

## GRSB at the Crossroad<sup>1</sup>

Having settled on a vision, mission, principles and criteria the GRSB is now at the critical point of resolving how best to guide the application of these principles and criteria. Decisions at this point will have a major impact on the extent to which GRSB achieves its mission of continuous improvement in sustainability. Decisions at this point will influence the extent to which businesses adopt the principles and criteria and the credibility of the verification of that improvement.

It would be unfortunate if GRSB chooses between flexibility on one hand and coherence and specificity on the other. With some lateral thinking we can meet both the legitimate need for flexibility at the business level and the coherence and specificity required at all levels.

The solution is through businesses demonstrating continuous improvement towards specific goals established through coherent processes. This approach recognises the need for relevance, flexibility and demonstrated effectiveness at the business level and the need for coherence across like-businesses at the regional level and beyond. Using internationally recognised management processes GRSB principles and criteria can be applied anywhere and to any business regardless of differences in localities and enterprises.

Consumers and traders would have confidence that differences of detail from place to place would not mean any lack of comparability or credibility, because the region or business specific approaches have a common foundation and a common management framework. GRSB adherents all over the world would be seen to be operating within the same sustainability outlook while consistently and measurably improving their performance. Typically businesses would increase profits, reduce costs, reduce market risks and meet community and consumers requirements.

We are not advocating that GRSB should be prescriptive in how this *Business Way* is achieved. However a brief description of our Certified Land Management (CLM) system will help illustrate the essential features of the approach.

Certified Land Management (CLM) enables and verifies continuous improvement in environmental and animal welfare outcomes. Using universally applicable and internationally recognised management processes landholders integrate environmental, animal welfare, landscape and other business requirements to develop and implement property specific management plans. Within boundaries business managers including landholders establish business goals that lead to improved productivity and improved environmental and animal welfare outcomes.

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It would be a simple step to incorporate GRSB principles and criteria. In this way CLM focuses on embedding sustainability in the business of the business hence strengthening the positive impacts and reducing the negative impacts of management. External accredited auditors verify continuous improvement against the goals specified in those plans.

In Australia CLM operates on a whole-of-property basis as nearly three quarters of agricultural produce by value is produced on properties operating two or more industries. For beef only eleven percent by value is produced on beef only properties.

There are many benefits to producers and to operators along product chains if we get it right.

In CLM there is an emphasis on improving soil-plant-animal function as this is a fundamental driver of profitability, sustainability, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation. CLM enables producers to differentiate their products making them more competitive in higher priced markets. It enables them to protect their most valuable asset, their productive base. CLM helps producers avoid the imposition of multiple and costly environmental and animal welfare specifications, it strengthens social resilience by having producers with common beliefs and values working together and it provides a mechanism of dramatically improving the effectiveness of government support for innovative producers. And of course it improves environmental and animal welfare outcomes. All of these things are just good business sense. What CLM does is that it provides a supportive framework within which to accelerate and be rewarded for continuous improvement.

CLM is a registered Australian certification trade mark attesting to its relevance and robustness and to its capacity to strengthen community and consumer recognition of environmental and animal welfare credentials.

In moving beyond the principles and criteria it will be necessary for GRSB to avoid ambiguity in how it uses terms such as standards, indicators and monitors and benchmarks. Catchall terms such as 'other metrics' should be avoided.

Standards may be processes, practices or outcomes or combinations of these. Indicators are the elements to be measured to indicate continuous improvement. Monitors are the techniques used to measure changes in indicators. These techniques are chosen depending on criteria such as relevance, accuracy, repeatability, sensitivity and/or precision with repeatability being a critical feature given the emphasis on continuous improvement. A benchmark is the specification of performance and can be established within and between businesses using the processes described above for the so called *Business Way*.

In conclusion the future effectiveness of the GRSB will be more dependent upon the approach taken to move beyond the principles and criteria than it will be on the detailed resolution of issues within the selected approach. In addition to the points raised above an advantage from choosing the *Business Way* is that it limits the need to codify prescriptive requirements, a process that we believe has the potential to derail the GRSB initiative.