Session: Collective Action in Rural Australia

Oral Presentation

**Identifying opportunities for cross-property landholder collaboration for conservation and production**

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Cross-property collaborations offer novel solutions for dealing with complex, multi-scalar issues and fortifying long-term landscape-scale conservation and increasing viability of production systems. This type of coordinated action has the potential to manifest a range of innovative, capital building ventures. This paper reports on a NSW Environmental Trust funded project ‘Increasing landholder collaboration for landscape scale conservation’, focused on the NSW Central West and Central Tablelands. To explore opportunities, a participatory rural appraisal (PRA), an interviewing process which utilises local people as researchers and involves a series of workshops, was conducted and 55 landholders were interviewed.

Evidence of cross-property collaboration included biodiversity management, vegetation plantings, fire safety and management, pest and weed control (e.g. dog baiting groups), informal sharing/trading of equipment, labour and transport, and informal grazing arrangements. Major barriers to collaboration were lack of time, reluctance to drive collaboration, individualistic mentalities, social dynamics, lack of contact (especially with absentee landholders), lack of perceived benefit from collaborating, and apprehension about personal liability versus group liability. Opportunities for increased collaboration include habitat connectivity, shared costs for pest and weed management, goat and kangaroo harvesting, shared branding and place-marketing, small-scale mobile production, and eco-tourism for recreation, cultural experience and nature-watching. To enable collaboration, realising synergies with neighbours, being able to discuss novel ideas in an online forum, and learning first-hand from other successful collaborators were identified as initiating steps.