



A Real Place with Unique Needs

The Outback is an extraordinary landscape. It covers more than 70 percent of the Australian continent, but less than four per cent of the population lives there. The Outback is also one of the few great natural places remaining on the globe.

It is rugged country, but supports an extremely rich and diverse range of native plants and animals. Despite its remoteness, harsh climate and ancient soils, the Outback generates enormous wealth for the nation. The Outback also represents both a real and mythological place - an icon that embodies much of the positive spirit of Australia and Australians.

Remote Australia, however, faces distinct and difficult issues – inter-dependent social, economic and environmental challenges. Many communities and districts in the Outback have poor and, sometimes, declining social and economic conditions. This is especially, but not solely, among Indigenous communities. There are extremes of wealth and poverty. These extremes are exacerbated by the fact that many wealth-generating projects in remote Australia do not create a lasting legacy of regional jobs and development.

These boom and bust cycles, together with a history of policy disincentive, have contributed to an inability to maintain viable communities and now much of our Outback lands are empty of people. There are fewer land managers on much of the Outback lands that at any time in the last 50,000 years. This has led to declining ecological health of the landscape and loss of native species as country is degraded by uncontrolled wildfires, invasive noxious weeds and feral animals.

The Outback has a particular set of geo-politics. Across its many charismatic regions exists a similar set of demographics, land tenures and resource-based economies. These are fundamentally different to that of the more populated lands of the wheatbelts, the coastal lands of the south-east, and in Australia's cities. The challenges and opportunities the Outback has are therefore unique. The Outback is, literally and emotionally, the heart of Australia and it requires a distinct and separate focus by the nation as a whole.

Short-termism has short-changed The Outback

There are a range of policy interventions and approaches that would increase the human and natural capital of the Outback, improving life for its people, its wildlife and the health of the land as a whole. Most or all of these require a consistent long-term approach by state, territory and national governments, something that has been missing to date. This is only possible if the Australian public and decision-makers in particular are encouraged to develop a much stronger understanding of remote Australia, its people, country and industries, and the policies and support needed to sustain this vast and vital region.

The assessment made by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders, who have worked in different capacities in remote Australia, is that policy solutions are needed that better deliver durable development for the Outback. Extensive and valuable policy development has been done. To date, however, outlining solutions to issues in remote Australia has been only patchily successful as the nation's decision-makers and key influencers do not well understand the problems.

Taking The Outback To Parliament

To secure long term policy success it is critical that the Outback's public profile is raised. Recognition of its distinct identity, its special socio-economic, cultural and environmental values and needs must improve if a breakthrough is going to be realised. This will allow the Outback to be properly included in the broader Australian discourse on the nation's future.

As a first step to achieve this end, a forum - a physical meeting in the Australian Parliament - is a necessary and powerful step to engaging interest and discussing solutions.

The Outback Forum will bring together key leaders and thinkers on remote Australia issues in Parliament House, to outline their views for long term, stable and sustainable solutions.

The Organisers

Pew Charitable Trusts is an international non-government organisation that works to support civil society by improving public policy, informing the public and invigorating civic life. Pew's work in Australia focusses on the conservation and protection of the Outback one of the few remaining great natural places remaining on Earth. A fundamental for Pew's work is maintaining active land management to maintain environmental health.

Rangeland Natural Resources Management Alliance is a network formed by 14 regional natural resource management organisations from across Australia. The Rangelands Alliance is dedicated to improving the productivity and environmental health of Australia's rangelands through setting and influencing policy.

Outback Forum Details

The Outback Forum will be held on March 17th at Parliament House, Canberra. The forum will be a morning to early afternoon event, with a lunch open to MPs, advisers and others who may not be able to attend the whole forum due to a press of other parliamentary work.

Outcomes Sought

- Increase the understanding in national decision makers of key information on the Outback, including existing policy solutions.
- Broaden public understanding of the Outback through media coverage.
- Find additional champions and allies for increasing development of the Outback work and establish engagement with interested leaders and decision makers.
- Begin more detailed discussion on key policies we need in place.

Forum Speakers

- The Hon Fred Chaney AO. Former Federal Cabinet Minister and Vice-President Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation. Long-time thinker & leader on remote Australia issues. *Overview on governance of remote lands.*
- Janet Brook. Grazier, major landholder in the Channel Country and Presiding Member, SA Arid Lands NRM Board. *Land management implications of policy and program development.*
- Martin Laverty. CEO, Royal Flying Doctor Service. *Links between health, communities and good policy.*
- Representative of MMG Mining. *Maximising the value of mining for remote communities.*
- Prof. Tom Calma AO. Indigenous leader, Chair Ninti-One & Chancellor, University of Canberra. *Policy impact on research programs and its influence on uptake of technology and innovation.*
- Dr. Jen Cleary. Chair, Deputy Prime Minister's Reference Group on Regional Australia. *Regional development needs to be regionally driven.*
- Nolan Hunter. CEO, Kimberley Land Council. *Policies that support and develop remote Indigenous communities.* To be confirmed.
- Lin Hatfield Dodds. National Director, Uniting Care Australia & Chair, Australian Social Inclusion Board. *The best approaches to ensure service delivery in remote Australia.*
- Dr. Mark Stafford-Smith. Chief Coordinating Scientist – Adaptation, CSIRO. *The Desert Syndrome and how it can guide the type and positioning of policy and funding.*
- Dr. Barry Trill. Director, The Pew Charitable Trusts. *To protect its wildlife and nature the Outback needs people and active land management.*
- Andrew Drysdale. CEO, QLD NRM Groups Collections; Chair, Rangeland NRM Alliance & LEB Community Advisory Committee. *Policies for natural resource management.*