

An overview of the Ecosystem Management Understanding (EMU) Project

Dr Hugh Pringle, Project Leader, August 2004

The EMU Project was developed in late 2000 through the Off-Reserve Conservation Management in Rangeland WA Project of the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy's (GMS) Regional Environmental Management Programme (REMP). It quickly became a close partnership between its founding agencies; the Departments of Agriculture (DAWA) and Conservation and Land Management (CALM) and has gained the strong support from both industry (e.g. PGA and CAPAC) and community (e.g. CCWA).

As NHT Phase 1 came to an end the project was amalgamated with another successful REMP project, the "Accreditation Project" to become a Priority Project for the entire southern rangelands under the Interim Funding Arrangements of NHT. "EMUplus" as it is often referred to, is now hosted by the Curtin University arm of the Centre for Management of Arid Environments in Kalgoorlie, with DAWA and CALM continuing to provide project staff and leadership. As well as Dr Ken Tinley (CALM) and Dr Hugh Pringle (DAWA), there are now three full-time Project Officers employed by CMAE through the Rangelands NRM Co-ordinating Group and another full-time equivalent consisting of strategic contract work. Additionally, regionally based CALM and DAWA staff also contribute to the project, as do NRM sustainable agriculture facilitators.

A major objective of the current project is to work closely with land managers across all tenures to foster a management ethic and associated expertise that recognises and fits in with natural patterns and processes and protects unique or rare and threatened components of the landscape. Linked to this activity is the Environmental Management Systems (EMS) activity in which we offer land managers the opportunity to formalise the changes they are making into an internationally certifiable EMS. Our work here is essentially R&D; we are fine tuning the current property-level EMS model and developing a model for groups of properties to become certified together, a prelude to marketing initiatives perhaps.

Major outcomes to date include:

1. Participation of 67 pastoral leases (12,289,710 ha) and 10 CALM-acquired leases (3,043,911 ha) totalling 5, 333,621 hectares. Acceleration is occurring as trainees become more independent.
2. Internationally recognised SQF certification (including an EMS) for three pastoral enterprises, all successfully re-audited
3. Technically supported seven successful ENVIROFUND applications, including two nationally listed wetlands and one imminent Indigenous Protected Area
4. A regional assessment of biodiversity hotspots in the GMS region
5. Two major catchment restoration projects underway in the Gascoyne and Murchison River catchments, with enthusiastic local Aboriginal participation
6. Recognition as a pilot project for rangelands NRM in the State Sustainability Strategy, recognition as a key project in the Desert Knowledge CRC, and formal inclusion in the NHT Joint Commonwealth-State Agreement (Biodiversity section)
7. Videos on the EMU Process, Accreditation and an off-reserve conservation project.

A more detailed report is available on our web-site, www.emuproject.org .

Looking forward, the project may be invited to expand north to the Pilbara and Kimberly regions, however our focus is on rolling the programme out across the southern rangelands and undertaking a major review to guide future project direction. An urgent task is to formalise governance arrangements to replace the REMP sub-committee through the Rangelands NRM co-ordinating group.

It is likely that there will be increasing demand from participants for support in developing EMSs and in developing specific biodiversity initiatives and catchment restoration projects. Given that we are already very busy meeting demand, the development of closer working relationships with State Government agencies and sub-regional NRM staff will be critical to realising the full potential this capacity building project offers. Finally, there is interest from other Australian jurisdictions and in southern Africa to commence EMU or something similar.