Regional NRM Manager Update

To all of you in our region, our thoughts are with you all as we enter some of the most uncertain times we have had to face.

The situation changes daily and by the time you read this, it could be vastly different from the time of writing this message. In accordance with the state and national guidelines around managing the threat of the pandemic we are postponing all events and non-essential activities for the coming months, including the SA Arid Lands Pastoral Field Day.

As your Natural Resources Management Board we are committed to remaining connected with you throughout the coming weeks and months.

Our staff are all available by phone and email and they will also be making contact with land managers, community groups and NRM group members over this time. We understand the disruption this brings to planned activities for both the organisers and attendees, but, as has been made abundantly clear, this is a response that is in the best interests of you, our SAAL community, staff and the Australian community more broadly.

You will see how we have invested your NRM Levy and how very busy we have been in the process, but while all of this has been happening, much change and reorganisation has been taking place in the background.

The staff of the SA Arid Lands NRM Board are delighted to welcome our new presiding member, Ross Sawers and additionally sad to have farewelled the members of the former Board. Soon we will have a fully installed new Landscape Board. As of July 1, the Board will be operating under the new Landscape SA Act and engaging with the community to define the direction of the Board’s investment in accordance with the new back to basics principles outlined in the legislation.

Thanks for reading ATO and for being a part of the stories within.

Jodie Gregg-Smith

Cover image: Joseph Berris sets Elliott traps for the Coward Springs fauna survey. Joseph was an invaluable volunteer for the survey, which received Community Grant funds.
Imogen and Sienna Michael had some fun in the puddles on Cariewerloo.

Rainfall brings hope to the region

Hope returned to the pastoral district when significant rainfalls were recorded across much of the region in February, proving it can still rain. This was followed by flooding in the north east corner of the region in March with Innamincka receiving 83mm of rain.

And while there were the biggest rainfall totals across parts of the district in a number of years, the resounding message that followed is follow up rain is needed for the landscape to recover and so pastoralists can restock.

Impacts from the falls were greatly varied across the region with properties 30km apart reporting such differences that some had enough to fill dams, while their neighbours reported no rainfall. In the north, some landholders reported no rainfall at homesteads, but found full dams when they ventured out.

In the Marree Innamincka District, those living in the lower areas received up to 50mm in February, while those in the mid to upper areas received little to no rainfall until March. When that 50mm fell in three hours around Marree in January, a number of places in the district reported infrastructure damage. It also equalled the total rainfall Marree had received in the preceding three years, since January 2017.

In the Gawler Ranges rainfall varied from 10mm in the west up to 110mm in the North East. Those that recorded high falls did incur damage to fences and dams.

In the Kingoonya District, Prominent Hill received 125mm and while properties in the west went without rain. Roxby Downs received 50mm but just 30km to the west, Andamooka township received only 12mm.

Some properties in the North East Pastoral reported rainfalls of 30mm, while others remained dry.

In the North Flinders most properties reported between 30mm and up to 120mm north of Blinman, with enough water to get creeks flowing. In the Marla Oodnadatta district rains missed the north eastern area, but the south west around Coober Pedy recorded rainfalls of more than 70mm.
Building awareness of mound springs

Educating visitors on the importance of the mound springs was one of 14 projects to be awarded a SA Arid Lands NRM Board Community Grant.

The Friends of Mound Springs received $1495 for its project Enhancing Awareness of GAB Springs in SA.

The funding provided the group with money to cover the cost of updating and printing three brochures, which explain the importance of the mound springs and provide details of walks at two important sites where springs are associated with ruins of Overland Telegraph repeater stations.

The first, The Mound Springs of South Australia, explains the importance of the springs as natural outlets for the water of the Great Artesian Basin and highlights the springs’ national significance due to their natural ecosystems and cultural heritage values.

The second brochure, The Peake Walks, provides maps for three self-guided walks with descriptions of numbered features to be found in each of the walks at The Peake Overland Telegraph site; while the Strangways Springs Walks brochure details three self-guided walks taking in the natural and cultural features of this significant heritage site on the Anna Creek pastoral lease.

Friends of Mound Springs (FOMS) secretary Simon Lewis said the benefit of the project would be measured by the uptake of the brochures at the two sites, which would be an indicator of the extent to which the information was being disseminated.

He said the group had received positive feedback from many visitors to the two sites. Site brochures are replenished by FOMS volunteers annually.

FOMs has been active in protecting mound springs, promoting community awareness, monitoring spring vegetation and many other associated activities since its inception in 2006.

Granting research into Flinders fish

Environmental monitoring in Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park received a boost when its Friends Group received a Community Grant of $2362 from the SA Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Board.

The Friends of Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park Inc started its environmental program in 2018, with the intention of running a long-term citizen science project. The project involves monitoring the Weetootla and Yuwanhinya Springs, along with the Nepouie Spring on the adjacent Wooltana pastoral lease.

Funds received from the Community Grants program enabled the monitoring work to occur.

All springs have continued to provide strong flows of relatively low salinity water over the past two years of very low rainfall. They also support populations of the endangered fish species Flinders Ranges purple-spotted gudgeon (Mogurnda clivicola) known also as Wirti Uda Varri in Adnyamathanha language.
Funds for fauna survey

A study assessing changes in the abundance and diversity of fauna species at the Coward Springs Wetland Heritage site was supported by an SA Arid Lands NRM Board Community Grant.

Funding of $9664 was awarded for a fauna survey that has been completed to record further changes taking place at the site since the first survey was undertaken in 1997.

As part of the survey, long term monitoring sites for small mammals were established, trapping equipment was purchased and pest animal and weed management requirements were determined.

Undertaken in August last year, the small mammal trapping survey recorded four species, three of which were native and all of which had been recorded in previous surveys in 1997 and 2006. Missing from previous recordings was Bolam’s mouse (Pseudomys bolami) which could be attributed to very low rainfall in recent years.

The three native small mammals trapped were Giles planigale (Planigale gilesi), Desert mouse (Psedomys desertor) and Stripe-faced dunnart (Sminthopsis macroura).

Persistence of the desert mouse at the site indicates the Coward Springs wetland is highly likely to be a refuge site for the species. It is thought that during dry periods, desert mice in the region are largely restricted to bore drains and mound springs that support sedge grasses. It is hoped further trapping programs will be able to document the desert mouse population response to rainfall over time.

The diversity of bird species at the site increased, with 42 different species recorded and it is considered likely that Coward Springs represents an important bird refuge during dry times.

European rabbits (Oryctolagus cuniculus) were the most abundant exotic pest species at the site, shown by the number of detections on remote infra-red camera operating during the survey. Foxes appeared to be in low numbers, possibly due to low rainfall and feral cats were not recorded, although one was trapped by the landholder in the weeks prior to the survey.

The survey report, written by fauna ecologist Karleah Berris, recommended continued controls of red foxes, feral cats and rabbits to ensure existing native fauna was protected and possibly enhanced.

She recommended that small mammal surveys should continue at Coward Springs to track the abundance of small mammal and vertebrate pest species at the site in response to rainfall over the years.

The results of this survey are a snapshot during a particularly dry period in the region. It was suggested another pitfall trapping survey could be completed in warmer months, because the failure to detect any reptiles was most likely due to the cold night time conditions.
Presiding Member’s Message

Thank you to all that have welcomed my return to the SA Arid Lands region as the new Presiding Member of the Landscapes Board for the SA Arid Lands. When taking on the role in early March, I never could have imagined that we, as a region, a nation and a world community, would be facing the challenges that are in front of us.

I acknowledge the monumental impact this is having on our region through the loss of vital tourism dollars, the cancellation of community events and the closure of businesses to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

As a Board we will continue to provide a service to you, our SAAL community, and while this will be done remotely, please know that our staff are just at the end of a phone or email.

Through all of this we are working to transition to a new way of doing business in preparation for a July 1 2020 commencement of the Landscape SA Act. Much of the business still continues despite the changes, as we see through projects funded by industry, the Australian Government and long-term commitments of the NRM Board that apply directly to the principles of the new legislation.

I have been heartened by the applications we received from local community members who nominated to serve on the new SA Arid Lands Landscape Board. I am working through this process with the Minister for Environment and Water and am hopeful we will be able to announce the new Landscape Board soon.

The new legislation ensures a number of key principles and benefits, all resulting from the extensive community consultation process which was undertaken early in the new Government’s term. A fundamental change is ensuring that the Boards have greater autonomy and improved agility with the power to manage their own budgets and respond to local needs. This will include the appointment of a General Manager who will be responsible for employing and managing staff. Regional Plans will be simplified with five priorities, of which pest plant and animal control, soils and water will be key. It is planned that by 2022, up to three board members will be elected by our community. The boundary of the SA Arid Lands will include the Port Augusta City and Flinders Ranges Councils. This brings a new opportunity to the wider region and I look forward to engaging with our new partners to identify how some mutual benefit can be achieved in managing the region’s resources.

There will be a process of integrating the new council districts into the region from a business planning and levy point of view. It is intended to have minimal impact on the Board’s current priorities and projects, while identifying new opportunities for the new council districts. A natural extension of the new Flinders Ranges Council area will add value to the current Northern Flinders district the Board supports, with an exciting opportunity to set up a Port Augusta/Quorn community group to develop the aspirations of those communities for managing their local landscapes.

I am abundantly aware of some of the high profile issues for the region and I would like to reassure you they will remain high priority matters for me and the new Landscapes Board. The completion and adoption of the Far North Prescribed Wells Area Water Allocation Plan, Wild Dog Management and landscape resilience for sustainable pastoralism are all key matters that align directly with the back to basics principles of the new Act. The current work of the NRM Groups, which will ultimately transition to become entities under the Landscape Board will ensure a level of continuity and connection with local communities that a board of seven would struggle to maintain over more than 50% of SA.

I would like to thank you in advance for your support of the Board as it evolves under the new legislation and assure you that what will soon be known as the “landscape levy” will be responsibly invested in the areas that promote sustainability in our industries, environment and communities, with your ongoing input and ideas.

I would also like to thank the previous Board for their dedicated and uniring efforts in ensuring the NRM Legislation was administered in accordance with that Acts requirements, and particularly Janet Brook, the Presiding Member for eight years.

I look forward to working with you from here.

Ross Sawers
The Middleback Alliance has gained vital information about malleefowl after tracking the movement of a bird in late 2019.

The group, which operates in the Gawler Ranges, has been monitoring malleefowl for more than 12 years. It is a partnership between local landowners, Ecological Horizons, the Department for Environment and Water and mining company SIMEC. Together they monitor more than 300 malleefowl mounds per year and recently partnered with the SA Arid Lands NRM Board to implement aerial fox baiting for further protection.

The aerial baiting was part of the Bounceback and Beyond project, which is supported by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board, through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program. PhD student Peri Stenhouse attached a satellite tracker to a malleefowl known to be nesting in Secret Rocks Nature Reserve in the southern part of the Gawler Ranges region late last year. She was supported by SIMEC and John Read and Katherine Moseby from Secret Rocks.

The initiative was undertaken to increase the understanding of the malleefowl by tracking the movement of individual birds. A satellite tracker was put on a bird in December 2019, allowing data to be remotely downloaded from the tracker every few days. The data was then plotted on a map to see where and how far the bird had moved. Chicks had successfully hatched at the mound this bird was tending, and the tracker meant the group knew the bird had survived a recent bushfire on the property which came perilously close to its mound.

The map (right) shows an example of the movements recorded from another malleefowl tracked on Secret Rocks for around 12 months. The bird moved well over 20 kilometres in nine days in November, but unfortunately died. It is suspected the bird succumbed to an extended heatwave and drought, rather than being taken by a predator.

Species such as malleefowl are particularly vulnerable to increasing frequency and severity of drought as a result of climate change.

“Satellite tracking data like this provide invaluable information on the movement patterns and survival of malleefowl, which helps us to better understand the species’ threats and find ways to protect the species into the future,” Katherine Moseby said.

“Although the bird outlined above likely died from starvation and heat stress, this contrasts with the deaths recorded in five other birds fitted with transmitters which were all caused by cat and fox predation.”

The malleefowl is a native ground-dwelling bird which is known for building large distinctive mound-shaped nests. The species incubates its eggs within the mound using heat from the sun and composting leaf litter. The species is particularly vulnerable to predation by introduced predators such as foxes and feral cats, as well as habitat loss through land clearing and inappropriate fire regimes.

It is one of the focus species of Bounceback and Beyond, which is supported by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board, through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program.
South Australia lost a great leader in water management with the recent passing of Lynn Brake.

An outstanding leader in the sustainable management of the Great Artesian Basin (GAB), Lake Eyre Basin and the GAB Springs both at a state and national level for more than 30 years, Lynn worked closely with State and Federal Governments, NRM boards, communities and industry groups.

Lynn’s positive, calm nature and his outstanding ability to engage well with people and communities enabled him to bring them along the journey to improve how water was managed and used in the far north. Lynn was widely respected for his integrity, knowledge, leadership and determination to achieve positive outcomes.

Just before his passing, the Commonwealth Government announced it would establish the Lynn Brake Scholarship in his honour to support the development of future scientists and to help foster links between academia, the wider community and governments.

Lynn also received the first copy of the recently completed report Great Artesian Basin Springs: a Plan for the Future with a special acknowledgement of his significant contribution to this work.

Lynn fulfilled many significant roles in water management including:

- Founding Member of the Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee
- Chairperson of the Arid Areas Water Resources Committee
- Inaugural Presiding Member of the Arid Areas Catchment Water Management Board
- Chairperson of the Water Advisory Committee (SAAL NRM Board)

In these roles Lynn was instrumental in developing the inaugural Strategic Management Plan for the Great Artesian Basin, which was adopted in 2000, and the new plan which will soon be adopted.

Lynn also led the preparation and adoption of the Far North Water Allocation Plan in 2009 covering the GAB in South Australia, as well as the multi-million dollar project entitled ‘Allocating Water and Maintaining Springs in the GAB’.

SA Arid Lands Principal Policy Officer for Water Planning & Security David Leek worked with Lynn for more than two decades and first met him at a meeting of the Arid Areas Water Resources Committee at Moomba.

“It quickly became obvious that Lynn was the driving force behind what that committee was trying to achieve. It is that drive, enthusiasm and ability to galvanise others that characterises Lynn in my eyes and I have been privileged to be a willing passenger on our journey together ever since,” David said.

“Lynn had the great ability to engage with people. It didn’t matter whether you were a ringer in the front bar of the Marree Hotel, or a politician in the hallowed halls of Canberra. Lynn paid due respect to your opinions and was both flexible and intelligent enough to account for those perspectives when building the policy that he was so influential in constructing.

“There are little things that I will miss very much as I continue driving around the outback doing all things water without Lynn there. The endless conversations about politics, family, delighted shouts when he spotted some of his favourite birds and my never ending surprise as he demonstrated his encyclopaedic knowledge of just about every topic.

“We are all a little poorer for his passing. I feel the loss deeply, but the overwhelming sense I have is that the most persistent lament emanates from up north, from the GAB Springs and the plants and animals that depend on the water that Lynn was so devoted to protecting.”

Lynn said before his passing, “there is more work to be done” and anyone who worked with Lynn will ensure his vision and legacy will continue. Lynn was a wonderful friend, colleague and mentor to many in SA and across Australia – he will be greatly missed.

Lynn Brake was presented with a published copy of his final work in the days before his passing. Great Artesian Basin Springs: a Plan for the Future – Evidence-based Methodologies for Managing Risks to Spring Values was released in January this year and considers threats to the GAB Springs and how they should be managed.

It refers to the artesian springs of the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) as unique environmental assets with international ecological value, as well as being water assets of immense economic and social value to communities, mining and pastoralism in the desert region.

GAB water is estimated to return about $13 billion of production annually, including $4 billion in stock, $6 billion in mining, $2 billion in gas and $1 billion from tourism.

The book explains that the continued survival and well-being of GAB springs are at risk from the twin threats of diminishing artesian pressure, which is reducing outflows from the springs, and disturbance of the surface vents from various land uses, particularly as water points for stock.

In the book, Lynn states that similar programs to GABSI’s bore capping, which invested $300 million from 1999-2018, are needed to continue to address the threat of reduced pressure. Equally, the threat of surface disturbance needs coordinated attention.

He also states that scientific knowledge of the Basin resource and its connectivity to other surface and groundwater systems has significantly increased since the 1980s and findings from recent research projects can inform future decision making and management for GAB springs.


Vale Lynn Brake
With the consultation for the Water Allocation Plan drawing to a close, it’s a good time to consider what happens next.

A consultation report will be prepared which will include all the verbal comments made during the consultation meetings in the region and in Adelaide, and all the comments received in writing and by telephone. The deadline for the consultation has been extended by two weeks at this stage to 5pm on 17 April, 2020 due to rain forcing the rescheduling of meetings in Innamincka and Marree and subsequent cancellation due to COVID-19. Teleconferences are being planned and dates will be promoted.

The report will identify all the comments made in relation to the draft WAP and where applicable, provide responses as to what could be changed in the WAP in order to respond to these comments. Comments that suggest significant changes to the draft WAP will be tabled at the Water Advisory Committee (WAC) for further discussion and a decision.

This report will be included in a package that will be considered by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board alongside the updated WAP and any supporting information about decisions made to implement changes.

The Board will make a decision about what changes are implemented on advice from the WAC. The Board will then request that the Minister adopt the updated draft WAP. The Minister will be provided with a copy of the draft WAP, a copy of the updated draft WAP with the changes identified, the consultation report and the plan which outlines how the WAP will be implemented once it is adopted, which will include such tasks as the timing and process of licensing, reporting, monitoring, compliance, communication and education.

The Minister may adopt the WAP as is or may request the Board consider some further changes to the document before it is formally adopted.

Keep up to date with the WAP consultation on the SA Arid Lands website under ‘events’.

Contributing to the WAP consultation in Coober Pedy were, from left, Ash Cooper, Tony Williams, Jake Fennell, Gillian Fennell, Alan Fennell, Donnagh Clarke and Andrew Clarke, Douglas Lillecrapp, Caroline Thomas and Scott Harrison.
GAWLER RANGES
Members of the Gawler Ranges NRM Group heard about carbon farming at their meeting held in Port Augusta on 6 March 2020. The presentation, given by Tim Moore from Regen Co provided members and guests with an introduction to Carbon Farming, opportunities and obstacles.

Also discussed at the meeting were Community Grants, Landscapes SA update, the planned Kids on Country and school group events, cactus control and planning for a joint meeting with the Kingoonya NRM Group. The Comedy Night event was reviewed and ideas and plans for the SA Arid Lands Pastoral Field Day were discussed.

Community Landscape Officer Chris Fulton has also been busy in the district working with landholders to discuss cactus control at a number of properties. At Iron Knob, cactus infestations were monitored with plans to soon introduce biocontrol agents post herbicide control. Cat control in and around the township was discussed with community members and the Outback Communities Authority.

Assistance has been provided to landholders for Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal grants and ongoing conversations discussing the PIRSA Water Infrastructure rebate.

KINGOONYA
The Kingoonya NRM Group met in Woomera on 10 January 2020, where projects for the coming months were discussed.

Landholders in the region have expressed a desire to grow native plants from seeds and cuttings following die-off of many well established plants during the drought. A number of plant propagation workshops are being planned for across the Kingoonya district. Further details will be made available closer to the time, so keep an eye on our website and Facebook page.

The Group is also considering hosting a second Outback Kids day following the success of the inaugural event last year. Cactus species at Andamooka are also being investigated to see if the bio control cochineal could be suitable for tackling the opuntia species. By working with the Andamooka Progress and Opal Miners Association, the group is planning to host a weeds workshop in the town in the future.

Community Landscapes Officer Glen Murray has recently visited a number of properties in the region, discussing issues including wild dogs.

MARREE INNAMINCKA
The Marree Innamincka NRM Group met on 8 January in Port Augusta.

Included in the discussion were:
- The upcoming SA Arid Lands Pastoral Field Day
- Plans for future workshops to be run in the district on ruminant nutrition during dry times.
- Promoting responsible travel for tourists
- Wild dog control and the possibility of injection services outside of the Dog Fence
- The NRM Rangelands Alliance
- Farm Map 4D and how it can be applied to pastoral properties

On Thursday 20 February, a Planning For Your Financial Future workshop hosted by Tony Catt from Catapult Wealth was held in Marree and was attended by eight pastoralists.

Topics from the session included: goal setting and business planning, managing generational transitions, operational transition versus ownership transition, and retirement considerations.

Feedback from attendees was positive and take home messages from the workshop included:
- The importance of building off-farm assets
- Understanding how preparation is key to having successful, multi-generational businesses
- The need to have difficult conversations to move forward
- Talking to all children about the business

A kid’s day was planned for the School of the Air students from the region, as well as Marree Aboriginal School at Dulkaninna Station at the end of March and will be rescheduled. The day will include learning about all things bugs and slugs, and a wetland walk with ecologists. A group meeting was held via teleconference on 28 March.
NORTH FLINDERS
North Flinders NRM Group is working on pest management priorities among its current activities.

The group extended an invitation to the community to join the meeting on 18 February 2020, at which Principal Rangelands Ecologist Rob Brandle and Bounceback Project Officer Geoff Axford discussed the Bounceback program and reintroductions. This included updates on current populations of Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies, quolls and possums and upcoming threat abatement activities such as fox baiting, goat control and kangaroo control.

The important role of property owners in the success of Bounceback over more than 25 years was highlighted, demonstrating the outcomes that can be achieved at a landscape scale across the Flinders, Orary and Gawler ranges.

The NRM Group is also following the progress of a Blinman Progress Association project, which has engaged Adelaide University to trial remote sensing to map cacti from the air. If successful, this new technology will make life easier for the cactus volunteers, who volunteer significant time in the district.

It is hoped the results of the remote sensing trial will enable volunteers and property owners to manage cactus in a more targeted fashion, with the findings expected to have benefits across the region.

MARLA OODNADATTA
Marla Oodnadatta NRM group hosted the Outback Comedy Roadshow in January, hosting 70 guests at the Italian Club in Coober Pedy.

A new format of event, *Cricket and Conversations in Coober Pedy* was planned for the end of March, following an NRM Group meeting at the Opal Inn.

The event was planned to include four guest speakers, including Rural Business Support Rural Financial Counsellor Paul Erkelenz; a PIRSA representative to speak about the On-farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme; FaB mentor Anne Collins; and Dr Colin Trengove, who is a lecturer in Ruminant Health and Production at the University of Adelaide’s School of Animal and Veterinary Science, discussed Cattle Health and disease in dry times.

Options are being investigated to reschedule or hold online given COVID-19 protocols.

IMPORTANT NEWS
Due to the COVID-19 threat, we have had to postpone our events for April and May, including the SA Arid Lands NRM Field Day planned for 21-22 May. We are working with our NRM Groups to determine new dates which will be posted under the events section on our website www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/aridlands/home

NORTH EAST PASTORAL
The North East Pastoral NRM Group met in January, coinciding with the Outback Comedy Roadshow night at Yunta. The meeting included a training session for Wild Dog scan, and covered topics including the SA Arid Lands Pastoral Field Day in Port Augusta in May, the Board’s sustainable agriculture project and the change to Landscape SA.

The group planned to host a community barbecue at Olary early this month, to open discussions about changing landscapes. This will be rescheduled and it is hoped some older pastoralists will share stories about how the landscape has changed over the years.

Community Landscape Officer Matt Westover had also planned to be at the Yunta Races to talk about the SA Arid Lands Pastoral Field Day in Port Augusta later this year.

Matt had hoped to demonstrate and display cochineal at the Yunta races. If you’re interested in what it is, how it can be used and how to spread it on your property, be sure to call him on 0438 816 210 or email matthew.westover@sa.gov.au
Infra-red and motion activated cameras have provided a solution to measuring trends in the numbers of foxes, cats and native wildlife present across more than 1,000,000 hectares of the SA Arid Lands region.

SA Arid Lands NRM Board in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (South Australia) are using 120 infra-red and motion activated cameras across the Flinders, Olary and Gawler Ranges as part of the Bounceback and Beyond project, which is supported by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program.

The cameras record animals crossing their sensors and cover a range of sizes from a rat to a camel.

SAAL’s Principal Rangelands Ecologist Rob Brandle said cameras were being used to assess the response fox and cat populations had to efforts to control them. The cameras also captured the presence of some of their prey such as echidnas, sand goannas, rabbits, brushtail possums and western quolls.

The cameras were placed at 480 different sites across four fox controlled regions and equal numbers of traps were set in baited and unbaited areas so the two areas could be compared to measure baiting effectiveness.

The map, right, shows the cameras in green baited areas and white comparison areas. Cameras were left for at least one month at each location.

Data collected from the monitoring areas showed foxes were conspicuously absent from all areas, which could also be attributed to dog baiting efforts by landholders and prolonged dry conditions.

Mr Brandle said the dry conditions and dog baiting on many pastoral leases meant the only area foxes were detected in any number was in the Gawler Ranges, where they were commonly detected in the unbaited areas.

“Their complete absence in the baited areas and response of prey species clearly demonstrates the value of this broad-scale land management activity,” he said.

Tellingly, goannas, Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies, echidnas and bluetongue lizards were more commonly recorded in areas where foxes were actively controlled, along with rabbits and cats.

Wild dogs were occasionally recorded in both baited and unbaited areas.
ICPA 49th conference

Parents from across the region converged in Port Augusta for the 49th Annual State Isolated Parents and Childrens Association (ICPA) Conference on 13 March.

The event was hosted by the North East Branch, with the theme ‘A 2020 vision for the future’.

Along with the official business of the conference, a number of presentations were also staged. They included #PlantASeedForSafety which focussed on practical work health and safety for properties, a presentation from Uni Hub Spencer Gulf which is providing tertiary study options in the region, an update on the NBN rollout as well as a health Q & A panel featuring RFDS, RICE and CaFHS.

Branch members were passionate about supporting and lobbying for a fair education for remote students and a number of motions that were carried were strongly in support of increasing staffing ratios, to reduce individual workloads and pressure on School of the Air teachers and fair and equitable access to student support officers for remote students.

SA State President Jill Greenfield welcomed the gathering and Dot Sandland, a former member of the North West branch, opened the conference proceedings providing a history on the beginnings of ICPA which started by seeking “equal access to education for our children”.

WEEDING OUT THE THREAT OF INVASIVE BUFFEL GRASS

The threat of buffel grass in arid zones will be considered in a new strategic plan aimed at protecting the environmental landscape.

The new South Australian Buffel Grass Strategic Plan for 2019-24 presents a coordinated statewide approach to buffel grass management, building on the success of the 2012-2017 plan and further developing the existing zones and management strategies.

Buffel grass is a perennial tussock grass which can cause a loss of native vegetation and habitats and competes with other plants for water and nutrients. It also creates a significant fire threat.

The pest weed is widely distributed across northern regions of South Australia.

Invasive Species Unit manager with Biosecurity SA Dr John Virtue said the development of the Buffel Grass Strategic Plan for 2019-24 was a coordinated effort.

“Our response to buffel grass requires a careful balance between its use as a pasture grass in other jurisdictions and the need to protect our environment, cultural landscapes and infrastructure,” Dr Virtue said.

“To manage this weed, we need to work with industry, community and government stakeholders at the local, regional and state levels.”

South Australia was the first state to declare buffel grass a pest plant in 2015. Work to manage it will be continued and refreshed under the Landscape SA Act 2019.

“There is no single control method available for the successful management of buffel grass over wide areas,” Dr Virtue said.

“The plan outlines risk assessment and control options for managing buffel grass to limit its spread and ensure the threat to the environment, communities and habitats is managed.

“We will continue to manage buffel grass in the northern rangelands and by reducing its spread, we will protect other valuable areas such as the Flinders Ranges.”

Arabana Cultural Rangers

Young rangers employed in a new cultural ranger program are working to protect country through working with elders and building relationships with community and industry.

The Arabana Rangers program began in January this year and employs five staff including Head Ranger Mick Stuart. While the groups work on Arabana country is broadly from Marree to Oodnadatta and in between, a big focus will be Finnis Springs and around Lake Eyre. Work will involve protecting mound springs with fencing to reduce damage from stock and feral animals, and monitoring of the springs as well as sacred sites. The rangers are also considering ways to manage the impacts of tourism on the environment and promote cultural travel protocols for the increasing tourist market.

The Arabana Aboriginal Corporation (AAC) has been working towards the ranger program since 2013 when it was identified as part of its cultural plan, which aligns to its healthy country plan.

Head Ranger Mick Stuart says the rangers are working towards achieving a healthy country, through having young Arabana people working on country, with elders and the community. “As an organisation we believe a way to preserve the Arabana culture is by sharing knowledge between elders and the younger generation, through the sharing of stories about the region and sites that are important to the Arabana people,” Mr Stuart said.

“We also recognise the importance of working with land managers across Arabana country and we are committed to this by building relationships with pastoralists, volunteer groups, conservation, community and government departments.”

WATER SOURCE REVIEW

A review of well location and water licence data has identified inconsistencies between water sources. The review, being undertaken by the Department for Environment and Water, with support from the SA Arid Lands NRM Board, aims to improve the accuracy of well locations, identify wells to be used for water supply and therefore needing to be included on water licences and to correct well status information.

As part of the review, water licensees are able to update their water source details without the need to complete a ‘Vary Water Licence’ form and at no expense.

Packages containing property maps with identified well records, a list of property wells, an instruction guide and USB with digital versions of the information provided were sent to water licensees in the Far North Prescribed Wells Area earlier this year.

Please return your updated information on water sources, well location and status, and any other relevant information in the reply paid envelope to PO Box 78 Port Augusta SA 5700. If you have not received a package of information or need help, please contact Water Project Officer Melissa Horgan, at melissa.horgan@sa.gov.au or mobile 0409 896 402.

For information on your water licence or wells, please visit the WaterConnect website at www.waterconnect.sa.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx.
New weather stations reduce blackspots

Four new weather stations are about to be installed in the North East, Kingoonya, Marree-Innamincka and the Marla Oodnadatta districts, made possible with a grant through Outback Community Authority who are administering the Australian Government’s Drought Communities Programme.

The weather stations will be strategically placed to reduce the number of weather monitoring blackspots across the region, with work expected to be completed by the end of June.

The decision to install a further four weather stations followed the success of an earlier installation at William Creek in 2018, and it will again be in partnership with the Outback Communities Authority. Through information on the NRM Weather Network website, the first weather station provides the region with publicly available, detailed weather information relevant to the mining, pastoral, aviation and tourism sectors.

Working on this success, and with funding available, there has been an opportunity to further increase this capacity and address other known blackspots.

Sites for the four weather stations were decided through consultation with members of the SA Arid Lands NRM groups.

The new weather stations will complement existing data in regional locations and provide accurate weather forecasts for those in the state’s Far North. They will provide real time and long-term data on temperatures, wind speed and rainfall. Collection of the data will, in the long term, build knowledge capacity for pastoralists, industry, and the tourism sector as well as Government.

The available climate data can help with planning and decision making and contribute to climate resilience, producing long term positive impacts for the wider community.

Stay tuned to SAAL’s Facebook and webpage for further updates, including where to locate this weather information once it has been made available.
Scats used to find what was on the menu

The link between fox scats and rare animals might seem a long bow, but at one arid lands property, one is being used to track another.

Eleven fox scats collected on Bon Bon Station Reserve by Bush Heritage’s SA Rangelands Ecologist Graeme Finlayson late in 2019 were sent away for analysis to get a better picture of what is on the menu at the property.

“By looking at what these predators are eating, we can figure out what we are trying to protect by controlling these highly destructive, introduced predators,” Mr Finlayson said.

“The information can also provide crucial records of native animals that are often difficult to detect in this type of landscape.

“It is just a small part of the large conservation program being conducted at Bon Bon, looking at biodiversity in the rangelands with a major focus on the interaction between native species and introduced predators that have been implicated with the decline and extinction of so many native species across Australia.”

Despite having previously undertaken annual pitfall surveys, this ‘old-school’ style of analysis has uncovered a hidden truth about the native animals on Bon Bon, even finding traces of a small mammal that has not been recorded during the annual trapping surveys conducted on the property for the past three years.

Forrest’s Mouse *Leggadina forresti* is a small native mouse with a short tail and thick, short, coarse light grey to yellowish brown fur with darker hairs above and white below. It has relatively small ears and eyes and a short, broad muzzle. It is sparsely distributed across arid and semi-arid inland Australia. Traces of it were found in the scats, despite not having been seen on the property for more than three years.

Other interesting traces found in the scats belonged to native rodent, Bolam’s Mouse *Pseudomys bolami*, and possibly two species of Dunnarts, which are small carnivorous marsupials. Bolam’s Mice and three species of Dunnarts (Stripe-faced, Fat-tailed and Ooldea) are all trapped during the annual pitfall trapping on Bon Bon.

Reptile traces found in the scats included blue tongues, bearded dragons, skinks, goannas, and other dragons. Arthropods (or invertebrates) included centipedes, moths, grasshoppers and beetles.

The scat analysis was completed by Georgeanna Story from Scats About: [www.scatsabout.com.au](http://www.scatsabout.com.au).

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**Percentage of each dietary item detected in fox scats on Bon Bon Station in late 2019.**

- Arthropod: 100%
- Small native mammal: 50%
- Rabbit: 40%
- Macropod: 30%
- Reptile: 20%
- Grass: 10%
- Bird: 0%

*Left: The Desert short-tailed mouse is known to live on Bon Bon Station Reserve, its remains having recently been discovered in fox scats.*

*Below: Scats are washed clean to identify useful pieces for testing.*

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*Left: The Desert short-tailed mouse is known to live on Bon Bon Station Reserve, its remains having recently been discovered in fox scats.*

*Below: Scats are washed clean to identify useful pieces for testing.*
Hay! There’s a good idea…

In remote areas there are many examples of ingenuity borne from necessity and an automated hay feeder at Wirraminna is among them.

Looking to source one of the machines, property manager Rob Davidson did some research to find it would cost about $25,000. Using his skills and knowledge, and aided by some online research, he converted scrap metal, an old trailer and a few additional bits and pieces into an automated hay dispensing feed trailer that can be operated single-handedly.

By using a winch and fabricating the feeding spindle with teeth, Rob can now feed two large rectangular hay bales off the trailer one at a time with a remote control. This was a manual process that previously needed two people and can now be dealt with by Rob himself.

AM honour for Glenise

Former SA Arid Lands NRM Board member Glenise Coulthard was recognised for significant service to Aboriginal Health in South Australia, when she was named as a member of the Order of Australia.

Glenise had served on the SAAL NRM Board since April 2016, completing her service recently. Glenise received the honour in the 2020 Australia Day Awards. “I feel honoured and blessed for the nomination and recognition,” Glenise said. Her award also recognised service to emergency response organisations. Glenise was a member of the Royal Flying Doctor Service Marketing Advisory Committee from 2010-2018, a member of its Health Advisory Committee from 2005-2017 and Director of its Central Operations Board from 1995-2018.

Glenise is the Director of Aboriginal Health in the Flinders & Upper North Local Health Network, a position she has held since 1997. Her service to Aboriginal Health also extends to her position as Deputy Chair of Ninti One, an organisation that aims to build opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through research, innovation and engagement. She is a founding member of the Iga Warta Cultural Tourism Venture, a past member of the Australian Hearing Services Board 2016-2017 and received a Churchill Fellowship in 1997.
INJECTION SERVICES
Co-ordinated injection services were held in the North East Pastoral, some parts of the Gawler Ranges and North Flinders districts during March. The last round of coordinated services will be offered in Kingoonya and some parts of the Gawler Ranges districts from 30 March until 3 April. Unfortunately, several services have been postponed until later in the season due to a shortage of meat available for bait production. The shortage is due to a decline in traditional meat sources impacted by ongoing drought conditions. Land managers are encouraged to source meat early or look at alternate meat suppliers for the remaining services to ensure they can maintain their baiting effort.

NORTH FENCE WILD DOG CONTROL
The end of 2019 saw an increase in reported wild dog impacts to stock located north of the dog fence. The SAAL NRM Board is currently considering options to service the needs of these pastoral properties, while ensuring the ecological and Aboriginal cultural roles of dingoes is maintained outside the Dog Fence.

WILD DOG CONTROL INFORMATION PACKAGES
The Biteback team is currently in the process of developing wild dog information packages for land managers in the region. Each package contains a wild dog activity map (January to June 2020), property specific baiting records, a Best Practice Guidelines fact sheet and other relevant information to help land managers determine their wild dog control requirements and techniques to get the best outcome for their control efforts.

AERIAL BAITING
The SAAL regional aerial wild dog control program is scheduled to start on 15 April and will be held over eight days. The program, funded by the SA Sheep Advisory Group (SASAG) and Australian Wool Innovations (AWI) is currently in its ninth year and aims to target wild dog populations located on inaccessible land south of the dog fence. This year, 50,000 semi-dried meat baits will be distributed across 93 properties on a total flight path of around 12,577km. Relevant properties targeted to be involved with the program have been contacted to review flight paths and provide approvals.

PROFESSIONAL TRAPPER PROGRAM
A reminder that the Professional Trapper program is still available to properties located south of the dog fence. To access the PIRSA Trapper Program you must be meeting the proactive level of baiting set out in the Best Practice Guidelines (1 bait/km on all tracks on a property, twice a year).

For more information please contact Heather Miller at PIRSA
Heather.miller@sa.gov.au
8429 2998 or 0488 426 395

MONITORING 2019
Maps and information through the Wild Dog Scan app are still coming in for the July to December 2019 period. Currently, 85 (43%) properties have returned maps for the 2019 calendar year, though many maps are still being received daily. If you have not returned your map for the July to December period, you can either return it now, or once you have received your information package.

The table below shows a snap shot of the data already received for the 2019 calendar year. These numbers may increase as more maps are returned for the July to December period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dogs Trapped (Including Professional trappers)</th>
<th>Dogs Shot (Including Professional trappers)</th>
<th>Dogs Seen</th>
<th>Stock Loss</th>
<th>Manufactured baits</th>
<th>Injected Baits</th>
<th>CPE’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>442</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>5548</td>
<td>15,370</td>
<td>109,588</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GUIDELINES OUTLINE BEST CONTROL METHODS

The Best Practice Guidelines for Wild Dog Control outline the best methods to control wild dogs based on an integrated management approach coordinating baiting, trapping and shooting, with monitoring. The guidelines were developed following discussion and feedback from land managers and Biteback groups over a number of years and were endorsed by Livestock SA before their release in October 2017. The Guidelines set a benchmark for land managers and the Board to assess community efforts to control wild dogs.


REVIEW OF WILD DOG MANAGEMENT

A review of the State’s Wild Dog policy, looking at ways to control and reduce wild dog populations inside South Australia’s Dog Fence, is open for consultation.
Among the changes that will impact landholders are:

- Mandatory minimum baiting standards inside the Dog Fence.
- Declaration of wild dogs for control in a buffer zone of 35 kilometres outside the Dog Fence.
- A mandatory minimum baiting standard for properties in the buffer zone.
- Ability to aerial bait wild dogs in all NRM regions.

The proposed changes will support the growth of South Australia’s sheep industry and reduce the risk of wild dog attacks, while ensuring the ecological and Aboriginal cultural roles of dingoes is maintained outside the Dog Fence.

Anyone with an interest in, or impacted by, the management of wild dogs in South Australia is invited to comment on the revised Declared Animal Policy (Wild dogs and dingoes). Responses will be taken into consideration by NRM boards, the Minister for Environment and Water, Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) and the Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development.

You can provide feedback by joining the online discussion at yoursay.sa.gov.au/wild-dog-management; emailing PIRSA at pirs.wilddogpolicy@sa.gov.au or sending comment via post to the Revised Declared Animal Policy – Wild Dogs Consultation, Biosecurity SA, GPO Box 1671 Adelaide SA 5001.

The consultation period will be open until 5pm on Friday 17 April 2020.

The review is happening under the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 (NRM Act) including its transition to the Landscape South Australia Act 2019. It is being overseen by Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) in collaboration with the Department for Environment and Water (DEW), including staff from all Natural Resource Management (NRM) regions and boards, and involves agricultural industry stakeholders and the broader community.

WILD DOG SCAN TRAINING

A How to use Feral Scan workshop was held at Yunta on 18 January, with 10 land managers attending to learn and improve the use of the WildDog Scan app.

Community Landscape Officer Matt Westover and Wild Dog Project Officer Chris Havelberg showcased the features of WildDog Scan and the benefits of using the app. Features include the ability to notify neighbours of wild dog activity, real time information and aids such as My Data records and graphing tools. Attendees left with a greater understanding of the app and confidence in entering records.

Below: Wild Dog Project Officer Chris Havelberg trains landholders and members of the North East Pastoral NRM Group in the Wild Dog Scan app.
Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies reclaim territory despite drought

The region’s Yellow-footed Rock-wallabies (YFRW) have maintained their recovery and expanded beyond their established populations, despite ongoing drought conditions.

The results of an aerial survey conducted in 2019, the first region wide YFRW population survey since 2012, highlights the population’s dispersal, made possible due to landscape scale pest management, particularly of foxes and goats.

An aerial survey commissioned by the SA Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Board (SAAL NRM Board) and Department for Environment and Water (DEW) last year investigated that a drop in populations in known colonies was not due to a decline in population but rather a population dispersal, with the wallabies reclaiming territory they once inhabited.

Fox and goat control are key to the recovery of the iconic wallaby as part of the 28-year DEW Bounceback program, aided by the Bounceback and Beyond project since 2018, which is supported by the SAAL NRM Board through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program.

Once widespread and abundant, evidenced by the several hundred-thousand pelts exported to Britain prior to the 1930s, by the 1990s the wallaby population had seriously declined and was struggling against a relentless tide of predation by foxes across its range in the Flinders, Gawler and Olary Ranges.

Figure 1. Relative abundance of yellow-footed rock wallabies at Wilpena Pound the ABC and Heysen Ranges in Ikara Flinders Ranges National Park (109 km of survey lines. Source: Ecoknowledge Aerial Survey Report 2019).
It survived only in the most rugged parts of the ranges with steep cliffs, caves and boulder fields that were inaccessible to foxes. In these areas it was obvious that populations were ageing with few young surviving to adulthood.

Principal Rangelands Ecologist Rob Brandle said the results of the 2019 YFRW survey showed that while populations in the main colonies had reduced, there had been a substantial increase in finding wallabies at greater distances from the ‘safe’ remnant colonies since 2012.

“The results suggest that by 2012, the original colonies may have reached carrying capacity of their local food resources following high rainfall in the 2010-2011 period, and the following dry years placed pressure on the population, forcing some animals to move to new locations,” he said.

The one area surveyed that did not reflect this dispersal trend, and where the population achieved its highest count in 2019, was Bimbowie Conservation Park in the North East Pastoral district. Mr Brandle said it is likely that carrying capacity on the park has not yet been reached, as the property only began to be managed for foxes and goats under Bounceback from 2005, with Bounceback starting in other areas in 1992.

Mr Brandle said all findings in the aerial survey are consistent with ground observations made by survey staff, NRM and National Parks and Wildlife Service staff, contractors and volunteers, who provided observations from new locations in the Flinders, Olay and Gawler Ranges.

The control of foxes through aerial 1080 baiting and as a side benefit of landholders baiting for wild dogs, has aided in the expansion of the wallaby population, Mr Brandle said.

“Camera based predator monitoring on pastoral lands show that in many areas, the NRM Board’s focus on property wide minimum standard baiting for wild dogs across SA Arid Lands NRM region has also had a large impact on fox numbers. This appears to have benefitted the expansion of wallaby populations on pastoral leases not currently involved in Bounceback fox baiting activities.”

The long term gains achieved by Bounceback, and more recently by Bounceback and Beyond, have been achieved through a collaborative approach with land managers, government agencies, universities, and funding support from the Australian Government and private philanthropic organisations such as FAME (Foundation for Australia Most Endangered Species).

Comparisons over time show spectacular increases in areas first sampled in 1993 (e.g. Figure 1.)
The extremely rare night parrot (*Pezoporus occidentalis*) is one of the most elusive birds of inland Australia and acoustic sound recordings are vital in detecting their presence. In a promising find, two sound recordings that are possibly the nocturnal ground-nesting parrot have been detected in the Coongie Lakes Ramsar area as part of the Coongie Wetland Wonders project. This project is supported by the SA Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program.

SA Arid Lands NRM staff set up acoustic recorders in the far north-east of the state in the Coongie Lakes Ramsar project site in the hope of detecting the highly elusive parrot. The acoustic recorders captured thousands of hours of sound recordings and through the surveys, two possible night parrot calls were detected. The analysis of acoustic data was done by Nick Leseberg and Steve Murphy from Adaptive NRM and University of Queensland, two experts in night parrot acoustic analysis and detection.

Principal Rangelands Ecologist Rob Brandle said while the initial survey results are promising, follow up investigation will be undertaken to confirm the presence of night parrots in the project area through further acoustic monitoring and habitat assessment.

“Night parrots are rare and extremely difficult to detect and while our current findings are promising and potentially significant, we need to verify any presence through further survey work.”

Listed as endangered under national environmental legislation, the Night Parrot is one of 20 birds that the Australian Government is prioritising for recovery through its Threatened Species Strategy. It is a priority for investment primarily because of its uniqueness and conservation status. Until further surveys detect many more night parrots, it is assumed the species is highly threatened, and potentially on the brink of extinction.

Any disturbance of these birds could result in failure to breed, subjecting individual birds to high levels of stress, or exposing them to predation. Because of the risks associated with disturbance, the Night Parrot Recovery Team has maintained a policy of minimising disturbance of night parrot sites and associated habitat. The key survey method used is passive listening.

While night parrots are extremely difficult to see, their distinctive call allows you to know if they’re present. You can hear the call at nightparrot.com.au/index.php/resources/night-parrot-calls.

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**PLANT PROFILE**

**SLENDER BELL-FRUIT *Codonocarpus pyramidalis***

The Slender bell fruit, listed as Vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, is one of the key threatened flora species being monitored under the Bounceback and Beyond project. Known only to occur in the Olary and Flinders Ranges, it is considered extinct in NSW.

This small, fast-growing, conical-shaped shrubby tree can live for up to 20 years and gets its name from its distinctive segmented small bell-shaped fruits that hang like lanterns. The tall spindly, flexible trunks help cast the seeds beyond their canopies, albeit shorter distances up and down slopes.

This species has been observed growing on a variety of hill slopes, usually scattered and occasionally in small clumps. What is known is that this species is fire responsive, but it may also respond to other disturbances such as heavy localised rain to trigger germination events.

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**INTERESTING FACT**

Slender Bell Fruit is very porous and when dead the timber weight is comparable to Balsa Wood. (Pers comm. Brandle 2009)
NEWLY APPOINTED BOARD

The newly appointed Pastoral Board held its inaugural meeting over two days in December.

Members of the new board were welcomed by Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development Tim Whetstone, and former Department for Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) Chief Executive Scott Ashby.

The Board’s new Presiding Member is David Larkin AM. Current Members are Mark Fennell, Colin Greenfield, Bruce Nutt, Tammy Partridge and Jenny Treloar; while deputy members are Sharon Oldfield, Jodie Gregg-Smith, Karina Sheehan, Mark Anderson and Keith Slade.

Meeting discussions included drought impacts, drought recovery and aspirations for enabling growth of the State’s pastoral industry. The new board will also support the Minister in the review of the Pastoral Land Management & Conservation Act 1989.

Board members also took part in governance training and discussed how best to work with PIRSA, which supports the Board’s operation. The Board was updated on various ongoing matters concerning the administration of the Pastoral Act, and progress regarding its review.

The new Board would value your feedback to assist in developing policies and advice for the Minister. Please submit your thoughts and ideas regarding issues the Board should focus on via: Pastoral Unit (PIRSA) – (08) 8429 0333 or email: PIRSA.Pastoral@sa.gov.au

PASTORAL LEASE RENT

Lessees will have recently received their annual lease rent invoices for the period November 2018 to October 2019. Extreme drought conditions can pose financial challenges and the Board encourages lessees to explore the drought support funding and rebate schemes on offer.

Given the eligibility for the lease rent rebate currently offered by the government may be difficult for many pastoralists, in the coming months the Board will be working with government to explore further options for drought support in the pastoral region (refer p27).

For queries relating to options and plans for the payment of lease rent, contact the PIRSA Pastoral Unit on 8429 0375 or email: PIRSA.Pastoral@sa.gov.au.
Laughter proves the best medicine

Laughter was heard across the SA Arid Lands in January as the Outback Comedy Roadshow took to stages in Coober Pedy, Port Augusta, Woomera, Marree, Blinman and Yunta.

Adelaide Comedy Club comedians Fabien Clark, Kel Balnaves and Lori Bell had audiences in stitches and provided light relief from the stresses of drought. The SA Arid Lands NRM Board secured funding for the event from the Outback Communities Authority, through the Australian Government’s Drought Communities Program. The program is aimed at supporting the economy of regions in drought.

Each show provided a chance for communities to come together, have a few good belly laughs and create memorable stories that will be relayed for years to come. Collectively they attracted an audience of more than 300 people.

The idea for the comedy nights began with the Gawler Ranges NRM Group hosting a drought relief comedy event in late 2018, funded by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board. Since then, other NRM Groups have asked for similar events, stating that in trying times ‘we just need to laugh’.

The events also provided a small economic boost to businesses across the region through accommodation, fuel, meals and drink sales, during their quiet, off peak visitor season.

Above: Comedian Lori Bell had audiences in stitches as ‘Granny Flaps’.

Outback Comedy Night
Jan 16 2020
Written by Sally Henery (to the tune of Billy Joel’s Piano Man)
Tell us a joke, you’re the funny ones
Tell us a joke tonight
Well we’re all in the mood for some comedy
And you’ll get us feeling alright
It’s a pretty good crowd for Blinman
And Matt Westover gives us a smile
Cause he knows many drive
to see comedy live
And forget about drought for a while
La, la la, di di da
La la, di di da, da dum
Tell us a joke, you’re the funny ones
Tell us a joke tonight
Well we’re all in the mood for some comedy
And you’ll get us feeling alright

The show really did give us something better to think and talk about and a lot of laughs and happy memories of a fun time. So I hope you and everyone involved is feeling pleased with themselves for putting on the roadshow for us, and for making things better for a bit while we wait for good soaking rains. Just wanted to let you know, and to say a BIG THANKYOU!

Sally Henery.
Alpana Station, Blinman

Left: Comedians Fabien Clark, Kel Balnaves and Lori Bell at the iconic Spud’s Roadhouse at Pimba.
Just a quick email to say a huge thank you for organising the Coober Pedy comedy night on Saturday. It was a fantastic night and was enjoyed by all. Given the consistent unfavourable seasonal conditions it was refreshing to attend something where you could forget about rain (or lack of) for the moment and have a laugh. It also provided an opportunity to get away from the property for the night and catch up with others which is what we all needed given the Summer it has been so far.

Kirsty Williams.
Mt Sarah Station, Oodnadatta

Being able to take the opportunity to attend the Comedy Night gave us the opportunity to connect and reconnect with the community without the usual focus on conditions. This in itself was a great relief. Since the Comedy Night we’ve been able to reflect back on funny aspects of the night together as a family and with other attendees and it’s given us yet another tool shifting focus beyond the trying times we’re facing.

Kate Greenfield.
South Gap Station

It was a great night that everyone enjoyed and gave the community a reason to get together and have a laugh during the tough times everyone is facing in the district with the drought. It helped us as a business, giving us an event and busy night instead of what would have been another quiet night in our off season.

Joe Calvert.
Marree

Left: Bridie Greenfield, Hollie Williams, Chantelle Williams and Kate Ozolins at the Coober Pedy Comedy Night.

Above: North East Pastoral and North Flinders Community Landscapes Officer Matt Westover with comedians Kel, Lori and Fabien.

Above: Comedian Fabien Clark with Fabian Hull from Marree.

Above: The comedians joined locals for a drink at the bar of the Marree Hotel.
Serving the Outback for 30 years

This year marks 30 years since Across the Outback first rolled off the press as Outback.

It was first published by the then Department of Lands on behalf of the Pastoral Board for the South Australian Pastoral Industry in 1990.

At the time, Minister of Lands Susan Lenehan introduced the first issue of Outback describing it as a tool “for good communication between all the groups which have an interest in the arid zone” including pastoralists, mining, conservation, recreation and tourist groups.

While the publication has outlasted many changing governments and departments, and seen changing covers, titles and faces, its commitment to report to the SA Arid Lands community on government activities that affect them has remained the same.

It has also changed with the times and evolved into an electronic newsletter and, based on community feedback, it now has two print editions and two electronic editions per year.

Across the Outback’s mailing list has more than 1200 subscribers and is continuing to grow. The number is fairly impressive given there are less than 10,000 people living in the region.

We are thrilled to be putting out a publication in its 30th year and we thank you for your support and welcome your feedback. If you have an idea for a story, please send them through on DEW.SAALNRMARidlands@sa.gov.au.

If you aren’t yet receiving a magazine in the mail or to your inbox, you can subscribe at www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/aridlands/news-resources/publications/subscribe.
Drought support programs expanded

While many areas of the SA Arid Lands region have received rain, the current drought situation is far from broken.

The ongoing drought is an issue that is better understood following forums in Marree and Hawker recently, which resulted in the expansion of the State Government’s $21 million Drought Support Program. The expanded program includes $200,000 for additional wild dog baits and provision of strategic business reviews for drought affected small businesses to help them plan for the future.

A $120 per dog wild dog bounty will be introduced, an extra wild dog trapper will be employed, $330,000 will be offered for community drought recovery events and the 50 per cent rebate for pastoral lease rents will be extended.

**Drought Community Support Initiative**

Also announced recently was additional funding from the Australian Government for the Drought Community Support Initiative.

This funding will provide up to $3000 in short-term financial assistance to eligible farming households who are facing hardship due to drought, as well as provide much-needed stimulus to local businesses.

For out of council areas in the Far North, this round two funding will be available through the St Vincent de Paul Society. For further information including access to a FAQ page please visit St De Paul’s website page www.vinnies.org.au/droughthelp or contact them directly on 1300 846 643.

PIRSA will also continue to offer a number of services and avenues for assistance that are available to support farm families, businesses and communities as they manage through drought.


PIRSA’s Drought Hub is an easy-to-navigate portal that provides South Australia specific information and resources on health, wellbeing, finance, technical advice, and grants.

**Drought Hotline:** 1800 255 556

Those who have questions about their circumstances or animal health or welfare can contact PIRSA on the dedicated 24-hour Drought Hotline.

**Rural Financial Counselling Service:** 1800 836 211 or ruralbusinesssupport.org.au/RFCS

Delivered by Rural Business Support, the Rural Financial Counselling Service offers independent, confidential and professional business support for primary producers and related agricultural business owners who are experiencing financial difficulties.

The service can help with information about Farm Household Allowance (FHA), RIC loans, Farm Debt Mediation and SACWA financial assistance applications.

Support is also available to help people to prepare for lender meetings, plus business analysis and referrals to other services.

**Family and Business Support Program**

The Family and Business (FaB) Support Program supports the health and wellbeing of communities impacted by weather-related events.

FaB mentors are available to meet and connect individuals, farming families and regional businesses to the appropriate services and programs available.

Each mentor is experienced in discussing, addressing and providing advice about the difficult issues that arise as a result of drought.

To connect with John White, FaB mentor in the Arid Lands region, please email: PIRSA.Recovery@sa.gov.au or call John on 0447 787 436


The On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate scheme is available for drought affected farmers in South Australia who invest in new on-farm water infrastructure.

Eligible farmers can access a one-off 25 per cent rebate up to $25,000, which can be applied to new purchases and installation of pipes, water storages, water pumps, and de-silting dams. The rebate can also be applied to drilling of new stock water bores and associated infrastructure including desalination plants and power supply such as generators. The rebate scheme covers work undertaken from 1 July 2018. The On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme is funded by the Federal Government and delivered by the State Government.
Women thriving in agriculture

Women are highly represented in the agricultural sector, making up half of the workforce.

To grow and support women in agriculture, the second annual Thriving Women Conference was held in Handorf in February, with attendance supported by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board.

Sessions covered building and protecting business wealth, work health safety, strategic planning and decision making, and preparing for a changing future, along with sessions on leadership and communication.

Given the drought impacts on pastoral business, the SA Arid Lands NRM Board sponsored five women to attend the conference through a region wide application call.

The five women selected by a panel were Kate Greenfield from South Gap Station, Lynley Kerin from North Well Station, Petie Rankin from The Twins Station, Kirstie Williams from Mt Sarah Station and Jill Greenfield from Billa Kalina Station.

Here’s what they had to say about the conference and the opportunity to attend:

The Thriving Women’s Conference gave me the opportunity to get outside of the ordinary day to day running of the business and enabled an opportunity to focus on how it is I show up in life. It gave me the opportunity to explore ideas that leaders in South Australian and Australian rural women are using to help them live and lead well.

Kate Greenfield, South Gap Station

The conference provided an invaluable opportunity to hear amazing speakers, attend valuable workshops and meet some inspiring people. There was something for everyone with the conference covering a diverse range of topics for women connected to agriculture in any way, shape or form. President of the National Farmers’ Federation, Fiona Simpson’s talk was a stand out for me with her unflappable genuineness and passion for the agricultural industry.

Kirsty Williams, Mt Sarah Station