



Short shrift for the Long Paddock

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Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

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The SMH had an interesting piece on the possible demise of the "[Long Paddock](#)" - land reserves for stockmen to move livestock around the country on foot. While it is rarely used nowadays, the land reserved for this use has a lot of environmental value - and (for those of a reversalist bent) they could possibly be revived one day if moving stock around by foot becomes the most energy efficient means of transportation to the markets - something the Queensland government seems to believe (it also maintains a website tracking [rural climate issues](#) using this name).

THE end appears nigh for much of the stock route system that helped to forge the nation's character. Most of the legendary Long Paddock in NSW will go if the recommendations from a new report are adopted. Only a minority of stock reserves along the north-south "driftway" through the centre of NSW - the ones that still pay their way - are expected to survive if rural lands protection boards do as the report suggests. They would give up thousands of hectares of unprofitable stock routes where drovers once pushed mobs of cattle and sheep.

The stock route system began to develop in the 1830s and still covers about 600,000 hectares, or nearly 1 per cent of NSW. But only five of the state's 47 rural lands protection boards - Cobar, Moree, Narrabri, Northern Slopes and Coonamble - make a profit out of it. Thousands of rural ratepayers who rarely or never put travelling stock on the routes subsidise the rest.

Environmentalists fear the demise of so many stock routes will spell disaster for a vast green web providing vital corridors for native plants and animals. For years the boards have been begging government for funding to help cover the maintenance of the routes, but with little success.

Many farmers want stock routes maintained as fodder reserves in times of drought, flood and fire, but the report says mechanised livestock transport "has made the role of [stock reserves] more or less redundant" and most should be ceded back to the Department of Lands. ...

Queensland is determined to keep its stock route network, believing use will rise along with petrol prices.

A livestock farmer and chairman of the Braidwood board, John Reardon, said his corner of the Long Paddock was little used by travelling stock. The board leased out stock routes to local ratepayers and had secured some environmental grants, he said, but costs exceeded income. Mr Reardon said Braidwood's stock reserves had high environmental value because they had been well managed, but unless government was prepared to cough up more environmental money, "stock reserves look like one of the things that are going to have to go to ease the [financial] pressure on boards".

For the Braidwood board ranger Grant Coe, who has spent 30 years caring for the district's stock routes, the thought of them being given away and their environmental value threatened is "heartbreaking".



The ABC also has a report on this issue - [Long Paddock set to be slashed](#).

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