



The Australian Rangeland Society

RANGE MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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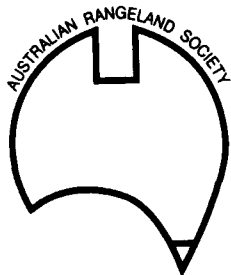
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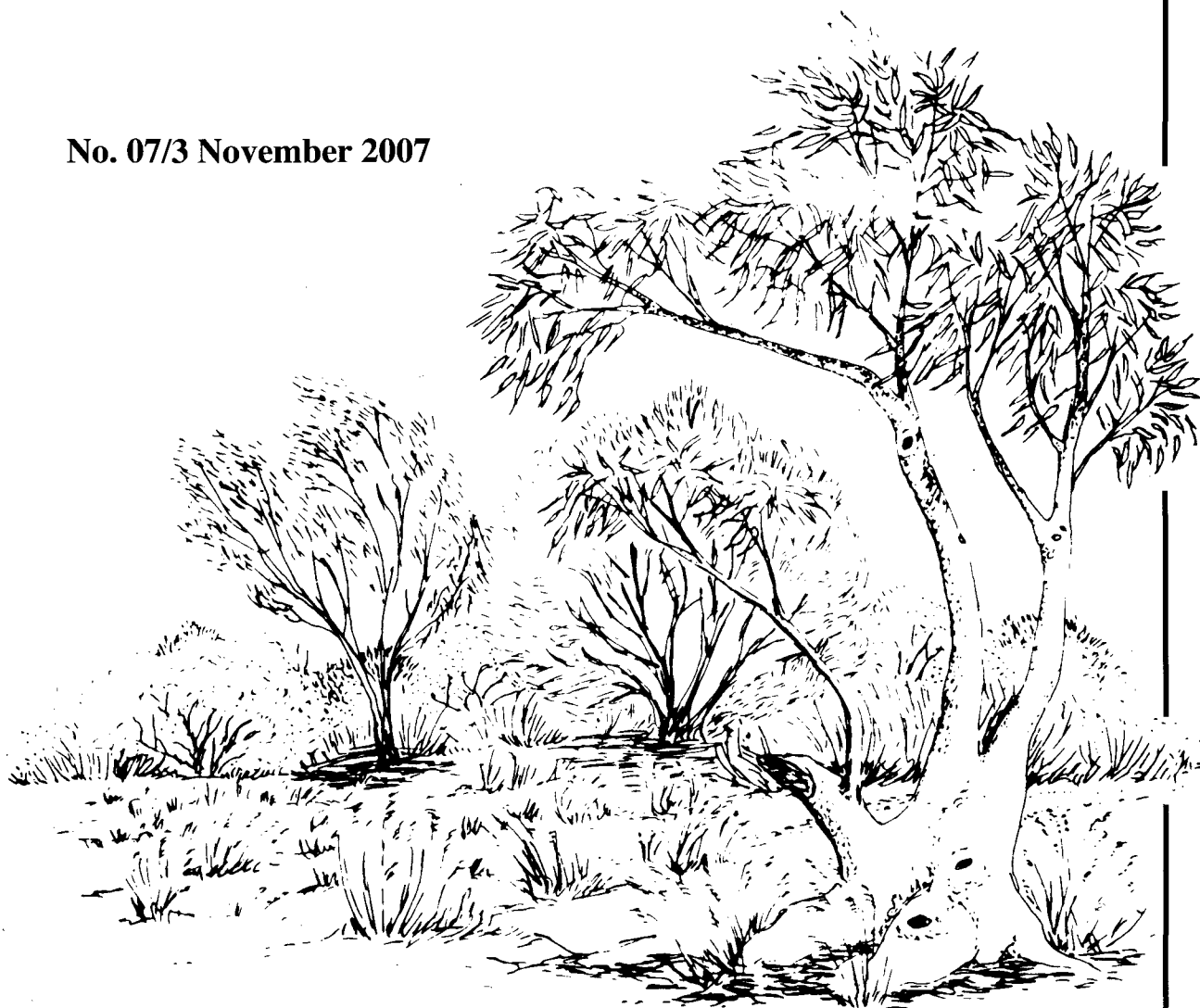
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FROM THE EDITOR

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Welcome to the final *Range Management Newsletter* for 2007. Opening this issue is an article by Phil Holmes which examines the usefulness of cost of production as an agricultural benchmark. This article was written in response to Bill Holmes' contribution in the last *RMN*. The authors agree on some aspects but not on others - why not read both articles and see what you think?

Have you been considering undertaking some further study but not sure if you could manage? Perhaps you should talk to a Rangeland Champion, one of a group of eleven specially-selected people who are passionate about further education and are willing to offer encouragement and support to both potential and currently enrolled students. An initiative of Rangeland Australia, this project has recently been established with funding support from the National Landcare Programme. Read about the project and meet the Champions on page 4. You can also read about some of the post-graduate courses to be offered by Rangelands Australia in 2008 on page 11.

In 2008, there are at least two important rangeland conferences scheduled. This issue includes an update on the Joint International Grassland Congress - International Rangeland Congress to be held in China in late June/early July next year. Many details are now available from the conference website (www.igc-irc2008.org) – note that early bird registration closes on the **29 February 2008**. I hope that some of you intending to travel to China will consider volunteering a conference report for the *RMN*. Also in this issue, I have included some introductory information about the ARS Biennial Conference, to be held in Charters Towers in late September/early October 2008. The theme for the conference will be “A Climate of Change in the Rangelands”. Conference organisers have called for abstracts of poster and spoken paper presentations – they are due by **10 February 2008**.

This issue also contains an excellent update on the status of the various ARS publications. Council and the Publications Committee have been working very hard to improve the Society's publications over the last few years – read what they have been doing on page 8. A new ARS Subscription Manager has also been found to take over Ian Watson's role. Find out who volunteered on page 9. Following this, the newsletter closes with a couple of shorter articles including a report on one of the Lake Eyre Basin projects and a brief obituary of former rangeland researcher Roger Oxley.

I would like to receive contributions for the next issue of the *RMN*, due out in March 2008, by late January. Please think about contributing an article.

Finally I would like to wish all the readers of the *Range Management Newsletter* a happy and healthy festive season. See you in 2008!

SOME ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON COST OF PRODUCTION

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A recent article in this newsletter (Bill Holmes, *RMN* 07/3 July 2007) presented a view on the usefulness or otherwise of cost of production as an agricultural benchmark. Many of the points raised in the article call for a response and additional perspective.

Some of the author's views made good sense, but the major points of difference are:

- Benchmarking the performance of a farm business should always be conducted at two levels. The primary level is always the whole farm business and the secondary level is the enterprise or enterprises being conducted by it. Entirely different and unrelated benchmarks are required for these two processes.
- Agriculture is not a unique industry and there is no reason why benchmarks used in other industries, including cost of production, cannot be used successfully in agriculture.
- Compliance accounts are not the preferred information source for agricultural business performance.
- The timeframe used for accurate and meaningful appraisal of the farm business extends well beyond one year.
- Cost of production is not the most important benchmark at the enterprise level of agriculture and a lower cost of production is not always meritorious.
- Farm business performance appraisal and outcome modeling are two different processes. There is an important role for both and they should not be confused.

A Background to Benchmarking

Private benchmarking of Australian farm business performance has been available for interested producers for at least thirty years. General interest in this procedure has been limited mostly to the minority of producers who are profit driven. This is in contrast to ABARE surveys of Australian agriculture that have been conducted for at least as long and, because they are based on a random selection of farm businesses each year, are more representative of industry wide performance. Private benchmarking has become more sophisticated over time with the development of new benchmarks at both the whole farm business level and the enterprise level, whereas the format of the ABARE surveys has changed little over time.

Cost of production is a relatively recent development in private benchmarking, appearing in the early 1990's and there is no hiding from the fact that it was borrowed as a concept from other industries. It was an attempt to advance from the rudimentary and often misleading approach of gross margin analysis which completely ignored fixed costs and was also an important first step in attempting to quantify one of the more important components of business risk at the enterprise level. Like any other benchmark, cost of production has inherent flaws and limitations, but as long as these are fully understood, it is nevertheless a useful tool.

Private benchmarking databases will always suffer from the bias of being skewed towards the top end of farm business performance and ABARE surveys will always suffer from lack of specific performance detail at the enterprise level. For this reason, it is prudent to refer to both datasets if a broad and relevant perspective is required.

Various academic critiques have been made of farm performance benchmarking (Burns, 1966; Mauldon and Schapper, 1970; Malcolm and Ferris, 1999; Malcolm, 2001) and many of the criticisms are valid because they assume that the primary purpose of the exercise is external, namely, inter-farm comparisons. For it to achieve its true potential, the benchmarking process must have an internal primary purpose, namely, setting business objectives for the farm business in question. The external purpose is useful only to the extent that it can help to identify best practice benchmarks and successful management protocols.

Benchmarking Farm Performance

All private enterprise businesses, including farm businesses, must be economically sustainable in a free enterprise economy. The alternative is the destruction of capital and this can be tolerated only if alternative sources of income meet or exceed the destruction rate. The single most important benchmark for determining this in any business, including agriculture, is return on assets (ROA), that is, earnings before interest and tax divided by the market value of the total assets under management. There are three or four additional benchmarks that can be used to identify the root cause of business performance problems at the whole farm level after the initial ROA screening.

If ROA does not exceed the after tax cost of debt, any business is economically unsustainable and will need to be propped up by asset appreciation and other means in order to survive in the long term. Sadly, such is the case for a significant proportion of Australian family farm agriculture.

For most family farm businesses across Australia, lack of operating scale is a major structural problem. Fixed costs (a.k.a. overhead costs) represent 60-70% of the total cost structure and, more often than not, these have to be spread over too few animals or cropped hectares. There are few options available to address this other than to get bigger through stocking rate where possible, or acquisition of

additional land. As well, a lack of fundamental business skills and a poor understanding of the key profit drivers contribute to suboptimal ROA performance in too many farm businesses.

In his criticism of cost of production, the author makes the assumption that the whole farm business and the individual enterprises can be aggregated for concurrent appraisal and that big picture benchmarks are more useful and appropriate. Whether this is the case or not depends on whether you are looking for a diagnosis or a prognosis. It is undeniable that the distinction between a basket case farm business and a gold mine farm business can be made mostly at the whole business level, but any attempt at conversion from one to the other is doomed unless the key profit drivers at the enterprise level are identified and addressed. Cost of production is a useful benchmark to be examined at this point, but it is not the most important.

Is Agriculture Unique?

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, agriculture dominated the Australian economy and wealthy landholders held powerful sway over the political process and, to some extent, government policy. They argued that agriculture's position of importance demanded that it be treated with special favour. "Australia grew on the sheep's back" and similar sentiments reinforced the view of many rural landholders that they occupied a special place in an industry that was making a unique contribution to the nation's fortunes. Direct subsidies, special tax concessions and industry protection all grew from this perception, combined with the ability to influence government policy through the disproportionate influence of minor coalition parties. Fortunately, these industry favours are gradually being phased out as Australian agriculture matures and learns to stand on its own feet, but, unfortunately, the environment is still paying too much of the asking price. Environmental capital continues to be destroyed at rates that have temporal and industry specific drivers. This is unlikely to change significantly until we walk away from our export mentality with agriculture and be content to feed and clothe only ourselves.

Agriculture is an industry, not a way of life. It is a commodity based industry and this mandates an in-depth understanding and unqualified acceptance of the three golden rules of commodity production if economic sustainability is the goal. The three golden rules are:

1. There is little or no opportunity to differentiate commodities on price. Most price premiums are small and rarely, if ever, fully compensate for the increased production costs involved.
2. The lowest cost producers are invariably the most profitable over the long term.
3. Technology that improves operating efficiency must be fully embraced in order to stay ahead of the declining terms of trade that are a constant background feature of commodity based industries.

These three golden rules are confronting, unyielding and particularly unpalatable to producers who believe that agricultural profits should be capitalized and losses socialized. However, a failure to comply with these rules in the long term will inevitably result in the loss of a competitive position and a clear view of the exit door to the industry. Awareness of the importance of cost of production is the starting point in compliance.

To argue that a commodity industry like agriculture is unique because it has a different production cycle is fallacious. The production cycles of the iron ore, coal, electricity, timber and beef industries are all different and, by definition, unique. This does not mean that ideas, tools and management protocols that have potential universal application cannot cross industry boundaries. To deny this implies introspection and at an industry level this means extinction at worst, and chronic underperformance at best.

There is only one feature of free enterprise agriculture that makes it unique as an industry; the majority of the producers are family farmers who vote. BHP does not vote. Perhaps this explains the birth, effectiveness and growing influence of non-agricultural political lobbying. Agriculture has to compete for labour and capital just like any other industry. With respect to the latter, in the long term, agriculture has to be an attractive investment for after-tax capital rather than a haven for temporary residents from other industries with a tax problem.

Whilst ever agriculture hides behind the argument that it is unique and deserving of special analysis, political favours or tax concessions, it will continue to lose out on the labour and capital fronts which are critical to its future. To have poorly informed and/or struggling producers argue that agriculture is unique and cannot be compared to other commodity based industries, or borrow ideas and techniques from them is one thing. To have trained agricultural economists do the same is a cause for concern.

The Role of Compliance Accounts

The author described his preference for the compliance accounts of the business to be the source of the information for farm business analysis. This is problematic. Compliance accounts are prepared by accountants to achieve one purpose only; provide an estimate of the tax liability on the reported profit. By definition, they are going to be biased towards either understating the profit or minimizing the tax paid. This is not to suggest illegal tax evasion activity is being employed, just the usual profit adjusting and tax minimization techniques that are employed every day and which can include:

- Changing the value of closing inventories by a range of means
- Including modest amounts of personal expenditure in the business expenses
- Assigning what should be a capital expense to repairs and maintenance

- Purchasing tax deductible farm inputs surplus to requirements at the end of the year that will be used at some point in the future.
- Paying some family members wages or superannuation disproportionate to their management input

It is useful to remember that profit is always an opinion whereas cashflow is fact. The two must always be considered concurrently to really understand what is going on and when the referee (the balance sheet) is consulted, the true picture usually emerges.

All well managed businesses should run two sets of books, compliance and management, with an income statement, a cashflow statement and a balance sheet for both sets. The compliance accounts serve their specific purpose but should never be used for serious business analysis or decision making unless extraordinary tax consequences are involved. Management accounts use market values for all assets, rather than distorted values resulting from ATO derived natural increase values and depreciation rates. They also properly assign expenses. Management accounts are the basis of all serious business analysis and valuation. They are the only source of data to be used for benchmarking purposes and if this means some extra work in lining up the chart of accounts, then that is the price of improved accuracy.

How Much Time?

Serious professional business analysts would never contemplate forming an opinion on the excellence or otherwise of a potential investment if they had access to the set of accounts for only one year. Most would require at least five years of accounts. The author argues that a one-off cost of production figure is meaningless and he is absolutely correct for exactly this reason.

It is very difficult to get an accurate fix on the performance of a farm business in medium to high rainfall regions in less than five years and in the rangelands it is at least eight years. This timeframe takes into account the impact of commodity price cycles and drought or poor seasons on enterprise and whole business performance. It also allows enough time for the effects of tactical and strategic management decisions to flow through to the bottom line. As well, longer appraisal timeframes provide the opportunity for trend analysis, an even more powerful tool. If these timeframes are used, all the problems that the author has with appraisal methodology, disappear and there is nothing left to debate.

What Is The Most Important Enterprise Level Benchmark For Agriculture?

It is not cost of production. At best, cost of production only explains about 70% of the variation in profit between enterprises over time. Cost of production is a function of two variables, kilograms produced and all operating costs before interest and tax. A one-off low cost of production figure can be misleading because it can be a result of abnormally high production or abnormal frugality. If it is too low, it is invariably unsustainable. As a general observation

over time, an uncompetitive cost of production is mostly a function of too few kilograms of production rather than a high cost structure. This is a positive finding because it provides the opportunity for improvement.

The ultimate enterprise level benchmark is operating margin per unit of production; that is, the difference between price received and cost of production and this benchmark explains more than 90% of the profit difference between enterprises over time, at least in rangeland beef enterprises. It does this because it picks up all the critical drivers; price, productivity and costs.

It is not possible to keep driving cost of production down over time. Once it has found its level in any enterprise, inflation will ensure that it keeps rising. Inflation will push the nominal price of the commodity up as well. Over time, the objective should be to maintain a real (inflation adjusted) constant operating margin.

In the case of a rangeland beef production business, if the average price received for an eight year period was say \$1.50/kg liveweight, you would expect to see the cost of production at close to \$0.75 and the operating margin \$0.75 and have this maintained reasonably consistently over the entire period if you were looking for a top 20% business performance. If a major drought happened in the period, you would expect the operating margin to contract but still stay positive. How much volatility there is in the operating margin over time is a good measure of inherent risk in the business. Operating margin volatility is a much more accurate and useful measure of business risk than the financial statements on their own, but the two should be used in conjunction. Once the inherent risk is established, the improvement strategy can be constructed and/or the cash provisioning for crises can be quantified and planned.

Business Appraisal and Modeling

Modeling strategies and tactics is an entirely different exercise to appraising the performance of a farm business. Whole business and herd specific models are not designed to diagnose problems; their primary role is to evaluate alternate courses of action. Appraisal comes first and modeling various remedial approaches should come second, once the key issues have been identified.

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-
- ## RANGELAND CHAMPIONS – UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT FOR MATURE-AGED LEARNERS
- John A Taylor, Rangelands Australia/The University of Queensland, Gatton Campus, Gatton QLD 4343.
Email: john.a.taylor@uq.edu.au*
- Rangelands Australia, with funding support from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, has recently established the first phase of a national network of Rangeland Champions to encourage and support learners in rural and regional Australia. The Champions are people who live in the rangelands and have experienced the rewards of tertiary education by distance. They are passionate about further education and the future for the rangelands, and are keen to encourage and support both potential students and enrolled students.
- The Champions network will assist potential students by providing information about the benefits of study, new and more accessible educational opportunities, and pathways for entry. They will also assist enrolled, mature-aged students by providing "after hours: advice regarding university expectations and learning skills, as well as providing general support and encouragement for people undertaking postgraduate study by distance – whatever the course. There is no fee for the Champions service.
- "This is a wonderful initiative that will encourage people in remote and very remote areas to further their education"* said Chrissy Brown, one of the new Champions from Reola Station in north-west NSW.
- The Champions were selected from over 35 applicants, and were prepared for the role through a 5-day program conducted by Elizabeth Wallis at The University of Queensland's Gatton Campus. Elizabeth is the Coordinator of the Champions network, and is providing high level support for the Champions.
- The Champions are quite enthusiastic about the potential of this network. *"I would have loved to have had a Champion when I was doing external study – especially on down days"* said Sharon Bell from Dulkaninna Station near Marree SA. *"People are increasingly recognizing the value and relevance of the Rangelands Australia-developed courses, and the availability of local Champions will support greater participation and retention of mature-aged students"* said Bob Shepherd, a Champion from Charters Towers, QLD.

Contact details and further information on each of the current Champions is given below, and on the Rangelands Australia website – www.rangelands-australia.com.au.

Janet and Ian Beale

Dunheved via Mungallala QLD Tel 07 4623 1840

Janet has lived in the rangelands for 20 years, and has experienced learning new skills and gaining a qualification by learning from home. Around 8 years ago she re-entered the workforce and subsequently undertook a postgraduate degree in nursing via distance education. She is currently studying medicine by distance. Janet understands the amazing opportunities available through distance, and how it is possible with commitment, organization and support.

Ian was raised on, and now manages, the property he and Janet own. Ian is a well known rangeland scientist who was based at the Charleville Pastoral Laboratory from 1965-1998 and was OIC for a time. He has done a Master of Agricultural Science degree by external study and does some part-time consulting.

Sharon Bell

Dulkaninna Station via Marree SA Tel 08 8675 8307

Sharon has lived and worked on Dulkaninna, a cattle station on the Birdsville track, for almost 30 years. She is a strong supporter of life long learning, and has completed a Bachelor of Land Management, by distance, over a period of 11 years. She is now partway through a postgraduate course in environmental studies. Sharon understands the importance of on-going support and encouragement, has acquired many strategies for studying, and has a good understanding of many of the pitfalls of studying by distance.

Christine Brown

Reola Station via Broken Hill NSW Tel 02 6874 7723

Christine was raised on Reola Station, a family owned and operated sheep and goat enterprise in north-western NSW. She has completed a Bachelor of Science in Wool and Pastoral Science, a range of business studies, and more recently a Graduate Diploma in Counselling by distance, and is actively involved in managing Reola. She is passionate about further education, and helping others discover its benefits. Having studied from home, Chrissy has a strong empathy for the difficulties faced by remote learners such as balancing work, family, study and other commitments.

Jim Cawthorne

Port Augusta SA Tel 08 8641 3738

Jim returned to study when aged 30 with a wife and three young children, and is very aware of the hardships of balancing the demands of study, family and personal health. He has 30 years experience as an extension officer in country SA, and has lived in the rangelands for the past 9 years.

He has managed service delivery for Primary Industries and Resources SA at district and regional levels for many years, and was involved in the establishment of Outback SA. Jim is committed to promoting further education, and to supporting people who are trying to help themselves through further study by distance.

Michael Jeffrey

Derby WA Tel 08 9191 0333

Michael has lived and worked in the rangelands all his life, and was a beef research officer in western Queensland for 12 years before he moved to the Kimberley's 3 years ago as a Research and Development officer. He has a Bachelor of Applied Science and has completed a Graduate Diploma in Rural Systems Management by distance. Michael has experienced the benefits of studying while working, and is keen to encourage and help others to study, work and continue to live in the rangelands.

Bob Shepherd

Charters Towers QLD Tel 07 4787 2891

Bob has lived and worked in the Burdekin and Northern Gulf regions for over 20 years, and completed a Masters of Agriculture (mix of full time and external part-time) while he was working as a rangeland management extension officer. He has worked with a wide spectrum of rangeland stakeholders, and has seen the value of further knowledge and qualifications. Bob has many interests, and understands the difficulties of balancing the demands of work, family, study and other commitments. He is passionate about learning, and helping people to pursue careers in agriculture and natural resource management.

Richard and Dionne Walsh

Katherine NT Tel 08 8972 3316

Richard grew up on the family sheep and cattle station in WA, and has worked in the pastoral and mining industries in WA, NSW, QLD and NT, and in banking in the NT. He completed a Graduate Certificate in Management (Agribusiness) while working full time. Dionne has a PhD in rangeland management and has worked in the rangelands of SA, WA and NT over the past 10 years. They both understand tertiary education and distance education, and want to demystify these for others. They also understand the difficulties of studying in remote localities, and the importance of support in maintaining motivation.

Dee Wilkes-Bowes

"Karanga", Binalong NSW Tel 02 6227 4181

Dee grew up in western NSW, completed an agricultural economics degree, and has worked in rural advocacy and agricultural policy development. She is currently doing a Masters in Public Policy, part-time and by distance, and understands the value of education in expanding horizons and

coping with change. Dee also appreciates the importance of motivation and a strong support base for success in distance education, especially when combining study with bringing up young children.

Rachael Williams

Paika Station via Balranald NSW Tel 03 5020 0585

Rachael has lived in the Western Division of NSW for most of her life. She values the option of studying from home and understands the difficulties faced by remote learners. Rachael has completed a Graduate Certificate in Agricultural Economics externally, is doing further study in rural sociology (PhD), and is active in community development. She is

keen to help others seize new educational opportunities, and to support them in building their confidence and in realizing the benefits of further education.

The first Annual meeting of the Champions will be held in Brisbane in late November. It is hoped that a few additional Champions (for example, from QLD, NT and WA) will have been inducted by then. If you think that you have the passion, personal qualities, experience and time to be an active Rangeland Champion, please contact John A Taylor (0429 725 838 or john.a.taylor@ug.edu.au for information.

The national network of Champions and their Coordinator (Mrs Elizabeth Wallis) are funded by the Australian Governments' National Landcare Programme.



The Champions Network.

L-R back: John Taylor , Director Rangelands Australia & UQ Gatton QLD; Elizabeth Wallis, Champions Coordinator & Academic advisor, UQ Gatton QLD; Dee Wilkes-Bowes, Karanga near Yass NSW; Rachael Williams , Paika Station near Balranald NSW; Chrissy Brown , Reola Station near Wanaaring NSW; Michael Jeffery , Derby WA.

L-R middle: Sharon Bell , Dulkaninna Station near Marree SA; Dionne Walsh, Katherine NT; Janet Beale, near Charleville QLD.

L-R front: Jim Cawthorne , Port Augusta SA; Bob Shepherd, Charters Towers QLD

Absent: Richard Walsh, Katherine NT; Ian Beale, near Charleville QLD.



The Australian Rangeland Society

presents the

15th Biennial Conference

“A Climate of Change in the Rangelands”

The World Theatre, 82-90 Mosman Street, Charters Towers, Queensland

Sunday 28 September 2008 to Thursday 2 October 2008

Attention: Managers, Carers and Users of the Rangelands – Why should you attend this conference?

- Get the latest technical information from some of Australia's best researchers and rangeland managers in the areas of natural resource management, conservation and biodiversity; environmental risk management; multiple land use; tourism and mining in the rangelands; sustainability indicators; social equity; stewardship; indigenous issues and land management; and land restoration.
- Participate in the youth forum: be inspired by presentations and posters delivered by rangeland students.
- Participate in conference tours showcasing a range of current uses management issues of the rangelands including conservation, mining, grazing land management and tourism. Gain an insight into the “Climate of Change” impacting on the rangelands and the town itself.
- Enjoy the evening social program: “Stockmans BBQ Dinner”, “Trivia in the Towers” and Conference Dinner

Call for Abstracts: You are invited to submit contributions - posters or spoken papers - by **10 February 2008**.

Interested in submitting an abstract or receiving more information about the conference?
Contact : JK Connections – Conference Organisers

Jackie Kyte
Tel: 07 5482 4368
Email: jkyte@bigpond.net.au

Janine King
Tel: 07 5547 0774
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Conference information will also available at www.austrangesoc.com.au in 2008.

AN UPDATE ON THE ARS PUBLICATIONS

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Peter Johnston, ARS President, c/o Dept of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Locked Mail Bag No 4, Moorooka QLD 4105. Email: peter.w.johnston@dpi.qld.gov.au

Wal Whalley, Editor, The Rangeland Journal, c/o School of Rural Science & Natural Resources, University of New England, Armidale NSW 2351. Email: rwhalley@metz.une.edu.au

The Publications Committee and the Executive Council have been steadily implementing the recommendations of a Review Committee (comprising Dr Dionne Walsh (Chairperson), Mr John Childs, Dr Jocelyn Davies, Dr Ron Hacker, Professor John Taylor) who made recommendations for the Publications of the Society in October 2005. For the Journal many recommended changes have been implemented; the Scope has been widened, there is more focus on current and emerging rangeland issues rather than disciplines, international recognition is stressed, links with CRC's and other groups is occurring (eg. Desert Knowledge CRC, STIPA), Associate Editors from overseas are being appointed and Special Issues to address "hot topics" are underway.

Four Associate Editors have been appointed recently. Professor Ruijun Long, Lanzhou University, China is researching ecosystem/animal/people systems in northwest China and is particularly interested in the Yak grazing system. Dr Mark Stafford Smith, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Australia is researching theory for remote and sustainable living through the Desert Knowledge CRC. Dr Brandon Bestelmeyer, USDA-ARS Las Cruces, USA is researching range condition assessment methodology and plant/soil/animal/climate relationships at the famous Jornada Experimental Range and recently spent three months in Australia. Associate Professor Maria Fernandez-Gimenez, Colorado State University, USA is researching ecological and social dimensions of rangelands, including community-based and collaborative natural resource management, traditional and local ecological knowledge, pastoralism and pastoral development and participatory research.

Further scientists from Africa and South America are being sought for appointment as Associate Editors by the Executive Council. The Publications Committee would welcome any information from members about suitable people we can consider. The valuable work of our existing Associate Editors is also acknowledged – we couldn't get on without you.

Two Special Issues of *The Rangeland Journal* are being developed now for publishing next year which we believe will be of great interest to members and others. The first, to be published in January 2008, and comes from the Desert

Knowledge movement. This is seeking to draw out the greater picture, asking how elements of rangelands and remote areas science interact. Pastoralists are small business people who must live remotely as well as manage grazing; so natural resource management is livelihood, management is technology, settlement is services, and so on – all interrelate. There are good reasons why natural resources (and hence rangelands ecology) are a vital element, but this Special Issue is an effort to illustrate a more holistic approach to desert living. The goal is that more people should come to see how their work fits into this wider context, thereby creating new synergies and linkages among disciplines to the betterment of outback dwellers everywhere, and laying the ground work for a new integrated and interdisciplinary Science of Desert Living. Mark Stafford Smith has been appointed as an Associate Editor to handle this Special Issue and subsequent papers or Special Issues from the Desert Knowledge CRC.

The second Special Issue is on the Rangelands of China. The issue will be published in May/June and copies will be given to all delegates at the joint International Grassland and Rangeland Congress to be held in Huhhot, China, 29 June to 5 July. Papers have now reached our Guest Editors Professor ZhiBiao Nan and Ken Hodgkinson and the refereeing process is beginning. These papers will give members a good insight into how the rapid development of China is affecting the vast rangeland resources, including people living remotely, in this densely populated country and incidentally how this development impacts on Australian rangelands. All authors are from China. We feel this new initiative will boldly bring the Australian Rangeland Society and *The Rangeland Journal* to the attention of a large international audience of rangeland and grassland people.

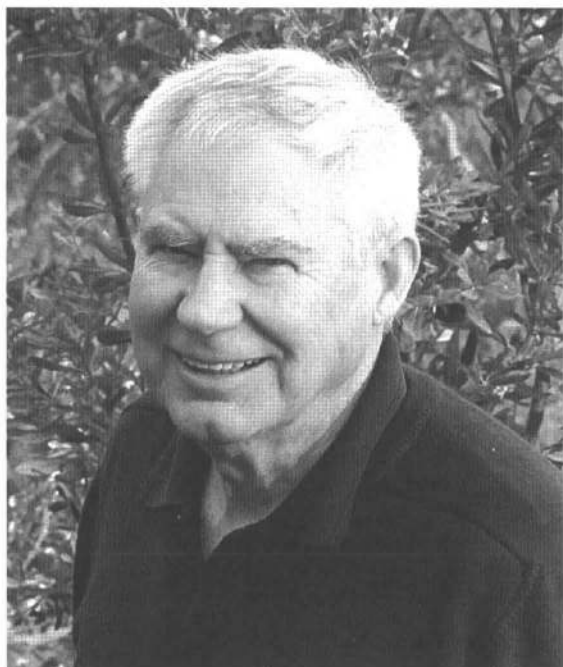
We will also produce our regular issue of submitted papers in late 2008 - Vol. 30 (3). If you are thinking of submitting a paper for this issue, then get it written as soon as possible. We now have a system in place so that once contributed papers have been accepted and finalised, the copy editing proceeds and they are mounted on the CSIRO Publications *TRJ* web site complete with page numbers <http://www.publish.csiro.au/journals/trj>. You may have noticed the pre-publication mounting of papers for Vol. 29 (2) recently. A further service now available is that you can have your paper published as "open access" by payment of a fee of A\$3,000. This means that a reader does not have to be a member of the ARS or a library that subscribes to *TRJ*, to download the full text of an open access paper from the CSIRO Publications web site. We published our first open access paper in Vol. 29 (2). When you are writing your paper, please ensure that you cite all relevant papers previously published in *TRJ* - it all helps our impact factor, which has gone down in the last year.

We have now moved to full electronic submission and review of all papers using OSPREY. To submit your paper, you need to open the CSIRO Publications *TRJ* web site <http://www.publish.csiro.au/journals/trj> and click on the bird icon and follow the prompts. If you have any problems with this procedure and want to submit a paper to *TRJ*,

be the Society's most dynamic publication". The "look" of the website is attractive as it is but more needs to be done to increase its dynamism, current content and interaction with members and potential members. We have an excellent Website but we need to think about further development. A group from the Publications Committee and the Executive Council have begun this task. The development will need to be done carefully so as to meet both member's needs and to present the Society to well the general public.

The *Range Management Newsletter*, ably edited by Noelene Duckett, continues to be of value to members. More material is always welcomed by Noelene and we urge you to more actively support this important publication of the Society. In 2008 the Publications Committee will undertake a review of the Newsletter as recommended by the Review Committee and we hope to soon have the Newsletter available to members electronically on the Website as well as in hardcopy.

NEW ARS SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER COMES ON BOARD



Graeme Tupper has generously volunteered to take over Ian Watson's role as the Society's Subscription Manager. After 5 years Ian was looking for a well-deserved break. I am sure that the ARS Council and all Society members would like to thank Ian for the substantial time and effort he has put into this position over a considerable period of time.

As the new Subscription Manager, Graeme will now be responsible for the many and varied duties of the position, which include keeping the Society's membership list up to date; sending out renewal notices and processing renewals; providing mailing labels for the Newsletter, the Journal and to

Council; sending out back-issues; dealing with subscription enquiries and chasing up recalcitrant members.

Graeme's contact details are as follows:

Graeme Tupper
PO Box 141, Orange NSW 2800
Email: grmtupper@yahoo.com.au
Tel: +61 2 6361 7734
Fax: +61 2 6362 5719

Want to see if Graeme is qualified for the job? Read about him in the brief profile given below.

Brief Profile

Graeme has a Master of Agricultural Science degree from the University of Melbourne, Diploma in Education from the University of Sydney, and Certificate IV, Small Business Management. His professional experience includes Lecturer in Agronomy, Dookie Agricultural College, Victoria; Experimental Scientist (Rangelands) CSIRO; Senior Lecturer Pasture Science, University of Fort Hare, South Africa; Faculty Affiliate, College of Natural Resources, Colorado State University, USA; Senior Pasture Agronomist and Chief, Smallholder Agricultural Development, Papua New Guinea; Program Leader/Technical Specialist, Resource Information, NSW DPI; and Technical Specialist, Knowing The Key Pty Ltd.

Graeme has a variety of professional experience in research, extension, education and management. He has owned and managed a small property in the Deniliquin District, NSW. He has authored and co-authored a range of technical publications. He is a Fellow of the AIAST, and a Churchill Fellow. He has travelled extensively in Australia and internationally.

Graeme is a member of the Australian Rangeland Society (currently a Councillor); Society for Range Management; Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (AIAST); Australian Society of Soil Science. He has held executive positions in several of these organisations.

Graeme is semi-retired, living in Orange, NSW, and involved in a range of institutional and community activities in a voluntary capacity. He has on-going involvement with a project in Rwanda, Eastern Africa. He is married to June, with four adult, married children and nine grandchildren.

ROGER OXLEY: CREATOR OF THE ARS LOGO

Ken Hodgkinson, Chair, Publications Committee, c/o CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, GPO Box 284, Canberra ACT 2601. Email: ken.hodgkinson@csiro.au

I have been meaning for some months to reflect on contributions made by Roger Oxley to the Australian Rangeland Society and to rangeland science in general. Roger passed away in late August 2006 after a long and difficult illness. He had a deep affection for the rangelands and joined the Society as an inaugural member. He was active in membership until his death.

I first met Roger when he moved within CSIRO from Canberra to Deniliquin. He was unsure about the transfer but like so many "blow-ins" he quickly developed a love for Deniliquin and for the rangelands research that took place there. Together with his wife Kate and two children, Elizabeth and David, he made his home there and soon forgot about Canberra.

His memory lives on in several ways. Roger, like others at the Laboratory, grew a considerable knowledge of rangeland flora and fauna. This became a passion and his knowledge was sought by others, the most notable being Ian McNamara of the Sunday morning ABC program "Australia All Over". This led to Roger supplying stories regularly to the Program. He was extremely proud when Ian asked him to put some of his stories into a book, which sold quite well.

In the days when CSIRO scientists were allowed to indulge in some research of their own, Roger did an analysis of records for over 100 years, kept for a large pastoral property in south-western Queensland; Thurulgoona. His two papers from this enquiry were published in *The Rangeland Journal* in 1987. The relationships he derived between rainfall and production figures were insightful and the changes in vegetation over the long period which he noted were most interesting. Others (such as David Roschier) used this approach later, with good success, but I think Roger was the first to do so.

At some stage in the early history of the ARS, a competition was held to design a logo for the Society. Of the entries, Rogers was judged to be the best. His logo we still use today and, together with the yellow (depicting dry grass) and recent orange-red (depicting red soil and Aboriginal culture) on the cover of *The Rangeland Journal*, we have a self grown "branding" for the ARS. Roger's creativity survives in the logo.

Finally, I was asked by his widow, Kate, for a suggestion as to what might be done with his complete set of TRJ. I suggested a recipient might be a university library in China. Kate agreed, so in March next year I will personally giving Roger's set to the library of Northeast Normal University, Chungchun, where there is a fine post-graduate department for grassland ecology research.

VIII INTERNATIONAL RANGELAND CONGRESS UPDATE

The XXI International Grassland Congress and VIII International Rangeland Congress is little more than half a year away. It will be held in Hohhot, China from 29 June – 5 July 2008.

The Congress website www.igc-irc2008.org now contains lots of information about the Congress including details of: Congress themes; paper submission; scientific programme, social programme; pre-, mid- and post-Congress tours; travel requirements (visa, flights, accommodation *etc*); as well as general information about the Inner Mongolia region.

The main theme of the Congress is "Multifunctional Grasslands and Rangelands in a Changing World". According to the website, this theme will be split into three simultaneous sub-themes:

- Grasslands/Rangelands Resources and Ecology;
- Grasslands/ Rangelands Production Systems; and
- Grasslands/Rangelands People and Policies.

There will be four days for presentations and poster viewing during the Congress, with plenary papers each day. The themes cover the areas of interests of both the International Grassland Congress and the International Rangeland Congress with 24 half-day sessions.

Two recent things to note:

- The deadline for receiving offered papers has been extended to 30 December 2007.
- The Congress Registration Form is now available to download from the website. Earlybird registration closes on 29 February 2008.

If you are going to go to the Congress would you be prepared to provide some feedback to the *Range Management Newsletter* on your experiences? If you are interested please contact the *RMN* Editor, Noelene Duckett at aduckett7@msn.com at your earliest convenience.

RANGELAND-SPECIFIC POSTGRADUATE COURSES IN 2008

*John A Taylor, Rangelands Australia/The University of
Queensland, Gatton Campus, Gatton QLD 4343.
Email: john.a.taylor@uq.edu.au*

In response to a widely-recognized need, and with support from a number of agencies, institutions and individuals with an interest in the rangelands, Rangelands Australia (RA) has developed a number of rangeland-specific, postgraduate-level courses for delivery by distance or intensive modes. This means that you can study from home, guided by an experienced learning facilitator, or in your region, and can learn from others through on-line discussions and tele/video-conferences.

The topics for these courses were identified in a national survey of knowledge and skills for future success in the rangelands. In the process of this needs analysis we listened to over 400 stakeholders. The structure, content and resources for each course were subsequently defined by scoping groups which included experienced managers, advisors, scientists and policy makers. The scoping and review process to date has engaged over 220 individuals with rangeland experience and expertise. Given the highly participative process for course development, it is not surprising that mature-aged students are rating the courses highly in terms of the quality of the courses, the skills and knowledge gained, the way in which they have been challenged to think, and for the relevance of the courses to people's workplace/business and their future in the rangelands.

These courses are part of the coursework programs in rangeland management (*i.e.* Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma or Masters in Rangeland Management) offered by The University of Queensland. Entry to the program can be with or without a degree (*ie.* through recognition of prior learning – RPL). However, people already enrolled in another program/ elsewhere could take some of the Rangelands Australia-developed courses as electives in their program through a process known as cross-institutional enrolment.

Rangeland-specific courses available now and under development are listed below.

Semester 1 courses

- Sustainable production systems and regions
- Global and national trends and local scenarios
- Grazing land management
- Managing self, developing and retaining others

Semester 2 courses

- Sustainable production systems and regions
- Building effective stakeholder engagements

- Advanced rangeland ecology
- Diversification and new industries
- Property, catchment and regional planning
- Animal nutrition and behavior

Courses under development

- Rangeland pests, weeds and bio-security
- Monitoring and adaptive management
- Animal wellbeing and health

There are some Commonwealth-supported places available for the Rangeland Management programs in 2008. These represent significant savings (*ie.* 55-65%!) off the published tuition fees for these programs.

Enrolments for Semester 1 close **31 January 2008**, and for Semester 2 close **30 June 2008**.

For further information on the courses or application forms visit the RA website – www.rangelands-australia.com.au or contact RA direct about entry, cross-institutional enrolment *etc* on 0429 725 838 or 07 5460 1662.

Rangelands Australia is based in the School of Natural and Rural Systems Management at The University of Queensland's Gatton Campus, and is supported by the Australian Governments' National Landcare Programme, the Queensland Government, Meat and Livestock Australia, CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems and The University of Queensland.

PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIES OF THE LAKE EYRE BASIN

*Vol Norris, Facilitator, Lake Eyre Basin Community
Advisory Committee, PO Box 519, Longreach QLD 4730.
Email: vol.norris@environment.gov.au*

This project, funded under the National Component of the Natural Heritage Trust from 2005 to 2008, and managed by the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, is a study of the people, communities, cultures and economies of the Lake Eyre Basin (LEB), to develop tools for improving sustainable natural resources management at local levels within a large, complex, multi-jurisdictional system. The project seeks to improve the understanding and functioning of the organisations that manage natural resources in the Lake Eyre Basin, with a particular focus on organisations that act as an "interface" between government and community.

The project was initiated by the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee and Scientific Advisory Panel, and recognises the critical role of social, cultural and economic conditions in developing, adopting, promoting and maintaining sustainable practices. It seeks to define clear pathways for building community capacity for sustainable natural resource management, by developing regional profiles of social, cultural and economic characteristics of the Lake Eyre Basin, and practical, effective methods to work with the particular people, businesses and communities of the Basin for better natural resource management.

The project has four stages:

1. LEB Social and Economic Profiles
2. Engagement and Success Factors of Interface Organisations
3. Case Studies to Improve Success Factors
4. Framework for Monitoring

Stage 1 is complete, and the resulting regional profile document can be downloaded in full from:

<http://www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au/research/downloads/DKCRC-Regional-profiles-of-the-Lake-Eyre--Basin.pdf>

Stage 2 of the project is nearing completion, and has highlighted a number of key factors important to the operation of successful interface organisations in the Basin. Background analyses for this stage included an assessment of the formal links between key sectoral organisations in the LEB, a review of the formal objectives of some of these key NRM-related organisations, and a review of success factors from the literature. A significant component of Stage 2 consisted of interviews with a diverse suite of members of the community, as well as key government personnel.

Stage 3 is currently underway in parallel with elements of Stage 4, which will develop a framework for monitoring

the continuing ability of water and related natural resource policy in the basin to respond effectively to social, cultural and economic circumstances.

Further information on the project can be found at:

<http://www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au/research/lakeeyrebasin.html>.

or by contacting:

Mr Lynn Brake (lkbrake@ozemail.com.au); or
Dr Tom Measham (Tom.Measham@csiro.au).

NEW MEMBERS LIST

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Lindsay Whiteman
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WULGURU QLD 4811

Chelsey Langley
Corangamite Catchment Management
64 Dennis Street
COLAC VIC 3250

INFORMATION SNIPPETS

2008 Desert Symposium to be held in Alice Springs

The 2008 Desert Knowledge Symposium and Business Showcase will be held at the Alice Springs Convention Centre, 4-7 November 2008. Hear how business innovators, researchers and educators from Australia and overseas are working in partnership with communities, industry and governments to develop a body of desert knowledge that will help sustain desert communities around the world.

Further information about the 2008 Symposium is available by downloading the following postcard: <http://www.desertknowledge.com.au/resource/Postcard%20%20web.pdf> Information about the previous Desert Knowledge Symposium held in 2006 is available at www.desertknowledge.com.au/symposium.

Outlook 2008 Conference

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) will be hosting the national Outlook 2008 conference in Canberra from 4-5 March 2008. This conference is the premier market assessment forum for Australia's agricultural and natural resource industries. It has a strong track record of providing reliable and essential information to the private, public and corporate sectors in Australia.

Next year's conference will examine the challenges that Australia's agricultural commodity sector is currently experiencing under increasing pressure from continued drought and a rapidly evolving world economy.

ABARE analysts will join nationally and internationally recognised speakers to discuss a number of issues including:

- With continuing drought conditions in some regions of Australia, what does this mean for the agriculture sector? Outlook 2008 sessions will explore the outlook for farm performance, grains, meat, wool, sugar, dairy and wine.
- How will water availability and access affect the farm sector and associated industries? Sessions on water, regional Australia, horticulture and fisheries are on the agenda.

Further details about the conference, including how to register, can be found at the conference website - <http://www.abareconomics.com/outlook/index.html>

New Mitchell Grasslands Booklet Released

The Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS) recently published the first publication in a new series of vegetation management booklets entitled *Vegetation management*:

Toward sustainability for vegetation management - Mitchell grasslands. This first booklet was released in September 2007 and was written by Richard Thackway, Margie Eddington, James Walcott, Katrina Burton, Ian Frakes and Lucy Randall.

The booklets provide factual, up-to-date information about key vegetation types in the agricultural landscape. Other editions will include temperate and tropical grassy woodlands.

The booklets are aimed at a broad audience, including primary producers, government and local government agencies, regional managers, policy-makers and the general public. They can be used as a handy reference for general interest, or as a basis for decision-making.

Copies of the booklet can be downloaded for free from: www.affashop.gov.au/product.asp?prodid=13828

New Report Examining Natural Resource Management and Indigenous Australians Released

Land & Water Australia has carried out a significant amount of Natural Resource Management research investigating the relationship of Indigenous Australians to the environment and their involvement in NRM. This research has been carried out since 2000 and comprises 12 completed projects and a further 12 projects in progress.

Recently LWA released a summary report entitled *The Engagement of Indigenous Australians in Natural Resource Management* by Alice Roughly and Susie Williams.

This report is a synthesis of the knowledge being generated by the projects and from literature reviews. It outlines the key messages, principles and outcomes that have emerged from the research to make them more accessible to NRM policy makers, managers, practitioners, researchers and Indigenous community members.

The report can be downloaded or ordered for free from the Land & Water Australia website – <http://products.lwa.gov.au/productsdetails.asp?pc=pr071332>

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, Vanessa Bailey, before **30 November**. An application form can be downloaded from the ARS website at www.austrangesoc.com.au. For further information contact Vanessa by phone on 07 4652 7310 or email at vanessa.bailey@epa.qld.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, Graeme Tupper, PO Box 141, Orange NSW 2800.
Ph (612) or (02) 6361 7734: Fax (612) or (02) 6362 5719: grmtupper@yahoo.com.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 2008.

(* 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.

