

Senate Inquiry - Landcare

National Rangeland NRM Alliance Response

The National Rangeland NRM Alliance (The Alliance) combines thirteen (13) rangeland NRM organisations which represent 80% of Australia's land mass, more than 6 million square kilometres. The Alliance aims to improve the delivery of NRM at a national level to improve sustainable land management in the rangelands of Australia.

The members use the Alliance as a solution to the difficulties associated with implementing large scale action across regional and jurisdictional boundaries. The driving force behind this group is the recognition that many rangeland issues require a national approach to meet local issues with implementation.

- a. the implications of the 2014–15 Budget for land care programs, in particular, on contracts, scope, structure, outcomes of programs and long-term impact on natural resource management;

The National Rangeland NRM Alliance (The Alliance) consists of 14 Natural Resource Management Regional Bodies which account for over 80% of Australia's landmass. The Alliance would like to highlight the following implications for reduced funding for the delivery of local activities across a majority of the country.



The rangeland NRM regional bodies, working in the most remote parts of Australia, provide a mechanism and support for people to work together on priority actions for the regions they live and work in. This is particularly important and evident in the very remote parts of Australia where the population is very small and the potential for community burn out is very real if efficient approaches

to land management issues are not found. This means that many groups of land managers in the rangelands are multi-tasking and that service providers work together to achieve the best results in the most efficient and effective manner often facilitated by regional NRM organisations. An example of this is in the Central West Local Land Services region where the impact of Invasive Native Scrub (Woody weed incursions) on productivity is an on-going issue that many agencies, organisations and individual land managers are working to address. The Central West LLS provided the facilitation to bring these individuals together to work and provide more effective use of funds and on-ground activities, far more effective as a whole than they could be as individual agents.

The rangeland NRM regional bodies assist land managers to prepare and contend with natural disasters, including droughts and floods but also weed and pest incursions, which affect the land condition and economic activities. The type of activities which people in remote areas have improved access to through the NRM regions and their partners are mapping of areas affected by disasters. An example of this is flood mapping in the Northern Gulf of Queensland providing evidence of the first 'wet drought' recognised in Australia. The spatial mapping capability of the Northern Gulf Natural Resources Group is used to assist in cyclone mapping and recovery operations as well as assisting in emergency situations such as missing persons and fire management. This same technology is being used with pastoralists to map improvements to their property design which will better prepare them for future disaster situations. The Alliance is currently working with its partners to show how this technology can be applied across the country to improve land management and productivity (funded by a National Landcare Program Innovation Grant).

The Alliance members work in the remotest areas of Australia for the improvement of natural resources supporting agricultural production and the communities which rely on these resources. They are funded through state and federal governments, community support and commercial partnerships with industry to undertake on-ground activities for economic and natural resource management purposes. The utilisation of Australian Government program funds to deliver these activities contributes greatly to employment and business activity, hence the health of these communities. The current Australian Government funds delivered to the Alliance member organisations contribute to the direct employment of 230 people. The indirect support of regional employment including Indigenous employment is more difficult to quantify however regions support employment through local contracts, consultancies, community activity and volunteer support and other delivery mechanisms to increase the footprint of Australian Government funds they receive. The impact of this employment is proportionately greater in the much smaller communities of the rangelands regions.

The regional NRM bodies involved with the Alliance carry a high degree of concern regarding any changes to policy and investment which negatively impact their ability to maintain relationships with the people in their regions who manage the natural resources of Australia. Supporting the people in remote areas to manage and improve the natural environment they live and work in revolves around developing understanding and relationships with those people as their decisions will have the greatest impact on natural resource condition. The need for continuity is particularly high in these sparsely populated areas.

- b. [the role of natural resource management bodies in past and future planning, delivery, reporting and outcomes; an analysis of national, state and regional funding priorities for land care programs;](#)

Rangelands cover some 81% of Australia - more than 6 million km²- and improving the land management of the degraded areas of this region supports the productivity outcomes for the broader pastoral industry, Indigenous Australians and multiple outcomes across the national landscape.

The primary industry related productivity of the region largely relies on the utilisation of relatively unmodified (when compared with more intensively farmed and grazed areas) landscapes. This means that the connectivity between good natural resource management outcomes and improved productivity for grazing land managers is inseparable. Improved natural resource management outcomes provide direct improved financial returns for land managers and social outcomes for the residents and communities within the rangelands.

A well designed program has the potential to provide significant economic, social and environmental outcomes across this region for Indigenous Australians, agricultural enterprises and significant areas of native flora and fauna habitat. Despite the large potential for rangelands natural resources management, there are significant barriers to participation in Australian Government land management and industry productivity support programs.

The following outlines the particular issues faced by rangelands managers and provides supporting evidence for the development of a Rangelands specific funding program. This is based on the work of a number of organisations across the Australian Rangelands and builds on the experience and knowledge gained through the participation and delivery of previous Australian Government programs. Previous programs have incorporated a number of design features that have impacted on the uptake and success of the programs and while the Australian Rangelands NRM Alliance supports the approach for a single coordinated program it is strongly advised that these hurdles be avoided in the design of the new National Landcare Program.

Specifically:

- Any measures of public good in the assessment or applicability of activities under the new program need to account for projects that occur on single large landholdings. In the past, works on single holdings have been perceived as providing private good, however in large parts of the rangelands activities can occur on single holdings that have significant public good. Large areas of the Australian Rangelands are natural areas of crown owned land and a consideration of cost / benefit of NRM programs and who receives the benefit, would indicate substantial public good from investment on these areas. For example, the maintenance of vegetation cover on pastoral and Indigenous managed lands across Central Australia prevents the impact of dust storms across large urban areas on the coastal fringe as well as protecting biodiversity values locally.
- Program design needs to take into account the cross border nature of many rangelands management programs. Previously, projects granted in one region or jurisdiction have been unable to operate across borders due to sometimes arbitrary geographical limitations on priority areas. Programs should be designed to promote collaboration and jointly delivered activities across the Rangelands free from the adverse impacts of the perceived need for a competitive process.
- Program design and participation must not hinge on a traditional view of what a Landcare group is. Often in the Rangelands the formation of groups are rather artificial when dealing with communities with very small populations and land managers do not support the formation of groups when it is the same people on the local progress society, school committee or race committee. The need for Coordinators is paramount in rangelands where distance is a great barrier to collaborative approaches. 'Rangeland Landcare' is more about coordinating properties/people with common problems/interests rather than perhaps a specific region or location – the connectivity is sometimes less geographic and more common issues/concerns. The non-contingent properties, the distances involved and the

low population means that if the group is depending solely on internal resources then 'member burnout' will occur very quickly and longevity of programs will not occur.

- Rangelands relevant issues, such as Total Grazing Pressure (TGP) control, (this is seen by many as being the single biggest issue facing the Australian Rangelands and is the key requirement for any real land management, whether domestic, feral or native), refuge waterhole management, broad scale erosion and repair, revegetation activities (ponding, camel pitting etc. rather than tree planting) and business management capacity development, must be eligible.
- Successful implementation of any program requires three key characteristics. They are: people must have the required level of KNOWLEDGE; MOTIVATION and CAPACITY. A program that only delivers part of this trilogy of needs across the rangelands will fail to deliver the required productivity and resource management outcomes across the 80% of Australia that is the Rangelands. Therefore the delivery program needs to address all of the elements or the one(s) that are currently limiting implementation. This will be aided by a sophisticated review of the current situation and needs across the rangelands rather than just implementing a generic program.
- Reporting requirements need to be practical for application across the rangelands. MERI in rangelands is very difficult due to the extremely large land areas involved and the long time frames required for natural resource change (due to extremely low rainfall and high climate variability). Effective MERI programs in the rangelands will require an approach similar to a program logic approach of outlining actions and short term outputs / outcomes and then stating assumptions and accepting the outcomes will occur over time (10 – 15 years). In some cases this can be associated with long term pastoral condition monitoring programs and national monitoring programs such as ACRIS (Australian Collaborative Rangelands Information System) and the TERN program. This is an alternate approach to trying to measure outcomes that vary so much due to natural variability.
- Often weed and feral animal issues, although technically a land manager's responsibility, need support for coordinated, across tenure management. Strategic differences in issues such as wild dog management require a 'nil-tenure' approach to management as wild dogstravel considerable distances and the activities of individual land managers have very little impact in managing the devastation these issues create. With weeds the real need to address invasive species when they are a small problem with an individual landholder will save substantial effort later across multiple landholdings and tenures. A supported and coordinated approach early is clearly justified.
- Any program design needs to recognise that the infrastructure, delivery and support costs are significantly higher in the rangelands when compared to other regional areas of Australia. The Rangelands are largely classified as remote or very remote and as such incur substantially greater costs due to increased freight costs, substantially higher fuel costs, the need for specific equipment to ensure safe operating conditions, and costs due to scale (for example fencing of waterways may involve hundreds of kilometres of fencing for one land holder).
- In large areas of the Rangelands, land managers are leaseholders and as such there is shared responsibility with State and Australian Governments for the delivery of good land management outcomes. This shared responsibility provides the justification for additional Government support for land management outcomes for the activities that deliver productivity and land management outcomes. Additionally, virtually all of these rangelands

are unmodified native vegetation/landscapes and as such contribute substantial environmental services to all of Australia.

The Rangelands of Australia can provide a number of vital environmental services to support a stronger Australia:

- A huge opportunity to provide land based greenhouse gas storage and mitigation
- An environment which maintains or improves the quality and quantity of water flowing into important water basins
- A land base which can support massive amounts of biodiversity and productive industries
- And all of this is best delivered for the nation through support for those people who manage the land to implement practical change at a local level.

In history has shown that when things are good they are very good but when they are bad, they are horrid.

The pressures on the rangelands are many and varied, which is to be expected when they cover an area of over 6,230,000sq km. When issues with land management occur across such a vast area the impact can be felt by more than just its residents. The costs associated with landscapes being pushed beyond their capability can have significant impact on the environment, industry, society and financial systems, well outside of the boundaries on a map.

The 2009 dust storms that swept across Australia moving millions of tonnes of soil causing problems including black outs and transport stoppages in major cities on the east coast, are an example of what may occur when a natural system is pushed beyond its capabilities. The dust storm that 'closed down' Sydney on 23 September 2009 was estimated to have cost over \$330 million for that single event (Tozer, 2012). This doesn't take account of lost soil, nutrients and carbon it is the cost to Sydney for 24 hours.

The reverse is also true and when the rangelands, are in good condition and experiencing one of its booms, the impact is felt well outside its boundaries. Australians want to celebrate how diverse, beautiful and abundant our semi-arid and arid areas (deserts) can be in the good times.

Good management of the rangelands environment is not only an issue for those that live there it is in the national interest. The cost of encouraging and enabling good management now will be far less than the cost of recovery in the future.

The Alliance is supportive a national coordinated approach to land management issues which supports delivery in a locally appropriate way and it is positioned to assist in developing and delivering such a programme in the rangelands.

The Alliance through the Australian Rangeland Initiative has identified a number of programs and needs in the rangelands which would benefit from a national/cross border cooperative approach. The main driver of rangeland health is the extent and health of groundcover and the main influences on groundcover are grazing pressure both domestic and feral animals, fire and invasive weeds. The management of grazing pressure and fire are of vital importance to land managers in the rangelands whether for a pastoral or environmental conservation enterprise.

The Alliance would advise against geographic or single issue (species) approaches at a national level as in the rangelands this often leads to perverse outcomes due to the interconnectivity of the systems. This type of approach is also easily interrupted due to adverse weather conditions.

Landcare in the rangelands works differently to elsewhere. It does not work on the model of people working together on projects as much as the establishment of networks and development of funding programs for common problems and this is where there is a link to NRM bodies who auspice this.

The issues may be common across a region but the work is done as individuals primarily due to scale and distance issues.

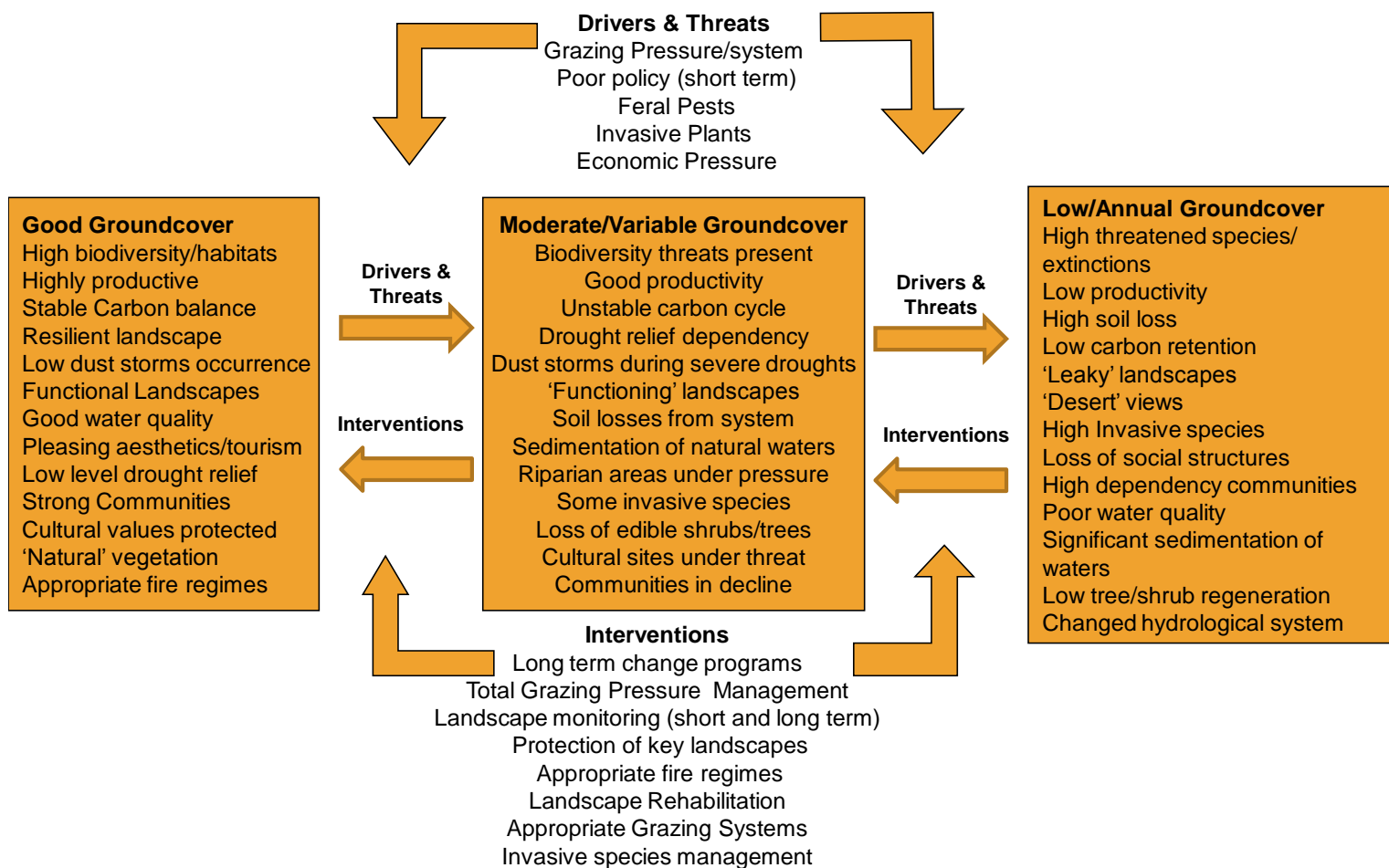
The Alliance would therefore advise that the following investment areas, identified nationally but then delivered in a regionally specific manner would be priorities.

- Total grazing pressure management through fencing, better availability of information on groundcover condition and improved grazing management practices
- Fire management and preparedness
- Stewardship for environmental conservation activities
- Management programs for invasive animal and weed pests across the country
- Improved and on-going monitoring systems to indicate the effectiveness of activities in the long term.

The state and transition model figure below demonstrates how the rangeland environment responds to different levels of management and the types of intervention required to ensure the health of the system improves.

Rangeland Resilience - State and Transition Model

Indicator - Groundcover



how the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture have, and can, work together to deliver a seamless land care program;

Green Army Delivery

The Alliance would welcome the opportunity to work with the Australian Government and registered/chosen deliverers to assist in developing the programme and activities which are relevant to the rangeland environment and are likely to lead to longer term employment for participants. The Rangeland Alliance is particularly interested in whether there is flexibility in this program to allow for meaningful application in areas of extensive areas and low population. In particular the Alliance would like to discuss the following:

Discussion points:

1. Regional and remote Australia (the rangelands fall in the remote and very remote category for ABS stats) has a very low population = 75% of Australia and 2.5% of population. This may make finding enough people in the correct age group to participate in the program every 6 months will be difficult
 - The ways to overcome this and still hit the target of training and developing environmental workers are:
 - Using the teams in more than one location by extending their employment period so when they are trained they can move to other locations across the country to address the same issue using the skills they have developed
 - Using teams for longer than 6 months to take skills from basic to a more applicable standard for real employment and possible longer term employment or business opportunities
 - Carefully choosing projects which provide long term outcomes so that the employment options are embedded in the region(s)
 - Providing travel and accommodation support for the teams
2. Rangelands are generally intact natural systems extensively grazed, Indigenous managed lands and conserved for environmental outcomes (accounts for 81% of rangeland land use) and land management activities are carried out on a scale and manner that is difficult to approach in teams such as these for 6 months.
 - This means that the activities that will result in the desired environmental outcome of the Green Army program are different from those in more fragmented agricultural, peri-urban or urban communities. The green army outcomes will be need to be met using different methods/activities in the rangelands
3. It is very unlikely that work sites will be within a daily commute for participants which may mean that the programs payments are not sufficient to entice participants into the program
 - That there is availability of support for travel and accommodation or maintenance of the group away from home?
4. The remote and, in some places, very remote nature of the rangelands means that there need to be a high priority put on the deliverer agents used in these remote localities to ensure they have experience in such environments and the procedures to ensure the activities are carried out in a safe manner
 - The training and development needed for such activities include chemical handling, remote first aid 4WD driver training and workplace safety in remote areas will be time consuming and expensive for the remote work environment. It would be advantageous if participants after undertaking this training can take the opportunity for longer term involvement to make the most of the investment made to their skills

- Development of skills of people to operate in remote areas will also give preparation for people to be able to operate in remote areas so they can participate in industries outside of natural resource management in the rangelands.

5. NRM Regional Body support to assist in managing projects

- Has there been consideration of resource support to regional NRM bodies who are working with delivery agents to identify projects, organise access and work dates with land managers and supply local knowledge and contacts?

It is important that the skills developed be transferable across the range of industries so that participants have the best opportunity to gain employment and remain in regional areas. This would be of particular benefit to Indigenous communities. The type of skills which are applicable across industries would be the use and application of GIS and remote sensing systems, operating in a remote environment and administration skills. Examples of practical programs which could result in such transferable skills may include training teams in the use of unmanned flying vehicles for the location and destruction of weed species, total grazing pressure activities including fencing and monitoring, monitoring of feral animal impact on environmental and cultural heritage sites and fire control programs.

Tozer, P (2012) Economic Impact of Off Site Wind Erosion, Final Report - prepared for Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Authority.

