TOCK ROUTE NETWORK WORKING GROUP

REPORT

TO BASQ

29TH August 2005

Members of the Group have worked independently to search for and obtain research reports relevant to the SRN, to make contact with South Queensland Local Government and to establish appropriate standards and protocol for vegetation and bird surveys conducted within the SRN for report to the managing authorities. Email has been the method of communication within the Group.

One meeting of the Group was conducted in Toowoomba on 25th August 2005.

RESEARCH:

Several research projects have been conducted by others and reported within a relevant timeframe. An assessment of these reports will be compiled for presentation to BASQ. In the meantime we anticipate one conclusion that arises unanimously from the research is that the SRN is now an important component of remnant vegetation such that its conservation is necessary. In the words of Freudenberger and Drew[1]

> The conservation value of TSRs in this extensively cleared region is high. Many TSRs are structurally complex and support bird species that do not occupy extensively cleared and intensively grazed landscapes. All the TSRs are relatively large and support a wide range of birds that do not occupy small patches (less than 10 ha) of native vegetation. Many TSRs are long and likely provide important corridors for the movement of animals and plants. Most importantly, TSRs occur across a wide range of vegetation types on a wide range of soils and slopes. This combination of size, connectivity, structural complexity and vegetation diversity supports an extraordinary range of birds, including many that are rapidly disappearing from the agricultural zone of NSW.
>
> Maintaining a diversity of grazing pressures across these TSRs is fundamental to the maintenance of their conservation value. .... The conservation value of TSRs depends on .... being able to maintain a flexible and responsive control of grazing in these important areas ....

Another conclusion that can be anticipated is that there has been sufficient research to establish the case and it is more important now to extend the findings of research to the responsible bodies than to call for additional research.

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[1] Freudenberger D & Drew A, September 2001, Bird Surveys in Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves on the Northwest Slopes and Plains: Perspectives on the Conservation Value of TSRs. CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems.

CONTACT:
Discussion has been held with CEO of Waggamba Shire which participates in a Working Group involving Stanthorpe, Inglewood and Waggamba Shires and Goondiwindi Town Council. That group is studying how best to deal with parts of the SRN in those LG areas now in low demand for travelling stock.

An offer has been made and accepted, to assist Waggamba by undertaking a systematic survey of birds within the Waggamba portion of low demand stock route and reserve.

We (BASQ SRN Working Group) propose to extend the same offer to the other three bodies.

We propose to concentrate effort within those four LG areas and refrain from involvement elsewhere until the initial objectives of our SRN Working Group are achieved.

SURVEYS:
A standardised method of bird and vegetation survey and reporting has been developed and we hope that several survey groups can be mounted to conduct the surveys if Stanthorpe, Inglewood and Goondiwindi Town request them. The surveys will be entered into a database and a report of the analysed results will be prepared for presentation to the LG bodies concerned.

FURTHER ACTIVITY:
We hope to complete the tasks outlined in our proposal in time to complete our 1st Stage Report to BASQ before the close of this year.

STOCK ROUTE NETWORK WORK GROUP
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO BASQ
AGM 5 DECEMBER 2006

Stock Routes in New South Wales and Queensland comprise a two state wide network of land (TSRs in NSW, SRN in Qld) originally reserved for the use of travelling livestock and set aside from settlement before widespread vegetation changes had occurred. Today these same reserves are an important component of remnant vegetation especially as they provide a continuous network across all the major ecosystems of the two states – an aspect lacking in every other system of reserves.

Over recent decades road transport has largely replaced the SRN function for travelling stock with the consequence that revenue for the maintenance of the SRN is diminished placing a heavier financial burden on shire ratepayers. Both states face consequent pressure to either disperse their stock routes or to raise revenue elsewhere than from travelling stock in order to maintain the network.

Undoubtedly there is a real and present threat to the Qld SRN because of changed times and the active shire objective of rationalisation and dispersal.

In 2003 the Qld network consisted of –

	STOCK ROUTES		**RESERVES FOR TRAVELLING STOCK**		
	LENGTH (km)	**AREA (ha)**	**NUMBERS**	**AREA (ha)**	
Primary	2,650	294,931	219	147,188	203
Secondary	5,000	301,591	179	109,584	173
Minor	4,000	678,288	364	139,107	193
Inactive	60,000	1,325,700	Numerous - unknown	NA	173
TOTALS	71,650	2,601,510	762+	395,879+	742

(LGAQ Stock Route Management Position Paper Dec 2003)

BASQ recognised that the modern pressures being faced by those responsible for the SRN constitute a threat to the future of stock routes and the flora and fauna dependant on them. BASQ established the SRN Working Group with the following objectives:-

1.
   a. What are stock-routes?
   b. Where are they?
   c. What are they for?
   d. Who are the stakeholders?
   e. Who pays for them?
   f. Is there a need for stock routes?
   g. What are the conservation issues?
      i. Threats
      ii. Opportunities
   h. What is an achievable/desirable conservation outcome for the future of stock-routes?
   i. What other systems of linear easements and reserves exist with potential conservation values similar to SRN?
2.
   a. Assemble research reports that have studied the SRN and the conservation needs
   b. Determine which other bodies have interests in the SRN and the conservation issues.
3.
   a. Develop achievable ideas for action by BASQ
   b. Provide BASQ Executive Committee with a report of the above scoping study and recommendations.

The Work Group has responded; research papers and reports that have been assembled are listed and attached in Appendix 1; a Draft Action Plan was produced and is attached as Appendix 2. Method and standards have been developed that should be suitable for the survey of birds and vegetation of any part of the network in either NSW or Qld and a trial run in Waggamba Shire was conducted.

One conclusion that arises unanimously from the research is that the SRN is now an important component of remnant vegetation (Austen, Davidson *et al* 2005, Freudenberger & Drew 2001, Spooner & Lunt 2004, Webster 1999) such that its conservation is necessary. In the words of Freudenberger and Drew 2001 [1]

> The conservation value of TSRs in this extensively cleared region is high. Many TSRs are structurally complex and support bird species that do not occupy extensively cleared and intensively grazed landscapes. All the TSRs are relatively large and support a wide range of birds that do not occupy small patches (less than 10 ha) of native vegetation. Many TSRs are long and likely provide important corridors for the movement of animals and plants. Most importantly, TSRs occur across a wide range of vegetation types on a wide range of soils and slopes. This combination of size, connectivity, structural complexity and vegetation diversity supports an extraordinary range of birds, including many that are rapidly disappearing from the agricultural zone of NSW.
>
> Maintaining a diversity of grazing pressures across these TSRs is fundamental to the maintenance of their conservation value. .... The conservation value of TSRs depends on .... being able to maintain a flexible and responsive control of grazing in these important areas ....

Another conclusion is that there has been sufficient research to establish the case and it is more important now to extend the findings of research to the responsible bodies than to call for additional research.

Generally, almost no one is conscious of the factors that have delivered the SRN to us in its present condition. Unless these factors are understood by the people responsible for the present concerted effort to refocus management of the SRN, they will be overlooked and the SRN vegetation values will rapidly decline.

The Working Group has responded to the responsibilities charged to it and I recommend that the Working Group be disbanded and that further SRN work be discharged directly by the BASQ committee as it sees fit.

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[1] Freudenberger D & Drew A, September 2001, Bird Surveys in Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves on the Northwest Slopes and Plains: Perspectives on the Conservation Value of TSRs. CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems.

Webster, R. 1999. Flora and Fauna Habitat Assessment of Travelling Stock Reserves in the Murray Darling Lands Protection Board. Report prepared for Murray Rural Lands Protection Board.

Davidson, I. Scammell, A. O'Shannassy, P. Mullins, M. Learmonth, S. 2005 Travelling stock reserves: refuges for stock and biodiversity? *Ecological Management & Restoration* Vol 5 No 1.

Austen, J. The Conservation and Identification of Biodiversity on Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves of North West New South Wales. Natural Heritage Trust.

Spooner, P. G. and Lunt, I. D. 2004 The influence of land-use history on roadside conservation values in an agricultural landscape. *Australian Journal of Botany, 2004, 52, 445-458.*

Evan Cleland
7 March 2006.

APPENDIX:

1.

Spooner, P. G. and Lunt, I. D. 2004 The influence of land-use history on roadside conservation values in an agricultural landscape. *Australian Journal of Botany, 2004, 52, 445-458.*

The authors investigated the influence of land use history on roadside conservation values in a typical agricultural landscape of southern New South Wales. Analysis of their collected data showed that road-reserve age and road width were significant predictors of roadside conservation values. Analysis showed that the first roads surveyed during the pastoral era (1840-1860s) were often of lower conservation value than roads surveyed in the 1870s, when major clearing of these landscapes commenced. Most roads were surveyed at one chain width (20.12 m); however, pre-1870s historic roads, travelling stock routes and county or parish boundaries were significantly wider, decisions that have indirectly led to higher present-day conservation values. Historical data also formed a useful model to predict the absence of short lived shrub species. The results highlight the influence and prevailing imprint of historical land-use on current roadside conservation values.

The paper is useful in the modern Stock Route Network context because it documents some of the aspects that have delivered roadside vegetation, stock routes and reserves in their present condition and correlates their present conservation value with decisions made long ago. An understanding of those decisions is necessary if the conservation values are to be maintained.

Freudenberger, D. & Drew, A. 2001 Bird Surveys in Travelling Stock Routes and reserves on the Northwest Slopes and Plains: Perspectives on the Conservation Value of TSRs. A report commissioned by the Northern Slopes Rural Lands Protection Boards, NSW. CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems.

Four Rural Land Protection Boards (Tamworth, Narrabri, Moree and Northern Slopes and Plains) contracted CSIRO to contribute to the assessment of the conservation value of Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves (TSRs) managed by the Boards. 62 sites were selected across stock routes and reserves of four broad vegetation types, half with a shrubby understory and half without. A single season bird survey within the sites and a rapid assessment of structural complexity was conducted.

130 species of birds were recorded. Markedly more bird species were found in TSRs with a structurally diverse understory than in simplified TSRs with little understory. Some species were only found in Grasslands, others only in Poplar Box or River Red Gum woodlands. There were 11 species of declining or vulnerable woodland birds that were only found in relatively large and structurally complex TSRs.

The authors reported that the conservation value of TSRs in the extensively cleared region is high. Many TSRs are structurally complex and support bird species that do not occupy extensively cleared and intensively grazed landscapes. All the TRSs are relatively large and support a wide range of birds that do not occupy small patches (less than 10 ha) of native vegetation. Many TSRs are long and likely provide important corridors for the movement of animals and plants. Most importantly, TSRs occur across a wide range of vegetation types on a wide range of soils and slopes. This combination of size, connectivity, structural complexity and vegetation diversity supports an extraordinary range of birds, including many that are rapidly disappearing from the agricultural zone of NSW.

Maintaining a diversity of grazing pressures across these TSRs is fundamental to the maintenance of their conservation value. Neither continuous grazing nor complete

exclusion is warranted across all TSRs. Management of grazing should continue to support a wide variation in TSR structural complexity – some with a shrubby understory, some without. The conservation value of TSRs depends on being able to maintain a flexible and responsive control of grazing in these important areas of the agricultural landscape.

Austen, J. The Conservation and Identification of Biodiversity on Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves of North West New South Wales. Natural Heritage Trust.

A project was developed that would identify and appropriately manage areas of high conservation value for travelling stock and biodiversity and which involved physically inspecting the stock routes and reserves, compiling a database of vegetation communities, disturbance regimes, threatened species and cultural sites and attempting to develop appropriate management regimes for the areas of identified high conservation value.

The project seems to have been an attempt to wrap the Freudenberger and Drew 2001 report and all other relevant scientific papers into a coherent identification of the items of conservation value and to develop a plan for their management. This reviewer does not think the objectives were achieved.

Davidson, I. Scammell, A. O'Shannassy, P. Mullins, M. Learmonth, S. 2005 Travelling stock reserves: refuges for stock and biodiversity? *Ecological Management & Restoration* Vol 5 No 1.

A summary of the assessment of values of travelling stock reserves and of the adjustment of management practice and resultant outcome. A useful and informative article.

Spooner, P. G. 2005 On Squatters, Settlers and Early Surveyors: historical development of country road reserves in southern New South Wales *Australian Geographer, Vol. 36, No 1, pp. 55-73.*

Country roads are an important social, economic and ecological component of agricultural landscapes in many parts of New South Wales. Using the Lockhart Shire Council area as a case study, this paper describes how present-day rural road networks are a historical vestige of past land-use decisions; a collection of Travelling Stock Routes, pastoral boundaries of early squatters, rail reserves, county and parish boundaries and an *ad hoc* collection of mostly 1 chain (20.12 m) roads surveyed during the late 1800s.

2.

ACTION PLAN
FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE STOCKROUTE NETWORK WITH ITS VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE.

- **Introduction**

Reserves for travelling stock incorporating access to water, were created by custom and legislation as land was made available for commercial occupation and officially surveyed. Stock routes have always been associated with water points and logical pathways between water; consequently, they have often coincided with traditional Aboriginal pathways. In both NSW and Qld, most stock routes were established within a few years either side of the 1860's decade and have remained largely intact since then. Major vegetation clearance commenced only slightly later (estimated between 1893 and 1921, 25.7 million ha was cleared for agriculture in NSW) but with the fortunate result that the already set aside stock routes retained their original vegetation. From their time of establishment, stockroutes and their associated camp

reserves were managed to preserve the best possible conditions for walking livestock. This ensured an intermittent grazing regime of periods of light use alternating with occasional heavy grazing which persisted for something more than100 years. Fortuitously, the regime suited the vegetation which retained original characteristics. During the first century of use stock routes were maintained by regional bodies at the cost of the beneficiaries, local landowning ratepayers and the droving users.

Over the same period, generally, other factors have operated on the rest of the countryside changing it far from original condition to a productive but alien landscape. The flora and much of the dependant fauna and biodiversity now have refuge across the landscape only on the SRN. If the stockroute vegetation were to be removed or degraded the Australian characteristic we enjoy will be lost and the landscape itself will be degraded.

Over the last 40 years, road transport has replaced droving as the preferred means of moving livestock and the need for the Stock Route Network has diminished to the point where local authorities and ratepayers are reluctant to bear the cost of its maintenance and there is pressure for alternative revenue generation and dispersal. One means of improving revenue is by leasing sections of stock route for permanent grazing by adjacent landholders. This grazing regime change and dispersal both lead to reversing the factors that have preserved the vegetation values for 140 years and leads to degeneration of both pasture and remnant.

- **The Need**

Those now responsible for the SRN need wide community support for the maintenance of the values it retains and particularly, they need to be adequately financed for their task.

- **The Objective**

The Stock Route Network evolves into a nationally maintained network that preserves its biodiversity and conserves the deep Aboriginal and Australian heritage values in perpetuity.

- **How to achieve the Objective**
    - Generate common objectives between NSW RLPB's and QLD Shires
        - Gather data on nearby TSRs (Waggamba, Inglewood, Stanthorpe current management and problems; use; biodiversity, tourism, cultural, history; etc
    - Establish a coalition of interests in the SRN
        - Stakeholders
            - RLPB's & Shires
            - QMDC and other landcare groups
            - NPA, WWF, WPSQ; other environmental organisations
            - Ratepaying landholders
            - Heritage interests
            - Tourism promoters
            - Natural history interests

        - Potential promotional identities
            - Stockmans' Hall of Fame
            - Bruce Simpson (Drovers' Memorial)
            - John Williamson (True Blue etc)
            - BA, BA regionals, BOCA etc
            - Associations representing RLPBs & Shires (Local Government Association of Queensland Inc.)
    - Promote the values of the SRN
        - One ecological evaluation group is required for each RLPB & Shire
            - When requested, an evaluation needs to be conducted and reported to the RLPB/Shire
        - Disseminate ideas for heritage & tourism projects
    - Develop a long term SRN conservation and management plan.
        - quantify long term finance for the maintenance and conservation of the SRN.
            - Finance:
                - 100% of SRN revenue retained by shire/RLPB for SRN maintenance
                - State financed fund for Capital SRN works
            - Management of grazing regime
                - Control grazing to achieve an average moderate stock rate
                - Intermittent stocking – avoid constant grazing.
            - Vegetation management
                - Weed (and pest) control
                - Reduction of undue shrub and tree thickening
                - Restoration of sand soil and gravel quarry sites
            - Maintenance of installed assets
                - Effective fencing
                - Stock water assets
    - Develop ideas for a sustainable SRN future
            - UQ, USQ, Griffiths for students to carry out research projects (at all levels)
        -

- **Implement a co-ordinated, national campaign.**

Des' report
Apr 2010

STOCK ROUTES WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED!

The Stock Route Coalition has every reason to be pleased with known achievements to date. The Coalition has lobbied hard over the past years for significant change to management. While local governments continue to manage the network business will not be the same as usual.

An indication of change to come was foreshadowed in the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) but the final changes will only surface with certainty when legislation is passed much later this year. However there are a number of the issues raised in the Stock Routes Coalition's log of claims cemented in place.

An interim Stock Route Panel has been formed with member representation from grazing, local government, aboriginal, droving, land protection and conservation interests. The Coalition and the Conservation movement were consulted and nominated Des Boyland. This panel is charged with recommending the management framework for the new Stock Route legislation. There is considerable work to be done within the given constraints arising from the RIS. Government is keen to have the new legislation in place prior to the end of 2010 but is most anxious to get it right rather meet a tight time frame. This committee has met twice and another meeting is scheduled for late April early May.

Known successes.

- Retention of the entire network.
- Management of all the values of the stock route. Sections of the network through some national parks closed with an alternate route skirting the park established.
- Expansion of the Stock Route Panel
- The State to make a plan for the entire network. Local governments will continue to administer the network and be the sole permit issuer but must comply with the state's minimum standards.
- Clear and transparent processes to define the various segments of the stock route from active through to inactive are being developed.
- A standard approach to the assessment of pasture and soil condition and other values is being developed.
- Guidelines on where and when grazing may occur are being developed
- Strategies for the management of weeds, feral pests and fire to ensure the values of the network not adversely impacted.
- Strong emphasis on education, compliance and enforcement issues.
- Enhanced funding raised through a user pays system so management is not subsidised by local rate payers.

This all goes well for an enhanced management outcome for the Stock route network and all its values. Within the foreseeable future, a full assessment of the entire network is required not only to establish a baseline but how do you know if the strategies being applied are appropriate if you do not know what you are managing.

The devil is always in the detail and until the legislation surfaces there is scope for an unexpected surprise.