

# Management of Grazing

## Managing Rangelands

(adapted from A Policy for the Future of Australia's Rangelands)

The use of the rangelands depends on understanding how the native species behave, whether the use is grazing or conservation. Any paddock or reserve may contain 100 or more species; learning to manage these requires different perspectives to those of more intensive agricultural production. The climate is unpredictable, the landscape is patchy and the scale of management is immense.

Management must take a long term view; management based on an annual and static cycle is inappropriate. Plant establishment occurs intermittently, perhaps once every five years or more rarely. At these times, palatable perennial species may need light grazing until fully established while inedible shrubs may need burning. Drought is also a natural part of the cycle, when plant survival is stretched to the limit. Both wet and drought years are normal in the rangelands. Management strategies must cater for these critical times.

The landscape is patchy. Water and nutrients concentrate in patches, around bushes and trees, or in gentle depressions. These are the main sites for production. These special sites must be protected from damage to maintain both composition and production. For grazing or pastoral land use, maintenance of a minimum level of



vegetation cover to protect the soil against erosion and the persistence of palatable species should be the main management goals. Individual paddocks are large (tens to hundreds of sq km) and properties larger (hundreds to thousands of sq km) and management inputs must be low cost. Generally, grazing and fire are the only management tools available. Where land has been degraded but retains inherent fertility, more expensive reclamation techniques may be warranted. These could include warren ripping to control rabbits or building ponding banks to control water flow, arrest erosion and increase pasture growth.

For tourism and conservation management, maximising the diversity of habitats will be an important objective. In large parks and reserves, fire often is the only practical tool. Patches of different fire 'age' will enhance diversity and break up wildfires. Rangeland management is a matter of working with the natural ecological forces of the land. Managers need to use these forces (e.g. fire) to their advantage thereby maximising the advantages created by redistribution and the formation of fertile patches.

