

Riverina Local Land Services Travelling Stock Reserve Grazing Area Pilot

Frequently asked questions



The Riverina Local Land Services' Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR) grazing area pilot is an innovative approach and the first of its kind in NSW. It will be treated as a pilot to test the approach.

It requires a four year period to ensure the viability for permit holders. It only covers 10 of the 15 Local Government areas within Riverina.

The TSR grazing area pilot involves creating six defined grazing areas in the central/eastern Riverina made up of reserves, routes and council roads. These regions will be permitted out as individual packages to prospective entities for an initial four-year period.

Existing arrangement and why it isn't working

1. How is the new TSR pilot different?

- Six grazing areas tendered to one permit holder per area
- Permit holder uses the grazing area to move their mob of cattle around via road network
- TSR reserves utilised for overnight or short duration grazing
- Three-month rolling travel plan to detail where the mob will travel to
- Mob assessed, tracked and audited by LLS.

2. How were the TSRs allocated previously?

TSRs that are in the pilot area historically have been leased to adjoining landholders through a range of permits. In 2015, a new Management Agreement Permit (MAP) was developed on a state-wide basis and TSRs were placed under a Tender.

This meant that individuals had the chance to place a value on each TSR for their grazing and management. The individuals who placed the highest value on the TSRs were selected to take up the MAP.

3. What's wrong with this process?

Most TSRs had low levels of interest and low offers in the tender with some having no tenders at all. This impacts on our commitments to look after TSRs as a whole across the Riverina. Only a few TSRs had high levels of interest and these were hotly contested between neighbours.

There were also issues with some permit holders who overgrazed TSRs, did not control weeds or undertook illegal activities like sowing crops or cutting firewood. Current permit revenue is significantly less than the running costs of managing the 85,000ha of TSRs in the Riverina.

For further information please contact:

Jonathan Berryman
Senior Land Service Officer
0429 998 700
jonathan.berryman@lls.nsw.gov.au

Peter Beal
Team Leader - TSRs
0428 968 249
peter.beal@lls.nsw.gov.au



Local Land
Services



@LLSRiverina

www.lls.nsw.gov.au/riverina

Consultation

4. Why haven't adjoining landholders been involved in the consultation process?

Adjoining landholders were advised 12 months out from their lease expiring on June 30 2021, and again by letter three months prior to expiry. Following this we spoke to many of the adjoining landholders who enquired about the process to lease. Initially we targeted the key stakeholders first to determine viability and to identify issues.

These stakeholders included Councils, Rural Fire Services (RFS), Landcare, Aboriginal Advisory Group, NSW Farmers and selected landholders, drovers and stock agents.

Once we had a good idea of issues, we then went out to the community initially via information sessions (later changed to webinars due to COVID restrictions), media, social and a designated website. Through this process we have made a number of changes to the grazing areas and to improve the terms and conditions of the pilot.

5. What are you doing with the feedback you have received and where to from here?

We have considered all feedback and made changes to the pilot as detailed in our consultation report including:

- reducing the maximum of mob size from 1000 to 800
- consolidating the North and South Young areas into one
- aligning grazing areas more closely to Local Government Areas (LGAs)
- removing the Hilston area from the pilot
- clarifying a number of terms and conditions.

The prospectus is scheduled to go out for public tender in September with a 1st Jan start. This Riverina initiative is a state-wide pilot.

One permit holder per grazing area

6. A three-month travel plan will be submitted by the permit holder to Local Land Services and Local Government Areas - how will this be regulated?

The three-month travel plan will be submitted two weeks prior commencing grazing. The plan will be reviewed by Local Land Services to identify the grazing route, assess any impact of weeds and control measures in place and to take account of any current or planned LGA roadworks. Once approved Local Land Services will issue the permit for travel on the roads and grazing. The local Council will be consulted on the three-month grazing plans.

7. How many grazing areas are there and where are they?

The grazing areas has been reduced from 7 to 6 large grazing areas and these [can be seen on our website](#). The size facilitates viability and long-term sustainability.

8. How large are the herd sizes?

Herd sizes will vary between 500 - 800 head of cattle on the routes. Reduced numbers may be necessary on some roads and this will be identified through the three-month travel plan.

[Detailed areas and LGA - map](#)

Fencing

9. Who is responsible for boundary fences adjoining TSRs or roadsides?

Under the *Dividing Fences Act*, adjoining landholders to Crown Land (eg roads and TSRs) are responsible for boundary fences. Local Land Services is responsible for the TSR fence fronting any other Crown Land (eg roads). When a TSR is allocated, the permit holder has responsibility to ensure boundary fences are maintained.

10. Who is liable for damage if stock enter a neighbouring property from a reserve or roadside?

Liability rests with the Permit holder and the drover who is under the employ of the stock owner. It is in the best interest of the permit holder and drover not to lose stock or have them enter adjacent properties. There is option to cancel a permit if repeated infringements have occurred.

Riverina Local Land Services have regular travelling stock moving throughout the region. There is a shared responsibility between the parties, and for the landholder to maintain a stock proof fence.

Weeds

11. Will these mobs spread weeds along the roads?

We believe we will reduce the spread of weeds over time especially the priority species identified in the top three categories of the Riverina Strategic Weed Management Plan (being prevention, eradication and containment). The revenue anticipated from this changed approach to managing stock movements and access to TSRs will be reinvested in weed control programs to address key weed species of concern.

It is important to note weeds are constantly being spread by many vectors such as wind, water, vehicles and stock. This is an opportunity for coordinated effort between Council and LLS to control problem weeds on TSRs and road reserves and utilise the three-month travel plan to avoid priority sites during certain months of the year.

12. TSRs are currently not being adequately controlled for weeds. Why will this be different?

These TSRs are under a Management Agreement Permit typically held by a neighbouring landholder. It is the permit holder's responsibility to carry out weed control on those TSRs. This is one of the issues that the pilot seeks to address in terms of weed management and overgrazing.

The pilot will see the Local Land Services undertake this role in a more strategic way and working with Council weeds officers to prioritise and control key sites and areas and maintain the spread of weeds.

13. Where will the cattle go during seed set periods of weed species.

We will target problem weeds in conjunction with Council weeds officers and use the three-month travel plan to avoid these areas. This control does not include all weeds but targets Containment listed species and some Asset protection species that Council has prioritised (Riverina Regional Strategic Weed Management Plan 2017).

Biosecurity

14. Is there an increase in biosecurity risks under this pilot?

The biosecurity risk is no more than currently exists and it is expected that the new system of less permit holders (6 instead of 140) and with regular audits, it will be more closely assessed and monitored and therefore the risk is minimised.

15. Why is there no requirement for travelling cattle to be pestivirus vaccinated?

All current requirements and practices pertaining to animal health and diseases will apply to all stock movements and management as currently exists. LLS applies the relevant animal health and biosecurity obligations taking account of Veterinarian and Biosecurity advice.

Bovine Johne's disease and Bovine pestivirus are endemic disease within Australia. Control of disease risk is based on an assessment made by a landholder and a person responsible for a travelling mob (risk goes both ways). Vaccination for endemic disease is not mandatory, so we will align with the current state-wide policy. The collection of relevant animal health information at the initial inspection of a mob gives us valuable information that can be risk assessed where relevant. Our auditing and GPS tracking will enable strong oversight of all mobs on the route.

Fuel Loads on Roads

16. How can one mob graze an area at the critical time for hazard reduction?

Each area will have a mob and a permit Holder. Generally, mobs in winter months are in the west and gradually move east in the spring-summer. As pasture is grazed and summer weather slows growth, we have a situation where fuel load is reduced initially through grazing and then maintained at lower levels due to heat and lack of moisture. This changes when we have summer rain, increasing growth and also reducing fire risk.

Local Land Services will continue to undertake risk assessments and advice from RFS and LGAs and prioritise grazing where possible in targeted locations in line with the three-month travel plan. Local Land Services is seeking to use grazing to reduce fuel loads where possible but may not be able to cover an entire grazing area. Hence, subject to the risk level landholders can apply for a hazard reduction grazing permit to be approved by Local Land Services.

Compliance

17. How will you be able to carry out the monitoring and compliance requirements of permit holders?

With six grazing areas that each have a three-month rolling travel plan, we will know where each mob is going and where they have been. This will assist us to monitor groundcover and ensure compliance checks are undertaken. Depending on revenue, there may also be scope to increase staffing levels. A Local Land Services officer will be closely monitoring grazing impacts to ensure biodiversity is not being depleted. This will be assessed through a biodiversity monitoring assessment model, currently being developed with rigorous scientific input.

18. What action can be taken against TSR permit holder for wrong doings and can they have their contract terminated?

Permit holders will be inducted onto the site so they understand all the permit conditions and their responsibilities. The induction will form part of their permit conditions. The new pilot includes strict monitoring and auditing of the permit holder to ensure they adhere to the conditions of the permit. Local Land Services will be tracking all mobs via the use of GPS satellite technology so they know the location of mobs at any given time.

Should a breach of the Management Agreement Permit (MAP) be of a serious biosecurity risk or a repeat offence after reasonable notice is served on the MAP holder and their staff, Local Land Services will implement its compliance policies and procedures which may include cancellation of the MAP.

19. Will permit holders be required to have stock off the roads at night?

Yes, stock will not be allowed on the roads between sunset and sunrise.

20. Is constant supervision required for the herd?

Supervision is required when the herd is travelling on roads but not in an enclosed TSR. However, the permit holder is responsible for containment of stock and is liable for damage caused by those stock.

Environmental

21. In what way are the TSRs continuing to be degraded under current arrangements?

Degradation includes a range of factors that look at TSR condition (species diversity, composition and infrastructure) and threats (weeds and pests).

One of the major reasons TSRs are being degraded is the increased presence of weeds. Weed levels increase following extended dry periods where overgrazing leads to bare ground which is an opportunity for weed germination and establishment.

This is generally not seen in high conservation value sites where groundcover is maintained and the perennial species can compete, especially with annual weeds. Local Land Services is committed to improving the condition of TSRs.

22. Will your pilot damage biodiversity?

Biodiversity is a key consideration for the grazing area pilot to succeed. As is a range of other values, hence why managing TSRs is a complex environment where all users need to be consulted, considered and engaged in the process. Adopting a rotational grazing regime where stock are grazing and moving along the next area, pasture species have greater chance of recovery than where travelling stock reserves are managed by set stocking rates which become excessive when pasture growth begins to decline.

The Riverina Local Land Services TSR Grazing Area Pilot is about managing the health and condition of the TSR network to ensure long term viability and sustainability.

Conditions will change from month to month and from season to season and this will be managed via the three-month travel plan in collaboration with local government. We believe the pilot will enhance biodiversity through grazing followed by long rest periods. This is a recognised management system to maintain ground cover that reduces erosion and weed infestations. Depending on the length of rest period, there may be regeneration of species like acacias which get grazed heavily under the current grazing regime.

23. How are you going to stop the cattle from eating the young trees and shrubs that are germinating in the reserves

The rotational grazing system will result in browsing some suckers/saplings but with long rest periods some will grow beyond the reach of cattle. This thinning is important to maintain a grassy woodland structure whilst allowing regeneration of grass, shrub and tree species. The majority of our TSRs within the pilot contain this structure. Where possible and necessary, Local Land Services will fence off regeneration.

24. Some of the smaller TSRs cannot handle 800 head. How will you manage this?

Herd sizes will vary between 500 - 800 head of cattle on the routes. The maximum mob size has been reduced following concerns raised through public consultation. Reduced numbers may be necessary on some roads and this will be identified through the three-month travel plan.

Rotational grazing is practiced with Walking Permits and allows for long recovery periods for the grazed vegetation. Monitoring of groundcover percentages will be a key criteria that we will undertake regularly, especially during dry periods. There is no doubt that overnight holding areas will be impacted but is important to note that these are small areas and will be prioritised for weed control. We expect better response with regard to groundcover on our roadsides and wider TSR network.

Access

25. How will this impact gravel roads and roadside drains during wet weather?

A three-month travel plan is a requirement of the permit holder that can manage avoiding roadworks or sensitive areas during wet weather conditions. Regular audits and GPS tracking will allow travel plans to be flexible to best manage wet weather situations. This does not apply to private roads constructed on TSRs. These are the responsibility of the individual who utilises it for access.

26. Are local landholders able to access roadsides in times of drought?

Permits will still be available for Destination Permits, Roadside Grazing Permits and Routine Stock movement Permits.

27. Are local landholders able to access TSRs in times of emergencies – fire and flood?

Yes, TSRs will still be available during emergencies and the permit holder may be compensated for any loss of access.

28. How are we going to operate our farm when we rely on the road to access to stock yards and paddocks.

Crown roads / TSRs are a shared resource and some inconvenience may be experienced at times, but this will be short in duration. The grazing plan will ensure stock are not on a particular road for weeks.

Mobs will only be passing a property for a short time, hours for smaller holdings and days for larger holdings. Drivers often shut gates ahead of the mob to avoid stock accessing adjacent land.

29. Why won't landholders be informed when mobs approach their farm?

It is impractical for the drover to notify every landholder that stock are approaching their farm. This isn't currently a requirement of Local Land Services to inform landholders of cattle movements when on walking permits and is in line with state-wide permit conditions. We will investigate other innovative options for this in the future.

Horses

30. Will horses be permitted to be used with travelling stock?

Horses are permitted to be used with travelling stock. Stallions will not be permitted to be in the driving team and on the TSR or roads and it will be a condition of the permit agreed to prior to contract signing.

Tender process

31. When will the Tender open and where will we find out about it?

We expect the Tender process will commence in the last quarter of 2021 with a prospectus and a draft Management Agreement Permit to be available on our website soon.

Viability

32. How will you have grass in front of them all the time

We recognise the challenge which is similar to one all graziers face. Rotational grazing allows groundcover to recover prior to the next grazing. The aim of this pilot is to ensure the recovery periods where groundcover actively growing are such that there will be pasture in front of them.

Considering DSE ratings, the hectares available and the number of proposed stock, we believe there will be available grazing annually, even in dry times. Once groundcover falls below 70% then stock will need to be moved off TSRs and the permit suspended.

33. What if no one tenders or if the tender is too low?

We will have several options, such as readvertising and promoting, installing a base tender amount, reduce the size of areas or return to the previous system and review the base price for each TSR.

34. Why not sell the TSRs?

TSRs are Crown Land and not owned by LLS. To be sold, it first must be converted to freehold by NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment – Crown Land. The NSW Government do not have any desire to undertake this process.

Riverina TSR Grazing Area Pilot - A summary

Current model

TSR revenue is generated through issuing permits.

This income provides funds to maintain/replace infrastructure (fences, water), control pest animals and weeds and general maintenance work (rubbish removal, slashing etc).

The changing nature of livestock industry (from droving to transporting livestock) has seen less demand for travelling stock permits.

This lower demand has meant there is not enough income to:

- ✘ Deliver desirable land management outcomes
- ✘ Meet stakeholder expectations
- ✘ Maintain infrastructure

Grazing area model

The new approach will split the eastern Riverina reserves and routes into six defined grazing regions and permitting them out as individual packages for a four-year period.

Stock will continuously travel around a region from one TSR to another.

This contrasts with the current management strategy where individual TSRs are permitted out to multiple landholders.

Permits will still be available for destination walking stock, roadside grazing, routine stock movement and apiarists.

- ✔ Improved weed management on routes and reserves – achieved through strategic grazing of weeds
- ✔ Fire hazard reduction
- ✔ Improved management of reserves by rotational grazing techniques improving groundcover and biodiversity
- ✔ Guaranteed annual income
- ✔ Improved infrastructure replacement program
- ✔ Travel plan – a three-month travel plan will be submitted to Local Land Services and Local Government Areas.

Riverina LLS TSR Grazing Area Pilot map

