



The Australian Rangeland Society

Council meeting # 227 Out of Session MINUTES

6 pm Queensland time Wednesday 31 October 2012 via Teleconference

1. **Present:** John Taylor, Carolyn Ireland, Ben Forsyth, Peter Marin, Graeme Tupper, Kate Masters

2. **Apologies:** Annabel Walsh

3. **Results of the Member Survey**

John Taylor circulated papers to inform Council about the results of the recent surveys.

Two different surveys were conducted – one by Survey Monkey aimed at ARS Members and a second at the Kununurra Conference aimed at conference participants, many of whom were not members. The second arose because although there were 185 conference delegates only 70 were current members. The majority of respondents to the first survey were bulk of the scientists and trainer/educators, and the second survey were more land care, land owners, etc. In both surveys respondents were invited to provide comments on various issues explored.

Responses to both surveys varied enormously: In both there was strong support for the Society and a recognition that the Society needs to raise the profile of the Rangelands and the Society amongst the Australian population. Some wanted more emphasis on science but there was also a strong leaning towards rangeland management and indigenous issues. Conferences were well supported. Other suggestions included: more interaction between members, involve more landholders, use more social media, face to face activities in each state in the 'in-between' conference years. Council agreed, in principle, with all these points.

Messages were very similar between first and second surveys: Conferences and TRJ consistently in top 3. Second tier ideas were web based information (which was seen to be filling an important need), science vs landcare and landholders, a Facebook page, webinars as way of sharing rangeland knowledge and the capture of old publications. However, it appears we have the balance right.

Use of funds: Most support was for travel/research grants and scholarships and producer events. Least support was for sponsorship of other organisations/ conferences and council member development.

Comments: What is the Rangelands? Web statistics show that Rangeland Australia's website did raise the profile of Rangelands. Need to have our website explaining Rangelands? Many respondents were willing to pay more money for additional services.

Many members belonged to other Societies. Non-members did not - many would probably never join a Society. Satisfaction among members is pretty high. Overall, a surprising high level of satisfaction. Distinct focus on human rather than virtual interaction.

ACTION: Web conference – post it rooms. Synchronous or asynchronous – posting in writing. Post comments on the issue – needs to be managed in accordance with a code of conduct. Russel Grant has probably not got time. Email chats – AGM even! Forum inviting them into share experiences. Look at some systems mechanisms for webinars and forums, id topics and see if we can set up one or two of these. Discussions. Appropriate responses – do some work. February. Approach the membership – email alert for an issue. It was noted that if you have the technology they work but if you don't they don't work. Keep it at email level. Ben to give a summary of Future Farmers Model – using purely email. Worth doing something. Email approach is good. First one light-hearted and not too technical! First one on how forums work! Admin at future farmers might be happy to run one. Ben to approach Future Farmers as a first contact and report back.

ACTION: Peter – increase indigenous involvement. Hard topic but Peter would like to start a working group to suggest how we could become more relevant to them. CRC for Remote Economic Participation is heavily in this space. How can we add value? Need to do some homework to identify niche and opportunities. Peter to drive this.

ACTION: Summary of the surveys to be written. John to take the lead and Carolyn to help. When? Quickly – something about why people attended the conference and the value of society to them and broadening the objectives as a first cut. Other things to come in a further article(s) in Feb RMN.

4. Brief discussion about the Motion proposed and voted on at the General Meeting of the Society on 27th October 2012. Extract from Minutes follows:

“MOTION from the floor by Bob Shepherd and Dionne Walsh:

- *“That the members of the Australian Rangeland Society acknowledge their strong support for the Rangeland Australia program and express its desire to see the programme continued by an institution who values education for rural and remote Australians”.*

*President John Taylor declared a conflict of interest and relinquished the Chair of the Meeting to Director Peter Marin. **The Motion was Seconded by Carolyn Harris and Carried unanimously.***

The proposers would like to see the ARS, as the Key representative body for the Australian Rangelands, express its concerns and make the current situation known to any organizations with an interest or stake in the rangelands.

Background: Rangelands Australia (RA) was a centre at the University of Queensland that coordinated the development and delivery of rangeland-relevant courses. The Rangeland Management program is the suite of courses. IP is largely owned by DAFF and MLA, with UQ owning 50% of the IP of the first six courses.

Discussion: Why has the University dropped the course and is there potential to reopen? For the centre to continue to operate RA had to fund itself after Uni had taken 95% of student fees as overheads. For that RA needed 250-450 students which is not achievable. Very strong focus in Unis on money, and we are seeing a shift to servicing overseas students at the expense of local students. This decision has really limited the choices available to students. Benefits to producers – gives academic backing to existing knowledge and expertise. Raises credibility.

The suggestion was made that a subcommittee made up of 2 Council Members and several relevant General Members be formed to address this motion.”

John Taylor declared a conflict of interest and stepped aside. Peter Marin took the chair.

Members available to form subcommittee: Dionne Walsh, Bob Shepherd, Bruce Alchin, Carolyn Harris, Megan Munchenberg, Ben Forsyth (Chair), Annabel Walsh

Suggestion: Subcommittee to come up with a terms of reference (TOR) that is more explicit than the above motion.

ACTION: Council agrees to form a subcommittee which includes two Council Members and other general members with direction from Council. Ben nominated as chair of this sub-committee. Ben happy to run the meetings as Chair. Annabel to be asked to be approached as the other Council Member. Peter to speak to Annabel. Graeme and John to provide other contact details to John. General Members certainly Dionne, Bob, probably one other.

ACTION: TOR – Ben and Peter to write a draft TOR and send round to Council for approval. Report to Council on 6th December.

5. Meeting closed at 7.30 pm