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## Part C: The Monaro Grasslands Program

### 1.1 Why this program was chosen

To explore the impact of the new NRM structures in driving changes in NRM practices, a 'live project' was chosen for detailed analysis.

The Monaro Grasslands Program (MGP) is a NSW Government funded program which aims to promote adoption of sustainable grazing practices in a harsh landscape, where landholders are 'doing it tough' in the face of drought, low commodity prices and weed invasion.

The MGP is of interest because:

- it aims to operate at a 'landscape' level
- it is 'systemic' in that it aims to integrate a number of discrete initiatives to improve the overall NRM change 'system'
- it is focused on triple-bottom line outcomes (biodiversity, landholder capacity and productivity)
- it is testing the use of a 'carrot' (incentives) approach, rather than a regulatory 'stick' (eg. Native Veg Act) and
- it involves the regional drivers of NRM change: drought and climate variability, terms of trade, weeds, and aging landholders.

It was also a challenging program, because (compared to the coast where dairy farmers have long been organised around Co-ops) the Monaro has relatively weak social infrastructure. The program therefore required working with landholders directly, without the assistance of an intermediary industry association.

It was also about 50% complete, which good time to review progress.


### 1.2 Description of the program

The Monaro grasslands are a striking (some would say [majestic](#)) landscape, where climate and volcanic soils combine to produce a largely treeless, semi-arid environment which is nevertheless quite productive. An early land rush in the 1850s saw the area converted to grazing. Many of the graziers here have family histories in the region going back 5 or 6 generations.

Reduced commodity prices have made all but large farms unviable and many graziers must now seek off-farm income. One grazier interviewed said he had "work for 2 families, but land for one".

The Monaro has been in virtually continuous drought since 1991. Drought and declining terms of trade combine to cause great financial hardship to graziers, who, because of age and reduced income, have

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less capacity to deal with the onslaught of weeds that also results from the drought.

Meanwhile drought, weeds and overgrazing reduce the diversity of native grasslands, with direct impacts on farm profitability.

The 'pilot project' aims to break this cycle introducing a 'sustainable grazing system' to allow graziers to tactically spell grasslands, preventing the overgrazing which damages both biodiversity and profitability. A series of additional mapping and research projects aimed to add to the decision-making capacity of NRM managers.

The 'pilot area' is a circle of 35,000 Hectares, centred on the junction of the three local Shires (the area was chosen because the three Shires were co-funding the weed-mapping project). There are 67 landholders in this area, 42 of whom are active, locally resident, graziers. The remaining 25, mostly owning small blocks, live outside the region.

The program's origin lies in 3 years of discussions between the South East Catchment Management Board and Monaro graziers, attempting to break down barriers and find common ground. In Pam Green's account (below) it eventually became apparent that the common ground had to be weeds.

Like many NRM programs, the actual program inception was opportunistic. \$1.1 million in NSW Government re-election funding became available to improve the viability of grazing in the Monaro. A program proposal was quickly assembled, based on the learnings from earlier discussions. The proposal had strong leadership from Kerry Pfeiffer, a Monaro grazier who was at the time, deputy chair of the South East CMB.<sup>1</sup> The funding had relatively few strings attached, and the early program team was able to be imaginative in devising a multi-pronged response to the problems facing Monaro graziers.


The program is managed by the Snowy Monaro Local Management Team (LMT), which includes SRCMA, DEC, DPI, Stuart Burge (the project agronomist), the local Shires, and three graziers in the pilot area. The LMT is chaired by one of the graziers, Bev Allen.

The project is a 'Flagship Program' in the SRCMA's 3yr Investment Strategy, where it logically connects to at least five regional management targets.

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<sup>1</sup> Kerry is now a director of the SRCMA. Another current Director, Charles Litchfield, whose family also graze the Monaro, has been a strong driver on the local management team. Brett Miners, at that time with DLWC, also deserves much credit for the inception of the program.

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The project design owes much to the example and lessons from the Sustainable Grazing Systems program previously run in the region by Meat and Livestock Australia. According to Stuart Burge, graziers got used to attending field days and workshops, and became increasingly interested in NRM issues.

**SOURCE INTERVIEWS: The origin and design of the program**

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[Stuart Burge on the MLA's Sustainable Grazing Systems Program](#)

[Stuart Burge on the Monaro Grasslands Program](#)

[Darval Dixon on understanding the strategy of the program](#)

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### 1.3 Evaluation of the program

The MGP consists of 5 separate projects. This evaluation focuses on the 'practice change' core of the program: the sustainable grazing incentives project being implemented by Stuart Burge. The other four projects are essentially technical projects, which aim to support better decision-making by NRM managers.<sup>2</sup>

Stuart's project was evaluated via the Seven Doors model, an analytic tool, which has proven useful in evaluating NRM programs. In the Seven Doors model a change program can be evaluated by posing four questions:

- 1) Predisposition: How well did the program address the dissatisfactions and desires of the participants?
- 2) Triggering: How well did the program mobilise engagement and action?
- 3) Enablement: How well did the program address barriers to action? (eg. knowledge, skills/confidence, convenience/price)
- 4) Satisfaction: How well did the action or innovation meet or exceed participant expectations?

But first, the nature of the innovation needs to be explained.

#### The innovation

" I realise the government can't cure your problems...they can't wave a magic wand. The main thing that will cure a lot of the problems around here is commodity prices. If we can make money

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<sup>2</sup> The explicit objectives of the MGP were:

- 1) Demonstrate an optimal grazing system to wider Monaro grazing community
- 2) Facilitate the adoption of sustainable grazing practices
- 3) Reduce the impact of weeds
- 4) Build agency capacity
- 5) Build landholder capacity
- 6) Build a communicable knowledge base

The program consists of a number of separate projects:

- 1) Pilot area incentives scheme: training and incentives for the adoption of sustainable grazing practices (subcontracted to a consultant agronomist, Stuart Burge).
- 2) Monaro Grassland Conservation Management Network. Farm walks and training events focusing on conserving native grasslands – essentially this supports Stuart's project (subcontracted to a consultant, David Eddy).
- 3) Research and development project to identify grazing practices which maximise the productivity of native grasslands (subcontracted to the Department of Primary Industries, DPI).
- 4) Native vegetation mapping. Aims to equip NRM managers with the capacity to identify the quality of native grasslands by interpretation of satellite images (subcontracted to the Department of Environment and Conservation, DEC).
- 5) Weed mapping This was a joint project of the three Shire councils. It preceded the MGP, and the Shires were very happy to receive additional money to support their work (subcontracted to Snowy River Shire Council).

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we'll pour it back into our properties. But I think of all the schemes I've seen this one's probably as good as any."

- Darval Dixon, Monaro grazier

Grazing in the Monaro depends on the quality of native grasslands. 'Pasture improvement' using introduced grasses is limited to a few alluvial sites on each property, while the bulk of each property is dominated by native grasses which are adapted to the harsh winters. These native grasslands vary in condition and diversity according to their grazing history. Relatively little (perhaps 2%) remains in close to pristine condition. Overgrazing ('flogging the land') is the chief cause of landscape decline – resulting in reduced diversity and patches of bare ground – open to invasion by the aggressive weed species, Serrated Tussock and African Love Grass. The problem is that sheep naturally tend to overgraze a few chosen spots. Graziers need a way of shifting sheep away from heavily grazed areas to allow 'spelling' of grasses – yet large paddocks make this impossible.

The 'sustainable grazing system' is a simple idea. It involves subdividing paddocks and installing water points in the new, smaller paddocks. These simple changes allow graziers greater control over the intensity of grazing, allowing them to shift sheep away from intensively grazed areas, so that native grasses can be spelled and bare ground (easily infested by weeds) avoided.

What is notable is that all the graziers interviewed have an implicit faith in the innovation, due partly to common sense, due partly to the previous attendance at MLA workshops on Sustainable Grazing Systems (run by Stuart Burge), but also due to the credibility of Stuart Burge and graziers who are backing the program.

SOURCE INTERVIEWS: **The innovation**

[Darval Dixon on a believable innovation](#)


[Darval Dixon on understanding the program](#)

### **1) Predisposition: How well did the program address the dissatisfactions and desires of the participants?**

The graziers have strong visions for their properties.

"I'd like to see it without a weed. I'd like to see all the improvements standing up and looking good. I'd like to see the stock looking well. I'd like to see all my country looking well. And one of my kids home and I've got something to hand over and say 'I'm proud to give it to you.'"

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- Darval Dixon, Monaro grazier

In these visions NRM and productivity agendas are inextricably mixed.

“We’ve got plans in place. I suppose financial constraints hold us back. I wouldn’t mind fencing some of the creek areas to stop accessing the creeks. By doing so we’d have to put in a water reticulation system...[to] let the stock get their water from stock troughs rather than coming down to the creek to drink.”

- Alison and Ashley Constance, Monaro graziers

“Basically the way they want to do it is you manage your pastures better whether they are native or improved...we had that worked out anyway.”

- Alan and Mark McGuffick, Monaro graziers

*Judgement:* There was a good match between the innovation offered by the MGP and the desires and visions of participants.

#### SOURCE INTERVIEWS: **Predispositions of participants**

[Monaro graziers’ visions for their properties](#)

[Graziers perspectives on the work to be done](#)


## **2) Triggering: How well did the program mobilise engagement and action?**

The project was launched with a meeting of graziers at Dalgety in December 2003. Because it was tied to funding, and because of Stuart Burge’s credibility, about 90% of landholders actually living in the pilot area attended.

Stuart’s credibility, based on his 25 years work as an extension officer in the Monaro, seems to have been vital in achieving a high level of involvement by graziers. Also important was the backing the program was seen to be receiving by respected graziers such as Kerry Pfeiffer, Richard Taylor and James Litchfield.

This was followed by visits by Stuart Burge to each of the graziers in the pilot area. He sat down with them and made an agreement for a grant for pesticide and casual labour to apply it. This first phase, for weed eradication, was seen as the ‘hook’ that would engage graziers in further activities. Virtually every grazier in the pilot area (about 40) accepted this assistance.

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The next step involved an offer of 50/50 funding for the adoption of a 'sustainable grazing system' (described above). For this, Stuart again visited interested graziers, talked them through a farm plan, and helped them prepare an application. So far, seven graziers have agreed to participate in the 50/50 incentives.

The significant barrier to engagement in this stage appears to be the requirement for 50% matching investment by the landholders. Because of the drought, relatively few graziers are in a position to make this investment. Such 'capacity barriers' reduce the pool of potential participants from 42 to a much smaller number. For instance, two of the largest graziers in the pilot area are women in their 70s with no relatives willing to succeed to their properties. How big is the true number of potential participants? As a result of this consultancy, Stuart is about to undertake an analysis to estimate that numbers.

*Judgement:* the level of participation has been excellent.

Virtually 100% of graziers (n=40) have accepted the offer of weedicide and casual labour. This is not surprising, as the weed problem is a major source of dissatisfaction and graziers already spend many weeks each year spraying weeds.

Approx. 25% of graziers (n=7)<sup>3</sup> have so far agreed to participate in the 50/50 cost sharing arrangement for fencing and watering points. This is a good figure, as relatively few graziers have matching funds to invest due to the long drought.

#### SOURCE INTERVIEWS: **How graziers were engaged**

[Alison and Ashley Constance on becoming involved](#)

[Darval Dixon on becoming involved](#)

[Sandy Brown on becoming involved](#)

[Stephen Rolfe on becoming involved](#)

[Alan and Mark McGufficks on becoming involved](#)


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[Bill Clarke on barriers](#)

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<sup>3</sup> It is assumed that the number contextually able to invest is much less than 42, as some farmers are elderly, ill, or in serious financial difficulty. A number of about 30 has been chosen as a likely guesstimate. At the time of this report, Stuart is about to commence a formal evaluation of this project, when better estimates will be made.

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**3) Enablement: How well did the program address barriers to action?** (eg. knowledge, skills/confidence, convenience/price)

The interviews suggest that the barriers to implementing sustainable grazing systems have been:

a) financial constraints;

SOURCE INTERVIEWS: **“So what’s changed?” “The money!”**

[Monaro graziers on the importance of financial support](#)

and

b) self-efficacy/confidence (skills in pasture assessment, plus being able to see the systems in operation and discuss fine details of implementation with other graziers).

A particularly effective aspect of the MGP has been the training workshops run by Stuart Burge. These built on his experience as a facilitator of the MLA’s Sustainable Grazing Systems program – particularly a workshop he developed called ‘Pasture Improvers Weed Removers’.

The key to Stuart’s workshops and farm walks is his use of facilitative methods and his ability to speak to ‘cockies’ in a way they understand. He created an atmosphere of openness and encouraged graziers to tell their own stories and demonstrate their own methods to each other.

The interviews suggest that these methods matched the learning styles of farmers:

“Doing it and seeing it are different to hearing about it.”


- Bill Clarke, Monaro grazier

“ He gets down to the nuts and bolts without all the garbage that goes on the sides.”

- Darval Dixon, Monaro grazier.

“People want to touch and feel. They want to go and see that paddock and say ‘did this really work? Show me the results?’”

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- Stephen Rolfe, Monaro grazier

Stuart's workshops are a good demonstration of the effectiveness of peer-based, as opposed to expertise-based, extension. See the Bill Clarke and McGuffick interviews below for eloquent descriptions of the comparative benefits of peer-based extension versus expert-based extension.

*Judgement:* The interviews suggest that the incentive funding has been vital in driving change, due the severe financial constraints imposed by drought. However the training workshops were an essential part of the change equation - and the facilitative manner in which they were run was as important as their content.

#### SOURCE INTERVIEWS: **The training workshops**

[Alison and Ashley Constance on the training](#)

[Stephen Rolfe on the training](#)

[Alan and Mark McGuffick on the training](#)

[Darval Dixon on the training](#)

[Bill Clarke on the training](#)

[Sandy Brown on the training](#)

[Stuart Burge – how he runs the training and the results](#)

#### **4) Satisfaction: How well did the action or innovation meet or exceed participant expectations?**

Graziers are already observing improvements in the density of native pastures as a result of subdividing their fields.

All those interviewed have a high level of confidence that the benefits in productivity and weed reduction will follow.


#### SOURCE INTERVIEWS: **Measuring the benefits**

[Darval Dixon on measuring change](#)

[Stephen Rolfe on measuring change](#)

[Alan and Mark McGuffick on measuring change](#)

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A valuable collateral benefit has been to break down some of the isolation Monaro graziers' experience. Coming together has helped disseminate a new norm of farm management, but it has also provided morale benefits from no longer believing they are facing these problems alone:

"We've all got the same problems, we've all got dry conditions, we've got low commodity prices, we've got a weed problem. We're all in the same boat."

- Alison Constance, Monaro grazier

SOURCE INTERVIEWS: **How the program has addressed isolation**

[Monaro farmers on being connected](#)

### **Dissatisfactions with the program**

Graziers pointed to a number of relatively minor, but niggling, frustrations in their experience of the program:

- a) They would like more feedback on the progress of the program (eg. by an occasional newsletter); and
- b) There was an extended delay in receiving payment for the 50/50 contribution: about 7 months. Given the financial hardship suffered by many graziers, this delay is unacceptable, and should not be repeated.

SOURCE INTERVIEWS: **Dissatisfactions of participants**

[Monaro farmers on the need for feedback](#)

On the delay in receiving payment

[Alison and Ashley Constance on the delay](#)

[Alan and Mark McGuffick on the delay](#)

## **1.4 Revealing the human dimensions of an incentive program**

The evaluation allows a hypothetical logic model to be proposed, which may have implications for similar projects in other parts of Australia.

Adoption of the new practice, in this case, appeared to require much more than the financial incentives. The incentives were the final link in



the 'change equation', but a number of other factors were vital.

<p><b>Graziers had serious dissatisfactions they wanted to act on</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	<p>Drought, weeds, commodity prices</p>
<p><b>Graziers had personal visions that included NRM improvements</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	<p>Graziers had already been exposed to NRM concepts in Prograze, SGS, Farming for the Future courses.</p>
<p><b>A credible innovation that achieves both productivity and NRM outcomes</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	<p>Rotational grazing is an easily understood, 'best bet' concept, that farmers are already familiar with due to exposure to previous extension efforts.</p>
<p><b>Credible backers of the project</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	<p>The project is seen to have the backing of 'large', 'successful', and forward thinking graziers.</p>
<p><b>A trusted, knowledgeable change agent</b></p> <p>Available for one-on-one advice</p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	<p>Stuart Burge has 25 years experience as an extension officer in the Monaro. He is known and trusted by graziers. He knows their properties and situations well. He has a motivational and 'facilitative' style.</p>
<p><b>Opportunities to discuss with peers and see what other are doing</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	<p>Stuart Burge's <i>Weed Removers Pasture Improvers</i> workshops are very positively evaluated. They mixed training on new methods, with plenty of opportunities for peer-peer interaction and sharing of trials and lessons during visits to properties.</p>
<p><b>Incentives to overcome the financial barriers (50%)</b></p>	<p>The drought made 100% investment by farmers unlikely.</p>

Table 1: Proposed change logic model for the Monaro Grasslands Program.

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## **1.5 Conclusions from the evaluation**

The MGP is clearly a successful program. The level of participation is good and there is already evidence that it is meeting its objectives of improving the biodiversity of native grasslands, improving productivity and reducing weeds.

On a national level, the MGP demonstrates the potential for public funds to be used to achieve landscape change even during an extended drought.

### **Gaps in the program strategy**

Although successful as a change project, some gaps in the overall strategy of the program are evident. Its purpose was not just to achieve improvements on the pilot area properties, but to demonstrate the effectiveness of the innovation to farmers and stakeholders throughout the Monaro region. Hence the program would benefit from having two additional projects:

- a) A monitoring and evaluation project. After the 3 years of the program it will be important to demonstrate that graziers increased their profitability, improved their biodiversity and needed to spend fewer days spraying weeds. Developing this kind of data is a complex project in its own right. It should start quickly in order to capture benchmark data.
- b) A communication project. Once the evaluation data is available it will be important to communicate it to the regional community, as well as NSW and Australian Governments. This will require a communication plan, professional PR staff and resources. This project could get started immediately by producing an occasional newsletter for participants and stakeholders.


To the credit of SRCMA staff, these recommendations are now being considered, and it's likely that these activities (in some form) will be fitted into the second 18 months of the program.

## **1.6 Organisational capacity issues**

Although judged successful, this program demonstrates some gaps in organisational methods.

The successful design (during the era of the South East CMB) was based 'seasoned hunches' of a number of experienced graziers and NRM professionals. However these seasoned hunches were not (at least initially) captured in a detailed strategy capable of being critically tested by outsiders or other stakeholders.

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Fortunately the SRCMA has moved in recent months to remedy this gap by creating a formal MGP program-level strategy in order to make possible a mid-term evaluation of the five projects.

The issue remains, however, that few NRM staff appear to be accustomed to strategic planning at the program level. NRM has traditionally focused on opportunistic small-scale restoration projects. Yet NRM has now moved into a new phase where multi-stakeholder planning at the catchment scale is essential. NRM staff will need training and tools to make the step up to these methods.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

This successful project illustrates some important aspects of 'practice change'.

#### **Savvy vs strategic planning**

It shows the extent of the NRM savvy which SRCMA staff and stakeholders are able to mobilise. It also reveals deficiencies in organisational capacity to formally plan – and hence evaluate – at the program level. The savvy of staff, however inspired, cannot always substitute for gaps in more formal systems of planning and reporting.

Strategic planning for its own sake can, of course, be ineffective. NRM staff have reason to be averse to many conventional strategic planning methods. Hence there is a need to develop a set of simple, quick NRM planning processes and tools which accord with the dynamic, pragmatic values of SRCMA staff, and which can be easily integrated into the work routines.

#### **Revealing the human dimension of NRM**

For policy makers, this case study throws light on significant human dimensions of NRM change, which are easily neglected.

This case study suggests that incentives are only likely to be effective as tools for sustained change when the 'human support' and 'human settings' are right: graziers' states of mind, the humanity and experience of the change agents, the credibility of the backers, the power of peer-peer communication, and the fact that the innovation must fit well with the needs, values and common sense of the participants.