

## **Session 7: Case Studies in Grassland Conservation (II): 'Radio Hill' and Cooma-Monaro Shire Council Involvement**

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### **Introduction**

The Cooma-Monaro Shire Council was appointed as Trustee for an area of Crown Land, being a "Reserve for Plantation" on what is known as Radio Hill, in 1964. This reserve has an area of around 45 Hectares (approximately 112 acres) and is one of two reserves on the ridge overlooking Cooma on the eastern side of town. The second reserve (to the North of the Reserve under Council's control) is leased to a local grazier, who generally has cattle in the reserve year-round.

### **Monaro Golden Daisy**

Alec Costin, back in 1948, identified and catalogued a population of the Monaro Golden Daisy (*Rutidosia leiolepis*) on what was described as a basalt ridge on the Cooma Common. Nothing further appears to have happened in regard to the Reserve until it was identified in 1995 by Rainer Rehwinkel as being a "grassland of significant conservation value" while undertaking a survey of grasslands in the region in conjunction with the NPWS. In 1996 Josh Dorrrough, working for WWF Australia, identified populations of the Monaro Golden Daisy growing on Radio Hill. This species is listed as a "threatened species", and Radio Hill is one of only a few known sites on the Monaro that the Golden Daisy exists. This was the first exposure that Council's staff had with the Monaro Golden Daisy.

### **Council's response**

Council's initial response was to ensure that our Weeds staff were aware of the presence of the Monaro Golden Daisy so that when undertaking weed control work on the Reserve, all care could be taken to prevent or minimise any spraying of weedicides on the Daisy.

In regard to "what to do about preserving the populations of the Monaro Golden Daisy" we were stumped. Council is the appointed Trustee of the Reserve (which basically confers "ownership" of the Crown Land to Council), so it is responsible for the upkeep of the land etc. Like most Councils, funding for maintenance of Crown Reserves is a problem. We recognised that the area should be preserved, but were doubtful whether Council funding could be obtained on an annual, on-going basis, for weed control, fencing and the like.

Another question faced us as to what the best conservation methods might be – the area under Council's jurisdiction has basically been untouched (apart from periodic weed control programs – mainly for African Lovegrass and St John's Wort, and some work on Hawthorn and Briars). The area has basically not been grazed, apart from intermittent use by travelling stock or "unauthorised" use in times of drought by some daring stockowners. On the other hand, the reserve to the North of this reserve, which has basically been stocked with cattle full-time, has also been identified as having a good population of the Monaro Daisy. We have no specialist staff in this field – we deal predominantly with the legislative side of things through our Planning Instruments and the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act.

### **Current Council and community involvement**

David Eddy, from WWF Australia, attempted to gain support for the establishment of the area as a grassland reserve. After discussions with various Council staff and local community groups, however, things weren't progressing very quickly. Council had both monetary and staff constraints, and the willing local community groups (of which there are only a few) were already occupied with other conservation projects like the North Ridge and Pine Ridge.

David was able to gain support from a Canberra-based group, "Friends of Grasslands" (FOG) and was able to obtain some grant funding through the Threatened Species Network Community Grants Program for assistance with repairs to fencing, weed control, sign posting and the like. Council was able to provide some funding for this initial work, and in later works provided the labour content to spray weeds with herbicide provided through the grant funding.

The area was surveyed and further grant funding was applied for through DLWC to provide perimeter fencing for the reserve. To obtain this funding, Council had to enter into a management contract with DLWC, for a period of 11 years, entrusting Council with on-going maintenance of fencing, ensuring access is available for bushfire and other emergency services, on-going weed control where resources are available, and the administration of the grant funds.

The Council initially balked at the terms of the proposed Management Agreement, fearing that it would be tied into an on-going management role that it had neither the funding or staff resources to effectively handle. While it agreed to the proposal in principle, the Council would not commit to an active role in the establishment and maintenance of the reserve.

After further correspondence and meetings between David Eddy, Council Staff, and DLWC, Council's Environmental Protection Committee was able to obtain Council's commitment to a revised management contract. A big factor in gaining the Council's support was the commitment to on-going assistance by FOG. The contracts have been signed by Council and have been returned to DLWC for processing.

### **Concluding remarks**

The reluctance of the Council in the initial stages of proceedings was not a big surprise. Most Council's are forever juggling staff and funds to try to meet both political and community expectations for delivery of services to ratepayers and residents. While the "Environmental" area of Local Government's functions is growing at an exponential rate, funding to meet environmental commitments and responsibilities is not. Our Council does not have enough manpower or funding to meet its mandatory legislative requirements in the Environmental area.

The bottom line is that while Council is happy to be involved in a project such as this, without the availability of Grant Funding from DLWC, NHT and the Threatened Species Network, this project would not be proceeding.