

## **Ecologically sustainable land management through the *EMU* Exercise**

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The EMU exercise is a major NHT Bushcare activity within the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy’s Regional Environmental Management Programme. It aims to help pastoralists understand more intimately the critical ecological processes occurring across their stations and to respond in a way that uses, rather than opposes those processes. The underlying principle of the EMU Exercise is “working with natural processes, not against them”. Through the Exercise pastoralists and ecologists discuss issues in the field on how to enhance or restore biodiversity and hence the sustainability of healthy landscapes and stock habitats, - and how and where to monitor this.

“Ecological sustainability” is now a legal requirement of pastoral lessees, yet we are only now starting to work out what this fine-sounding principle actually means on a station and within a paddock. The “EMU Exercise” is truly an equal partnership between pastoralists and ecologists; the exercise is entirely voluntary and does not generate any work orders or formal Government reports. It is a partnership aimed at improving the triple bottom lines of environment, business and community.

The demand for the EMU Exercise has been overwhelming, last year nearly seven million hectares of pastoral land was covered by the project, involving the Murchison Land Conservation District Committee, the Lower Murchison Best Practice Group and the Rangeland Produce and Fibre Association from around Mt Magnet.

Currently the project is in a consolidation phase, but there are plans to expand the project both within the GMS and beyond if pastoralists continue to request a chance to participate. Results from a recent evaluation survey of the EMU Exercise indicated strongly that pastoralists benefited from their involvement and most intended to use the Exercise for ongoing management and as a local group initiative.

Participants in the exercise can choose to formalise their work into an Environmental Management System (EMS) through Lucy Taylor’s accreditation project. This may simply help improve the efficiency of their management, or it may be used to demonstrate environmental credentials to administrators or to discriminating markets. As the control of all sources of grazing is so important to ecological management of rangelands, we also have close links to the Total Grazing Management project and we discuss various grazing strategies that might work better than traditional continuous grazing. Thus, the “EMU Exercise” is not a stand-alone project; it is the mapped baseline of information for all sustainable land uses and hence an integral part of ecological management on participating stations.

For more information, or to formally register your group's interest, please contact your local Department of Agriculture or Conservation and Land Management office or either Hugh or Ken directly.