

## Social Mapping Supporting Information.

### South West Natural Resource Management Region of Queensland.

This project commenced via discussions between several graziers in the Cooladdi District in order to illustrate the loss of community. This was to help highlight this issue in an easy to digest format for the visit by Senators Barry O’Sullivan and Brett Mason from the Liberal National Party.

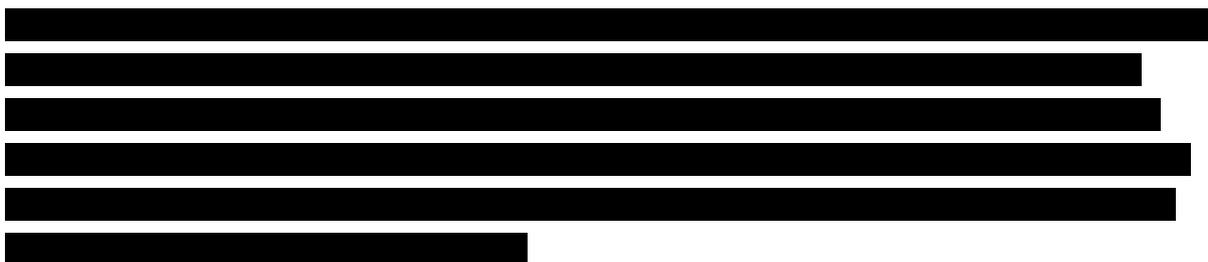
South West Natural Resource Management (SW NRM) kindly provided a base map for us to depict the two categories of tenure being Absentee and Foreign Owned. As a result of viewing this information the Senators’ requested the scale of the mapping be expanded across a larger area to see if this was just a localised anomaly or reflected a greater trend in the community.

Again SW NRM provided assistance with larger base map which has been filled in progressively from information supplied by a wide range of people and organisations across this region. Wherever possible the information has been verified or cross referenced by confirming with several sources as to the status, but if there has been some uncertainty regarding the status we have erred on the side of caution and left the property(s) as white.

A total of 16,772,174ha and some 2,607 properties / parcels have been included in this mapping project and seven different categories have been identified as of significance.

These categories are as follows.

- |  |            |             |
|--|------------|-------------|
| • Absentee Landholders.                  | 11.9% area | 1,988,528ha |
| • Absentee Landholders with Managers.    | 18.1% area | 3,039,656ha |
| • Australian Owner Corporate.            | 7.6% area  | 1,271,440ha |
| • Foreign Ownership.                     | 3.7% area  | 627,614ha   |
| • Private Conservancy / Other.           | 1.2% area  | 201,878ha   |
| • State / Local Government owned Estate. | 5.3% area  | 886,834ha   |
| • White Areas (as the remainder).        | 52.2% area | 8,756,224ha |



**Absentee Landholders. 113 properties. Owner not residing on the property and not present on property for greater than 50% of the time.**

There are a large range of reasons that Landholders become an Absentee Landholder such as pressures due to:-

- Environmental conditions including successive years of drought followed by record floods and again followed by drought, high numbers of macropods increasing grazing pressures and high levels of predation by species including wild dogs and pigs.
- Economic reasons in looking for additional incomes to support properties to continue to operate, income to provide a basic standard of living and education for children and income to support property to exit out of drought and continue operating and developing to stay viable.
- Social reasons in trying to keep family units together and or conversely separating them to try and provide educational opportunities for children and a secondary income from one partner via town based employment, but more and more frequently it has come down to a decision of economics.

Due to higher production costs, lower returns and the variety of social, economic and environmental pressures many landholders have had to make a decision to seek outside employment which usually entails relocating. To support family and property a regular income has become vital for many people to cover items such as education for their children, property / stock development and standard of living for family members.

In many cases the decision to leave the property unoccupied is a difficult process but can be the difference between families remaining together or separating. Many family's first attempt the spatial separation with one partner and children moving to towns or city and one partner remaining on the property. However this can only be supported for a short period of time before pressures become too great on the partner left managing the property and the final decision as to stay or go is made in order to keep the family unit together.

Some properties are held and managed as part of drought resilience plans ie. have a number of properties in different climatic zones in order to enable movement of stock between properties with feed, water etc and to have different income streams coming in via different stock ie diversification between cattle and sheep etc. The owners base themselves on the first property with the majority of plant and equipment and commute to the secondary property on an as needs basis to undertake essential management works.

**Absentee Landholders with Managers. 70 properties. Absentee Landholder but a full time Manager residing on property. Does not include Caretakers who are often elderly and are present just to keep a homestead running and who do not undertake the full range of property management tasks.**

In order to keep up with active property management Landholders who cannot be present 100% of the time to manage their property may employ Managers to live and work on the property on their behalf.

As with employing anyone under any business it can be a hit and miss affair and unfortunately due to the remote nature and independence required there is a percentage of Managers who take advantage of this situation. After a run of bad Managers some Landholders make a decision to forgo the benefits of a Manager and leave the property unoccupied. On the other hand by having a Manager present on the property 100% of the time there is the ability to react immediately to land management needs such as stock rotation, feral control, identifying and responding to weeds, Macropod management, fire management, maintenance of fences and being part of a local community. In many cases having a Manager on property provides additional people into the community and in some cases families with young children into the rural communities.

On the down side if several properties are owned by the same owner and are within reasonable distances of each other the one Manager maybe contending with looking after several properties diluting the time available to each location. In some cases this can entail thousands of Ha.

There is the potential for some or all of these 70 properties that fit within the Absentee with Manager category to change and join the Absentee category due to increased pressures as listed in the Absentee section, reduced profit margins and also as a result of increasing difficulties in finding Managers prepared to live in high levels of isolation from general communities.

**Australian Owned Corporations (Cross hatched). 20 properties.** Australian based corporations such as **Australian Country Choice (ACC)**, **Bydands Pastoral Company** and **Consolidated Pastoral Company (CPC)** which are food production based. Permanent managers are generally in place on each property or aggregation.

Additional staff maybe resident on the property full time or maybe employed on a seasonal / as needs basis particularly on the larger western and northern properties for mustering and fencing.

**Australian Country Choice (ACC)** has a combination of properties owned (7) and Leased (6) within the SW region where this mapping has taken place. In all cases ACC properties there is a permanent Manager in place on each property including the Leased properties.

**Bydands Pastoral Company** is owned by an Australian however he (Mike Gordon) leases %'s of the aggregation out to Investment Companies. These currently include other Australian investors as well as foreign owned Investors such as international Gold and Copper mining ventures. Bydands owns the Noorama aggregation of 104,000ha in the "Salad Bowl" south of Bollon and Cunnamulla.

**Consolidated Pastoral Company (CPC)** owns and operates the large Nockatunga Station in western area and extending west out of the region.

**Georgina Pastoral Company (GPC)** owns three properties in QLD including the combined Carwell and Caldervale in the north east of this region.

**Western Grazing Company (WGC)** also has the 1 property in the SW region at Allendale near Augathella.

**Foreign Ownership.** 35 properties. Varies from large International Corporates' such as SLM (Sustainable Land Management) and Hassads Australia to individual foreign investors. There is generally one Manager based on one property but if several properties are owned by the same company the Manager commutes to the second and or third etc property as required.

Properties under Foreign Ownership fall into 2 main categories. These being ownership by large body corporate and are one of a chain of properties or aggregations or are owned by an individual international owner.

Ownership within the SW QLD area seems to vary between SLM (Sustainable Land Management) the Danish Pension Fund and Hassads (Qatar based) as the large Corporate's through to a range of Chinese, Japanese, English and French as the smaller independent (generally single property) Investors.

Generally the small individual Foreign owned properties employ a live on full time manager to undertake the day to day duties of property management and in several cases these managers have been present on the property for 10 or more years.

Larger Corporate's such as SLM have a chain of properties and base one Manager on one of the properties who then commute to other properties within the area as needed. This can mean that 1 Manager is looking after 3 or more large properties consisting of several thousand Ha.

In both cases if several properties have been amalgamated together and or several separate properties are managed by 1 Manager there can be very large tracts of land under the management of 1 person therefore the percentage of time available to undertake the full spectrum of land management activities is severely diluted.

**Hassads Australia** is owned and operated by Hassads Food Company which is based in Qatar (Arab). The majority of properties were purchased in 2010 and are termed as the Clover Downs Aggregate consisting of 125,292ha. Hassads Australia owns 13 of these aggregations across Australia. Hassads have this aggregation concentrated in the "Salad Bowl" area south of Bollon and Cunnamulla QLD.

In the SW region of QLD this aggregation consist of 8 properties including Clover Downs, Talbarea, Borambil, Wonga, Weelamurra, Mitchell Plains, Manly and Speeling Point.

***Sustainable Land Management Partners (SLM)*** operates on behalf of the Danish Pension Fund – Pensionskassernes Administration (PKA). They have 480,000ha in QLD with 9 properties in 2 large blocks in the Cunnamulla and Quilpie areas.

Within the Cunnamulla area (the highly productive “Salad Bowl” of QLD) includes the following properties:- Padua Park, Willacorra, Amenda, Garrawin (includes Gumahah and Callendony) with Eureka Plains just across the border in NSW joining onto the southern extent of the QLD properties.

The Quilpie area consists of the properties including Colac, Armobilla (includes Fairlie), Mumburry (includes Harredean and Derremut) and Listowel Downs. These are all properties within the higher production range of the land type.

The small individually Foreign Owned properties generally have a manager on and have been owned and operated by the same individual for a long period of time which in many ways creates stability in the community and continues to support the local community with the employment of that long term manager and family. This is quite different to the large Foreign Corporate investment groups acquiring numerous properties into an aggregation and managing from one central place with minimal input into the local communities.

**Private Conservancy / Other (Cross Hatched). 6 properties. Represents privately owned properties that are no longer food production based ie are a private conservation reserve, Traditionally Owned land or for other non food production such as Carbon Credits or recreation.**

There has been an increasing trend towards properties that have high conservation values to fade out of production and focus on protecting conservation values. In some cases limited grazing may still occur to assist with land management issues such as weed control and fire management but in general these properties are no longer supporting food production. In most cases these properties are affiliated with the larger philanthropic organisations such as Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) or Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC). Generally these organisations employ full time managers to live on the properties to undertake the day to day duties of land management.

There are several Traditional Owner Groups across the region that own and operate properties. Several have been recently destocked and are currently being operated for other purposes. Other properties such as Mt Tabor have agreements in place with Corporate entities such as Australian Country Choice (ACC) and are leased by them to run stock on. ACC employs local Indigenous staff to facilitate the on ground management as part of those leases.

There was one final anomaly that showed up with a property being owned and operated by the Returned Services man's League (RSL) being Alric Station – again they are not focused on food production but on providing a location for Returned Service people to congregate and get away from city living and pressures.

**State Government owned Estate. 1686 properties. State owned Conservation Reserves ie National Parks and State Forest. This category also includes the extensive network of stock routes and water leases etc owned by government. In some cases these stock routes are regularly grazed etc and in others they form a corridor for the movement of wildlife etc. Some reserves are very small areas and fragmented leading to the high number of properties or parcels.**

There is a number of different land tenures associated with State owned Conservation Estates across the region. These range from National Parks to State Forest and Timber Reserves to Stock Routes. Generally within the high conservation areas such as National Parks there is no production based activities ie grazing etc; however grazing leases are issued for a number of State Forests and Timber Reserves within the region. This provides graziers with drought refuges and Government with an additional tool to target fire management through fuel reduction and weed control.

Generally only the larger and high profile National Parks have full time staff employed to undertake day to day land management duties living on them. Other Parks and Reserves are managed by staff commuting to those locations as required.

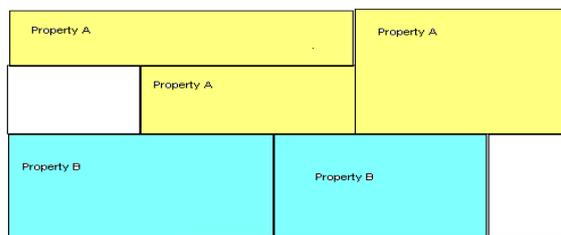
Stock routes have been included here as altogether they add up to a reasonable percentage of area that is not individually owned or managed. If we left them in the white category it would have miss represented that category.

The number of properties / parcels represented under this category is very high as a result of including water leases and stock routes etc as well as parks and reserves however when represented at % of total area brings this back into proportion.

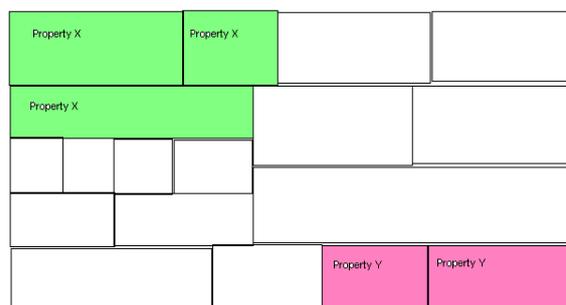
**White Areas.** 726 properties. The remaining White areas are generally family holdings centred on food production ie mainly grazing enterprises.

Areas that are left as white on the base map are properties that are still under Owner / Occupier management. This means that the Owner is still resident on that property(s) 100% of the time and as a result is there to undertake day to day land management practices.

In a significant percentage of properties the one owner may actually own and manage several properties having brought out a neighbour previously as part of their property build up to remain economically viable. As the two properties (A and B) are under the one ownership and are managed as one; we have decided to leave these as Owner Occupied even though there is not an occupied house on each of the individual titles and two or more properties / titles are now supporting the one family.



In other instances the owners may have two or more properties (X and Y) but as they do not share a common boundary they are distinct stand alone titles. If these properties are within 50km of their home (residential) property they can be managed on a daily (regular) basis therefore we have again elected to leave these as White (Owner Occupied).



This multiple property acquisition has occurred in attempts to reach or retain a critical mass to ensure viability in the long term.

We have estimated that across the region at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  or 25% of the White (Owner Occupied) properties / parcels (726) would fall into one of these 2 categories. Extrapolated this means that when looking at the White (Owner / Occupied) areas a further 25% or 181 properties / parcels do not have anyone residing on them. In other terms  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the properties in the White area are part of a series of properties supporting the one family not several families.

**Note.** The area to the east of Charleville may not be fully representative of the situation as the collators had minimal contacts in these areas to ascertain the occupancy. Please note that when in doubt as to the tenure we have opted to leave it as White.

## **Consequences of lack of people living and working on properties.**

In general if you have a property that is surrounded by other owner occupiers there are a wide range of intangible or unquantifiable benefits by having neighbours at home.

These include opportunities for cooperative weed management along catchments, cooperation in boundary fencing maintenance and replacement, pasture management and improvement, total grazing pressure management and control of Macropod populations, fire management including controlled burns and wildfire suppression, feral animal control and stock management. Opportunities exist to support each other sharing plant and equipment as well as skills and expertise. Opportunities may also exist to seek outside support and funding as a “group” under Natural Resource Management organisations.

For properties with a large percentage of Absentee owners of one sort or another on their boundaries have invariably increased pressures and workloads. This occurs due to increased requirement for the owner occupier to be the only one regularly undertaking duties such as boundary fence checks, only being able to look at controls for weeds and feral animals once they are on the property. If good relations do occur with Absentee Owners the Owner Occupier may gain permission to undertake some programs such as weed control, feral control and fire suppression on the neighbouring property that will provide some direct benefit to their own programs.

For properties with a high percentage of Absenteeism on their boundaries pressures from issues such as Macropods can become a very major issue regardless of level of controls in place on the occupied property. The property undertaking the controls can become the sink into which animals from neighbouring properties continually drain into.

Once the trend to leaving a property vacant commences it starts a local trend that extends out and as the pressures increase on the remaining properties it can tip the balance and leads to the next property becoming Absentee. Looking at the map this is clearly seen that where there is more than one property as Absentee there quickly becomes a cluster of Absentee properties.

To turn this trend around is nearly impossible ie getting the family to move back out to live on property so the end result is a choice between two options –retaining the property and running as an Absentee or selling the property. The selling option has its own suite of difficulties and the same reasons of why the current Land managers fell into the Absentee category generally still apply to the new owners.

Figures were obtained from the Charleville School of Distance Education from 2003 and 2013 respectively. In 2003, 227 students were enrolled and attended 6 different venues for mini school sessions throughout the year. In 2013 the numbers of enrolments had dropped to 132 students and reduced to 3 mini school venues per year thus greatly reducing opportunities for face to face education. The number of enrolments has dropped over this 10 year period by 95 students nearly halving the intake between 2003 and 2013.

The Principle noted that the most severely depleted areas are west and south of Charleville where most families have departed from. This is immediately born out with the mapping showing the highest levels of concentration of Absentee (Blue) properties in these areas. Once families have left, the future of properties become even more uncertain as the probability of passing that property onto the next generation becomes dramatically reduced.

Generally due to pressures from Wild Dogs many people are being forced into cattle over small animals such as sheep and goats. Once people have made the decision to become Absentee they can really only consider running cattle on the property. The level of on ground maintenance running sheep over cattle almost dictates that sheep can only be run by Owner Occupiers particularly where there is increasing pressures from predation by wild dogs. As a result in many areas where the landscape and vegetation types are more suitable for sheep they are forced to run cattle. So in drought years the properties struggle to remain operational due to the rapid decline in cattle prices and the poor condition of animals.

Along with the declining and ageing population within the rural communities the trend of trying to manage properties from a distance is compounding effects of the towns and services with the rural communities.

When Absentee Owners do come to undertake works on their unoccupied properties they often bring all their material and equipment with them ranging from plant and machinery to food and supplies. So there is no expenditure in the local small towns or communities. Once finished with the week or two week program at the secondary property everything is returned back to the home base where plant and equipment is serviced again in communities outside of the local towns of the satellite property.

Due to security; most plant and equipment is transported in and out as required to properties so there is little left on properties as a resource to be shared by neighbours and or available for emergency situations.

Suggestions have been made as to using this map to assist direction for issues such as wild dog management. Although we agree that if people are not living on properties 100% of the time they are less likely to be able to react to pressures from issues such as wild dogs; they are not necessarily guilty of not undertaking any control measures. In some cases Absentee Owners maybe undertaking more control programs such as supporting Syndicate Trappers, Shire based or individual 1080 baiting programs across their land at key times compared to some Owner Occupiers who do not see any need to support any of these programs.

The key difference being that if you are actively undertaking Land Management and are there 100% of the time you are able to immediately and specifically react to issues, sightings and evidence that is only visible for short periods of time ie bitten stock and tracks. You are also in a better position to undertake preventative programs such as fencing. Given that these need regular and consistent maintenance an active Owner Occupier can ensure that these are done as opposed to Absentee Owners.

Wherever properties now exist that have a proportion of their boundaries with Absentee or Foreign ownership they have an increasing level of pressure and workloads on them due to the reduced level of land management on the other side of the fence.

Allambie Station 40km south of Cooladdi is a prime example of this with almost all of the neighbours now falling into either the Absentee or Foreign Ownership categories.

From firsthand knowledge this property owner over the last 30 years indicates that the following aspects are very true. Where adjoining properties to Allambie Station are under Foreign Ownership there has been no contact for over 12 months (since the time the property has changed hands) or evidence that there has been any boundary inspection or repair or upgrade on boundary fences.

Additional pressures may come from a number of different aspects including some of the following.

- Reduced ability by the Absentee neighbours to undertake feral animal control (Wild dogs, pigs, foxes, rabbits etc).
- Reduced ability by the Absentee neighbours to undertake weed control. This is especially significant to those properties downstream in catchments.
- Reduced ability by the Absentee neighbours to undertake immediate responses to fire control. In many cases they may be totally unaware of the fires on their properties until they have burnt though them and onto the neighbours.
- Reduced ability by the Absentee neighbours to undertake regular maintenance of boundary fences to prevent straying of stock.
- Reduced ability by the Absentee neighbours to undertake total grazing pressure management by culling Macropod numbers when in excessive proportions.

Once people have moved away from properties the ability to get them to return is greatly diminished.

Once people have moved to town for work they are in direct competition with people who are town based for the limited array of jobs and work available. So where they were originally self-supporting with an income on property they are now seeking paid employment in towns and cities etc which reduces the pool of work available and potentially forces someone onto government support via Centrelink etc.

Recently the Pew Trust published several articles in papers discussing the decline in populations in outback Australia. They specifically commented that the current population in outback Australia was now at its lowest since the arrival of European populations and how this flows onto a suite of environmental management issues.

Information within this document and on the map has been truth as much as possible with organisations and agencies including QLD National Parks and Wildlife, Shire Council Offices (although the Council offices have been constrained in providing us with information due to confidentiality issues), South West NRM staff along with Owners / Managers of all the different categories at a number of different locations and functions. Where possible we have used the internet to cross reference information and “truth” properties and boundaries etc. Terrence and Rosemary Alick’s Atlas of Queensland and Northern Territory Pastoral Stations etc. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition has also been used to determine the extent of property boundaries.

The information provided here has been produced by local graziers and is to the best of our ability and knowledge correct at the time of printing however we take no responsibility for any omissions or inaccuracy’s present.

This information has been compiled from a variety of sources by the following people.

Cathy Zwick and Brett McDonald

Allambie Station

Cooladdi

QLD 4479

E-mail [mcdallambie@gmail.com](mailto:mcdallambie@gmail.com)