

READ ABOUT

[Certified Land Management](#)
[The essentials for land certification](#)
[Landholders who get it](#)
[2010 - busy year for ALM Group](#)
[Green marketing](#)
[What next?](#)

CERTIFIED LAND MANAGEMENT

It is ten years since the Roma pastoralist, horticulturalist and community activist Jock Douglas suggested we develop a land management improvement system that enabled recognition and hence further improvement.

It was a simple suggestion and I wonder why we haven't had such a system in place for decades. What we have done is as simple as the suggestion itself.

We have developed and proven a [certified land management](#) (CLM) system that bundles together existing drivers for improving land management.

Yes, we need more and stronger drivers but we have some to start with, including: improved self esteem from recognition, productivity improvements, NRM project support, lower legal and asset risks and, for those prepared and able to negotiate, reduced insurance and financing costs.

The CLM design draws on the ancient parable of a bundle of sticks being stronger than the sum of the strengths of individual sticks.



**CLM is a single system for multiple land uses for multiple benefits,
domestically and internationally**

Importantly, CLM enables new drivers, like payments for environmental services, support for environmental management initiatives and preferred market status for food and fibre and related products.

These markets have developed slowly - more slowly, frankly, than has the market for reports on how it might happen. But it is beginning.

We have the support of our foundation partners, [Elders](#) and the [Queensland Murray-Darling Committee](#). Thanks to [Australian Wool Innovation](#) we have support from the Japanese and Korean textile corporations, Onward Kashiya and Cheil Industries. The [Merino Company](#) provides a price premium for wool from properties with certification. There is mounting evidence that consumers are prepared to favour products with environmental credentials.

But for all this to happen we need innovative landholders adopting a credible certification system. We need landholders to petition their organisations and governments to support it happening.

[Back to top](#)

ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF A CERTIFIED LAND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

We have been able to get as far as we have because we began by identifying what the certified land management system should do.

1. It needs to be credible in both domestic and international markets. Home spun self assessment approaches won't cut it.

2. It needs to cover a range of land uses, many of which are used in combination on the same land parcel. Why would you want a different system for every product, for every industry, for every region? It would be madness.

3. It needs to take an integrated ecological approach to managing our environmental impacts rather than one that deals separately with impacts on water, soil, vegetation, fauna and the atmosphere.

4. It needs to reflect that virtually all of our impacts are mediated through the investments and actions of landholders. One by one, landholders need to be responsible for developing and implementing the environmental plan for their property. If they don't do it nobody will. Hence the system must be capable of delivering benefits that are attractive to landholders.

5. It needs to reflect that 'wishing to do the right thing' is an important motivator and it needs to be bundled together with other motivators. We are dealing with landholders who want to be recognised and rewarded for doing it.

Somewhat irreverently, one might ask of those who are responsible for the individual sticks, for the piecemeal industry-by-industry and regional approaches and for the ecological reductionism, "what is it about this that you don't get?"

[Back to top](#)

LANDHOLDERS WHO GET IT

Clearly there are innovative landholders who 'get it'.

There now are about 150 landholders with CLM across four states managing 750,000 ha, with another 500,000 ha in transition. On average each landholder manages about 8,000 ha with more than 90% managing over 200 ha. Most are involved in broadacre grazing and cropping. Most of the growth in participation has been in the last 3 years, after years of product development and testing.

To put this into context, there is no land management certification system in Australia besides the successful organic movement that would go anywhere near matching this coverage. And even for organics, after two to three decades, there are about 2,200 landholders with organic certification covering some 12 million ha. About 75% of these landholders are involved with horticulture and over 50% have 20 ha or less. There is a need for organics. But there is also a need for a less prescriptive system for landholders who want to improve environmental management and get recognition.

New groups of CLM landholders have been established in SA in the Eden Valley, in Victoria at Hamilton, in NSW at Goulburn and Hay, and in Queensland at Roma and Rockhampton. We are talking with the Olive, Tea Tree and Macadamia associations and with grazing/cropping landholders in Victoria and Queensland. We are working with energy companies with substantial landholdings.



But the chicken-and-egg syndrome applies. There are thousands of other landholders who 'get it' but who are reluctant to adopt the system until there is a stronger alignment of motivators. In particular, these landholders look for support from NRM and stewardship programs and from the market places for environmental outcomes and food and fibre products.

Surely we can have one or more systems that deliver multiple benefits

[Back to top](#)

2010 - A BUSY YEAR

Last year was the busiest yet for the ALM Group, with 23 landholder workshops, 17 landholder information sessions and many discussions with and presentations to industry organisations, governments and potential partners.

Other highlights include beef market investigations in Europe and Asia, participation in a [Global Beef Sustainability Conference](#) in Denver, project support from the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee for CLM landholders, enhancement of our software, *myEMS*, and establishment of a CLM Committee in SA. We produced new guides and manuals for landholders and enhanced our *myEMS* software.

The strength of the design of the CLM system was reaffirmed by: experience on the ground, an extensive review of overseas environmental accreditation and certification systems (available soon), continued critiquing of Australian environmental systems and participation in the [Global Beef Sustainability Conference](#). We identified the need to better monitor and communicate outcomes and to extend the system to encompass animal welfare and OH&S.

We get essential support and encouragement from our foundation partners, [Elders Ltd](#) and the [Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc.](#) We need to broaden and strengthen our partnerships with all levels of government, industry organisations and NGOs. There are differing and compelling reasons for partnerships with various organisations.

**[Elders Ltd](#) and the [Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc.](#) are
our important foundation partners**

In 2010 we had promising talks with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA), the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM), the Sunshine Coast Regional Council (SCRC), the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and the Landcare Network.

Discussions with WWF lead to support for our participation in the [Global Beef Sustainability Conference](#) in Denver in November 2010. This is significant on three counts. First, it acknowledges the contribution being made by ALM Group and its partners. Second, it provides a window into global and to domestic developments across the food and fibre sectors. Third, it could lead to wider adoption of CLM, domestically and internationally.

The FBA, which operates out of Rockhampton, is one of thirteen natural resource management organisations in Queensland. Once the floods pass we will run a pilot trial of the CLM system in the Fitzroy Basin. This is a strategic development as the FBA is a vocal supporter of industry-by-industry best management practice based systems. We need to demonstrate the different roles of and synergies between those systems and CLM.

Work with DERM was initiated following the Queensland Governor's ALM Group breakfast in October 2009. Our software has been significantly strengthened and we look forward to further developing our partnership with them.

Discussions and presentations to the SCRC just north of Brisbane have identified mutual interest in applying CLM and using *myEMS* for landholders in the region, council managed lands in the region and in the council itself. These are early days but the push in council to badge itself as a leading 'green' region can be helped along through adoption of CLM.

These are significant developments especially given the fact that landholder adoption of CLM is constrained by fragmentation between NRM support programs and the lack of links between those programs and national and international markets for food, fibre and other environmental services. We now have a way to redress this situation and the need to do so is a constant message in our many discussions with industry, all levels of government and NGOs.

[Back to top](#)

Green marketing

During 2010 we deepened our understanding of the domestic and international context we

operate in as a result of:

- discussions with food processors and retailers and investigations of the markets for environmentally certified beef in Europe and Asia (funded jointly with two large organisations adopting CLM, an interesting development on its own)
- a commissioned review of environmental accreditation and certification schemes for food and related products in Europe and North America
- detailed critiques of environmental assurance systems in Australia and an associated proposal for a system for accrediting such systems
- a synthesis of information on community attitudes to environmental marketing
- participation in the [Global Conference on Beef Sustainability](#) in Denver
- work with government agencies at the interface between environmental regulation and environment management systems.

Businesses, governments, NGOs and individuals are responding to growing concern about environmental impacts with a particular focus on the impacts of land management practices. Reliance on regulation and micro-managed projects will increasingly be replaced by responses to evolving market-based drivers. These drivers include internal pressures driving productivity (lower waste) and external public and private sector rewards for environmental outcomes. The private motivation of wishing to 'do the right thing' will become more important as community attitudes mature in favour of environmental responsibility.



This presents interesting opportunities and dangers for managers in land-based product chains. There are opportunities to strengthen businesses through responding well to environmental and related considerations and there are dangers from responding badly, for instance in costly and/or less than credible ways. There are advantages in leading with systems that suit and dangers in having competitors or other parts of the product chain impose systems that have low benefit/cost ratios for players back up through the product chain.

Get on the front foot or distant markets might impose more impractical requirements than would domestic legislation

Out of all this we have formulated rules of engagement for green marketing and these will guide us in our future activities. They boil down to the fact that unless Australia takes a stronger leadership role in this area then our landholders will be puppets of international food and fibre product chains. Major operators in these chains are each developing their own environmental related requirements for suppliers many of which will not be attuned to the practicalities of land management in Australia.

[Back to top](#)

What next?

We begin the year thinking of those affected by extreme weather conditions. These events humble us and we are reminded of our need for resilient and adaptable management approaches. There is no one approach, each of us needs to take account of our own operating environments and our own aspirations and capabilities. Nevertheless, we don't need to operate in isolation and the [ALM Group Board](#) is keen for us to strengthen the social benefits flowing from participation in the CLM system.

We need to **extend participation and improve support** for existing members. Conversely, we need to find ways for participating landholders to advocate on behalf of the group. Benefits for participants will grow as our numbers and influence grow.

We need to **establish new business, government and NGO partnerships**. For good reasons primary producers often complain about being price takers but no one gives two hoots. It will only change when landholders take the initiative and differentiate themselves in the market place, for instance as responsible environmental managers. The evidence is that communities and consumers want to help. We need to find ways to enable them to do that.

By July this year we will **finalise our ALM Group certification symbol, logo and code of practice**. Participating landholders and others along product chains and in supporting industry and NRM organisations will have a distinctive symbol to tell the market place and the community that they are responsible environmental managers.

Also by July this year we will have begun to incorporate **animal welfare and occupational health and safety** into the **CLM** system. This will make it easier for landholders to manage these requirements and it will improve the recognition and benefits flowing to participants.

We will improve **planning processes** for new entrants and simplify **review and auditing processes** for ongoing participants. If we have the resources, we will develop a web-based capacity to enable participants to store outcome data and photographs. A stronger **focus on outcomes** will provide a strong point of differentiation from other systems.

Every year each of us responsible to participating landholders for keeping this business going has a birthday. Mine was this month. It is not my 21st. We need to **strengthen** our succession and governance strategies.

For the many who have worked with us and against us over the past decade, thank you. At the end of the current decade I hope more of us will be working together. If that happens I know we will benefit from and be pleased to be associated with an internationally respected movement for responsible land management.

[Back to top](#)

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