



# The Royal Society of Queensland

PO Box 6021, St Lucia, Queensland 4067, Australia

[www.royalsocietyqld.org.au](http://www.royalsocietyqld.org.au)

General inquiries [rsocqld@gmail.com](mailto:rsocqld@gmail.com)

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## RECALIBRATING POLICY FOR THE QUEENSLAND RANGELANDS After Drought and Debt, What Next?

### Many unsolved problems

It is not difficult to come to the conclusion that the 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 signpost very stressed communities.

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 affairs*: 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 heed the warning signs, typified by the announcement of the outcomes of the much-hyped national Drought Summit in October 2018 before the delegates had arrived, and seemingly limited to another patch-up drought welfare program.

### A new roadmap required

It ought to be possible to draft a stewardship vision for the pastoral industry that would gain a high degree of 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 *theory of sustainability* to explain cause and effect; and 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 all over inland Queensland, 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 output sought is a "Brisbane Declaration" that will be presented to political leaders at a subsequent event. The statement will seek to recalibrate drought policy and rural policy in the direction of sustainability. It is intended that this declaration will be endorsed by as many participating organisations as possible, and after endorsement will then be publicised by all means available to bring attention to possible solutions to the current economic and environmental distress in rural Queensland.

### **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 summit will take the Queensland unimproved pastures (the Rangelands) as its canvas, with the intention (if it is successful) of replicating it on a national canvas at a later time in collaboration with national bodies.

### **The Brisbane Declaration**

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, 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).

Geoff Edwards

President [president@royalsocietyqld.org.au](mailto:president@royalsocietyqld.org.au)

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