, Place and Possibilities*, with threads or yarns being woven by presenters selected from over one hundred contributed papers. Key themes running through all sessions include innovation, alternatives and sustainability.

The opening keynote speaker is Barney Foran, well known by many for his early years as a rangeland researcher in Alice Springs. Barney played a major role in organising the conference held in South Australia 10 years ago. He is going to remind us what we came up with in terms of our vision of the rangelands in 2010 and examine how this relates to current trends.

Nick Palousis, co-ordinator of *The Natural Edge Project*, which provides advice to governments and corporations on environmental and economically sustainable initiatives will give us all a new perspective on the rangelands’ “natural edge”. Nick is sure to stimulate our thinking and draw out a more lateral approach to sustainable development and management of our natural resources and assets.

To commemorate the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, Philip Young will present the current state and future trend in the grasslands of Inner Mongolia and probe at the underlying drivers of desertification, comparing it to the situation in Australia. A session lead by Mark Stafford Smith is dedicated to this topic and includes exciting rangeland speakers Hugh Pringle and Angus Hopkins.

Panel sessions will maximise available time for a greater number of presenters with a panel of experts asking questions and drawing out key messages. Each day will conclude with a rangeland muster. At this time, delegates will be given an unexpected taste of the posters on display, which they may want to explore later, in more detail.

The field tours on Wednesday will cover a range of country from flood plain and water issues, to pastoral lands and land managed for conservation. All tours will finish the day with dinner at Banrock Station on the banks of the River Murray.

In keeping with the aim of the Society to be a forum for sharing information, the organising committee has taken a bold step by combining the ARS Conference with the Lake Eyre Basin Conference. In this way delegates will have the opportunity to attend both events and to share information and ideas of relevance that could be both broader or more in depth. It is also a great event to network with the extended ‘rangeland family’. This is a great opportunity for land managers, scientists, policy makers and all interested people, don’t miss out.

If you haven’t received your registration brochure or for more information check the Australian Rangeland Society website: www.austrangesoc.com.au

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Re *Range Management Newsletter* 04/3 (November, 2004)

I read with interest the article on buffel grass and compliment the Heaslip Family on their generosity.

The following is from practical observation only. Many landholders may find some similarities in different parts of Australia.

Our locality is about 160 kilometres south of Broken Hill and not far from the South Australian border. We first spread buffel grass in the 1960's when ripping rabbits or trying to control woody weeds. The variety suggested by (Government) Departments was Gayndah. We also brought home some seed from the Gascoyne area in Western Australia in 1968. This type did not do well and has now completely died out.

We have two exclusion areas near our homestead and it has been interesting to observe the buffel grass over so many different seasons. These areas can also be compared to the outside where kangaroos "give it curry".

Stock, especially cattle, have been observed to eat the buffel grass down pretty short but when the seasons have been kind most stands are able to survive and seed. However, during the past five years of very low rainfall we estimate that 75% of our buffel grass has died. This is contrary to the predictions from Queensland buffel grass country.

We observed the great stands of buffel grass about the Alice Springs and Ayers Rock area in the 1970's, and were determined to further our efforts regarding the spread of seed. Unfortunately the elements and the wildlife seem to be winning. The only grass we have found to be tough enough, especially for sandhill erosion is couch grass. Plants a few runners after a rain and it usually spreads quickly.

Yours faithfully

AAS Withers
Springwood Station
Via Wentworth NSW 2648
ARS Member No 428

INTERNATIONAL RANGELAND CONGRESS

There are only another two years to go! The VIII International Rangeland Congress is scheduled to be held in conjunction with the XXI International Grassland Congress from 29th June – 5th July 2008 in Huhhot, China. This will be the first time that these two important International Congresses have met together.

The First Announcement for this Joint Meeting was recently distributed by the Organising Committee. This circular briefly lists the Programme Sessions planned for the Congress. These include sessions discussing resources and ecology, production and multi-functions of rangeland/grassland systems. Seven Pre-Congress tours have also been organised including visits to the Silk Road, the Loess Plateau and a tour of Mongolia.

More details about the Congress are available at the Congress web-site (www.igc-irc2008.org) or from:

2008 IGC/IRC Secretariat
Institute of Grassland Science
China Agricultural University
2 Yuan MingYuan Xilu,
Haidian, Beijing, 100094
P R CHINA

Ph: +86 10 62731666
Fax: +86 10 62732799
Email: secretariat2008@hotmail.com

According to the website, an Announcement incorporating the Call for Papers and Registration Form will be distributed in December 2006

NEW MEMBERS

Jamie Gorry
25 Spencer Street
ROMA QLD 4455

Marion Murphy
42 Birrale Avenue
MILDURA VIC 3500

Anke Frank
School of Biological Sciences
University of Sydney
CAMPERDOWN NSW 2005

Elizabeth Makonnen Desta
27 Enmore Street
TRANGIE NSW 2823

RESTORATION OF RABBIT WARRENS LIKELY TO BE A SLOW PROCESS

David Eldridge, Department of Natural Resources,
School of Biological, Earth and
Environmental Sciences, University of NSW 2052 NSW.
Email: d.eldridge@unsw.edu.au.

A recent study in an area of semi-arid woodland at Yathong Nature Reserve in western NSW has indicated a very slow recovery of vegetation on rabbit warrens that had been ripped 5 to 7 years previously. The impact of disturbance by rabbits on plants and soils was studied on a gradient out from the centre of the ripped warrens. Litter cover, plant cover and plant diversity remained unchanged with increasing distance from the centre of the warren. However, the cover of bare soil declined, and cryptogam cover increased, with increasing distance from the warren.

Three plant species dominated the warren mounds; the exotic annual grass *Schismus barbatus*, the exotic forb *Salsola kali* var. *kali* and the native annual forb *Chenopodium melanocarpum*. The perennial grass *Austrostipa scabra* was dominant off the warrens. Seedbank studies were also carried out in the glasshouse. Warrens had the lowest numbers of species, while the number of species was greatest on the edge of the warren.

A supporting study at the site showed that plant composition on ripped warrens was substantially different to that on the unripped warrens, though there was little difference in the quality of the vegetation between unripped and ripped warrens, i.e. they were both dominated by weedy species. Despite the fact that ripping may be having little effect on plant composition in the short term, it is still important management tool to reduce reinvasion by rabbits post-RCD. Unripped warrens had about 10-times more active warren entrances (mean = 4.01) compared with ripped warrens (0.43), and larger warrens had more entrances.

Taken together, our results reinforce the view that rabbits have a destructive effect on surface soils and vegetation in semi-arid woodlands, and suggest that restoration of the original woodland vegetation after warren ripping is likely to be a slow process. The impact of rabbits on surface soils is the subject of ongoing research.

Further information about this work can be found in our recently published article in *Restoration Ecology*, Vol 14 (1), p 50-59.

REINTRODUCED NATIVE MAMMALS 'ENGINEER' THE RESTORATION OF DEGRADED ARID LANDSCAPES

Alex James, School of Biological, Earth and
Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales,
Sydney, NSW, 2052.
Email: a.james@student.unsw.edu.au

Many mammals are now locally extinct over much of arid Australia. Their reintroduction is critical, not only for their continued survival, but for the re-establishment of ecosystem function and the restoration of degraded environments. Given the generally low and patchy distribution of resources in arid areas, the pits constructed by semi-fossorial (digging) animals while foraging are likely to be important for concentrating scarce water, litter and nutrients, and for successful plant germination and establishment.

Within an arid shrubland in central South Australia we compared: (1) the density of foraging pits among dunes, gibber plains and the intervening ecotones; (2) the mass of soil excavated by Greater Bilbies and Burrowing Bettongs (within an enclosure), Gould's Sand Goanna (within and outside of an enclosure), and European Rabbits (outside an enclosure); and (3) the concentrations of litter, nutrients and viable seeds within these pits compared with the surrounding soil.

Pits covered up to 0.9% of the dunes and ecotones, and density was greater in the dunes and ecotones compared with the gibbers, and in the paddock occupied by bilbies, bettongs and goannas compared with the grazed paddock containing only goannas and rabbits. Soil excavation ranged from 6 t ha⁻¹ in the dunes to 1.3 t ha⁻¹ in the gibber plains. Larger pits captured more litter, and the underlying soil contained higher concentrations of total carbon and nitrogen compared with non-pit surface soils. Although no plants germinated from surface soil, 1307 individuals from 46 genera emerged from litter collecting in the pits. The study indicates that reintroduced semi-fossorial mammals are critical for the creation of fertile microsites in arid landscapes, and suggests that a number of key ecosystem processes have been lost with the decimation of Australia's mammal fauna.

More information about this study is available by contacting the author.

INFORMATION SNIPPETS

Ecological Society of Australia Conference

The ESA 2006: Ecology Across the Tasman Conference will be held from 28th August - 1st September in Wellington, New Zealand. This is the third joint conference of the New Zealand Ecological Society and the Ecological Society of Australia.

All ecologists are invited to a week of stimulating discussion mixed with fun social events and field trips in the wilds of Wellington. This conference will enable people from all sectors of ecology to interact and exchange information, and to discuss current and envisioned developments in ecology. A four-day scientific programme is planned, and there will also be exhibitions, social events and field trips to some of Wellington's major ecological attractions.

Further details are available from the Conference website at <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/ecology06/>. Although it is too late to submit a paper, it is not too late to register to go!

International Landcare Conference

The International Landcare Conference will be held in Melbourne from October 8th-11th, 2006.

The focus of the Conference will be: "People and the environment, creating future landscapes, lifestyles and livelihoods". It will provide an opportunity for people to:

- exchange ideas and consider future issues building on the Landcare vision of cooperative community-based resource management to protect the environment and support society into the 21st Century;
- build on the contributions made in previous international and national Landcare conferences; and
- contribute to building social capital and community and agency networks for rural, regional and urban resource management.

Keynote speakers include Maude Barlow (The Council Of Canadians), Bobbie Brazil (Australian Landcare Council) and Jack Whelan (The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum).

More details are available from the Conference website at www.internationallandcareconference2006.com.au or by phoning the Conference Managers, Waldron Smith Management, on (03) 9645 6311.

Call for Donations to the Jill Landsberg Trust Fund

The Jill Landsberg Trust Fund has been established to honour the life of an eminent Australian ecologist – Dr Jill Landsberg – who died prematurely in May 2005.

Jill Landsberg's outstanding contributions to ecology extended back 25 years. The common theme to Jill's ecological research interests was the conservation of biodiversity in landscapes managed mainly for primary production. She also made a significant contribution to the conservation of threatened species, through her long service on the Australian Government's Endangered Species Scientific Advisory Committee.

Jill was awarded the Gold Medal of the Ecological Society of Australia in 2005, and was a valued member of the Australian Rangeland Society since joining in 1990. She was also an inspiration to many young ecologists as a compassionate critic and a role model.

The Jill Landsberg Trust has now been established to accumulate and use funds to further Jill's ambitions of training and mentoring young ecologists. The Trust fund will be used to help postgraduate students in applied ecology enhance their degrees.

Tax deductible donations to the Trust can be lodged using the form included on the ESA website at: <http://www.ecolsoc.org.au/What%20we%20do/Endowments.html>.

Those wishing to know more about Jill's contributions to ecology should read the tribute written by Jacqui Stol included in *RMN* 05/2 (July 2005).

New Publication on Grazing Management Near Waterways is Now Available

Land & Water Australia's 'Rivers' programmes have just released a new publication entitled *Stock and Waterways: a Manager's Guide*.

This guide, written by J Staton and J O'Sullivan, is full of practical suggestions, diagrams and case studies and is described as 'a must for landholders and anyone working with graziers.'

This guide is designed to help land managers:

- recognise riparian land and its multiple values;
- identify how stock access and grazing in and around riparian land can be improved; and
- develop a strategy to manage riparian land productively and sustainably.

The publication can be downloaded free of charge from the on-line products catalogue section of the Land and Water website (www.lwa.gov.au). If you prefer, a hard-copy can also be obtained through the website.

Community Water Grants Available

The Australian Government has announced the chance for community organisations, schools and the Indigenous communities around Australia to apply for a Community Water Grant to save and protect one of our most precious resources, our water.

Community Water Grants, which is one of the three national programmes in the \$2 billion Australian Government Water Fund, is providing a total of \$200 million over five years to help communities play a positive role in tackling Australia's water crisis. 1,750 projects are already under way around Australia.

Grants of up to \$50,000 are available for projects related to:

- water saving and efficiency;
- water recycling; and
- water treatment – improving surface and groundwater health.

Community Water Grants are open to most community-based organisations that want to take action by implementing practical, on-the-ground projects that help solve local water problems. Eligible applicants include agricultural, conservation and other community groups, Indigenous organisations, sporting clubs, schools, local governments and the private sector. Projects must engage the local community and have clear public benefits to be eligible. Projects must also comply with relevant planning, health and environmental regulations and guidelines.

Application forms and guidelines are available from the Australian Government Water Fund website at www.australia.gov.au/communitywatergrants or by calling 1 800 780 730. Applications close on 25 August 2006.



The Australian Rangeland Society

ABN 43 008 784 414

2006 ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS

[Ed – This is an edited version of the report delivered at the Annual General Meeting held in May 2006].

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*David Wilcox, President, Australian Rangeland Society,
54 Broome Street, Cottesloe WA 6011.
Email: dgwilcox@cygnus.uwa.edu.au*

It is with pleasure that I present the Annual Report of the Council of the Society for the period January to December 2005.

Council Meetings

Council met six times during the year. Five of these meetings were by telephone hook-up. The first meeting of the year was a two day face-to-face meeting held in Adelaide and attended also by the Chairman of the Publications Committee.

Council in person meetings are costly to run and arrange. They are held on an annual basis, in alternate years the meetings are held in conjunction with the biennial conference. In a Society such as this where members are scattered throughout this vast country it is essential that Council members meet as a body from time to time so that they may develop a corporate ethic and a feeling of relationship with one another. It is hoped that future Councils will maintain this practice. Council funded an in-person meeting of the Publications committee in December 2005 when the report of a Working Group on publications was discussed.

Tele-conferences are adequate for strictly business meetings, but are quite inadequate for the purpose of defining strategies for the future or for difficult decision making. On occasion, use was made of an out-of-session process so that urgent matters might be decided quickly.

The matters covered in the deliberations of the Council included changes to the Articles of the Association of the Society, the travel grants, fellowship awards, the web site, the business plan of the Society, *The Rangeland Journal* and the *Rangeland Management Newsletter* and the financial situation of the Society.

Some of the specific changes include:

Travel Grant Awards

Council decided upon the awards which will be made and limited the amount that would be made available in total in each year. The conditions of the award were made more clear and the application forms are now available

on the web site. It has to be remembered that successful applicants are expected to provide a report on the use of the grant for publication in the Newsletter.

This year's awards were made to Dr Leigh Hunt to assist him to attend a meeting on savannah grasslands in South Africa and to Dr Robert Pearce to assist him to travel to Australia to present a paper at the September conference of the society and to travel in Australia.

Council expects to be able to continue the awards at a modest level even though the cost of maintaining electronic publication is a drain on reserves.

Honours Sub-committee

Some years ago it was provided that worthy members would be awarded the title of Fellow of the Society. The process was never formalized nor was provision made for a regular award to be made. Council has asked Dr A McR Holm to lead a sub-committee with Dr A D Wilson and Mr. Eric Anderson with suitable terms of reference and to report to Council on the number of awards to be made, their frequency and the criteria that should be used to identify suitable recipients.

Publications of the Society

Review of the publications of the Society

On the recommendation of the Publications Committee Council commissioned a review of the Publications of the Society, the potential place of publishing major works on rangeland matters and of the Web Site of the Society. The Working Group so formed comprising Dr. Dionne Walsh (chairman), Dr. Ron Hacker, Dr. Jocelyn Davies, Professor John Taylor and Dr. John Childs met through phone conferences and delivered its report to Council in October 2005. Council is very grateful to Dr. Walsh and her committee for producing a comprehensive report upon which the Society can build in order to enhance the status of the Journal and its other publications. While the Publications Committee has had an opportunity to review the report Council has not yet been able to make decisions upon the many recommendations that were made. Many of the matters require a financial analysis of their impact. As the Society is coming to terms with the additional burden of producing the Journal electronically, it has proved no easy task to decide upon the priority which the various recommendations should assume.

The principal recommendations made by the Review Group surrounded the enhancement of the international appeal of the Journal, enlarging the number of Associate Editors so that more disciplines and regions of interest can be represented on that group thereby reflecting the broad range of issue that Council wishes to see canvassed, revising the presentation and content of the *Range*

Management Newsletter and the upgrading of the Web Site as well as the appointment of a person to take over the day-to-day running of this means of communication both to members and to the public.

The Rangeland Journal

The Rangeland Journal is one of the principal activities of the Society. The Journal is now published electronically under an agreement with CSIRO Publishing for an initial period of three years. Two such issues have now been produced in a new, near A4, format with two columns providing for easier reading. At the same time the opportunity was taken to bring the Notices to Contributors up to date and to make the Scope of the Journal more international, more broadly based and moved significantly away from its earlier orientation towards production. Since the introduction of electronic publication there has been an upturn on the flow of papers to the Journal which is very pleasing. Our associates in the electronic publication, CSIRO Publishing, are convinced that the Journal will be published more frequently as the number of papers increases. It is hoped that their confidence for the future will be fulfilled.

Members of the Society may now gain access via the CSIRO Publishing Web Site to all Journal papers published since its inception. Data from the server shows that there has been a large number of institutional downloads for articles occurring in the past three years.

The cost of publishing the Journal in its new mode is about \$22 000 per year which is more than the cost of self-publication. In addition we have lost the subscriptions of the institutional members, e.g. Libraries, who have been transferred to CSIRO Publishing. The net cost is therefore in excess of \$25 000 against which should be deducted the cost of self-publishing.

Council has been convinced that the move to electronic publication was necessary if the Journal was to survive in the electronic age in which most readers of the scientific journals use this medium for their research and for the compilation of information.

Council and Society are very much in debt to Dr. Wal Whalley and his editorial associates for producing an excellent Journal which is now accepted by all the abstracting publications so high is its reputation. Editing a scientific journal is not an easy task. It is continuous, and at times onerous, requiring a sound scientific knowledge and a great capacity to persist with authors and referees. All members will surely join me in thanking the Editorial team for the selfless way in which they have volunteered to assist the Society.

The Range Management Newsletter

Three issues of the *Range Management Newsletter* were edited in the current year by the Editor, Dr. Noelene Duckett. There was a small decline in the number of major articles received even though the Newsletter provides a forum for a range of articles and reports of a general nature. It is hoped that members will take advantage of the opportunity to put forward partly tested ideas as well

as opinions in the Newsletter. Council has yet to comment upon recommendations made for the Newsletter in the Working Group's report. It has been suggested that the newsletter be published electronically and that it should come out quarterly. This latter depends, of course, upon the use made of the publication by members and others. It also recommended that the format and presentation of the Newsletter should be upgraded. Obviously enough this will require additional funds.

The Production Manager of the Newsletter Mr Malcolm Howes has continued to produce a publication of which the Society should be proud. It is produced on time and is always of great interest.

The ARS Web Site

The Web Site of the Society is now about three years old and is showing signs that it could do with some rejuvenation. Progress with web sites in general has been extremely rapid in the past few years. The Working Group recognized that it was not immediately attractive to the user, nor was it current on some areas. The Group has recommended that a person responsible for the Web Site should be appointed so that day-to day matters are attended to within an acceptable time. It has also suggested that greater use of the site should be made by the Society in several areas including "position statements of 'briefing papers' and ARS policies. Some members have difficulties with this proposal as they consider that it is not always possible to develop position of universal acceptance within the Society. Council is of the view that such papers can be placed on the Web Site as part of a forum for open debate on a range of subjects. It intends to pursue this innovation on the Web Site in order to attract those who use the internet as a source of information and thus increase the membership of the Society.

It has been pointed out that all papers published in the Journal are already available on the internet through various links. The Newsletter might also be placed there in the future. It is proposed that suitable "search engines" will be available to those who wish to scrutinize the contents for their special interests. Council believes that limiting the Web Site as a research and information tool will not allow the Society to be actively involved in the numerous issues currently open for discussion in rangelands. It will research further the opportunities for its Web Site to be truly interactive. The potential cost of this approach to increasing the circulation of professional opinion on rangelands will be closely monitored.

The Publications Committee

The Publications Committee is extremely hard working and in the past year has seen several matters brought to successful fruition, notably the review of the publications of the Society and bedding down of electronic publication of the Journal. The Committee is very ably chaired by Dr. Ken Hodgkinson who continually labours for improvements in this portfolio. He has been punctilious in the maintenance of first class communication with Council and for this Council is particularly grateful. He

has initiated a dialogue with the representatives of the China Grassland Society which will be organising the next International Rangeland Congress. The Publications Committee is negotiating to produce a special issue of the Journal entitled the Grasslands of China to mark the holding of the IRC in China.

The Financial Position of the Society

The Financial and Audit Officer, Mr. Tim Ferraro, has been very diligent in the past two years in his overhaul of the financial affairs of the Society. The Society is now fully compliant with all ASIC requirements. It is a pleasure to report that the auditors were able to provide an unqualified report of our accounts for the past year ending in December 2005.

The financial affairs of the Society remain on a strong footing though there was a loss of \$25 211 in the year compared with a profit of \$40 357 for the previous year. This year is a non-conference year and the loss in operating was expected. We anticipate that the Renmark conference planned for September 2006 will result in a profit and restore the losses made in the 2005 year. The total equity of the Society is \$176 228 which is more than sufficient to cover any liabilities.

As explained elsewhere in this report the financial status of the Society depends in the long run on a vigorous membership. While we might be able to maintain our current program although dependent upon a successful conference to provide the required funds, the Society itself needs to direct its attention towards a greater involvement of the members in a wider range of activities of interest to them.

Membership

A comprehensive report from the Subscription Secretary was presented at the Annual General Meeting. The principal points of the report are

- Membership numbers continue to decline. There were 267 in May 2006 compared with 244 in May 2005. This is a matter of concern in respect of the viability of the Society. Some Full members of the Society changed to Part membership as a consequence of the provision of the Journal to them through employer's subscription.
- A comparison of full year figures serves to be a more reliable guide to membership. In December 2005 there were 321 members of the Society managed by it and a further 61 now being managed by CSIRO Publications giving a total of 382. This compares with 438 at the same time in 2004, 434 in 2003 and 427 in 2002.
- The Society continues to attract new members, but we are not retaining those who join. Approximately 70% of new members fail to re-subscribe in the two years following their initial membership.
- There was a pleasing and positive response to the letter from the President to those with apparently lapsed membership. More than 50% of those who were contacted rejoined the Society.

- About 6% of members are located outside Australia. It is clear then that the Society will need to recruit more members. As noted elsewhere in this report it is considered that an increase in the membership must come from an awakened interest through a revitalized web site and through other measures which appeal to users and potential recruits other than our publications and the bi-annual conference.

Some General Observations

There are some general matters that I would like to bring to your notice. They are concerned with the governance of the Society and merit inclusion in this report.

The Council and Committees of the Society are entirely voluntary. If payment had to be made for the services provided by these volunteers the Society would rapidly go out of existence since the amount of time which is donated by the individuals concerned is very large. In the absence of volunteer support the annual subscription would have to be significantly increased. In the past officials of governments departments were permitted to allot a limited number of hours of duty time to causes such as professional societies since it was then agreed that such activity maintained the specific discipline and was, furthermore, an invaluable part of training in professionalism.

In today's environment where programs and processes order the lives of those in government employ, where many of our members spend their time, this seeming altruistic attitude on the part of their employers no longer pertains. In consequence, those volunteers in the Society are now devoting more and more of their personal and free time to Society business and to the benefit of the remaining members.

I am of the view that the Society will not survive in the long term without the support of members in many capacities. I am not suggesting that Council need be larger or that there should be an augmentation of the various committees that serve the Society. I am inclined to the view that Council should set up more *ad hoc* groups to carry out special tasks. The re-creation of the Web Site is just one topic. Another would be the preparation of position statements on various aspects of rangelands and their use. In all circumstances where these groups are established I would urge you all to respond positively to a call.

It is important that the Society continues to represent itself as a professional body with a capacity to respond to the public debate on rangeland issues whether these have an orientation towards economic and social activities, to conservation of the natural biodiversity of the rangelands, to governance in the rangelands, to sustainable use for any purpose, to multiple land use or to cooperative land use between parties. Future Councils might well consider the production of relevant discussion papers following deliberate forums on these subjects. The Society must be able to convince the community that it is a responsible body capable of producing well argued cases in support of rangelands.

AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY AWARDS

The Society has two awards to assist members with either:

- travel expenses associated with attending a conference or some other activity, or
- studies related to the rangelands.

Applications for each award will be considered on a yearly basis and close in November of each year. Any member of the Society interested in either award is invited to apply.

Australian Rangeland Society Travel Grant

This grant is intended to assist eligible persons to attend a meeting, conference or congress related to the rangelands; or to assist eligible persons with travel or transport costs to investigate a topic connected with range management or to implement a program of rangeland investigation not already being undertaken. The grant is available for overseas travel and/or travel within Australia. It is not intended for subsistence expenses.

Australian Rangeland Society Scholarship

This scholarship is for assisting eligible members with formal study of a subject or course related to the rangelands and which will further the aims of the Australian Rangeland Society. The scholarship is available for study assistance either overseas or within Australia. It is not intended to defray travel expenses.

How to Apply

Members interested in either award should submit a written outline of their proposed activity. Applications should clearly address how the intended activity (ie. travel or study) meets the aims of the Society. Applications should be brief (less than 1000 words) and should be submitted to the Secretary, Sandra Van Vreeswyk, before **30 November 2006**. An application form can be downloaded from the ARS website at www.austrangesoc.com.au. For further information contact Sandra Van Vreeswyk by phone on (08) 9347 5120 or Email at sandra.vanvreeswyk@dpi.wa.gov.au.

Conditions

Applications for the Travel Grant should include details of the costs and describe how the grant is to be spent. Applications for the Scholarship should include details of the program of study or course being undertaken and the institution under which it will be conducted, and information on how the scholarship money will be spent. For both awards details of any other sources of funding should be given.

Applications for either award should include the names of two referees.

Finally, on completing the travel or study, recipients are required to fully acquit their award. They are also expected to write an article on their activities suitable for publication in the *Range Management Newsletter* or *The Rangeland Journal* as appropriate, and for the Australian Rangeland Society website, within six months of completion of their travel or study.

Eligibility

No formal qualifications are required for either award. There are no age restrictions and all members of the Society are eligible to apply. Applications are encouraged from persons who do not have organisational support.

There is a restriction on both awards for overseas travel or study assistance in that the applicants must have been members of the Society for at least 12 months. The awards can be for Australian members to travel to or study overseas or for overseas members to travel to or study in Australia.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM



The Australian Rangeland Society

TAX INVOICE / RECEIPT ABN 43 008 784 414

Please complete and return to the Subscription Manager, Ian Watson, PO Box 483, NORTHAM WA 6401
Ph (618) or (08) 9690 2179: Fax (618) or (08) 9622 1902: iwatson@agric.wa.gov.au

I, [name]

of [address]

Postcode Email address

Phone Fax

apply for membership of the Australian Rangeland Society and agree to be bound by the regulations of the Society as stated in the Articles of Association and Memorandum.

☐ Enclosed is a cheque for \$AU..... for full/part* membership for an individual/student/institution* for the calendar year 2006.

(* delete as appropriate)

☐ Charge my Mastercard VISA Bankcard AU\$.....for full/part* membership for an individual/student/institution* for the calendar year 2006.

Card No.: _ _ _ _ _ Expiry Date: _ _ _ _ _

Signature:..... Date: Cardholders Name:.....

If you were introduced to the Society by an existing member please include their name here

Please list details of your institution & student number if you are applying for student rates

Membership Rates; GST inclusive

Australia

Overseas Airmail

Individual or Family -

Full (Journal + Newsletter)/Student

\$85.00/\$65.00

\$105.00/\$85.00

Part (Newsletter only)/Student

\$50.00/\$35.00

\$60.00/\$40.00

Company -

Full (Journal + Newsletter)

\$115.00

\$140.00

Part (Newsletter only)

\$65.00

\$75.00

- All rates are quoted in AUSTRALIAN currency and must be paid in AUSTRALIAN currency.
- Membership is for the calendar year 1st January to 31st December. Subscriptions paid after 1st October will be deemed as payment for the following year.

Australian Rangeland Society Privacy Statement. Consistent with national privacy legislation, the Australian Rangeland Society (ARS) will only use members' personal contact information for keeping its records up to date, and enabling member access to ARS products and services e.g. meetings, events, newsletters, journals and conferences. ARS will not use members' information as supplied to ARS for any other purpose and it will not disclose the information to any other party without the member's consent. This will be achieved through email communication or any other means as appropriate.