



PASTORAL BOARD

Department of Environment Water
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Ian Hunter MLC
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
Minister for Water and the River Murray
Minister for Aboriginal affairs and reconciliation

PO Box 1047
Adelaide
South Australia 5001

Dear Minister Hunter,

Thank you for providing an opportunity for the Pastoral Board to have input into the Premier's reform of government boards and committees. The Board understands and respects the rationale for these changes and is of the view that it is well placed to assist government in achieving these aims. The Board's unique composition, close connection with pastoral lessees and other stakeholders and the need for objectivity and independence in the exercise of its complex functions presents a strong case for the Board to be retained. The Board is of the unbiased opinion that it provides the most effective and efficient mechanisms of engaging the pastoral lands community in land management decisions. There is a tangible risk that the condition of the pastoral lands will decline should the Pastoral Board be abolished. Additionally, the Board has been undertaking work to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, which are outlined in the submission below.

The current benefits of the Pastoral Board and how the Board adds value for the Government:

The Pastoral Board has for over 100 yrs been the Pastoral Lands Landlord on behalf of the State Government of South Australia.

The Pastoral Board today and historically has been made up of appointees who are selected for having pastoral industry knowledge, extensive experience, State Government corporate knowledge and importantly good relationships with lessees and good communication skills. The Board is made up of experts in their field additionally informed by the Community. The Board's practical understanding of the complexity of managing pastoral lands sustainably, the economic sustainability of

Lessees and its firm but fair approach to its regulatory role has gained the trust and respect of pastoral land managers.

The Board openly engages with the Pastoral Community through open regional forums, home visits by Pastoral Unit staff, phone calls, correspondence, news letters and publications and invitations to attend meetings when required.

It is felt that whereas many if not most Lessees would feel threatened by Government Agencies, they feel comfortable with the Board to deal with issues with understanding, guidance and confidentiality.

The Board model is working well which is demonstrated by the fact that most lessees engage in sustainable land management practices and often seek advice from the Board or Pastoral Unit staff. This has resulted in the pastoral lands of South Australia being in very good health especially compared to other pastoral land areas in Australia. For the most part, the pastoral lands of South Australia can boast intact vegetation communities and ecosystems across the region, this is something that South Australia can be proud of.

South Australia has a strong system for caring for pastoral lands through successive pieces of legislation (currently the *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act 1989*). The Board feels that the assessment process (long term) and inspection process (short term) complement each other very well.

During the past three years, the Pastoral Board has embraced the State Governments philosophy of aligning and integrating policy and delivery with the other State Authorities that have overlapping or similar responsibilities. The Board has an annual joint meeting with the SAAL NRM Board and closely engages with all relevant NRM Boards and the Native Vegetation Council on matters of policy and delivery.

Risks if the Pastoral Board were to be abolished:

The biggest risk to the region would be the loss of the respected and informed connection of the Lessees with the State Government.

The management of the pastoral region is a specialist field that is best done by people with diverse pastoral lands experience, knowledge and connection with the lessees.

Pastoral land management expertise, empathy, confidence, confidentiality and engagement would need to be maintained with the pastoral land managers if the Pastoral Board were to be abolished. This would take time should responsibility transfer to a new entity and would be very difficult to achieve if government assumes these functions in the absence of the Board.

The consequences of not providing a system of governance at the level that the Pastoral Board currently provides, is a probable deterioration of the pastoral lands condition and its renewable resources.

This current board model is the most cost effective, inclusive and systematic way of reaching the pastoral community and relevant stakeholders as membership includes representatives with expertise in pastoral sheep and cattle industries who have been nominated by those industries along with an independent industry chair, government expertise with significant historical knowledge and a conservations sector representative.

Achieving this cross section of collective knowledge and experience, where collaborative, constructive group discussions are held via alternative means, such as on a consultancy basis for instance, would cost significantly more than the current board model. Receiving individual comments via social media alone as an alternative would not deliver the richness of discussion and the sound decisions that result from integrating all perspectives via group meetings. Loss of the Board could be seen as a loss of an inclusive, representative model.

Suggestions of ways the government could improve achievement of outcomes currently delivered by the Pastoral Board:

For the reasons outlined above, the current Pastoral Board would prefer that the current structure remains in place, however the Board, in partnership with the Department, could make improvements in the following ways;

- **providing greater direct access to government**

Two way communication could be improved by better use of the electronic media, such as a 'Have your say website' where community members could post open or confidential comments or questions that will either be responded to immediately or taken on notice if a decision is required.

- **dramatically reducing red tape**

Review relevant legislation, policy and guidelines to achieve this driver without compromise to the States key objectives.

- **improving accountability and governance**

Providing open and transparent electronic communication channels could improve accountability.

The current governance structure is rigorous and works well, however the current Pastoral Board is open to a governance review.

- **delivering savings**

The current Pastoral Board believes that delivery of pastoral land management service as defined by the *Pastoral Land Management and Conservation Act, 1989* is best done by the current structure, however if that

structure does not fit with the State Governments objectives then the Board is open to alternatives.

The following two alternatives have been discussed by the Board;

- Amalgamation with other relevant authorities such as the South Australian Natural Resource Management Board (SAAL NRM) and other relevant NRM boards in an 'Outback SA' type structure; or
- Expansion of the current Pastoral Board responsibilities to cover a broader scope than is currently required under the Act such as land manager capacity building and participation in programmes that will deliver ecosystem function outcomes.

Another cost saving incentive could include;

- Use of teleconferencing technology for some meetings reducing the need for travel and accommodation costs

Functions that require a level of separation from government to ensure objectivity

The Pastoral Board system currently provides both community expertise and involvement along with government corporate knowledge that could not be provided by a government service alone.

Independence and objectivity is crucial to the Board's regulatory role as members of the Board bring their diverse knowledge and connections to different interest groups to the decision-making table. The composition and governance of the Board enable it to understand and consider the multiplicity of aspects that balance the interests of all stakeholders and enable the natural ecosystems and the pastoral industry to coexist in what is sustainable use of the pastoral lands for the good of South Australia.

By liaising directly with stakeholders the Board is able to identify potential tensions before they arise and address them in a considered and balanced manner. In doing so the board provides a safe, arms length, decision making body that is of benefit to government, the department and pastoral lessees.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Mills
Presiding Member
Pastoral Board of South Australia

Date: 11/8/14