

MEMO

4 July 2022

TO: Executive Director, BCS
SUBJECT: Travel Report: Conservation opportunities in fenced areas, western Queensland

I travelled to western Queensland to attend a field trip and workshop on exploring the conservation opportunities in fenced areas, 30 May – 4 June 2022. It was hosted by the University of Southern Queensland and funded by WWF-Australia. The purpose of the on-site workshop was to bring together scientists, conservation managers and representatives of national and state government departments responsible for threatened fauna conservation and land management to assess the opportunities and challenges associated with biodiversity conservation and threatened species management within fenced areas. The site visits provided important practical context for the workshop to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) of this approach for the purposes of developing a strategic plan for enhancing biodiversity conservation outcomes.

On 30th May 2022 I travelled to Charleville and met with the other participants to discuss the plans for the field trip and workshop. The following three days involved site visits and meetings with landholders looking at examples of pastoral properties of different sizes under different management, on various vegetation types within Mulga lands and Mitchell Grass Plains, involved in different cluster fencing arrangements. The main sites visited included,

- Bunginderry Station (Stephen Tully; 150,000 ha) and Alaric Station (Eric Stelzer; 50,000 ha), with yellow footed rock wallaby colonies (West Bulloo, West Warrego and Northern Uplands IBRA subregions)
- Alice Downs Station (Neil Cadzow, 52,000 ha) with desert woodlands including poplar box, iron bark, cyprus and river redgums (Southern Downs subregion)
- Leander Station (Maree and John MacMillan; 12,000 ha) with sandy ridges, boree downs, gibber and gidgee (Southern Wooded Downs subregion).

Friday 3rd June was a workshop with additional participants online, and return travel to Perth from Longreach.

The benefits of this travel lie principally with progressing efforts to deliver improved biodiversity conservation outcomes, particularly for Australia's threatened mammals, birds and reptiles, on pastoral properties. There has been a rapid expansion in pest-proof 'cluster fences' in recent years. Queensland is leading this trend with about 150 000 km² involved so far, however, other states including Western Australia, are following. Improved control of pest animals (e.g., wild dogs, foxes, feral pigs, feral goats and possibly feral cats), and kangaroos (reduced grazing pressure) within these areas can result in substantially improved native habitat condition and native species diversity and abundance. These benefits include enhancing the recovery of extant threatened species and the potential for creating reintroduction-ready landscapes for locally extinct species. A report in preparation will summarise the advances made during the field trip and workshop.

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