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Q1

First name
[REDACTED]

Q2

Last name
[REDACTED]

Q3

Email
[REDACTED]

Q4 Yes
Can we contact you about your submission (if needed)?

Q5 Yes
Can we add your email to our mailing list for occasional updates on this topic?

Q6 None of the above (I have a general interest in the topic).
What best describes you?

Q7 Western
What best describes your main regional interest?

Q8

Your submission may be published. If you do not want your personal details or responses published, please tell us here.

I agree to have my submission published anonymously
– please remove my name before publishing.

Q9

What do you consider is the most significant action(s) we can undertake to protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystem function on private lands?

Western NSW is largely ignored by policy makers and politicians in considerations of biodiversity and ecosystem function. However, in occupying 40% of the state and retaining approximately 95% of native vegetation cover, it presents a major opportunity for conserving biodiversity within a context of maintaining agricultural production. Unfortunately, while the region remains in a natural state, the vegetation is in mediocre condition and ecosystem function is compromised by poor groundcover, leading to susceptibility to wind and water erosion as well as compromised habitat for many species, including iconic small mammals. Dustwatch records demonstrate that groundcover levels are consistently below erosion protection thresholds (Ground cover indicator for drought resilience. Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. ABARES. <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/aclump/land-cover/ground-cover-drought-resilience-indicator#concepts-and-data-sources>)

A significant biodiversity issue affecting the region is termed total grazing pressure, whereby excessive and selective grazing pressure is applied by unmanaged grazing animals regardless of the management of livestock by pastoralists. In particular, land cannot be rested from grazing as unmanaged grazers, primarily red, western grey and eastern grey kangaroos as well as feral goats have ready access to pastures where traditional fencing and waterpoint infrastructure is in place.

This issue can be addressed as has been demonstrated by numerous landholders who have undertaken fencing and waterpoint upgrades as well as implementing pasture management systems incorporating paddock spelling.

Q10

How can we further improve soil, water and vegetation management to protect and restore biodiversity while delivering sustainable economic outcomes?

Western NSW is home to a wide range of arid-zone fauna and flora species, but abundance and viability is suppressed. The persistence of small mammals such as the kultarr represents the promise of this region if biodiversity was prioritised.

To protect and restore biodiversity in western NSW in the context of soil, land and vegetation management requires the control of overabundant kangaroo populations as well as placing rangeland goats under management.

Kangaroo populations have been freed from predation and resource constraints since the introduction of pastoralism. Populations are now irruptive, responding only to season, then catastrophically crashing with the onset of drought. For instance, 7 million kangaroos died of starvation and thirst in 2018 due to a two year drought. Kangaroo management is being progressed by the growing use of exclusion fencing, but a humane cull by professional operators is a necessary component. Unfortunately options for managing overabundant kangaroos are being rapidly reduced by activism and associated risk aversion. The commercial harvest is no longer of relevance in property-based kangaroo management.

Goat populations have continued to increase since the late 1990"s when there were about 900,000 to now when there are 5 million animals. The economic framework built around the goat harvesting industry has muted any concern of the impact of unmanaged goats on biodiversity. Goats are selective grazers that can survive on browse in tough seasons and also impact refugia sites in terrain where biodiversity attempts to persist during drought. Yet goats can be readily managed through adequate fencing and waterpoint trap facilities across much of the region.

When unmanaged grazing is controlled, there are measurable improvement in groundcover, species diversity, perenniality, soil carbon and pasture biomass. See:

Waters, C. M., Orgill, S. E., Melville, G. J., Toole, I. D., and Smith, W. J. (2017). Management of grazing intensity in the semi-arid rangelands of southern Australia: effects on soil and biodiversity. *Land Degradation& Development* 28, 1363–1375

McDonald S. E., Reid N., Smith R., Waters C. M., Hunter J., Rader R. (2019) Rotational grazing management achieves similar plant diversity outcomes to areas managed for conservation in a semi-arid rangeland. *The Rangeland Journal* 41, 135-145.

The Kangaroo Management Task Force is a group that has considered kangaroo issues in depth for a number of years and possesses an significant bibliography covering relevant literature:

<https://kangaroomanagementtaskforce.com.au/>

Additional kangaroo management information can be found at:

https://www.ils.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1253705/Integrated-Kangaroo-Management_web.pdf

Q11

What do you consider is the most effective way to further support and enable landholders to deliver sustainable land management and production outcomes?

Landholders face a difficult issue in managing kangaroo numbers, especially in drought where animals congregate and often die in unappealing circumstances. The reality of the issue is seemingly avoided by activists and political operatives who see few votes in addressing the problem.

To move forward, NSW at minimum should work towards a Kangaroo Management Strategy. Such a strategy would take a holistic approach to kangaroo management, considering landscape health and ecosystem function in addition to kangaroo abundance and welfare. The existing Kangaroo Harvest Plan policy approach is designed only with conservation of numbers in mind, not the bigger picture of landscape health. The strategy could present a framework for progressing options for a more progressive and informed management approach to overabundant kangaroo populations (clearly recognising that there are also macropod populations at risk).

Landholders should be supported further in gaining management control of feral goats (in addition to existing programs). However, with current rock-bottom market prices for goats, there is little incentive for landholders to do this. Again, the government needs to develop a strategic approach to goat management, recognising the industry opportunities but also mindful of the landscape impacts, which have essentially been ignored for some time.

Q12

Is there any other information about this topic you would like to share with us?

Western NSW represents a great opportunity for improving biodiversity in conjunction with maintaining a viable agricultural industry. The current coastal /koala focus of public consciousness needs to be expanded to incorporate other aspects of biodiversity, especially given that 40% of NSW is semi-arid.
