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Rangelands Issues

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There have been many common elements in contributions to the Rangelands Policy Dialogue, such as:

- the continuing deterioration of the rangelands environments (the position remains much as Baden Williams described in 1995 in relation to degradation, remedial opportunities and constantly inadequate government programs – <https://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/library/pubs/rp/1995-96/96rp01.pdf>)
- climate change (I would add the other global changes affecting the rangelands – biodiversity losses, soil degradation and loss, toxification from waste and pollution, with differing relevance in different areas)
- the need for action to be ground-level driven, rather than top down
- declining terms of trade for farming (noting that Consolidated Pastoral is claiming that capital appreciation of north Queensland pastoral investment has been outperforming the stock market, which is not the same as saying that all pastoral enterprises are successful or viable, or that businesses in rural towns are all thriving).

The need for a precautionary approach in the face of uncertain futures has been raised. Rangelands issues involve ‘wicked’ problems - highly resistant to resolution and characterised by complexity, uncertainty, and divergence and fragmentation in viewpoints, values, and strategic intentions.

Four suggested approaches

Here are some suggestions.

1. Tony Gleeson and I have argued that increased production should be and will be profit-driven underpinned by measures to protect and enhance the natural resource base, through integrated policies and programs that better service customer requirements in existing and emerging high end markets and through related measures to improve on-farm productivity.

We argued that ecological integrity (maintaining the quality of an ecosystem in which the ecological processes sustain the function, composition and structure of the system) should be the foundation for successful environmentally-friendly farming. See *Australian Agriculture in the First Half of the 21st Century* at <http://www.almg.org.au/resources/current-documents> .

A Quality Assurance approach involving measurable continuous improvement is often used in businesses, and is one of the foundations of the extraordinary success of the Japanese economy post World War II.

These two lines of thinking underly the Certified Land Management (CLM) approach) – see <http://www.almg.org.au> (developed as a follow up to Jock Douglas’s 1988 initiative with the Cattlemen’s Union). This approach goes beyond Best Management Practice and adaptive management by requiring regular review, continuous improvement and certification – actually proving ‘clean, green’ claims and not resting on past practices; always looking for ‘better.’ CLM is also based on community collaboration and voluntarism.

2. Approach increasing soil carbon on an holistic basis, i.e., do not rely on the reductionist approach now endorsed by governments for ‘carbon farming’ – see Baden Williams paper above.

3. Make the precautionary approach practical by developing farmer friendly guidelines. See the suggestions for this in my submission to the Craik review of farmer-EPBC Act interactions - <http://www.environment.gov.au/submissions/epbc-agricultural-review/quinn.pdf> .

4. Landholder-driven programs for pest and disease control and for conservation action.

Landholders in New South Wales established the Serrated Tussock Working Party for NSW and the ACT to increase action on serrated tussock, the most damaging weed in pastoral New South Wales and now encroaching on Queensland, and other persistent perennial grass pests. Our efforts have had a positive impact, which diminished over time as the State government ceased its investment in the Working Party. See the comprehensive strategy we developed (*Improving Serrated Tussock Control*) at <http://www.serratedtussock.com.au/?i=88&policy-papers>.

The 2016 study *Priority Threat Management for Imperilled Species in the Queensland Brigalow Belt* found that more efficient and effective biosecurity strategies would follow development of a ‘common vision’ among the diverse range of stakeholders to achieve a focused approach at a landscape level covering ecological and other needs, such as farm production, mining and infrastructure management. This ‘common vision’ approach could overcome the problem of management efforts being based on individual goals and agendas without regard for the consequences for others. See <https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/download?pid=csiro:EP154521&dsid=DS5>

Summary

Promote and adopt innovative management systems based on ecological integrity (CLM or equivalents).

Maintain a goal of increased soil carbon without being trapped in reductionist approaches.

Use guidance for application of the precautionary principle.

Develop ‘common visions’ to achieve progress where many interests are involved – overall, a reduction in ‘wickedness.’

Status: draft for critical review.