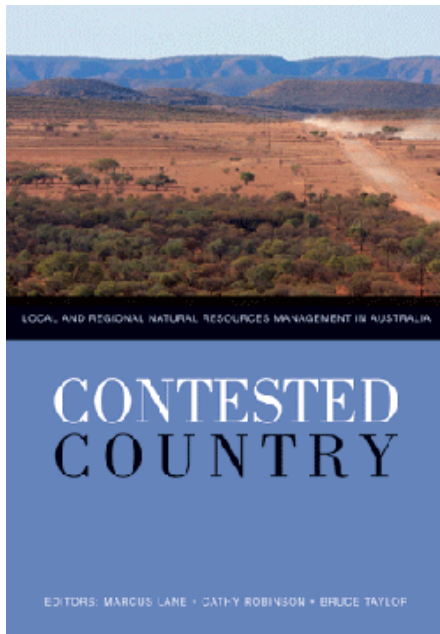


Assessing how well we've cared for country

Rachel Sullivan

Environmental management in Australia has always been controversial and frequently contentious. The battle against drought, erosion, salinity, vanishing biodiversity and now climate change has been fought using a variety of government strategies and funding models; from aerial camel culls to supporting locals armed with baseball bats and wheelie bins trying to halt the march of cane toads.



Contested Country: Local and Regional
Natural Resources Management in Australia
Marcus Lane, Cathy Robinson & Bruce
Taylor (Eds)
CSIRO Publishing
2009, Softcover
ISBN: 9780643095861 – AU\$79.95
www.publish.csiro.au

Over time, top-down state or federal government-driven models have evolved to become more locally and regionally driven, but are they working? 'Caring for Our Country' is the latest iteration of regional natural resources management (NRM); its forerunner was the Natural Heritage Trust Program (NHT), which itself grew out of the success of Landcare in the '80s and early '90s. When it was introduced, NHT was an innovative approach to environmental management in Australia, decentralising governance of environmental management issues and rescaling natural resource planning to regional and local levels.

Yet while similar models overseas have attracted sustained research on their outcomes, in Australia, decentralised sustainable environmental planning and decision-making has had little independent review.

Contested Country: Local and Regional Natural Resources Management in Australia changes that. Written at the

conclusion of the NHT program by social scientists from CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems and other experts in planning, geography, environmental studies and public policy, it asks whether regional environmental management is working and addresses some of the tough questions about decentralised environmental governance.

Politics, accountability, marginalisation and scientific fidelity all affect the success of any program. Using case studies and insight gained from projects across Australia, *Contested Country* identifies the management challenges that need to be met in the national quest for sustainability, such as linking local action and decision-making with national investment priorities, and recognising the voices of all groups who have responsibilities to care for the country.

From ECOS online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC153p31>