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Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands project funded to boost rangeland resilience

Pastoralists and land managers across Australia's Southern Rangelands will soon benefit from a major new initiative designed to improve grazing management and ecosystem health, the Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands project.

This project is supported by the Australian Government through funding from the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust. It is being led by the University of Adelaide, through the South Australian Drought Hub, and will assist pastoral enterprises to adopt proven climate-smart decision support tools and technologies.

Director of Southern NSW Innovation Hub Cindy Cassidy said that in its rollout for Western NSW, the project will focus on making it easy for pastoralists to use the GEOGLAM Rangeland and Pasture Productivity (RaPP) satellite mapping tool to predict dry times up to six months ahead.

"Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands is an expansion of a successful [pilot project](#) that we delivered in the Western Riverina, which showed how satellite mapping could be used by pastoralists to predict groundcover changes on farm and trigger management decisions like feeding, selling stock, and adjusting stocking rates."

Cindy said, "We're excited to have the opportunity through this new project to make the RaPP technology more accessible and user-friendly for farmers so they can plan ahead with confidence and make decisions that are good for their businesses, even when they're facing dry times."

The project is being coordinated across Southern Australia's Rangelands areas through the SA Drought Hub, Southern NSW Innovation Hub and the Grower Group Alliance in Western Australia. SA Drought Hub Knowledge Broker and project coordinator Tony Randall said, "This project brings together a range of experienced and trusted NRM organisations, grower groups and service providers from across Australia's Southern Rangelands to offer pastoral businesses locally driven support through demonstration sites, training, peer-to-peer learning and expert guidance."

"We will be establishing demonstration sites strategically across 1.5 million square kilometres of Australia's Southern Rangelands and will be working with pastoralists to trial and adopt decision-support tools and technologies to improve grazing management and ecosystem health," he said.

The project will offer participating pastoral businesses with a range of options to best meet their operational and business needs.

A key strength of the project is the involvement and support from partners and collaborators, who have seen benefits from the pilot and are now keen for the next stages of extension and adoption.

Dr John Leys of DustWatch Australia stated that in Australian Rangelands, land degradation is primarily caused by erosion and dust storms that occur during droughts.

"Predicting four to six months ahead of when vegetation cover will fall below the soil erosion protection level is a critical task to help reduce land degradation and the stress on land managers going into drought. Destocking before the onset of drought is a critical management action that can maintain cover and reduce soil erosion."

Matt Paget of CSIRO said, "We are excited to contribute our large data analytics and science capabilities to help address drought and land management in Australian Rangelands.

"CSIRO has a strong history of providing consistent long-term vegetation cover and related land condition products derived from Earth observation satellites with ABARES and DAFF. This project will see us deploy automated data processing and online tools that provide land managers with near-real time and seasonal information to aid in their decision making."

Overall, the co-designed program Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands will drive peer-to-peer learning outcomes to benefit pastoralists.

Smart Grazing, Stronger Lands is supported by the Australian Government through funding from the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program under the Natural Heritage Trust. It is led by the University of Adelaide through the SA Drought Hub, in partnership with Southern NSW Innovation Hub, Grower Group Alliance Inc., South Australian Arid Lands Landscape Board, DustWatch Australia, CSIRO, Western Local Land Services, Riverina Local Land Services, Rangelands NRM, Gascoyne Catchments Group, Southern Rangelands Pastoral Alliance, and the Goldfields Nullarbor Rangelands Biosecurity Association. Local service providers with grazing management expertise will also play a key role in delivery.

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About Southern NSW Innovation Hub

Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub connects farmers and rural communities with practical, modern solutions to adapt to a changing climate. As part of a national network, we collaborate with trusted organisations, experts, researchers, and community groups to drive sustainable change with the long-term goal of improved drought resilience.

Southern NSW Innovation Hub is one of eight Hubs established nationally through funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund. Southern NSW Innovation Hub works closely with its partners to create a skilled, flexible network that can identify and solve the challenges and harness opportunities posed by a changing climate. Southern NSW Innovation Hub partners include Charles Sturt University (Hub lead), Australian National University, NSW Local Land Services (LLS), NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), Rural Aid, University of Canberra, and the Farming Systems Groups Alliance.

[Find out more](#)