



**TROPICAL SAVANNAS CRC**

Cooperative Research Centre for the Sustainable Development of Tropical Savannas

Report on the

# Northern Grassy Landscapes Conference

29–31 August 2000

Katherine,

Northern Territory



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# Background

A Northern Grassy Landscapes Conference was held on 29–31 August 2000 in Katherine, Northern Territory. This followed a similar conference on southern grasslands in Clare, South Australia in 1999. This Conference was recommended by CSVM.

It was organised by a consortium of interested parties in northern Australia and coordinated by Tropical Savannas CRC. Representatives of these parties constituted the Conference Coordinating Group.

The purposes of the conference were twofold. Firstly to exchange knowledge and experiences in the management of northern grassy landscapes and so improve the capability to manage them healthily. Secondly it was to provide guidance and advice to agencies responsible for programs which could benefit northern grassy landscapes and those people responsible for managing and caring for them. It was a conference for practical landholders and managers, people supporting natural resource management and both government and non-government program managers and policy-makers.

The Conference had major sponsorship from National Heritage Trust and Bushcare, Tropical Savannas CRC and the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries. It also received sponsorship from Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission, Northern Territory Department of Lands Planning and Environment, Agriculture WA, Department of Conservation and Land Management in Western Australia, Greening Australia Northern Territory, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and from Stanbroke Pastoral Company.

Conference attendees were officially welcomed by The Honourable Mike Reed, Deputy Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government and the Conference was officially opened by The Honourable Dr Sharman Stone, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Australian Federal Government. The Conference acknowledged the Jawoyn people as traditional owners.

The Conference was attended by 240 people; the planning target was for 130 people. There were approximately equal numbers of land holders and managers, service agency people (public and private) and researchers. There were people from throughout northern Australia. Fifteen landholders were provided with financial support to attend.

The Conference was a mixture of speaker sessions, large and small workshops and a number of social activities.

There were two field trips; a conservation focused trip dealing with mine site rehabilitation and biodiversity conservation and a trip to Elsey Station concerning Aboriginal pastoral, conservation and ecotourism operations. Both these trips were fully booked.

Feedback provided on the evaluation sheets for the Conference was overwhelmingly positive. Comment was made on the constructive interaction of the sectors across northern Australia and a range of topics and interests presented. The Conference presentations and activities ran smoothly. Unfortunately the higher than expected numbers meant the workshops were not as interactive as they might have been. The field trips were very informative with good information and speakers.

Conference Proceedings which included most papers and an abstract for each of the 35 posters, were provided to each attendee on registration.

The final Conference Proceedings which will include all the papers and their accompanying graphic material as well as the discussion sessions and the speaker's Powerpoint presentations will be distributed as a CD-ROM.

# Outcomes

The final session of the Conference involved small groups considering the future needs of the Northern Grassy Landscapes, the major issues and actions that needed to be undertaken. These workshop groups identified the following.

## 1. Regional Planning

A greater emphasis was needed on integrated regional planning to achieve the goal of a healthy landscape. This planning needed to recognise the aspirations and experience of a range of people and groups. It needed to identify common goals and to be focused on achieving sustainable, healthy landscapes. There needed to be a focus on helping people change. The focus should be on prevention before the need for a cure. All stakeholders need to feel that their involvement is legitimate and that both long and short term outcomes are important.

### *Actions:*

- a broader context for Property Management Planning to incorporate cultural, conservation and production values
- a series of regionally coordinated forums where people could seriously deliberate on the complex issues and arrive at coordinated regional plans
- the need for legislative congruence on matters affecting natural resource management and sustainability across northern Australia e.g. fire regulations
- support for mechanisms for biodiversity management within a production context
- all planning activities need to identify common goals and to be focused on achieving sustainable, healthy landscapes.

## 2. Cooperative Action

Activities and action for sustainable management needed to be integrated at the local and regional levels. All relevant stakeholders needed to be included. It needed to be a cooperative approach coordinated by a neutral but involved body. There needed to be support for collaborative decision-making and implementation. There is a need to broaden the responsibility for sustainable resource management to include the wider community and to ensure it makes its relevant contribution.

### *Actions:*

- a system of levies or credits based on the achievement of desired environmental, social, economic and cultural outcomes, and which appropriately shared the cost of achieving these outcomes
- focused learning workshops and opportunities so that people acquired the new skills and knowledge necessary for this changed management.
- appropriate legislation and congruence of legislation across northern Australia which contributes to sustainable management
- incentives and support for appropriate management outcomes
- incorporate group based extension in regional and workshop activities and ensure wide community involvement in any action
- develop mechanisms for agreeing on changes needed and managing their environmental, economic and social impacts

## 3. Monitoring

A comprehensive monitoring framework was essential for the achievement of sustainable healthy landscapes. This monitoring needed to encompass the full range of values important to achieving and maintaining a healthy landscape.

*Actions:*

- there needs to be an appropriate institutional framework to ensure the monitoring happens and to coordinate it across northern Australia and integrate it with local and regional management activities
- obtain the long-term commitment by government and industries to the monitoring program
- arrangements for community and landholder participation in monitoring programs
- validation, adaptation and incorporation of appropriate methodologies into local, regional, state and National monitoring programs
- incorporation of the full range of environmental, production, economic, social and cultural criteria and values in the monitoring program and the indicators for assessing these.

## 4. Production and Conservation

The conflict between production and conservation needs to be resolved. This will require a regional vision and approach. It will also require the active participation of all stakeholders and the wide community.

*Actions:*

- the actions specified in relation to regional planning, regional action and monitoring will contribute to resolving this conflict provided they deal with the issues in a participative and considerate way.
- activities should utilise current existing local and regional groups to broaden their focus.
- opportunities for interaction and exchange of views such as this Northern Grassy Landscape Conference must be repeated frequently

## 5. Communication

The collection and communication of appropriate information is essential to a better understanding of the issues and requirements for sustainable healthy landscapes. This will require the simultaneous use of a range of communication channels and media. It requires the use of the most appropriate technology and methods for the audience. It is an important ingredient in supporting adaptive management of the landscape.

*Actions:*

- there needs to be an education and information strategy developed for the wider community, schools, service people and land managers.
- the communication needs to be closely linked to extension and education activities by agencies
- different forms of communication need to be interrelated so the message is consistent

## 6. Education

Education is a key ingredient to a wider level of competence and appreciation of the importance of northern grassy landscapes and their management. It needs to be targeted so it is relevant to particular groups. It needs to cover both the wider picture and local application.

*Actions:*

- there needs to be particular programs developed to suit school curricula
- visitors to the northern grassy landscapes need to have particular information prepared for them and training for people who are likely to inform them
- consumers need to be aware of the benefits of products from healthy landscapes
- education activities to assist landholders to acquire skills and knowledge to manage appropriately need to be conducted within local communities
- evaluate the real costs of production including externalities and intangibles
- organise educational exchanges between indigenous and non-indigenous landholders for their mutual benefit

## 7. Weeds

Weeds are a major threat to the northern grassy landscapes. There is also the issue that plants introduced as improved pasture species have become weeds in certain situations and are threatening ecosystem processes. This dichotomy of views is a cause for disagreement and conflict between production and conservation sectors.

### *Actions:*

- enhance the processes which identify weeds early and manage the eradication or limitation of them prior to a widespread problem becoming evident (e.g. Gamba grass, ponded pasture species)
- conduct education and awareness of the damage that weeds can cause and how to manage them
- conduct research and extension on control of weeds including the cost of monitoring and remedial action

## 8. Additional issues

The work of Tropical Savannas CRC in research, education and communication and its role as a neutral facilitator of interaction between a wide range of stakeholders was strongly supported. It has demonstrated a positive and constructive role in addressing some of these major issues raised. It has the ability and experience to implement some of the important actions proposed.

Natural Resource Management policy must consider these critical needs and actions if it is to be relevant to northern grassy landscapes of Australia. It needs to adopt a principle of prevention before expensive restoration is needed. It needs to incorporate a range of scales in considering sustainable use and management. It must address the breadth of values and requirements for sustainability incorporating production, conservation, social and cultural needs.

Many of these issues and actions support the National Principles and Guidelines for Rangeland Management.

## Possible Future Activities

The following suggestions are made to stimulate discussion on what could/should be done to maintain the momentum created by the Conference.

Please add your suggestions or comments and let us know what you think.

**A Series of Regional Forums** should be conducted across northern Australia to achieve the following outcomes:

- development of regional strategic plans for integrated conservation and production management
- resolve issues of conflict between production and conservation interests
- maintain the momentum of activities and learning supported by this Northern Grassy Landscapes Conference.

Regional Groups already active regional planning and management should be involved in the conduct of these Regional Forums to achieve these sustainability outcomes incorporating environmental protection, economic viability and social desirability. Such groups include: Desert Uplands Build-up and Community Development Committee, Burdekin Management Study Coordinating Group, SW Strategy Coordinating Group, Barkly Tablelands Regional Beef Research Committee, Sturt Plateau Best Practice Group, Victoria River District Conservation Association, Ord-Bonaparte Management Group, West Kimberley Sea and Land Management Group, Aurukun Land Management Group, Centralian Land Management Association and Dimuru Development Corporation. The Tropical Savannas CRC is currently involved in activities with a number of these groups.

**Broaden the scope of Property Management Planning (PMP)** to include conservation management and biodiversity protection strategies and practises. This will require the training of existing staff or secondment of people with expertise to support these new aspects of PMP implementation.

**Conduct a review of State/Territory and Local Government resource management legislation and regulations** to identify aspects which are contrary to or impeding sound sustainable landscape management. A particular focus should be placed on fire management, weed and feral animal management and grazing management.

## **Report on the Northern Grassy Landscapes Conference**

A Report would be prepared for use by those governments and groups interested in resource management.

**Implement a National monitoring program for grassy landscapes** (northern and southern), incorporating production, conservation, social and cultural values.

The National Land and Water Resources Audit is developing such a monitoring proposal for Australia's rangelands.

The monitoring program needs to incorporate mechanisms, incentives and communication to enable landholders and managers to use the outputs of such a program in the management decision-making.