

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF RANGELANDS AND PASTORALISTS - BRIEF

A dedicated *International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists* (<https://iyrp.info>) would promote the contribution of Australia's rangelands to agriculture; building investment in beef, wool and goat industries, and benefitting regional communities through enhanced global interest in agriculture, technology and tourism. Australia's rangelands cover 80% of our vast continent and are synonymous with the 'Outback'.

An *International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists* (<https://iyrp.info>) would:

- raise awareness of the value of sustainable pastoralism and rangelands globally;
- strengthen the science-policy interface on sustainable pastoralism and rangelands; and
- increase activities to develop rangeland potential to contribute to strong communities and livelihoods.

The proposal for an IYRP has widespread international support by organisations such as:

Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), CIGAR global research partnership, Rangelands Partnership (19 USA universities), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Rangeland Congress (IRC) and International Grassland Congress (IGC).

Benefits to Australia from an IYRP

Australia is a world leader in developing expertise in rangeland and livestock management. Our rangelands support 8.6 million cattle (39% of the national herd) and 4.5 million sheep (7% of the national flock) and generates substantial agricultural exports.

Australia's participation in an IYRP will further enhance our already high reputation in pastoralism and agriculture. The many benefits for Australia include the opportunity to showcase and market:

- Clean green products: meat and wool are produced by 6,000 pastoral businesses across 337 million hectares of natural woodlands, grasslands and shrublands. The industry includes the world's largest area of certified organic rangeland production of about 10 million hectares;
- Rural business skills: Australian rural people are the most productive and entrepreneurial in the world. A typical rural resident contributes \$80,000/year in goods and services; with one innovative business to every 14 people, compared to the Australian national average of one in 32 people;
- Agricultural business management and modelling tools: examples such as the 'digital homestead' and precision pastoral's eTrend® technology combine remotely recorded cattle liveweights and pasture information, are now being exported around the world;
- Expertise in new rangeland industries: Australian alternative industries valued at ~\$500 M annually include enterprises harvesting bush/native foods, cut flowers, feral and native animal harvesting;
- Australian scientists and practitioners who provide a range of services to other countries through programs run by AusAid, ACIAR, other university partnerships and private sector programs;
- Tourism opportunities: Australian outback tourism is valued at about \$3 billion (value added), with iconic Australian animals, protected areas, rural history and Indigenous culture. Tourism capitalizes on the wide-open spaces and relatively untouched environment of the Australian rangelands;
- World-leading carbon management: programs include the Emissions Reduction Fund projects aims to sequester carbon by revegetating rangelands; and the use of indigenous knowledge of fire management to mitigate carbon emissions from tropical grasslands;
- Australia as the power plant of the future: opportunities exist to export solar power and provide a major carbon store; with high sunlight intensities e.g. through Clean Energy Innovation Fund co-investment in solar power stations at Longreach and other outback centres.

The 'outback' also gives Australians a 'national sense of place' and provides internationally renowned tourist destinations (Uluru, Kakadu, Kimberley) including six World Heritage sites. Rangelands are the focus of much research and development aimed at increasing agricultural productivity, addressing economic and environmental problems, and developing sustainable livelihoods for rural and regional communities. Across all industries and uses, rangelands contribute significant wealth to our national economy (approximately \$90 billion annually).

International Benefits of IYRP

Rangelands are important globally, as remote areas that provide valuable grazing lands for livestock and native wildlife. They cover at least 50 per cent of the earth's land mass, support 35 per cent of the world's population and 50 per cent of the world's livestock. As well as extensive animal industries, these areas support major mining industries, contain some of the world's largest rivers and sustain pastoralist peoples with diverse cultures, such as Mongolian herders, African nomadic people, and Scandinavia's Sami Reindeer herders.

The declaration of an IYRP will lift the profile of the rangelands, their people and industries both internationally and in Australia. Australian support for an IYRP would demonstrate solidarity with many developing countries of the south. Here, large tracts of rangelands are seriously degraded; pastoralists face problems associated with economic uncertainties, increasing conflicts through drought, and legal controversies over land ownership. Australia can offer support to develop much needed scientifically-based policies, to restore and maintain these rangelands and livelihoods. The IYRP could help increase the economic position and the international recognition of many low income pastoralists of the third world.

Side events at the United Nations Environment Assembly (both UNEA-2 and UNEA-4) led to an internationally agreed resolutions calling for increased global efforts to conserve and sustainably manage rangelands. In 2019 at UNEA-4, the ongoing effort for a UN designated IYRP was acknowledged. An IYRP fits well with the current [Decade of the Family Farm](#) 2019–2028, which mentions rangeland pastoralists as one type of family farmer. Likewise, an IYRP links to the recently designated [Decade of Ecosystem Restoration](#) 2021–2030, which is a global call to action to reverse the degradation of up to of deforested and degraded land, including rangelands, in an effort to combat climate change and preserve biodiversity. An IYRP would also follow from the very successful International Year of Soils 2015.

The IYRP will contribute to the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, in particular:

- Rights of pastoralists (SDG 1, 2, 5): the lack of land rights is a huge challenge for pastoralists in countries of the south or developing countries, posing big threats to sustainability and viability.
- Importance of people (SDG 15): in helping to “sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss”, and of the need for multilateral environmental agencies to cooperate and collaborate.
- Availability and management of water for all (SDG 6): Australian water expertise is well recognized, and could assist in helping to achieve: equitable access to safe and affordable water (SDG 6.1); increase water-use efficiency in all sectors (Goal 6.4); protect and restore international cooperation and capacity building around water to support developing countries (SDG 6.6).

Conclusion

In Australia, an enhanced profile for rangelands, their industries and communities would contribute to a growing national awareness of their significance, an increase in investment to support their sustainable use, and an international awareness of the contributions that the Australian experience can make to the management of a major biome globally.

We commend this important and valuable initiative, the IYRP, to you. We trust that your national government and local organisations will support the Mongolian Government's proposal for an IYRP. The United Nations vote on this proposal will occur in 2021.