

'The struggle is never ending to sustain a land hard won and cared for by relentlessly dedicated landholders'.



Stock Route review submission Dec 2016

Boulia Shire Council

Lynn Moore with grateful acknowledgement
to Kelsey Neilson

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Stock Routes Review submission acknowledgement

Boulia Shire Council gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Mrs Kelsey Neilson, Two Rivers, Boulia in the preparation of this submission.

The Focus point

Boulia Shire Council, due to its geographical location is described as semi arid and this entails a particular style of land management to be able to sustain the land, long term for beef production (primary driver). The focus of our submission in response to this Bill is directly linked to the effect on the landholders (and council) which revolves around the ability and capacity to generate sufficient income from Stock Route fees.

Boulia Shire

Boulia Shire covers an area which is over 60,000 square kilometres with approximately 30 landholders grazing around 200,000 head of cattle. The shire is identified as having both primary and secondary Stock routes on both roads and reserves. These stock routes are predominantly used by large companies travelling young cattle from their northern properties to their fattening blocks further south. Travelling stock movements through the Shire are sporadic at best.

Payment by landholders

The capacity for the landholder (grazier) to pay fees and rental payments is increasingly restricted on remote areas like Boulia.

Any increased costs on graziers which reduces profits results in the landholder putting more pressure on the land by trying to run more stock in order to meet commitments. This legislation may lead to land degradation of native pastures which will be entirely contrary to the stated intent. Once GA's are in place landholders will be encouraged to use the feed they have paid for first.

Thought needs to be given to what will happen in the years when there is no grass available on the stock route, will the landholders still be required to pay the annual grazing agreement when there is no pasture available either through drought or through flooding?

Impact on local government bodies

Any increased burden on the grazing industry is of concern to local governments in western Queensland Shires where grazing remains the major industry. The sustainability of the grazing industry is fundamental to the economic future of Shires like the Boulia Shire.

This Stock Routes Management Bill is asking local government to manage, monitor and be the tax collector for the State's asset. They are asking local government to fund, administer and manage Stock routes with the incentive that the 'revenue' raised will go back to the local Government'.

Administration staff for these tasks will be almost impossible to source and the high staff turn over, recruiting and training costs along with the administrative reporting requirements will soon soak up any financial gains (if any) which may come to council due to the annual grazing agreements.

When the Government had the ownership and responsibility for the Stock Routes they had the ability to charge fees and recover costs but were unwilling or unable to do so – what is the underlying rationale which makes the Government think that Local Government Councils can succeed where they couldn't?

Cost recovery calculation....

There have been no driving permits issued here for the last 7 years. This calculation shows the effect of drought and the potential cost to council to maintain bores which are not being used.

TABLE 1.

BOULIA WATER POINTS	MTCE COST PER ANNUM	INCOME GENERATED	TOTAL COST TO COUNCIL (7YRS)
14	\$5,000	\$ 0	\$490,000

Ecological impacts

When landholders have to pay annual grazing agreement on the stock route they will make sure that they use that area every year. Many land managers are being encouraged to spell country, especially along watercourses where most of the western Queensland stock routes are situated. The legislation may have a negative effect on this practice.

The State government is failing to recognise or concede that the landholder is an important resource with regards to maintaining the good land condition along the stock routes. Over a hundred years of land management by existing land managers finds the land and rivers (where the stock routes mainly lay in western Queensland) is in such good condition that the government is proposing Wild Rivers listing and there have been attempts in the past to have the Lake Eyre Basin catchment listed as a World Heritage area.

Infrastructure maintenance

Clause 102 – local government must supply, and maintain in working order water facilities on the stock route.

The existing infrastructure in the Boullia Shire is in many cases in a very bad state of repair, very old and barely functioning. A considerable amount of money would be required in order to renew or repair the State's water infrastructure which has been neglected for decades due to the very limited funding available from the State to keep the facilities in good repair. The State is handing these obsolete decaying assets to LG and then the Minister has the power to instruct LG ***to supply*** water facilities and to maintain them. The funds raised through AGA's will not be sufficient to fund an asset replacement program or maintenance program as well as fund the administration, monitoring and compliance of managing the routes. (refer table 1)

Clause 218-Stock must not damage a formed road

This clause is not practical for large properties with hundreds of kilometres of unsealed roads and on unfenced stock routes. In a rain or flood event - cattle will walk to the road to find the highest point.

Clause 220 – minimum grazing authority 3 months.

Consideration to be given to increase this to twelve months minimum which will decrease, unnecessary administrative processing for the LG.

Clause 102 Notice to comply

This clause requires that a local government must comply with a written notice from the Minister requiring a stock facility to be supplied on a primary stock route or reserve in its management area.

Stock routes are touted as nature corridors which they do have the potential to become however, the neglect by the State in providing adequate resources to councils to keep the stock routes water facilities in good working condition and the failure to keep woody weeds under control has seen the areas become havens for infestations of declared pest plants and the travelling stock are the worst possible way of spreading the weeds to clean country.

Each local government area's stock route bores be assessed and estimates for necessary repairs be collated. In many areas the infrastructure and equipment is very old and barely functional and to the point of requiring complete renewal.

The renewal of the State's assets should take place before they are handed to Local Government and the cost burden of replacement is transferred to the Shires.

Possible solutions

- Grazing rights given to the land owner managing the stock route in cost neutral way.
- Regional Stock Routes Supervisors and Monitoring Staff to be sourced through DCQ and other such regional natural resource management bodies and fully funded by the State including training.
- Data gathered by Stock Routes Supervisors based at NRM offices could be used for any number of extended applications relating to resource management.
- In large western Shires where distances are considerable and where in many cases the stock routes are seldom if ever used. The State could offer to sell or lease the stock route water facilities to the landholder with the agreement being that the landholder would keep the watering point maintained and operating and would allow legitimate travelling stock with the relevant permits to water at the facility.
- Landholders would be required to keep sufficient pasture for travelling stock when the season allows, recognising that in drought years there may be no pasture available.
- The stock route portion of the lease to go into the State land rental system as a special lease but at a significantly reduced rate due to the extra conditions imposed if there is no water facility on the parcel of land and all Stock Route fees waived if the landholder has an agreement to maintain the facility.

Grazing rights

A shire policy could be developed along the line of grazing rights given to the land owner managing the stock route in cost neutral way.

This concept would negate the costly requirement by local government to continually source, recruit and train staff to perform the monitoring, administrative and compliance tasks as they currently exist in the proposed legislation and avoid the strong possibility of lengthy periods of time when local governments are simply unable to access a suitable person to fill the position.

Selling or leasing watering points

By selling or leasing the watering points the State would be utilising the existing human resources already residing on the stock routes with the necessary skills to maintain the watering points. Or otherwise if the State wishes to retain the water facility asset then they could remain responsible for the capital infrastructure replacement costs.

Stock route water facilities are in a very poor state of repair due to lack of funding over a long period of time. Where unfenced stock routes are only used sporadically in large outback Shires and where the travelling stock require access to private watering points to be able to complete the journey the State could waive GA fees in return for:

- the landholder entering into a water facility agreement where they are responsible for the operation, repairs and maintenance (but not the capital replacement costs) of the bore and associated equipment such as tanks and troughs
- reporting biannually to the Shire on the condition of the water facility and any repair work undertaken
- the landholder agreeing to monitor, report and control weeds to existing conditions on the stock route
- the landholder granting access to travelling stock to their private watering points along the route
- the landholder to comply with the regulations around the pasture condition and quantity as stated in the legislation

Benefits to the LG and State:

- Land owners are able to pull and repair the bores. Skilled bore repair contractors are increasingly hard to find and increasingly costly, minimum \$600 per day plus costs and travel
- Landholders are onsite with the necessary skills and equipment to monitor and keep water facility operational (Use existing resource of landholder instead of viewing the landholder as an adversary)
- No monitoring, reporting or repair work on stock route bores
- No costly administration requirement to establish monitor and report on AGA's and ensure compliance
- Long wait to get stock route bores functional again avoided
- Regular monitoring and maintenance to keep bores pumping will have long term cost benefits as water facilities left dry deteriorate quickly
- Landholders regularly inspecting waters can monitor and assist in the control of the emergence of any new weeds which appear after rains
- Provision of access to private waters by landholders is the only way some routes can remain viable.
- Single annual inspection by regional Stock Route Supervisor based in DCQ Longreach. This duty could be incorporated into a regional pest management

coordinator role and the annual inspection of the pasture on the stock routes could also be collecting data on weed infestations location and species.

- Single data collection and collation point for large region on land condition and weed infestation which could incorporate water as well.

In summary, I request that the vast western Queensland Shires where the hundreds of kilometres of stock routes are unfenced and rarely used be given the opportunity to have our Shire reviewed via an onsite inspection to evidence the comments made in this submission prior to the finalisation of the Bill.

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Eric C Britton

Mayor, Boulia Shire Council

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