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## Handing over the Reins—the Changing Relationship between People and Policy in the South Australian Rangelands

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## **Handing over the reins—the changing relationship between people and policy in the south Australian rangelands**

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The gradual development of collaborative models in natural resource policy and extension programs in the South Australian rangelands over the past 25 years provides relevant lessons for other rangelands regions across the globe .

Until the late 1980's , most extension programs in South Australia's rangelands were for the purpose of promoting and supporting government policy and regulation . These programs were developed by government , with little reference to relevant industries and communities . Local communities often had very little say in the nature of the regulatory framework ; what was subject to regulation and how and where those regulations were enforced .

The passing of the *Soil Conservation and Landcare Act 1989* was an important policy innovation , which actively involved local people in natural resource management and decision making through the formation of local Soil Conservation Boards . This legislation has recently been superseded by the integrated *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* , which aims for protection of biodiversity ; sustainable land and water use and pest plant and animal management while supporting primary and other production . The Natural Resource Management Boards , made up of local community people has resulted in further devolution of power to regional communities , supported by both the South Australian state government and Australian government funding .

Extension programs in South Australia's rangelands have also changed significantly over this period . The early 1990's saw the birth of the Australian *Landcare* movement , with local groups determining their own priorities to address natural resource management issues , supported , rather than directed by government (Curtis , 2003) . Learning and development activities have been a key focus for such groups . Programs such as *Property Management Planning (PMP)* recognised that natural resource management must be integrated , linking economic and people considerations . *PMP* also used adult leaning principles , (Fell , 1986) , incorporating group approaches to learning and development .

More recent programs such as *Improving Rangeland Sustainability* , have taken this self directed approach to learning and development further . This program currently offers pastoralists and pastoral groups , support to decide upon and carry out on property trials and training , assisting them to better manage their natural resources and improve their productivity . The overriding premise is that improvement in natural resource condition can be achieved without compromising livelihoods , successfully marrying economics , people and the environment . Pastoralists have been invited to nominate what activities they would like to be involved in and surveys have been conducted to determine detailed needs . Activities delivered so far include an *Evaporation Trial* , testing the efficiency and cost effectiveness of evaporation limiting technology ; a *Revegetation Trial* focusing on establishing a seed source for natural regeneration on bare paddocks and the development of a beef brand , based on chemical free , environmentally friendly production systems .

Local communities in the South Australian rangelands are now closely involved in the development and implementation of natural resource management policy and exercise a large degree of control over the delivery of extension programs . Key factors in this have been the development of regulatory frameworks which encourage local involvement in decision making and the establishment and maintenance of long term relationships between local communities and key agency staff ( e.g . extension officers , policy makers) . While short term funding cycles can be a barrier to progress , groups that have strong networks ; a long term vision and the ability to be innovative have maintained momentum .

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