

A decade of monitoring Australia's rangelands to finish

ABC Rural / By Lauren Pezet

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Pastoralism is one the dominant industries in Australia's rangelands. (Lauren Fitzgerald)

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A national system that helps governments assess the effectiveness of conservation initiatives and targets will cease.

Funding for the Australian Collaborative Rangelands Information System (ACRIS) was cut in the recent Federal Budget.

ACRIS was used to evaluate the success of government programs, such as Caring for our Country and the Biodiversity Fund, and progress in meeting international obligations such as the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

It was also a tool for Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups doing conservation work across Australia.

Since 2012 the system has collated and synthesised data that reflects changes in Australia's rangelands, which make up more than 75 per cent of Australia's landmass, including tropical savannahs in the north and the Spinifex deserts in central Australia.

Rangelands are home to pastoral properties, Indigenous communities, mining exploration and operations, and relatively undisturbed ecosystems.

ACRIS coordinator, Gary Bastin, says the funding cut is not a surprise and ACRIS can be proud of its achievements.

"We've been able to build collaboration and partnership and make the whole larger than the sum of the other parts," Mr Bastin said.

"We've been able to make some statements about what state the rangelands are in and how they're changing.

"And to some extent be able to separate management affects, particularly in terms of grazing effects and fire management.

We're in a funding cycle at the moment where there aren't the resources that were available in the past to do this sort of research.

"Those effects are seen as seperate to the large seasonal variations that the rangelands experience."

Mr Bastin says their rangeland research has also made an impact internationally.

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Gary Bastin, ACRIS Coordinator (Lauren Fitzgerald)



Rangelands make up more than 75 per cent of Australia's land mass (ACRIS Management Unit)

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ABC RURAL A decade of monitoring Australia's rangelands

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He says while he's not surprised the funding was cut in the recent Federal Budget, he hopes an alternative monitoring system will be established.

"I'm positive about that. We're in a funding cycle at the moment where there aren't the resources that were available in the past to do this sort of research.

"But I think those times will change in the future, I'm optimistic they will."

ACRIS is a partnership between the Australian Government, CSIRO, Ninti One and government agencies in Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales.

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Mr Bastin says their rangeland research has also made an impact internationally.

"ACRIS is one of the few government supported programs in the dry lands of the world, which is a significant area of about 40 per cent land mass and sustaining something like two billion people, where there has been information available to say what long term change has been and to some extent what effects people have had in terms of that change."

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2014-07-15/acris-rangelands-funding-cut/5597046>