



## **MONITORING RANGELAND CONDITION ON PASTORAL LEASES**

### **New Self-assessment Approach by Pastoralists**

Monitoring of rangeland vegetation, soil and land system condition on pastoral land has for many years been undertaken by the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA) for the Pastoral Lands Board.

Since 2003 the pastoral industry has sought more responsibility for monitoring their pastoral leases. So in 2008 DAFWA, for the Pastoral Lands Board and with industry input, researched and identified a new 'Pastoralist self-assessment rangeland condition monitoring' approach.

The new approach allows lessees direct responsibility to monitor their rangelands through:

- Monitoring of vegetation with fixed sites
- Reporting of objective data from these sites
- Electronic submission of data via the internet

The new approach is being refined by DAFWA over 2009-10 with the intent to commence training for pastoralists in 2010-11, if not sooner.

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### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)**

**Q *How many monitoring sites do I need to have on my station?***

**A** The number of sites will be dependent on several factors including the size of the lease and the pastoral potential of the land systems present. It is expected that most leases will require no more than 30 sites. Pastoralists will be given an opportunity to attend training and will be provided guidelines on installing monitoring sites.

**Q *When do I need to start self assessing?***

**A** Once established, a third of the monitoring sites will be assessed each year, with all sites done once over a three year period. The current timeline is that lessees will be required to install the monitoring sites and submit the first years information by no later than 31 December 2011.

**Q *Can I use my existing Photographic Monitoring Sites (PMS)?***

**A** Yes, provided the existing PMS sites meet the necessary site creation guidelines in terms of site layout, distribution, distance from water, appropriate country type and condition. However additional sites may be necessary to provide the required lease coverage.

**Q *Can I use the Western Australian Rangeland Monitoring Sites (WARMS) on my station?***

**A** No. These sites were not established to monitor change at individual station level, rather to measure regional landscape trends. As such the location of WARMS are not necessarily beneficial to your individual station management tool needs.



**Q How will I use the monitoring sites to determine range condition on my station?**

**A** Rather than assessing range condition itself, lessees are being asked to assess **change in range condition**, that is, whether the land is improving, staying the same, or declining. Information from the monitoring sites provides evidence (objective data) to support that assessment. You are encouraged to use the monitoring sites on a regular basis, outside of the Board reporting requirement, to assist you in feed budgeting and livestock distribution planning.

**Q Will the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) be installing the monitoring sites?**

**A** No. Pastoral lessees are responsible for monitoring site installation. DAFWA will offer training to groups of lessees in how to select, install and assess monitoring sites.

**Q I'm very busy. Do I really have to do this?**

**A** Yes. Pastoral self reporting is compulsory. Rangeland condition monitoring is an important tool for managing a sustainable pastoral business, with many pastoralists considering it essential in their station management.

**Q To save time, can I submit the monitoring site reporting online?**

**A** Yes. One of the changes requested from the industry was that the 'Annual Returns of Livestock and Improvements' be submitted online together with the rangeland condition reports. The Department of Agriculture and Food will be developing and testing an online system for the Pastoral Lands Board in time for the first reporting due in 2011.

**Q Can I be confident I will not be penalised when my station experiences a drought?**

**A** Lessees who demonstrate that every measure has been taken to preserve the resource in drought or any other natural disaster, will not be penalised.

**Q Do I have to count plants in the monitoring site?**

**A** In the shrublands individual plants of four selected shrub species will be counted. In grasslands the frequency or presence of four selected perennial grass species will be recorded. Plant counts are necessary to ensure the assessment process is objective.

**Q How can I identify which plants are in the monitoring site?**

**A** Identification of regionally important plants will be part of the training provided by the Department of Agriculture and Food. Booklets outlining plant identification will be provided as part of this training.



**Q How can the Pastoral Lands Board be sure the monitoring sites will indicate change in range condition on my lease?**

**A** Each station's sites are subject to validation by the Department of Agriculture and Food to ensure the sites selected are appropriate to indicate range condition trend. Validation may involve checking site locations against known information such as the distance from nearest water and land system maps or may occur during station visits.

**Q How will the Pastoral Lands Board use the information I submit?**

**A** The information submitted in lessee self reports will be reviewed annually. Decisions will then be made as to whether any further information, contact with the lessee or a visit to the lease is required.

**Q What would require a lease to be audited?**

**A** Audits will be performed if a lessee's self report appears to be inaccurate. Random audits will also be conducted.

**Q What will be done during a pastoral lease audit?**

**A** A pastoral inspector will audit a self report using exactly the same method as the lessee, that is, assess the monitoring site(s). If there is evidence that the lease requires an improvement in rangeland management, then the Pastoral Lands Board may require a detailed technical on-site lease inspection. The Board as a result may direct the lessee to undertake specific improvements, providing a set timeframe for these.

**Q Will a lease inspection be required prior to advertising a lease for sale?**

**A** Not necessarily. As per current requirements permission to sell is necessary; however, given that the new self-assessment rangeland condition monitoring will be submitted by lessees online, the Pastoral Lands Board will quickly be able to obtain technical advice on lease condition and a lease inspection may not be required.

Under existing requirements, incoming purchasers must be provided with current rangeland condition monitoring records of the station by the pastoral lessee (vendor) or a real estate agent acting on their behalf. Any rangeland improvement Directives by the Pastoral Lands Board on the lease would remain in force and would require written acceptance by the incoming lessee before Ministerial Approval could be granted.

### **NEED FURTHER INFORMATION ? or have QUESTIONS ?**

For **Pastoral Lands Board** queries, please contact the **Department of Regional Development and Lands, Pastoral Land** section - Andrew Prior at Midland on **08 9347 5127**; OR

For **rangeland monitoring advice**, please contact the **Department of Agriculture and Food**:  
Pilbara and Southern Rangelands - David Warburton at Northam on **08 9690 2235** or  
Kimberley - Sandra van Vreeswyk at Derby on **08 9191 0324**.