

Sustainable Tourism in the Rangelands:

Landholder perspectives on conservation

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Sustainable Tourism in the Rangelands: Landholder perspectives on conservation

- Case Study:
 - The Flinders Ranges,
South Australia
- Research question:
 - *Could the growth of ecotourism assist ecological recovery in the Flinders Ranges?*



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- Research Strategy:
 - Literature review: environmental degradation in the rangelands; positives and negatives of ecotourism operations (in Australia)
 - Data collection: to gather opinions of visitors, tourism operators & landholders in study site
 - Economic impacts of each industry
 - Environmental impacts of each industry
 - Present & future land-use options and potential in rangelands (incl. the ecotourism market)

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Methods:

- Semi-structured interviews with local landholders and tourism operators
- Focus group with sub-group of landholders
- Intercept surveys with tourists



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- Map of study site:
Area for data collection was guided by the boundaries of the DEH restoration project Operation Bounceback (shaded yellow), in the central and northern regions of the Flinders Ranges.



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- Reminder:
This presentation focuses on the results of the
landholder interviews

3 key themes came out of the research:

- Unreliable nature of pastoralism
- Diversification is necessary for
landholders
- Diversification into ecotourism
is favourable in the rangelands



Unreliable nature of pastoralism

- Sustainability of pastoralism, particularly in areas where drought is not unknown, is under constant investigation
- Landholders identified numerous factors influencing their success:
 - Climate (drought, heat wave, frost -> influencing feed availability & carrying capacity), demand for product, commodity prices, locusts, grasshoppers, having too many factors beyond their control...



Diversification is necessary for landholders

- Related to:
 - the unpredictable position of the pastoral industry
 - economic & environmental viability
 - an increasing environmental awareness by the Australian public
 - the recognition of a multiple-use value, esp. recreation
 - 5 of 17 interviewees had off-farm incomes (e.g. teaching, truck work, seasonal work on other properties)
 - 10 of 17 had additional non-pastoral incomes (e.g. user-pays 4WD tracks, accommodation)
- A shift away from the purely productivist landscape (see Holmes, 2002)



Diversification into ecotourism is favourable in the rangelands

Interviewed landholders:

- care 'a lot' about conservation in the Flinders Ranges (94%) and place environmental sustainability high on their list of concerns
- are restricted in their conservation efforts due to financial barriers (75%)

'If we had more money, we could do more to help.'

'The less versatile people [economically] have to put more pressure on the land.'

- think financial incentives for conservation work well (83%)
- acknowledge that both need to be managed correctly, but only 15% were of the opinion pastoralism is less damaging than tourism

'Tourism, correctly managed, can relieve grazing pressure and can aid in rejuvenation of perennial plants.'

'Ecotourism is the last chance now to help the Flinders.'

Diversification into ecotourism is favourable in the rangelands

Landholders see the key benefits of ecotourism as:

- giving them **additional cash for conservation**;
- helping **educate tourists**; and
- enabling a **reduced reliance on pastoralism**

Combined, these benefits facilitate greater ecological recovery in the rangelands.

- *'We had to use tourism to protect the environment.'*
- *'Having an income from tourism has meant we've been able to reduce the number of stock grazing and increase our revegetation efforts.'*
- *'Tourism is fraught with difficulties but there's more money in tourism.'*
- *'We can teach people the real impacts and they can see for themselves how we need to help protect the environment.'*
- *'You need to show people what is there, to get them to relate to it, so people can give it a value'. That's why tourism can work for conservation.'*

Conclusions:

Combining conservation with pastoralism in the rangelands is seen as an issue of high priority

- Large area of land involved
- Potential for pastoralism to degrade land resources
- Ecotourism presents itself as one way (that is well accepted by local landholders as a diversification option) to facilitate multiple-use – bringing pastoralism and conservation together whilst also providing for the more recently recognised environmental services values and the desire for rangeland recreation.
- Ecotourism can help landholders reach their economic *and* environmental goals

