

Pastoralism: Problem or solution?

A vision for Pastoralism in the Kimberley and other regions in Northern Australia?

By Chris Henggeler, Kachana Pastoral Company, August 2013

Pastoralism, when given the chance to reinvent itself, has the immediate potential to create new self-employment opportunities, new businesses and new jobs.

Pastoralism can also create genuine new wealth for the Nation in a sustainable manner.

Why would somebody make such a statement?

Why is what I say not happening as fast as it could/should?

It is safe to say that in the Kimberley we do not run anywhere near the numbers of livestock that the country could support. The reasons are many and varied.

Hey, but should there not be many, many, many more animals (*wild as well as domesticated*) in the Kimberley to support the health of the country?

There is an accepted industry view: Produce and/or sell animals with a high gross margin.

This means we wish to: Maximise the return on our annual in-puts.

That is fine.

That is what the industry is good at.

Many people in the industry are doing just that.

There is another view.

(It is worth mentioning that the two views do not exclude each other...)

This other view is not new by any means.

It has, however for many years, been a **minority-view**.

A minority-view is seldom a vote-catcher, and therefore easily overlooked at political levels.

This **other view** is like that of a **natural capitalist**.

We view the land and its natural resources as our **Natural Capital**.

We invest in building an increasingly stronger **capital base**.

Our aim is to live off the interest that this capital base can sustainably generate.

The focus is on producing “valuable acres” instead of “valuable cows”.

We focus on increasing “Kilos of Beef / Hectare” rather than on increasing

“Kilos / animal” whilst hoping for more “\$ / Kilo”.

Today we have a whole industry where the pay-off hinges on “\$ / Kilo”.

We saw how a ministerial knee-jerk reaction can bring such an industry down onto its knees.

Some are still feeling the pain.

A “**Kilos of Beef / Hectare**” focus, however, can help **pastoralism reinvent itself**.

- When we turn off livestock, we still get “\$ / Kilo”
- But on top of that we also **produce environmental services** for the broader community and for the benefit of those who pick up where we leave off
 - we build soil
 - we increase biodiversity
 - we reduce the impact of flooding
 - we mitigate the impact of droughts
 - we also capture and store carbon
 - we can manage fuel-loads to lessen the impact of wild-fire
 - we can create and maintain low-fuel-zones as firebreaks

Generally these environmental services go unrecognised or society takes them for granted.

But it is when such environmental services are no longer performed that we get fiascos like the flooding on **Weber-Plains Road Kununurra**. (*A 3.1 square km small eroding catchment leading to all sorts of costly attempts at stop-gap-solutions.*)

It is when upper-river catchments are regularly denuded and soil is exposed that more water runs off quicker and we end up with the need to rebuild a township like **Warmun (Turkey Creek)**.

I am told that over \$ 200 million has been spent to date???

... and we have not even addressed the root-cause of the problem!

When more water runs off quicker in upper-river catchments we also find Main Roads needing to build **ever bigger and stronger bridges**.

Was it \$ 60 million a few years ago for a new bridge over the Dunham River?

Does there ever come a point in time where communities run out of public funding?

This is what Allan Savory means when he says that deteriorating land inevitably leads to poverty and eventually to violence.

(Do we have any communities in the Kimberley that experience poverty and violence?)

The good news is that by mimicking nature we can use livestock as a tool to make our landscapes increasingly productive.

We use managed herds (*tightly bunched animals*) to mulch, evenly fertilise and prune vegetation.

This changes raindrops from bomb-shells to mist-irrigators.

Increasingly more rainwater is soaked up on site and has time to percolate down through the soil-profile.

Aquifers are replenished and moisture remains in the soil long after it rains.

The many little things that live in the soil can continue their work long into the dry season without being exposed to radiation from the sun and a daily range of extreme temperature fluctuations.

As natural soil-building and soil-rejuvenation speeds up, more vegetation is produced and the country can support more people and animals (*wild as well as domesticated*).

We are not talking about silver bullets or quick-fixes.

Cutting-edge pastoral practices and planning techniques are the key.

In some instances the responses are immediate, in others it may take years to reclaim former levels of productivity.

We learn as we go. Each situation is unique.

We monitor for signs that tell us if we go off track and we correct.

This is about **blending local knowledge and experience with new and proven techniques backed by up-to-date science.**

We suggest that political leaders take note, and that without public support and appropriate incentives, pastoralism may not be given the opportunity to step up to the challenge in time.

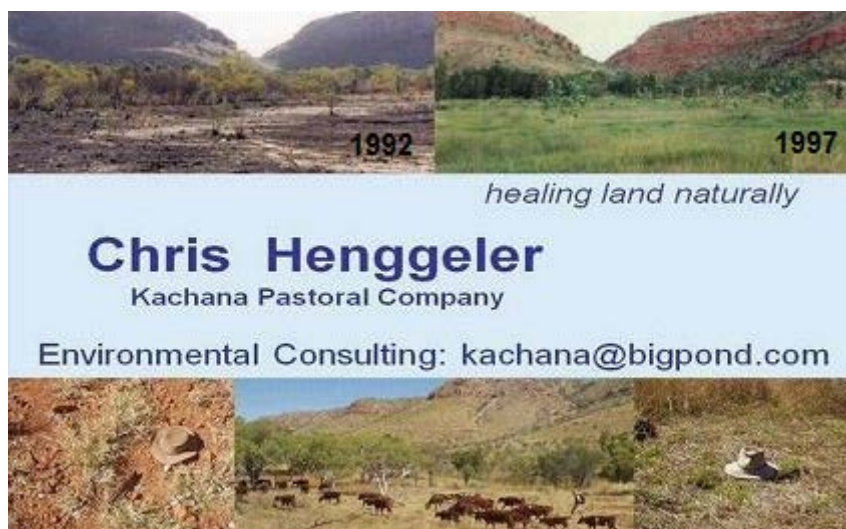
Those who have not yet seen it, I encourage to view Allan Savory's TED presentation on u-tube.

<http://on.ted.com/Savory>

or

Simply google: ted allan savory

To those that intend to retire, get old and to die in Northern Australia (*as I do*), I suggest you listen to Allan's message more than once and also to forward it as appropriate. ☺



Biodiversity – a key to life on Earth

Water Security (flood-reduction and drought-proofing)

Capture and Storage of Carbon – Nature's Cash

Rangeland Health and Productivity – the key to vibrant communities

For information on what we do on the ground, visit: www.kachana.com

Or: Kachana on Facebook which is managed by our younger generation:

<http://www.facebook.com/kachanastation>

“The primary goal of succession planning should not be to transfer your farm or ranch to your heirs after your death, but to provide for a comfortable living for you after you give up day-to-day management. Whenever any industry starts to survive in the short term by consuming its young ... it ensures its death in the longer term. When the young can no longer find an easy way in, the old can find no comfortable way out.”

~ Allan Nation ~