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the STOCK ROUTES COALITION

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The Stock Routes Coalition

Comments on the report of the Queensland Stock Routes Assessment Panel.

The position of the Stock Route Coalition

1. Although their use has decreased, the stock route network provides a valuable service to travelling stock, as well as an emergency drought refuge. With steeply rising fuel prices their use is likely to increase again.
2. For over 100 years their managers have maintained their grazing value and incidentally their biodiversity values. The light and intermittent grazing regimen has ensured that the native vegetation is mostly in reasonable condition and that reservoirs of native seed persist.
3. Many stock routes cross cleared agricultural and pastoral landscapes and provide habitat for flora and fauna lost from the surrounding areas. The only surviving examples of some Regional Ecosystems are on stock routes.
4. In many places they are the only source of connectivity in the landscape, providing corridors for the movement of wildlife and plants. Stock routes incorporate a variety of local landforms, and vegetation types. Stock routes often contain fertile soils and much greater biodiversity than adjoining private grazed or cropped land.
5. Some native wildlife (flora and fauna) are likely to be adversely affected by climate change. Stock routes provide east-west and north-south corridors for these species west of the Dividing Range.
6. The iconic Long Paddock also has cultural values associated with indigenous trade routes and sites of archaeological significance. Both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples have family and personal connections to certain stock routes. Stock routes have links with exploration and settlement.

To maintain the value of the stock routes for travelling stock and for biodiversity, it is important that the Queensland Government

1. recognises and embeds the conservation values of the existing stock route networks in policy and protects them in the day-to-day management of the stock routes,
2. creates by legislation, Protected Corridors for Travelling Stock and Biodiversity to encompass the entire Stock Route Network and
3. contributes the necessary ongoing financial support from environmental budgetary sources reflecting the public interest conservation component and for enhancement of the stock routes networks through the Regional Funding Component of the Australian Government's NRM Initiative.
4. put an immediate freeze on the lease of any segments of the stock routes until they have taken account of their potential benefits for biodiversity under climate change,

Recommendations of the Stock Route Assessment Panel

In general we support most of the recommendations in the report. They provide a good basis for the future successful management of the network for its primary purpose – facilitating the movement of travelling stock.

The Stock Routes Coalition is a group of organisations who have come together to have the NSW and Queensland Stock Routes declared 'Protected Corridors for Travelling Stock and Biodiversity', managed by the current managers and adequately resourced with supplements from public funds. (For more information see www.basq.org.au/stockroutes/TSR.htm)

Any disagreements we have are due to the failure to give sufficient weight to the heritage, cultural and environmental values of the network, and to potential future changes in use of the parts of the network which are currently inactive.

We accept the user-pays principle, but would include as users, the public who have an interest in these non-livestock related values.

We are concerned that any agistment or other form of static grazing may not only harm the biodiversity values, but also may reduce the future value for travelling stock as usage changes.

We support the views of the Droving and Stock Routes Association on Annual Grazing Agreements, that there is no room for shared usage of the fenced, active network (section 2.2.4.2). We would go further, and argue that all static grazing on any parts of the network be phased out as soon as practicable, and that the only intermittent grazing be allowed when necessary to manage for pasture and / or biodiversity.

The assets on the inactive network should be retained; managed for their heritage, cultural and environmental values, and for potential future use by travelling stock; and funded appropriately.

Legislation

The new legislation must ensure the protection of the network for travelling stock, and for its heritage, cultural and environmental values. The Stock Routes Coalition recommends that a head of power be provided in the new legislation for the State Government to make a plan for the entire network enforceable by regulation. Local Governments, where required, may produce management plans adopting as a minimum the standards set in the State plan.

A comparison could be drawn to the State Coastal Management Plan in that it applied until more specific lower level plans were prepared. This approach would ensure that there was an enforceable plan for the entire network. This would also address concerns that minimum standards are not being applied across the entire network. However we do need to see biodiversity and cultural heritage values reflected in the management, not merely use as a stock route.

Furthermore it is our understanding that many Local Authorities experience problems in dealing with breaches of stock routes regulations and have no practical legal powers to ensure justice is fairly carried out. There is also difficulty in Local Authorities not having appropriate powers to deal with and plan for biodiversity protection. The situation would be similar for protection of Aboriginal heritage and cultural values.

Finally it is apparent that the existing fees generated do not cover the current costs or fund future refurbishment of this significant resource. All these issues must be addressed in any new legislation. It is appreciated that to achieve these aims some amendments would more than likely be required in the Local Government Act.

References

Possingham, H and Nix, H; 2008. *The Long Paddock Scientists' Statement*

Bob Sutherst, Evan Cleland & Judit Szabo; 2008. *The Environmental Case for Converting Stock Routes into 'Protected Corridors for Travelling Stock and Biodiversity' under Climate Change.*