

Draft

A VISION FOR THE RANGELANDS

Prepared by the Natural Resource Management Office for consideration by the Natural Resource Management Council – for recommendation to the Minister for the Environment

PURPOSE

To seek Cabinet Standing Committee on Environmental Policy endorsement for the adoption of a comprehensive vision, management principles and policy direction for the sustainable ecological management of Western Australia's rangelands.

BACKGROUND

The State Government and community have a role to establish governance frameworks and management structures and processes that create sustainable rangelands. This framework needs to build the capacity of individuals, communities and enterprises to contribute to the ecological sustainability, financial viability and social and cultural wellbeing of the rangelands through effective resource-use and management.

Whilst a plethora of management programs and activities, strategic statements, policy guidelines and legislation have been developed and implemented to varying degrees there

is no vision or clear program agenda to create sustainable ecological management of the rangelands. To this end the Natural Resource Management Council (NRMC), through its Rangelands Working Group, has worked in partnership with the community, government agencies and industry to address some of these issues.

The NRMC acknowledges the work undertaken by the Pastoralism for Sustainability Working Group for the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure the Honourable Alannah McTiernan. The NRMC and the Rangelands Working Group support the outcomes and recommendations outlined in the report developed by the Pastoralism for Sustainability working group looking, amongst other things, at achieving sustainable pastoral rangeland management. However, it was felt that as this report dealt only with the pastoral sector that the NRMC Rangelands Working Group would focus on the wider issue of sustainable rangeland management.

For the purposes of this document the rangelands is defined as the 90% of the State outside the agricultural area and includes pastoral leases, unallocated Crown land and coastal zones. These areas support most of the State's mining industry and have significant tourism and grazing sectors. The region is sparsely populated compared to the rest of the State.

As a result of consultation and consideration of the many and varied policy documents that relate to rangelands, the NRMC has developed a vision statement, visual picture and set of guiding principles to guide future management and ecological sustainability of the rangelands. The vision statement and visual picture are as follows:

Vision Statement:

Western Australia's vast landscape, intricate web of biodiversity and natural resources are preserved, managed and used sustainably for the common good closely involving the community in management and planning processes that are transparent, inclusive and based on a clear set of environmental values and objectives.

The rangelands will have a robust, vibrant economy based on the sustainable management of economic, social and environmental resources and a strong partnership approach within and between regional communities, industry and Government.

The close, traditional association of Indigenous people with components of biological diversity and land management should be recognised and integrated to achieve contemporary environmental values and objectives.

Visual Picture:

The rangelands will remain sparsely settled but will have established a higher quality of life and met the needs and aspirations of all its citizens, including Indigenous communities. The rangelands will have developed as a model of environmental management where growing economic strength has been complemented by a diverse natural environment free from environmental degradation. The community will feel more empowered by a consultative planning process that delivers a high degree of consensus on major development questions.

There has been an improvement in biodiversity health across the landscape through the combined actions targeting the protection, restoration and sustainable use of plants, animals and other native organisms within the rangelands.

Sustainability is accepted as a fundamental goal and all land managers, including the Crown, follow regional indicators and targets for environmental management. The network of parks and reserves has expanded, including an established comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system and Aboriginal groups have title to larger areas, whilst mining continues, but none of these totally dominate the landscape. All rangelands land managers take responsibility to control pest plants and animals and fire and work actively to rehabilitate degraded areas.

Human activity in the rangelands will be richer and more diverse. There are many different kinds of businesses within resource specific niches in the rangelands operating on an ecologically sustainable basis including horticulture, aquaculture, native foods, mining, tourism and rural retreats. Habitats that only occur in areas attractive to human activity are carefully protected. Traditional knowledge will be integrated into decision making at all levels.

There will be a new generation of pastoral lease managers who adopt risk management approaches to business and grazing management, focused on the condition of the land and its vegetation. Monitoring and evaluation of natural resource conditions will be a

condition of leases and open up marketing opportunities for 'ecologically sustainable' products. The range of livestock grazed and the mix of livestock reflect climatic, economic and market demands. Pastoralists have adopted new technology and best practice management systems and many have diversified their enterprises. Government regulations and incentives have supported these changes, but the primary driver of change has been the pastoralists' own business decisions.

Marine and coastal biodiversity will be managed and protected through an established comprehensive and representative system of secure marine protected areas as well as through the identification and protection of areas of high conservation significance from threatening activities.

Rangelands Guiding Principles:

These principles have either been developed or based upon existing principles from a variety of policy documents currently being utilised to guide management of the rangelands. The principles provide a clear link to the vision picture and statement to guide, influence and support decision making and management by all parties involved in management of the rangelands.

The principles have been divided into categories that include over-arching principles, economic and social and land and water to clearly show how each addresses and links to the over-arching vision statement and picture as outlined above. These are not necessarily listed in order of importance.

Over-arching

- Ecologically sustainable management of natural resources and associated systems that underpins all decision making.
- Commitment to inter- and intra-generational equity.
- Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation ('the precautionary principle').
- Decision making processes should effectively integrate both long and short-term economic, environmental, social, cultural and equity considerations.

- Development of regional sustainable development strategies should rest primarily with regional and local communities, but in consultation with government and inclusive of the broader community.
- The overall effectiveness of NRM strategies, policies and management plans should be evaluated on a regular basis to ensure total effectiveness.
- Evaluation of any given project or program needs to be considered within the context of the entire NRM framework.
- Strategic approaches to resource allocation in progressing sustainable development are required.
- Partnerships between government, industry, non-government organisations and regional and local communities that balance rights and responsibilities are required in progressing sustainability in the rangelands.
- Develop adaptable management that recognises the dynamic nature of the environment and that knowledge is constantly changing.
- Diversification of the instruments used in environmental policy, including market and economic instruments.
- The close, traditional association of Indigenous people with components of biological diversity should be recognised, as should the desirability of sharing equitably benefits arising from the innovative use of traditional knowledge of biological diversity and ecological management

Economic and Social

- The need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy, that can enhance long-term economic health, biodiversity and ecological integrity and equity within the capacity of natural systems to maintain that activity.
- The need to institute and maintain international competitiveness in an environmentally sound manner through the introduction of accreditation mechanisms such as eco labelling or stewardship.
- Commitment to economic, social and community development in regional WA, through equity in the provision of services, encouragement of investment and direct support for regional economic development.
- Commitment to Indigenous aspirations for self-determination, protection and development of cultural heritage and achievement of specific requirements for environmental, economic and social development and protection/management.
- Commitment to strengthening local communities to ensure that community aspirations and viability are met through engagement of all people.
- Environmental factors should be included in the valuation of assets and services.
- Environmental goals should be pursued in the most effective and efficient way, including by way of incentive structures and market based instruments.

- Commitment to innovative alternative economic models that enhance the protection and sustainable management of natural resources and systems should be investigated and where appropriate implemented.

Land and Water

- Recognition of the need to adopt an ecosystem approach in the use of land and water.
- Conservation and restoration of biodiversity in the rangelands to protect biological diversity, maintain ecological processes and integrity and life-support systems.
- Effective monitoring and auditing that is linked to regional ecological objectives and targets for the rangelands.
- Recognise that waterways provide essential habitats and have a high landscape value.
- Take action to manage high value waterways.
- Commitment to the development and adoption of environment management systems and codes of practice that clearly demonstrate that all enterprises in the rangelands, both public and private, have the ability to manage proposed use in an ecologically sustainable way.
- Acknowledge that biological diversity is best conserved in-situ and managed accordingly

Actions Required to Achieve Effective Implementation of the Vision and Guidelines:

To achieve the vision, visual picture and ensure the guidelines are implemented and fulfilled a number of key areas need to be addressed and actions developed and implemented. The key areas can be categorised under five key themes of legislation, organisational structures, policy, implementation and community mobilisation.

It is recommended that to investigate and implement the key themes identified below that a formal Rangelands Working Group (RWG) is established that reports to the NRMC and the Cabinet Standing Committees on Environmental Policy and Regional Development. The membership of the Working Group could draw on expertise from the Pastoralism for Sustainability Working Group, pastoralists, conservation representatives, the NRMC, Regional Development Commissions and Indigenous representatives. A key recommendation of the Pastoralism for Sustainability Working Group is the development of a Rangelands Working Group to action recommendations from the Working Group's

report. It is suggested that rather than establishing two Rangelands Working Groups, that the roles of the proposed groups be reviewed and integrated where possible.

As the recommended Rangelands Working Group would have a diverse membership it is suggested that the task of investigating the key themes be divided into sub-groups within the Working Group to maximise expertise and skills and distribute overall workloads. Ideally the RWG would have a discrete Executive Officer to coordinate and ensure the completion of activities. The sub-working groups would need to be resourced through the key NRM agencies with a member of the RWG as the chair of each group. To ensure that the sub-groups are effective the staff allocated from the agencies would need dedicated time to be made available through their respective agency's budget allocation or business planning processes.

Legislation:

Current legislation lacks flexibility in delivery and is a complex maze that is often difficult to enact. It is also questionable that existing legislation applicable to the rangelands, fully caters to the specific requirements of this diverse environment. The *Land Administration Act*, for example has embedded the notion of pastoral pursuits as the only recognised land use despite the emergence of the desire for alternative land uses.

A review of existing legislation would form the precursor to the development of over-arching legislation by enabling the identification of current blockages and barriers, current legislative loopholes and/or anomalies and exploration of the integration of legislation covering Indigenous affairs and planning for example.

There is a need to create over-arching rangelands legislation that could be couched under wider NRM legislation that enables the flexible delivery of effective sustainable NRM management. Such legislation would need to consider issues of stewardship and duty of care, the integration and cross management of legislative issues such as triple bottom line reporting, and provide clear landuse requirements that are flexible and do not restrict diversification within the parameters of ecological sustainable management.

In the short term current legislative blockages and barriers could be addressed through relatively simple legislative amendments. For example, while the *Land Administration Act* requires the Pastoral Lands Board (PLB) to ensure that pastoral lands are managed on

an ecologically sustainable basis, there are no mechanisms within the Act to enable the PLB to enforce this requirement.

Institutional and Organisational Structures

The institutional and organisational structures in the rangelands are intricate and involve a multitude of Government agencies at national, state and local level, statutory authorities and other decision-makers. This leads to conflict, confusion, competition for resources and overlaps in delivery of services between land-use groups when an integrated approach is required.

Presently there is little coordination of service delivery, management, planning and administration across institutional structures seriously impacting on effective sustainable ecological management.

There is a need to review the current organisational and institutional structures and arrangements to ensure more effective collaboration, resourcing and overall management of the rangelands. This will involve reviewing the operational arrangements of agencies and other organisations in respect to establishing formal and informal linkages and inter-group relationships including the evaluation of appropriate mechanisms, such as codes of practice and memorandums of understanding, for such relationships to be established and maintained.

Additionally, transparent reporting mechanisms which provide timely and relevant information across jurisdictions to all parties involved with rangelands management should be investigated and developed.

Investigation into the establishment of a statutory organisation for NRM is required as such a body may provide a vital coordinating role as the primary body managing NRM at a state level. A sub-set of a NRM body could specifically focus on rangelands management, delivery of services and strategic planning and direction. Such a body

would help to overcome the current disjointed situation of a number of statutory vehicles managing the rangelands.

The introduction of a statutory NRM body has wider implications in terms of policy direction, support and strategic frameworks for the NRM sector as a whole and therefore would require extensive investigation in relation to viability and application at a state NRM level.

Policy

Like legislation, current policy is complex and involves a multitude of players. Policies abound, with a policy statement developed by the majority of key organisations involved within the rangelands. Yet no agency or body is ultimately responsible for rangelands management. Within these policy statements there is often very little cross-reference or true integration of policy objectives and implementation to achieve common goals. Thus the silo effect is perpetuated often resulting in poor implementation and communication of action to stakeholders. For example economic, social and environmental indicators tend to be developed and measured according to agency responsibilities, thus health indicators are developed and measured by the Department of Health whilst grazing industry statistics are captured by the Department of Agriculture. There have been few examples where agencies have combined forces to determine measures of triple bottom line performance at community, industry and regional scale.

A paradigm shift is required to facilitate the development of an over-arching NRM rangelands policy framework that enables long-term ecological management of the rangelands. A coordinated NRM rangelands policy framework would provide an over-arching NRM strategic direction and reference point including management goals and objectives.

In developing this policy approach it will be important to review and evaluate existing policy, management structures and models to determine efficacy across the rangelands. For example the relationship between the key strategic policy functions of regional planning strategies and statement of planning policies requires greater understanding and integration as a tool to manage land use change. The proposed Rangelands Working Group would be effective in carrying out such a task due to their multi-lateral constituency.

It is imperative that the proposed NRM rangelands policy facilitates and leads changes taking place or proposed and not act as a barrier. It is inappropriate that policy development should take place solely or predominantly within a primary industry focus for example, but should be developed within the wider scope of NRM.

Many policies fail because those impacted do not understand or agree with the objective of the policy. Whilst all policy development in Western Australia requires a consultation period, there is a need to investigate the processes used and subsequent effectiveness of community engagement within policy development. It is suggested that models of engagement be reviewed to increase capacity for and effectiveness of engagement in developing policy and other management processes. The joint Commonwealth – State Community Engagement and Capacity Building Working Group could be a useful resource for further investigating this issue.

Implementation

The development of policy frameworks, strategic direction and other tools are important processes, however, without effective implementation they can be unsuccessful. As previously outlined, there are currently a wide variety of policies covering the rangelands, yet many of these are not being implemented and no one ‘body’ is responsible for auditing implementation. There are a number of key implementation areas that need to be addressed to ensure sustainable ecological management of the rangelands. They include the implementation of integrated environmental land management systems, the development of mechanisms to overcome short-term funding cycles and lack of funding, the implementation of a “whole-of-government” approach, the communication and adoption of a jointly held vision and guiding principles for rangelands management, and the development of links with the non NRM sector.

Environmental management systems across the pastoral sector are already being implemented through existing management plans such as the Gascoyne Murchison Strategy and will become more important as local and international consumers expect the use of sustainable practices in production. The adoption of such systems will provide benchmarks for the future that in turn will supply evidence of the efficacy of management practices to achieve sustainability. This will be particularly useful in the renewal of leases in providing confidence in the likelihood of future management being consistent with sustainability principles.

The Environmental Management Unit (EMU) approach, currently being implemented within the Gascoyne Murchison region, aims to provide pastoralists with tools to integrate production/grazing value, infrastructure and range condition with ecological processes and biodiversity. There are significant opportunities to extend the EMU approach into other parts of the rangelands.

Short-term funding cycles have in effect created a process of short-term policy that tends to become reactive to issues rather than proactive and produces short-term outputs rather than long-term outcomes. Mechanisms to enable long-term policy initiatives are crucial.

There is a need within current management structures to facilitate change that would bring about greater cooperation and coordination. The adoption of a whole-of-government approach including collaborative funding applications across multi organisations may help to reduce competition for funds to undertake similar projects, thus ensuring cooperative joint outcomes. Implementation of cooperative approaches could be facilitated through the development of Memoranda of Understanding between parties and the development of inter-agency/party business plans and/or delivery units.

In addition to the adoption and development of common shared relationships and collaborative partnerships, a sense of embracing and selling the shared vision for the rangelands is paramount. Once it is determined that the vision, visual statement and guiding principles described above are appropriate for all proponents in the rangelands they can be institutionalised through strategies, policies, budgets and management plans. In turn, the development of an implementation framework and associated communication plan intrinsically linked to the vision, visual statement and guiding principles would help to facilitate widespread adoption and implementation. A draft implementation mechanism has been provided in attachment A to outline a proposed process to assist with the facilitation of information and action.

It is becoming more evident that industry at all levels are adopting triple bottom line reporting mechanisms and are acknowledging their impacts upon the environment as a whole and the subsequent need to factor in environmental management systems within their operations. It is important for links with the non NRM sector to be further developed to better integrate rangelands management. The development of a voluntary partnership program could provide a viable option to facilitate integration. Such partnerships would provide a forum where organisations and groups can constructively engage in projects, discussion and joint ventures to meet overall sustainable ecological management of the rangelands through the clear direction provided by the vision, visual

picture and guiding principles. Such partnership programs have been established internationally and should be further investigated as a viable option that may be implemented in the rangelands of Western Australia.

It is suggested that current models considered successful within the rangelands in terms of integration and implementation could be reviewed. The Gascoyne Murchison Strategy program may be one such program. Additionally the differences in the objectives of operating at different scales, be they individual, local or regional, needs to be fully catered for to ensure that multi-layered objectives are not negated.

Community Mobilisation

Community mobilisation and engagement has been strong in some sectors involved with rangelands management with groups including Land Conservation District Committees actively participating in NRM activities. However, there is a need to ensure that all custodians of the rangelands are fully integrated into management processes.

It is critical that the NRMC provides to the community a clear process of engagement if it is to achieve the key objectives of its terms of reference. The NRMC is currently finalising a communications plan that will better facilitate understanding of its role and activities within the rangelands as well as developing further networks amongst the rangelands community.

Indigenous groups, through vehicles such as the Indigenous Land Councils, are more effectively engaging with the NRM framework, however greater participation and engagement is required to effectively integrate traditional Indigenous land management practices into overall management programs, policies and strategies. The introduction of Indigenous facilitators within key NRM agencies is strongly encouraged as is the development of an over-arching communication strategy that clearly integrates strategies to more effectively engage Indigenous groups as well as outlining general communication and engagement principles.

The Commonwealth-State Community Engagement and Capacity Building Working Group has been investigating various processes to increase community engagement and capacity including the development of a Mutual Learning Opportunities package and the promotion of high quality approaches towards enhancing community engagement. Much of this work is in infancy but it is recommended that the outcomes of this working group be monitored closely to determine possible application of processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Minister for the Environment:

- 1) Adopts the recommendations as outlined for the Rangelands Working Group and recommends these to the Cabinet Steering Committee on Environmental Policy.
- 2) Agrees to the vision statement, visual picture and guiding principles.
- 3) Supports the establishment of a Rangelands Working Group with the structure, reporting mechanism and role as described.

That the Rangelands Working Group:

- a) Further review existing legislation pertaining to rangelands management to identify current blockages, barriers and legislative loopholes.
- b) Develop an over-arching rangelands framework as a component of NRM legislation that considers duty of care, the integration and coordination of issues and clear landuse requirements that do not restrict diversification within ecologically sustainable parameters.
- c) Review current organisational and institutional structures and arrangements to assist in the establishment of formal and informal linkages and appropriate mechanisms for such relationships to be effectively established and maintained.
- d) NRMC to investigate the development of over-arching NRM legislation including a NRM statutory body. The Rangelands Working Group would focus on investigating the rangelands component of the legislation.
- e) Further review existing policy, management structures and models to develop a coordinated rangelands policy to be nested within State NRM policy. Particular focus would be on the relationship between key strategic policy functions such as regional planning strategies and statement of planning policies as a tool to manage landuse change.
- f) Investigate and develop mechanisms to ensure the implementation of long-term policy initiatives within the rangelands.
- g) Institutionalise the vision, visual picture and guidelines through adoption within rangeland strategies, policies, budgets and management plans.

- h) Determine the efficacy of partnership programs to integrate the non-NRM sector into the wider management of NRM within the rangelands.
- i) Develop a communication, consultation and engagement strategy to promote engagement of all sectors within the rangelands community with a key focus on inclusion of Indigenous groups.
- j) Actively promote the role and activities of the NRMC through the adoption and implementation of the communication plan.