

**Kachana – Kununurra -Newcastle Waters –
Brunette Downs – Cloncurry – Winton –
Emerald – The Old Station –
Pegunny Station – Longreach – Mt. Isa –
Newcastle Waters – Kachana**



A 5254-kilometre low-level flight across northern Australia, October 2020 reveals that politically-correct extraction of nutrients wins the day over sound custodianship of the nation's natural resources. I refer to nutrient export industries that legitimise the use of livestock and vegetation to mine the fertility and life out of the nation's soils, thereby exacerbating ecological dysfunction in the rangelands. (The mining of other resources deeper within the earth and shipping them off-shore as well, is a discussion for another day. [For the record my stance on this is covered in a podcast interview with Anthony James.](#))

My relationship to landscapes traversed date back to 1980. With the exception of one area where I spent two seasons in the saddle, eleven other encounters with the country we flew over were of briefer nature and less intimate, but nonetheless intense enough to identify trends. To borrow the words of [Ray \[the Soil-Guy\] Archuletta](#):

Much of the land ***"is bare, dehydrating and running a fever."***





A recent run of some fairly ordinary seasons has not helped to paint a prettier picture on these rugged but still very beautiful landscapes.

I find that I always have more questions than answers and it is easier to criticise than to offer solutions. If one cannot offer solutions, it is wiser to shut up.

Fortunately, in this case, nature does offer viable solutions.

Not only does nature not shut up, she also bats last.

This, therefore is an attempt to interpret and to sum up what I saw nature telling me.

I saw land that remains understocked. Lower vegetation was either senescent or eaten to the ground, water reserves are being tested... .. livestock are living largely on welfare! i.e. feeding off root-reserves and supplements and locking up nutrients near watering points. I am not in a position to comment on trees and wildlife. Both appear to be surviving, but are possibly under stress. (I'd need to take a closer look.)

Sooner or later rain will come. Much of the country will look green for a few months and well managed soils will even bring dividends, but sustaining the overriding trends listed earlier is tantamount to ecological suicide for regions as well as for nations.

My own experience on Kachana has taught me that to heal the land and to build and to maintain water-security, Australia* requires functional herds to replace the fires that annually exhaust nutrients and carbon into the air.

Managing animal behaviour is the key.

By mulching, fertilizing and pruning vegetation, herds assist plants to feed the soil organisms that build soil and maintain fertility as well as water holding capacity.

We either need many, many, many more herbivores to keep enough vegetation healthy, or existing animals will need to do much more work.

*Healthy ecosystems can self-regulate and are somewhat resilient. With the loss of most of its original megafauna, Australian savannah systems had over millennia become reliant on human inputs. Many such landscapes have since been abandoned, neglected or are being poorly managed. It is in these areas where the remedial capacity of managed herds might

well be the only viable option left to bring back the required interaction of vegetation, soils and animals (biodiversity).

The relevant knowledge and according skill-sets have been tested and put to use in Australia for well over 20 years. To a back-drop of scepticism, public speculation and ongoing academic and political debate, science seems to have finally caught up.

What therefore is preventing the use of managed ‘free-range herds’ to provide the industry with export animals?

Corruption and greed might play a role, but I suspect that it has more to do with paradigms, faulty legislation, financial disincentives, peer-pressure, lacking education and skills, ...

What is preventing industry-players to boost the SDH (stock-days per hectare) in intensively managed areas whilst using managed free-range herds to build water-security at catchment levels?

Again, my bet is on paradigm-paralysis, faulty legislation, financial disincentives, peer-pressure, lacking education and skills, ...

The pastoral industry requires healthy functional animals.

These animals are mostly used to either breed with or to be slaughtered.

Some could also be put to work as landscape regeneration tools!

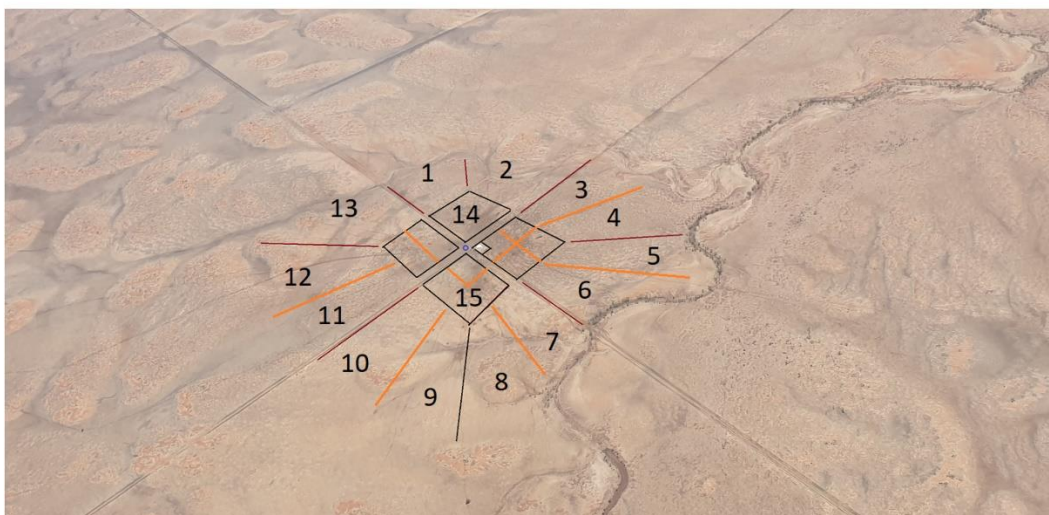
My guess is that when society begins to put a realistic value on water-security, it will become feasible for pastoralists to become “rainfallmanagers”. ([Click here to watch these concepts explained in greater detail.](#))



Perhaps new grazing paradigms call for new animal behaviour and new fencing paradigms

- Could lifting the SDH of country close to existing station-infrastructure warrant additional permanent fencing?
- Would a quadrupling of SDH suffice?

An 'enviro-gym approach' allows a “get paid as you go” learning of the answers if they cannot already be extracted from current performance records.



Knowing what you already know, do you believe that [without a loss in animal-production] you could double the SDH in one average season and double it again in a second average season?

I know that most can. I believe we must! - Chris Henggeler, [Kachana Station](#), Kimberley, WA