

Dear Mike and fellow Land Managers,

Re.: Termination of the [Kachana Wild Donkey Project](#)

Please note that this current bureaucratic tantrum is the result of departmental inertia:

We have been trying to get this issue looked into for some time: [Donkey Issue, September 2002](#)

With the stroke of a ministerial pen, Land Act 97 put us on the wrong side of the politically correct fence.

As a consequence, we needed to operate with [greater transparency than most managers would feel comfortable with](#). I assure you it is no picnic.

Hereby I acknowledge receipt of the [Kimberley Rangelands Biosecurity Association letter](#) dated 03rd May 2018 and signed by Mike as Chairman.

This letter was in response to [our correspondence of 6th April 2018](#).

Mike, it was a pleasure to host you three long-term locals on Kachana for the first time. However after listening to you advocate “win win” solutions, this reactive top-down turnaround, is a disappointment. The bureaucratic information you impart comes as no surprise.

As comes across so clearly in your letter, the solutions you suggest are based merely on **belief** and **confidence**. They also appear to be ecologically unsound, and the reasoning behind them seems to be more political than practical. Win win (or even win lose [at our end]) would need to at least include sound ecological decision-making.

It is hard to believe that informed land managers with any integrity would put their names behind such politically correct rubbish that has its roots in a failing European agricultural paradigm of ‘subduing and controlling’, instead of ‘managing and working with’ nature.

Where and when do we draw the line? Today the focus of “ethnic cleansing” is on donkeys and gamba grass; tomorrow it could be mules and buffel grass; next stylos, parra grass, pangola, indian couch, and a whole lot of other useful species, simply because they were not here when captain Cook arrived.

Mark the words of Fred Provenza, backed by history and prehistory: “In nature, **change is the only constant**.”, “Today’s natives are yesterday’s invasives and tomorrow’s extinct species”.

Like it or not, at this point in time we pastoralists are the primary custodians of the bulk of Australia’s land. We have the responsibility to act with the best of knowledge available to us.

The land tells us: Australia risks running out of reliable water long before beef or grass.

We are not telling anybody how to manage their land.

With our management we simply demonstrate that it is easier to add productivity (e.g. tons of beef) to a landscape than to add kilos to carcass-weight.

At a model level we demonstrate that pastoralists (if only given some incentive) could in less than two decades offer water-security to much of Australia. Their “unfair advantage” being direct access to the behaviour of Australia’s new mega-fauna (i.e. enhancing the functional roles of species in a landscape). Suddenly a few people who should be serving the public interest are crying “Foul!”, because we are using part of the problem as part of the solution...

What sort of legacy do we wish to leave behind?

As custodians of land, we feel that we owe accountability primarily to our children and grandchildren and only to a lesser extent to bureaucrats and city-dwelling legislators.

What do we need to see more of in our rugged watershed country?



In our case the country does not yet safely support enough cattle to do the job, we make use of the additional hoofs and mouths of donkeys and horses.

Each pastoral operation is unique and 'one size fits all' solutions tend not work in ecological settings. In most cases the land manager onsite is best qualified to know how he/she might achieve what they are aiming for. Within given constraints we do the best we can. We experience enough bureaucratic hurdles from people in ivory towers without needing to create more for each other locally.

The unsolicited operational advice that you offer shows an astounding lack of understanding of animal nutrition and animal welfare. Even if that were not the case, which one of us land managers goes and tells somebody else how to run their operation?

We see this to be a very unfortunate case of pitching pastoralist against pastoralist. This is hardly something that a group consisting mainly of local land managers should engage in.

We are not ready to settle for a "lose lose" option.

We suggest you go back to the drawing board while there is still scope for a "win win" outcome. – By that we specifically mean an outcome that also produces a healthier landscape for those that come after us.

Meanwhile we will do our best to make this discussion as public as possible so that it might be easier for you to make decisions that promise improved landscape outcomes instead of your needing to hide behind flawed legislation.

In the interest of greater transparency and accountability it would be beneficial to all if you could shed more light on the Donkey Program.

During your visit you stated:

- Approx. \$ 8'000'000 already spent
- Approx. 500'000 animals destroyed to date
- Few animals remaining
- Pressure to wrap up the program

Questions:

1. Please share a map that indicates which areas are now clean of donkeys.
2. Please share a graph showing annual/seasonal expenditures, on a timeline since the beginning of the program.
3. Please share a graph showing annual/seasonal numbers of donkeys destroyed, on a timeline since the beginning of the program.

4. Please share a graph showing the actual cost per donkey shot, on a timeline since the beginning of the program. (E.g. How much did each donkey destroyed last year actually cost us?)

Questions already asked, but for which we still expect answers:

5. *Other than reducing or exterminating the wild donkey population of the Kimberly, what other outcomes does this Donkey Program actually offer?*
Dick mentioned one: the replacement of donkeys with cattle. - In the clean areas, do we have figures on increased productivity per hectare or per property in terms of volume of either tonnage or head? (Dollar-terms are meaningless due to inflation and fluctuating prices.)
What outcomes does the program promise the public?
6. *Is there evidence to support the notion that ecological health may have improved as a result of culling donkeys, rather than through improved grazing practices, or other seasonal factors?*
Do we have science to support this?
7. *Is there evidence to support the hope that the escalating fire damage since the mid-nineties is merely an association, and not directly correlated to a decrease in Donkey numbers?*
Do we have science to support this?

There is more at stake than a few million dollars of public money and a bunch of egos.

In short, no personal offense intended Mike, but let us be professional about what is going on here.

Regards,

Chris

PS

I include other local land-managers in this email-loop because we are firm believers in local solutions for local challenges. Those of us who have our careers and/or investments on the line are better qualified and motivated to assess the current relevance of thirty-year old policies and legislation, than our paid officials who come and go with the political winds of the day.

Our time is our most valuable non-renewable asset that we manage.

Timeout because of bureaucratic impediments keeps us away from core business.

This time it is Kachana Pastoral Company that is being given the run-around. Any of you could be next.

Demanding accountability and responsible behaviour from our publicly funded bodies goes a long way to stop "the tail wagging the dog" and to keep local communities vibrant and productive.

This does not mean that we reject new information or the coordination of sound governance.



healing land naturally

Chris Henggeler

Kachana Pastoral Company

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Biodiversity – a key to life on Earth

Water Security (flood-reduction and drought-proofing)

Capture, Storage and Management of Carbon – Nature’s Cash

Rangeland Health and Productivity – the key to vibrant communities

→ *These [concepts explained on YouTube](#) (25 Minutes)*

→ *3-minute [introduction to Kachana Station](#) on YouTube*

Partner in [HPMC](#) - **facilitating the building of “biological bank-accounts” (*true wealth*)**

Encouraging small-scale farmers in southern Africa to reap the fruits of their labours as they build resilient landscapes