



# Australian Rangelands Society Conference Community Subsidisation Evaluation Results

# Feedback received from Rangelands NRM sponsored attendees

Sponsorship was provided to pastoral landholders to attend the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennial Australian Rangelands Society Conference in Kununurra in September 2012. The theme for the Conference was 'Celebrating diversity: people, places, purpose'. The program included:

- strategic land and water use planning in northern Australia;
- balancing pastoral, tourism, mining, and conservation uses in the rangelands;
- Indigenous land use and management;
- latest techniques in grazing, biodiversity, fire, and carbon management;
- new science for rangeland management in a multiple use framework; and
- case studies in land restoration and land use change.

The initial target for landholder subsidisation was six sponsorships for a total of \$40,000. Only limited applications were received and as a result four pastoralists/land managers were sponsored with funds provided towards registration, accommodation, or travel expenses. A total of \$4,875 was spent providing the sponsorship. Several Rangelands NRM Board members and staff also attended. The cost of this is not known.

An evaluation form was provided in an effort to obtain an understanding of the effectiveness of the sponsorship in meeting the needs of those attending. A decision was made to also have the evaluation form completed by Rangelands NRM staff and Board members who attended the conference. 11 responses were received. Of those, 3 (27%) were completed by sponsored land managers, 4 by staff (36%), 3 by Board members (27%), and 1 by a project partner (9%).

## Results

Question 1 asked if the information obtained at the conference provided them with a new perspective of how to manage the landscape. The question was two-pronged with a 'yes' or 'no' response required together with an open ended comment.

Eight respondents answered 'Yes' (80%) and two respondents answered 'No' (20%). One respondent did not provide a response. The negative responses were provided by one of the sponsored land managers and a Rangelands staff member who is responsible for functions other than on-ground works.

The respondents' multi-foci open ended comments about their changed perspective of landscape management were concentrated on several key themes:

- an increased understanding of the need for enhanced rangelands management techniques, particularly fire management (5 instances);
- a recognition that there is a need to carefully integrate agricultural production management of the rangelands with conservation and carbon and greenhouse gas abatement (3 instances);

- the need to recognise “the value of ‘people’ in the equation” and the need to continue to provide information and education to increase motivation “to look after the rangelands” (2 instances); and
- the need to ensure that the disparity between research and practice is addressed (1 instance).

Of concern was that one of the sponsored land managers noted that they “Did not attend enough of the sessions to pick up anything new”.

Question 2 asked if respondents felt that they had learnt something that could be taken home and applied to their own land management activities. The question was two-pronged with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response required together with an open ended comment.

Nine respondents answered ‘Yes’ (82%) and two respondents answered ‘No’ (18%). The negative responses were given by the same respondents.

The respondents’ comments about what they had learnt and could apply to their activities were concentrated around two key themes.

- Previous concepts and understanding were challenged and respondents realised the need to think innovatively even if they didn’t entirely agree with the information imparted.
- Ways to improve productivity whilst having a positive impact on the environment and ensuring that this information is passed onto others.

Again, of concern is that the same sponsored land manager was unable to learn anything at the conference because they didn’t attend sufficient sessions.

Question 3 asked whether there was any other key learning that was taken away. This consisted of an open ended response only.

The other key learnings identified included:

- the importance of communicating and building relationships with peers, co-ordinating bodies, and policy makers;
- a need to ‘work smarter’, co-ordinate activities, and learn through the actions of others not just scientific literature; and
- the need to diversify and look to other ecosystems for innovation.

Question 4 asked if there value for respondents in attending the conference. This was a two-pronged question with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response required together with an open ended comment.

Eleven respondents answered and all (100%) were affirmative.

The feedback received indicated that the overriding impact of attendance was gained through the opportunities for networking, communication between stakeholder groups (including policy makers) sharing ideas, and gaining a broader perspective. A further comment reflected the need for such events

to be more inclusive of Indigenous NRM. One respondent provided additional commentary to note his appreciation of the financial support received from Rangelands NRM to attend the conference and the ease of processes associated with the sponsorship.

## Analysis

Analysis of the results indicates that land managers' desire for sponsorship to such events was either lower than initially anticipated or other unknown factors influenced the uptake. Feedback has also indicated that at least 25% of those that accepted sponsorship were unable to commit to full attendance. These results may indicate that care should be exercised prior to repeating sponsorship to similar events.

Learnings taken away from the conference sessions were varied but most focussed on respondents feeling that their current management perceptions had been challenged and they realised that innovation and integration is required for long-term sustainability.

The key value for the majority of respondents was the opportunity to network, meet land holders in similar situations, and be given an opportunity to discuss issues with co-ordinating bodies and policy makers. This would indicate that opportunities for further, ongoing networking should be explored.