

Land Conservation District Committee

21st February 2003

Sustainability Policy Unit
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
197 ST Georges Terrace
Perth WA 6000

Dear Sir

Re: The Western Australian State Sustainability Strategy – Consultation Draft

The following reflects the views of the Roeburne – Port Hedland Land Conservation District Committee.

Sustainable use of natural resources

When discussing agricultural land use there needs to be clear delineation between pastoralism and farming. While having some common aspects the differences are far greater as are the impacts on the natural resource.

Pastoralists are generally well aware of the impact their industry has on the natural resource. A resource which is critical to the economic, ecological and social sustainability of the pastoral and wider community. The basis for this strategy is about **all** impact on the basic needs of air, water and land; and the inter relationship of these impacts, which are fundamental to the sustainability of all communities. It is the level of acceptable impact and the ability to manage/minimise the impact that is the crucial point.

It is recognised that early settlers did not have an understanding of the management needs of the Australian landscapes and that mistakes were made in land use. Pastoral land use was not exempt from this lack of knowledge and errors. However less than 0.01% of the rangelands were covered by Western Australian Regional Rangelands Surveys as at 2001 were deemed to be severely degraded and eroded.

As responsible land managers, the pastoral sector has a vital role in both sustainability of ecological systems and as a small vibrant contributor to the sustainability of the State's economy. It should also be recognised that the Pastoral industry adds an extra dimension to the economies and cultural of regional areas which are often heavily reliant on the mining sector.

One of the shortfalls of the State Sustainability Strategy is that it appears to consider the pastoral industry almost in isolation. The industry is inextricably linked to the economic, social and environmental fabric of the regions in which it exists. As such there needs to be two-way interaction between the sector, other industry and the wider community.

One of the concerns of pastoralists is that other industry, conservation areas, infrastructure development and the wider community can have a substantial impact on the sustainability of the pastoral sector in terms of for example, pollution, water management issues, water flow, soil erosion and fire management. Such impacts on the pastoral industry are often ignored or trivialised. In addition the depth of accumulated knowledge as land managers is often ignored, particularly when planning infrastructure such as roads and railway lines which have considerable potential to negatively impact on land systems.

While Land Conservation District Committees provide a framework for dealing with land conservation issues at a local level there is a need for the impact of other industry and community activity to be considered. The Sustainability Strategy would be strengthened by providing a framework by which the LCDCs have the ability to participate in wider community decisions on developments that affect the sustainability of pastoral ecosystems. Furthermore LCDCs have played a pivotal role in developing integrated land management beyond an individual property's boundary and the Sustainability Strategy should attempt to build on the partnerships developed with Development Commissions, FESA and CALM to better manage resources. Eg Pilbara Fire Management Plan.

Regional Sustainability

The strategy appears to be inconsistent in that it recognises the strength of the regions as a basis for sustainability but appears to want to prescribe a "one-size fits all" approach to the management of pastoral lands. The structural nature of the industry is different between regions depending on:-

- Degrees of reliance on sheep versus cattle
- Degree of diversification
- Carrying capacity of land systems within a region
- Lease size
- Climate variability
- Reliability of rainfall
- Level of impact by other industries
- Total grazing pressure

The sustainability issues and solutions for the pastoral sector differ from region to region. For example, the 'Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy' was a specific action to the needs of that region – and area largely dependent on sheep/wool enterprises suffering from a prolonged downturn in the wool market, dry seasons, excessive uncontrolled goat population and vegetation decline. Local or regional decision making will ensure the industry remains sustainable and operates within a wider sustainability framework for the region in which it is based. It is suggested that there be an interrelationship between the sustainable strategy, the Development of Agriculture draft WA 2002 Rangelands Strategy and the development of regional natural resource management strategies.

With regard to regional boundaries as defined under the Regional Development Commissions Act (1993) should be retained as a suitable model for regional identity and decision making.

In conclusion I would like to quote the Department of Agriculture's vision of the rangelands as appears in the 2002 Rangelands Strategy.

“An ecologically sustainable resource that is utilised in a responsive way to contribute to the State economy and social integrity.

This vision is based on appropriate land use, close consultation with industry, protection of the agriculture investment, industry development and community self management.

It builds on people's sense of pride and custodianship for the rangelands and acknowledges the aesthetic and heritage values of the rangelands.”

Yours sincerely

Robyn Richardson
Secretary
Roebourne-Port Hedland Land Conservation District Committee