

Tree Clearing and other Comments

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Introduction

Notes from an on-ground landholder who has owned and worked on a property in the Desert Uplands bio-region in central western Queensland for 36 years. These are some comments after hearing the Rangelands talks.

Our experience with “Tree Clearing”

1. Knocking down trees disturbs the soil and hence has a beneficial effect on the soils by releasing nitrogen etc from the soil, the same effect as digging up the soil before propagating plants in a garden in town.
2. This disturbance leads to much more grass and vegetation germination. Grass cover has a very beneficial effect in the reduction of soil erosion, soil health and soil carbon. Ground cover, not tree cover maximises soil carbon.
3. Trees lying on the ground have a beneficial effect over time on the plants and soil. They provide protection for plants to grow up around them; they help to prevent soil loss/erosion from runoff after a heavy fall of rain; they help to reduce topsoil loss by catching blowing dust, blowing & falling leaves etc. Topsoil, leaves etc provide mulch around the fallen logs which is beneficial to the growing of vegetation.
4. In the Desert Uplands bio-region, when trees are knocked down, the roots in the ground are still alive, as they are very deep. After the next decent fall of rain every tree regrows. Some trees such as Gidyea can be a lot slower to grow, while others such as Ironbark take off very quickly.
5. During this long drought that we have been experiencing, we have noticed on our place that in some of the old growth forest country, up to 70% of the trees have died, and even more in places. However, of the trees that we had pulled down, every single one has regrown and not one of these young regrowing trees has died during this drought. Surely this has a very beneficial carbon sequestering effect??



Every tree has regrown after pulling approximately 10 years ago. They are healthier than ones nearby is that have never been touched. There is also more grass which germinated in the disturbed soil when the trees were knocked down.

Environmental Protection/Improvement

One speaker mentioned that economics has the most significant impact on the environment in the rangelands. A Social Research Project in the Desert Uplands bio-region carried out by the Desert Uplands Committee and led by Gerry Roberts, found that younger landholders who had greater financial debt, had young families to educate etc. were more likely to be focussed on the economics of their enterprise. It was the over 70s who had much less debt, their families had grown up and were no longer dependent on them financially, who were more interested in the environmental health of their properties, and who were taking the most action to improve it.

Hence, yes, the payment of landholders/enterprises to improve and care for the environmental/ecological part of their land, should be a necessity. We are caring for the land for the benefit of all Australians of the present and into the future. Surely all Australians should then contribute towards the cost of doing this?

Such payment could be the equivalent of agistment that would have been received on the numbers of livestock that have been reduced in order to have less impact on the vegetation. Or, in a farming situation, it could be the equivalent of the net profit that would have resulted from cropping that portion of land that is to be set aside and no longer farmed.

The government and all Australians need to recognise the eco-services produced by landholders, especially as it is a cost to the landholder to run fewer livestock or farm less country. Landholders shouldn't have to bear the cost of the expectations of and benefits to the rest of Australia.

Healthy food production

Livestock grazing on the natural pastures of the Rangelands, free-ranging and often walking several kilometres a day, provide much healthier meat, milk etc. than animals that are kept in very close proximity to one another in yards for months without exercise, and fed a lot of non-natural food products. This healthy outcome should definitely be recognised, promoted and rewarded.

Questions: One of the questions asked of the speakers was why didn't some landholders notice the damage being done and do something about it?

Again, the Desert Uplands Social Research Project found that personality types play a very important part in how people operate their businesses, how they see their environment etc. One needs to appeal to the main different personality types in the way that they best understand and operate, in order to communicate with them more successfully.

As with all industries, with the carrying out of new ideas in the pastoral industry, there are always the few who grab the idea first and experiment with it. The rest will watch to see what the outcomes are. If they are successful, the majority will then gradually follow. There will always be a small number who refuse to change, unless there is a real and decent benefit, or legislation forces them to take action.

The majority of primary producers are not good at communication with government officials, public servants, university researchers etc. They learn most through talking to their neighbours and other primary producers in a similar business. Again, through our Desert Uplands Social Research we discovered that many landholders cannot read or write. However, this does not mean that they are not successful in their business. They tended to have other advantages such as much greater observational powers.

Legislation or the forcing of landholders to not be able to use some of their country because of endangered species etc. being there, can often have a detrimental effect on the eco outcomes. In order to obtain the best eco-outcome, the landholder should be rewarded for having it on his/her place and rewarded for taking care of it.

That way, instead of destroying it or hiding it, as has happened in the past, people will come forward and acknowledge what they have. This will be of benefit to the whole country. Reward, not threats or punishment, has the best outcomes.