



Research Briefing Note

Characteristics of Australia's rangelands and key design issues for monitoring.

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BACKGROUND

We present the key issues that are most likely to influence any set of guiding principles for developing biodiversity monitoring programs in Australia's rangelands. We define the 'Australian rangelands' and present an overview of its climate extremes, land use pressures and 'biodiversity' loss, and then focus on issues underpinning the design phase of any monitoring program. Using Noss's (1990) framework of compositional, structural and functional attributes of biodiversity and its new revisions by others, we show how this elusive, abstract concept of biodiversity can be used to identify many measurable attributes that may form a minimum and necessary set of indicators for any biodiversity monitoring task. We then described the steps in the monitoring process with a particular focus on the reasons for monitoring biodiversity as they strongly influence the selection of indicators. We conclude by providing a table of key issues as background information for developing guiding principles. The list is by no means an exhaustive list for the design phase but it does indicate considerable attention needs to be given to this phase when developing monitoring programs. We have intentionally not addressed the equally important issues associated with the planning and delivery phases of developing a monitoring program.

AIM

1. Summarise the unique biophysical characteristics, land use pressures and socio-economic factors of Australia's rangelands that determine its present day ecosystems, plants and animals.
2. Present the key issues to be addressed when developing any set of guiding principles for biodiversity monitoring programs.

OUTCOMES

Increased knowledge of the factors and key issues to consider when developing policy frameworks for monitoring biodiversity in Australia's diverse rangelands.



IMPLICATIONS

This research provided the background for a national technical workshop of experts on monitoring biodiversity in the rangelands held in Alice Springs, Northern Territory , 29 October to 1 November 2002.

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