

Report on the 39th Annual Conference  
of the Grassland Society of Victoria  
Held at Bendigo, 17-19 June 1998

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I represented our Society at the Victorian Society's 39th Annual conference at Bendigo. It was a most stimulating and instructive experience. I would certainly urge some of our members to try and get to the Victorian Conference in future. The Victorian Society has over 2000 members and the daily attendance at the conference is over 400.

The first afternoon was a presentation by the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment (=Department of Agriculture). Each presentation was for 25 minutes and covered several grassland-oriented research projects. I was interested that included in the DNRE presentations, was one by Professor David Chapman on, 'Sustainable grazing systems in western Victoria'. Professor Chapman (a New Zealander) is a recent appointment to the University of Melbourne and is particularly interested in pasture/animal relationships. His involvement with DNRE augers well for further research in animal production from pastures. In this session, there were papers on grazing management, pastures for crops, biotechnology breakthroughs and pasture plant breeding. Congratulations to the executive and the committee for suggesting such a good introduction to the conference.

The 'Conference proper' started with a paper by Dr Rod Kater, CEO of Australia's largest beef producer, the Stanbroke Pastoral Company. In a comprehensive analysis of animal production problems in Australia, he ended on an encouraging

note saying, "What can we do?", and his three suggestions were: (1) strict input cost control, (2) continuing education and, (3) carefully considering new ideas. The rest of the morning session was on, 'The challenge of sustainability', by the local branch, soil acidity, unlocking the mysteries of fertilisers, persistent perennials and, finally, one from NSW Land and Water Conservation, 'Low input grasses for low input environments'.

In the afternoon there was a choice of five bus tours. I went on a tour to Colin Dellavedova's property, 'Maryborough', where the theme was, 'Maintaining perennial pastures in marginal country'. He had started with 2.5 dse/ha and was now running 10.5 dse/ha with an average wool cut of 7 kg/head - and they call it marginal country! The second farm we went to was equally impressive - Ken and Helen Calder at 'Woodlands', Wareek, where the theme was, 'Improving pastures to improve crops'. At this property, wheat yield on a selected paddock in 1996 was 4.4 tonnes/ha. As with Colin Dellavedova, the superphosphate applied annually in the pasture phase was at least 135 kg/ha.

The first session on the final day was, 'Pasture - Cropping's Future?'. The first paper was by Mark Peoples and CSIRO colleagues plus two co-authors from Victoria's DNRE on, 'Pasture nitrogen for sustainable farming systems'. This was a paper with a wealth of painstakingly collected data on the amount of nitrogen fixed by legumes and available for cropping. This was followed by two producer

cropping', including irrigation and one on irrigated lucerne hay production.

After morning tea there was a controversial paper on, 'Tactical grazing strategies for annual pastures' by Mike Grimm, an entomologist from Albany WA. This paper suggested the use of highly complex grazing systems (including rationing in spring), use of nitrogenous fertilisers, drainage systems and conservation. We await experimental verification of the value of some of these highly intensive procedures.

This paper was followed by a producer paper (White, Lockhart and White) on experiences with the Grasslands Productivity Programme in a 425 mm rainfall area. They found benefit from moving toward a high input-high output system by using more superphosphate. This was followed by the usual vigorous presentation by Geoff Saul on his current research results. The final paper of the morning was by Sue Haggard, a 'hands on' producer from Euroa who gave an excellent account of applying the GPP program to her property, including her trials with cell grazing and highly successful

gully control.

The post lunch papers were on business planning, including succession planning. This was followed by a paper on using water more efficiently for milk production. After this there was a producer paper on managing a lucerne system - a paper full of useful management suggestions.

The final paper (which I unfortunately missed) was by Ian Holton of Holton Weather Forecasting Pty Ltd on, 'Accurate long-range rainfall forecasts for south-eastern Australia'. He stated that the SOI in the last 20 years has not been an acceptable prediction of July to November rainfall in SE Australia. He gave data to show that the Holton model was highly correlated with rainfall in SE Australia.

I am grateful to both the NSW and the Victorian Societies for the opportunity to attend the Victorian Conference. I was most impressed with the dynamism and vigour of their society, stimulating programs (as are ours!) and a particularly efficient organisation.