

RATIONALE FOR THE RANGELANDS POLICY DIALOGUE

Crafting a Roadmap for a Sustainable Rural Future in the Rangelands - Markets, Debt, Water, Drought and Climate Change

It is easy to conclude that the broadacre pastoral industry in Queensland is facing weighty challenges for which there are no obvious policy solutions.

In *economic affairs*: statistics indicate rising farm debt, a narrowing of the surplus of profits over costs and a complex array of drought aid schemes with persistent doubts about their effectiveness or fairness.

In *society affairs*: population is leaching away to the coastal cities, communities are breaking down through limitless distress about the future and elevated suicide statistics signal that communities are very stressed.

In *environmental affairs*: we see plagues of kangaroos frustrating paddock management, precedence given to the gas industry in exploiting artesian waters, pest plants spreading relentlessly, prolonged and widening drought, extreme weather events and the threat of accelerating climate change.

In *governance*: disputes over property rights and vegetation management are still festering, 20 years after the first round of prescriptive legislation.

Scientists join with pastoralists in despair at the inability of our institutions of government to come to grips with the complex issues involved, typified by the announcement of the outcomes of the national Drought Summit in October 2018 before the delegates had arrived, and largely limited to a patch-up drought welfare program. Current policy settings need to be reviewed so that landholders are incentivised to preserve ecosystem functions, more funding is invested in managing our pastoral landscapes, population drift is reversed, and new thinking is focused on managing drought and floods within an era of climate change.

A new roadmap towards resilience and regenerative agriculture is required

It ought to be possible to draft a vision for the pastoral industry that would gain consensus among graziers, scientists, conservationists and all other sectors with a stake in the inland. Queenslanders would unite in wanting a pastoral industry that is sustainably profitable, environmentally sustainable and sustained by vigorous communities. What is lacking is a *feasible path* or *roadmap* from the present fractured condition to a sustainable one, restoring the natural capital of Queensland's landscapes and the well-being of its human communities.

Motivated by the declining condition of natural systems, The Royal Society of Queensland as a non-sectoral knowledge broker is collaborating with AgForce, representing broadacre rural industry and NRM Regions Queensland, representing the 12 regional NRM bodies to bring knowledgeable people from all sectors into a two-day dialogue to craft some policy solutions. The collaborators are pleased that the Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Science has agreed to sponsor the event, allowing attendance to be free of charge.

Purpose in more detail

The purpose of the Dialogue is to:

- identify policy issues and gaps that need to be addressed for moving to a sustainable future focused on *building natural capital*, increasing investment in restoration and maintenance and dealing with the impacts of climate change;
- break down disciplinary and sectoral silos to tap into the knowledge of people with insight to share in a way that no current deliberative forum seems set to do;
- propose best means for solving identified issues and filling gaps to achieve agricultural, environmental and rural community sustainability;
- seek agreement on the way(s) forward.

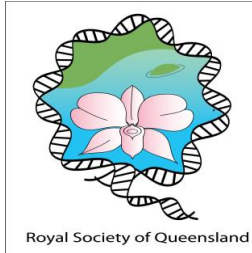
The Dialogue will take the Queensland unimproved pastures (the Rangelands) as its canvas, with the intention of replicating it on a national canvas later in collaboration with national bodies. The Dialogue won't apply directly to arable agriculture, although many of the principles will no doubt also apply to cropping lands.

The Rangelands Roadmap

The output sought is a "Rangelands Roadmap" that will seek to recalibrate drought policy and rural policy in the direction of sustainability. A small writing team will wordsmith the declaration immediately after the event. It is intended that this declaration will be endorsed by participating organisations, and then publicised by all means available to promote solutions to economic and environmental distress in rural Queensland. It will be presented to political leaders at a subsequent event.

The three collaborators have no preconceived positions on the contents of the declaration, but suggest the following structure:

1. In the face of...: (the *key problems* that are driving decline)
2. Queensland needs to...: (*strategic changes* needed to reposition pastoralism)
3. We call on governments, business, media companies... (*specific actions* needed to trend upward)
4. On our part we agree to ...: (*specific activities* that will be pursued by the undersigned over the next year).



RANGELANDS POLICY DIALOGUE PROGRAM OUTLINE

Background

The Royal Society of Queensland, AgForce and NRM Regions Queensland have agreed to collaborate in a Rangelands Policy Dialogue on 1, 2 July 2019. The Queensland Department of Environment and Science has agreed to cover the costs of the event.

A [webpage](#) dedicated to this Dialogue has been established under the "[Rural Policy](#)" head page.

Venue, Dates and Times

111 George Street Brisbane Auditorium. Seating capacity maximum 150.

Monday 1 July 2019 10.00am – 4.30pm refreshments, for 5.00pm close.

Tuesday 2 July 9.00am – 4.30pm refreshments, for 5.00pm close.

Format

The first day will focus on current condition and trends. The second will focus on responses needed to transition rangelands pastoralism to a sustainable footing.

The event will feature brief provocations and context-setting comments from a number of knowledgeable pastoralists and other experts. These invited panellists will have 7 minutes each to deliver a "spark plug" of up to 20 slides with 5 minutes for questions, then generous time for discussion.

Names of panellists will be announced as acceptances are received.

Reading material

Panellists and other registrants are invited to table a handout of not more than two pages on any relevant subject. These will be lodged on the Dialogue's website.

Other details

Chatham House rules will operate (no attribution without consent).

Dinner will be arranged on the Monday evening at extra cost.

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