

GUEST EDITORIAL*'Shifting Camp'***L.P. Hunt***CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, PMB 44, Winnellie NT 0822*

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That the last ten years or so have seen major changes in the economic, environmental and social circumstances in which Australia's rangelands are used and managed is not news to anyone who has more than a passing interest in the rangelands. This period has probably witnessed the most dramatic change since the rangelands were 'opened up' and the first pastoral runs were established in the 19th century. An evolution in attitudes to, and expectations for, rangeland use, as well as in actual land use, continues today in response to forces operating at local, national and global levels. These are resulting in increasing pressures on rangeland use. For example, there is a tightening of economic margins for pastoralism, an increasing interest by the wider community in the natural environment and demands for sustainable use, a growing recognition of the need to maintain biodiversity resources, an aspiration for access to land by Aboriginal people for economic, social and cultural purposes, and a greater interest in establishing non-pastoral land uses. Whereas the existence of these pressures is widely acknowledged, their implications for changes in rangeland use, and how best to deal with these changes, remain poorly understood.

Coping with changing circumstances is something that the pastoral community, the dominant land user in the rangelands, is generally accustomed to and renowned for. The quintessential characteristics of the outback 'bushy' of a person who is adaptable and resilient, and who is able to improvise in the face of challenges thrown up by changing seasonal and economic conditions, remoteness and isolation are probably key factors in the ability of rangeland people to easily cope with many changes. Thus, it might be expected that the pastoral community would be able to readily accommodate the changes that are occurring in the environment affecting land use in the rangelands, although it seems that this is not necessarily so.

Adjusting to change, especially in factors that potentially affect livelihoods and lifestyles, is not easy. Of course today there are many other legitimate land users and residents in the rangelands in addition to pastoralists. But it is arguable that it is the pastoral community, of all rangeland residents, land users and interested parties, which is having the greatest difficulty adjusting to contemporary pressures of change.

To some extent this is understandable since many pastoralists perceive that they can only lose from any changes that occur, and they have the most to lose at a personal level. But the relatively fast pace of change, and the coincidence of multiple drivers of change raise problems that do not have immediately obvious and compatible solutions. This adds to the complexity of the situation and the uncertainty of the outcomes. Indeed the situation presents difficulties that cannot be resolved internally by pastoralists and solely at the property level.

As a result of this complexity and the limited capacity to respond locally, the rangeland community must pro-actively address the issues of change, and involve all interested parties in the process to properly understand the problems and people's expectations and aspirations. This will create the best chance of finding solutions that are acceptable to as many people as possible, which protect natural resource values, and achieve profitable and sustainable use. Increasingly there are attempts to do just this with community-based land use planning activities having been

initiated in a number of areas in the rangelands to bring about more integrated natural resource management at the regional level. Although these regional planning activities have met with varying success, they should be viewed as part of a continual learning process in developing better ways to address land use issues. It is also important that there be ongoing discussion and analysis of the drivers of change in the rangelands, the opportunities and threats they present, and the strategies for dealing with them.

In September 2002 the Australian Rangeland Society convened its 12th Biennial Conference in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, with the theme ‘Shifting Camp’. The choice of this theme was a recognition of the importance of the changing balance of land use interests in many parts of the rangelands and, in particular, whether we should broaden our view of the rangelands from one which sees pastoral use as the dominant and most appropriate land use. In focussing on this question, the aim was to stimulate discussion and dialogue amongst people and so move closer to achieving more flexible and responsive arrangements for land use that better reflect contemporary economic, social and environmental conditions and expectations.

His Excellency Lieutenant General John Sanderson AC, the Governor of Western Australia, opened the conference. In his introductory address, presented here as the Introduction to this Special Issue of *The Rangeland Journal*, the Governor provided an excellent overview of the situation and issues affecting current and future use of the rangelands. His Excellency’s comments highlighted the broad community interest in the rangelands, and the validity of all interested parties participating in or at least monitoring progress in decisions affecting the future of the rangelands. In addition, he emphasised that all who have a direct interest in the rangelands must work together to develop practical solutions to rangeland issues.

A series of keynote ‘scene-setting’ papers was then presented. These provided perspectives on the future of rangeland use from the point of view of the key land uses and associated factors that are driving change in the rangelands. Expanded versions of most of these papers are published in this Special Issue. Included are papers on pastoral use (Ash and Stafford Smith), global forces affecting the rangelands (Robertson), the economics of land use (Fargher *et al.*), biodiversity conservation (Woinarski and Fisher) and mining use (Read). The needs of Aboriginal people in the rangelands were also considered in a presentation at the Conference but, unfortunately, it was not possible to include this paper in this Special Issue. The papers present valuable insights on the needs and opportunities for future land use. Together they provide a positive view of the potential for achieving long-term sustainable land use through an integrated approach that satisfies the needs of all rangeland people. The final paper in this issue draws together some of the main findings of the conference and offers a vision for moving forward.