

Change for the Better on GMS Rangelands

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Recent analyses of rangeland monitoring sites have shown dramatic improvement in perennial vegetation, and hence range condition, over the last few years in the Gascoyne – Murchison area.

The evaluation was funded through GMS, with a view to incorporating the current Western Australian Rangeland Monitoring System (WARMS) as part of the work towards ecological accreditation of pastoralism.

The WARMS sites used in the analyses were installed during 1993 to 1997 and reassessed between 1999 and 2001. Another 391 sites have been installed but not yet reassessed. WARMS is based on the view that the health of the perennial vegetation is a good indicator of the health of the rangelands. In the GMS area, the perennial vegetation is doing very well indeed.

There are more plants now (both “good” and “bad”) and the plants are much bigger and more widespread than there were before. Recruitment rates are high and new individuals of even long-lived species like mulga are entering the populations. These changes suggest that the perennial vegetation is healthy and vigorous.

The cover of the perennial vegetation has actually increased on average by 180% across most sites and shrub species are also becoming more widely distributed.

Amidst all this good news there are still some cautions. WARMS sites are located on uniform representative areas of the rangelands, generally away from areas of acute degradation such as river frontages and gully heads.

Some areas of the GMS continue to have significant range degradation issues. However, the broadly representative areas of the region are doing very well. A good run of rainfall has contributed to these results. The challenge now is to retain the improvement should seasons turn dry.

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