

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY
BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society

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Form of Reference

The reference for this article should be in this general form;
Author family name, initials (year). Title. *In*: Proceedings of the nth Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference. Pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

For example:

Anderson, L., van Klinken, R. D., and Shepherd, D. (2008). Aerially surveying Mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.) in the Pilbara. *In*: 'A Climate of Change in the Rangelands. Proceedings of the 15th Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference'. (Ed. D. Orr) 4 pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

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The Australian Rangeland Society

GASCOYNE MURCHISON STRATEGY – A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

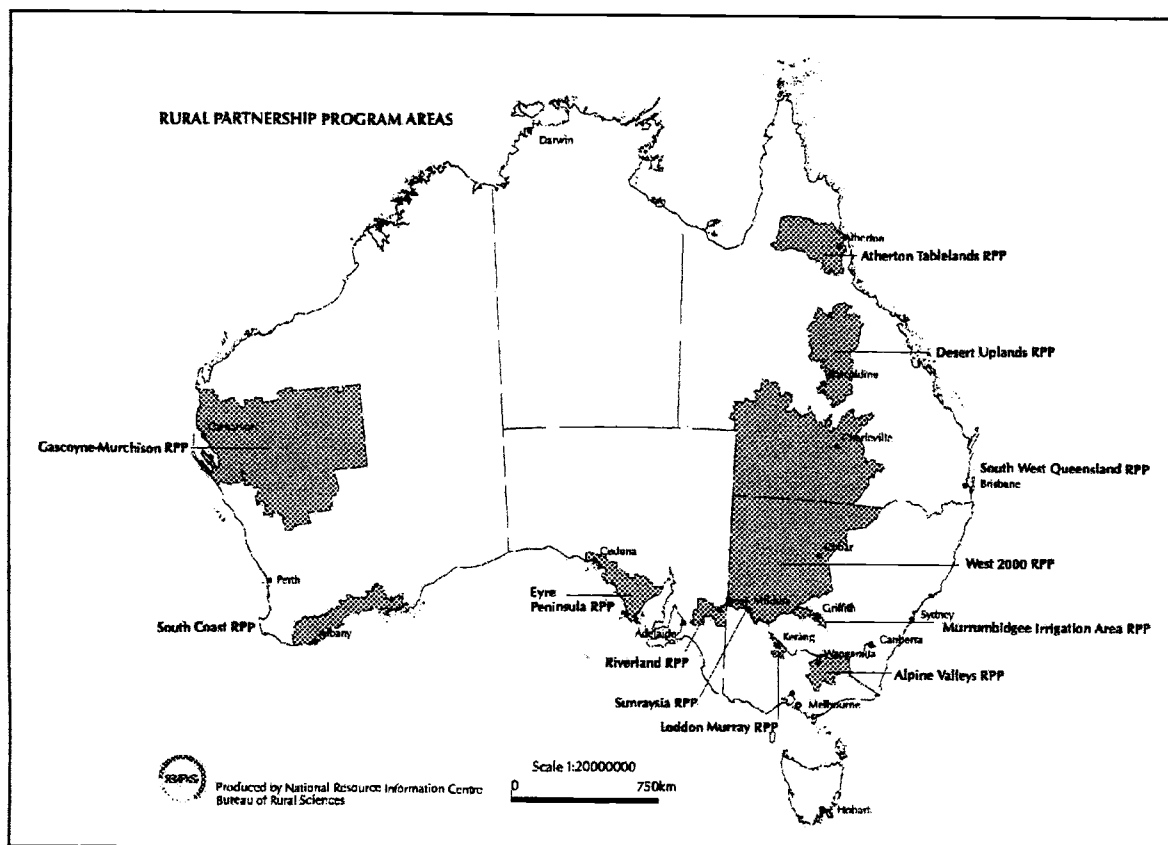
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The Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy (GMS) is a regional initiative addressing critical economic development, structural adjustment and natural resource management needs of the pastoral industry in the Gascoyne-Murchison region of Western Australia.

The Strategy is the largest of the twelve national Rural Partnership Programs (RPP) in terms of committed funding, area and scope.

Figure I: Rural Partnership Program areas around Australia



The Strategy is based on an area in excess of 570,000 km², encompassing the Gascoyne River and Murchison River catchments.

This Strategy is the broadest of its type covering the areas of business and industry development, sustainable environmental management, structural adjustment, and the development of new management tools for the rangelands.

Established in response to community and government recognition of problems with economic and environmental sustainability across much of the region, the Strategy was developed through an extensive consultation and planning process over more than two years.

State Cabinet approved the formation of an official committee of government and appointed a board and approved the GMS Action Plan in December 1997. Subsequently a State/Commonwealth Agreement for funding its implementation was signed and the Premier launched the Strategy in April 1998. The strategy agreements are generally timed to complete in December 2003 however the

Strategy is recognised as a regional organisation and consideration of its role beyond 2003 as a regional organisation is to be decided.

Total government funding for implementation of the GMS is around \$45 million over five years, including:

- \$32 million State funds (agency allocations and new resources approved by Cabinet)
- \$13 million of federal funds from the Natural Heritage Trust and Rural Adjustment Scheme

WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT DELIVERY

The Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy is delivered through a whole-of-government approach utilising the support and services of a number of Government agencies including

- *Western Australian Government Agencies:*
 - Department of Agriculture (*Lead Agency*)
 - Department of Environment, Water and Catchment Protection
 - Department of Conservation and Land Management
 - Gascoyne Development Commission
 - Mid West Development Commission
 - Department of Fisheries
 - Department of Local Government and Regional Development
 - Department of Minerals and Energy
 - Department of Land Administration
- *And the Federal Government*
 - Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia
 - Environment Australia

THE GMS COMPRISES FOUR CORE PROGRAMS:

1. Business and Industry Development Grants

(Closed 30 September 2000 - Grants paid to 30 December 2003)

Comprises: Grants Program and Carnarvon Artesian Basin Bore Rehabilitation Program

Grants for individual businesses and business groups to implement business plans that improve productivity, profitability and sustainability through:

- Information and skills for business development
- Innovative on-ground works and activities that improve the stations business position
- Installation of approved Total Grazing Management systems
- Development of new enterprises and industries with regional benefits
- Rehabilitation and reticulation of artesian bores for better land and water management in the Carnarvon Artesian Basin and the development of an on-going management framework
- Development of financial benchmarks for the region and business review assistance
- Financial restructuring advice

GMS is now managing grants to over 60% of the eligible businesses and cooperatives from the GMS area. These grants assist these enterprises to undertake a range of productivity enhancing activities.

Figure II: What areas of regional enterprise development have the grants gone to?
(Excludes Carnarvon Artesian Basin Bore Rehabilitation works)

Activity	GMS	% of total grants
Fencing of fragile and normally highly productive land systems	\$717,405	11%
Fencing for increased cattle productivity and improved mgmt.	\$705,475	11%
Fencing for increased sheep productivity and improved mgmt.	\$301,873	5%
Construct. of Total Grazing Management (TGM) yards	\$1,771,217	25%
Construction of stock handling yards	\$181,700	3%
Development of domesticated goat enterprises	\$773,425	12%
Development of new waters through bores or pipelines	\$1,236,213	17%
Development of new and expanded tourist facilities, pathways	\$404,450	6%
Development of expanded viticulture projects	\$121,700	2%
Creating tourism and industry development plans	\$33,524	1%
Creating a Regional Tourism Pathway	\$80,000	1%
Development of aquaculture projects	\$157,524	2.85%
Development of wool marketing project	\$40,000	1%
Creating Supply Chains in the rangelands (forum)	\$10,000	0.05%
Development of mineral prospectivity map	\$10,000	0.05%
Development of horticulture enterprises	\$129,750	2%
Development/ expansion of commercial fabric dyeing project	\$3,250	0.05%
Total	\$6,677,506	100%

(Note: Some stations have been allocated funding for more than one activity.)

Figure III: Funding provided to Regional Groups

Tourism Pathways	\$80 000
Gascoyne Inland Aquaculture Group	\$157 524
Regional Based Alternative Forums & Projects	\$62 900
Rangeland Fibre & Produce Association Inc.	\$40 000
WA Rangeland Meat Cooperative	\$5 000
Group Total	\$345 424

Figure IV: What regional areas has the funding gone to?

Shire	GMS Funds	Enterprise Funds	Total Funds
Carnarvon	\$1 125 218	\$1 502 168	\$2 627 386
Cue	\$133 590	\$149 938	\$283 528
Exmouth	\$159 350	\$299 900	\$459 250
Upper Gascoyne	\$719 050	\$877 750	\$1 596 800
Mount Magnet	\$421 614	\$543 278	\$964 892
Meekatharra	\$809 775	\$893 275	\$1 700 550
Mount Marshall	\$119 550	\$103 100	\$222 650
Morowa	\$10 300	\$10 920	\$21 220
Murchison	\$1 020 600	\$1 059 080	\$2 119 680
Northampton	\$70 250	\$87 450	\$157 700
Perenjori	\$35 853	\$24 728	\$60 581
Shark Bay	\$141 750	\$245 650	\$387 400
Sandstone	\$114 100	\$130 000	\$244 100
Wiluna	\$633 446	\$1 067 743	\$1 701 189
Yalgoo	\$817 636	\$1 091 691	\$1 909 327
Pastoral Total	\$6 332 082	\$8 086 671	\$14 456 253

Other Schemes of Assistance:

GMS attracted and administers additional funding to the Strategy area from the State and Federal Government following the devastating outcomes of Cyclone Vance (the strongest cyclone ever to cross the Australian mainland). In addition GMS with the Waters and Rivers Commission project manage the Carnarvon Artesian Basin Bore Rehabilitation Project.

To date, the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy has contributed:

<i>Grant Scheme</i>	GMS
Cyclone Vance Water Supply Recovery Scheme	\$705,000
Carnarvon Artesian Basin Bore Rehabilitation Project	\$3,359,000
Business & Industry Development Grant	\$6,597,506
Total	\$10,661,506

This is a significant investment into the region and one that is matched by a total pastoralist contribution in the vicinity of \$9,200,000 through cash and 'in-kind'.

2. Voluntary Lease Adjustment

Brokered commercial subdivision of pastoral leases to increase sustainable production and diversity of land use in the region. The Strategy will only get involved in cases where the subdivision creates significant economic and environmental benefits and has Pastoral Lands Board approval.

3. Industry Research and Development

- Commissioned projects including:
- Better climate information for use in property planning and land management
- Market premiums for 'sustainable' rangeland products
- Investigation of new commercial finance options for rural businesses
- New technology that reduces overheads, increases gross margins and turnover
- Better water quality, distribution and capacity to control and monitor stock and water supplies
- Increased community awareness of rangelands and rangeland industry issues

4. Regional Environment Management Program (REMP)

Initiatives to improve natural resource management at paddock level through to regional level:

- Development of a regional biodiversity database that identifies and monitors threatened and at risk biological processes
- Acquisition of conservation reserves and development of off-reserve management agreements with landholders (based on the above database)
- Development of a new approach to landscape function and capability
- Guidelines for ecologically-sustainable management within production systems
- Development of product and property accreditation systems based on ecological sustainability
- Research and development grants for establishment of supply chains for accredited products
- Industry-driven institutional structures for ongoing regional delivery of NRM in the rangelands

ESTABLISHMENT OF A WORLD CLASS CONSERVATION RESERVE SYSTEM

A key plank of the GMS environmental initiative is the establishment of a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) conservation reserve system representing the full range of landforms and biological communities. This initiative aims to meet the commitment in the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity endorsed by all Australian governments. Up to \$15

million will be spent in acquiring the estate with the State Government allocating an additional \$1.2 million per year to manage the system on an on-going basis.

Through the Strategy the Department of Conservation and Land Management has to date purchased 15 whole and 15 part leases that equates to almost 40,000 sq. km and represents about 8% of the target 10-15% of land types in each bioregion to be set aside. The reserve system will ensure that we have:

- Locked away our biodiversity at regional and property scale
- The potential for new enterprises in the region based on a world class CAR system and more generally increase eco-tourism visitations to the region
- A unique and a world-first, in being able to demonstrate and undertake an industry backed Environmental Management System that has a CAR system as the backbone of this accreditation, and
- Market access protection on environmental grounds into the future and the ability of individual producers to use these environmental credentials as marketing tools.

INSTITUTIONALISING THE OUTCOMES

A key mandate of the GMS is to leave behind a number of reform agendas. While GMS has been piloting and targeting the Gascoyne-Murchison area there is an opportunity to now take “what GMS has learnt” to the broader rangelands. As a pilot process, GMS has identified the need for a more strategic long-term planning approach to meeting the significant trends now facing the rangeland. Currently there is no overarching vision or institutional mechanisms that will create this vision, let alone a whole-of government/community approach (except in the GMS) to integrating current or future activity.

To this end there is an opportunity to leverage off the commencement of NHT II (ie initiating regional planning and development of investment plans) to take a “strategic position” to implement reform and a new approach to managing the rangelands. These include:

- The development of an overarching NRM/Industry Development coordinating body for the rangelands to meet the emerging trends facing 78% of WA
- Development of a consistent management framework to deliver strategies to meet these trends and issues that includes community agreed objectives, targets, current recommended practices and monitoring and evaluation system at the range of scales required.
- The formation of working group that makes recommendations to government and provides options for implementation including investigating and making recommendations on the relationship between the Rangeland coordinating body and the State NRM Council.

GMS’ role will be complete when these issues are finalised and institutionalised by 2004.