

Investing in research and development

Information for researchers

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) is a producer-owned company committed to increasing market access, growing demand and developing a competitive advantage for the Australian red meat and livestock industry, from paddock to plate.

MLA is primarily funded by transaction levies paid by producers on livestock sales, and dollar-for-dollar funds contributed by the Federal Government for investment in research and development (R&D). We also receive contributions from processor and live export bodies, as well as cooperative contributions from individual processors, wholesalers, foodservice operators and retailers.

Working in consultation with industry, MLA develops and delivers a wide range of R&D projects aligned with the Federal Government's national and rural research priorities to create an innovative, sustainable industry.

R&D investment

The framework that guides MLA's R&D portfolio stipulates that R&D invested in by MLA must include systematic experimentation or analysis in any field of science, technology or economics (including the study of the social or environmental consequences of the adoption of new technology) carried out with the object of:

- a. acquiring knowledge for the purpose of obtaining or furthering an objective of the meat and livestock industry, including knowledge that may be of use in improving any aspect of the production, processing, storage, transport, or marketing of meat or livestock, or goods that are derived from them; or
- b. applying knowledge for the purpose referred to above.

Where appropriate, MLA collaborates with government, the industry and other research organisations (including rural R&D corporations) to avoid research duplication and ensure joint approaches to common problems.

MLA invests in R&D relevant to the sheep, cattle or goat sectors of the industry, or a combination of these, to boost the productivity and sustainability of the entire red meat supply chain.

MLA's R&D portfolio covers processing innovation, product quality and integrity, red meat innovation and human nutrition, as well as a significant portion of funding allocated to livestock production R&D.

Livestock production R&D

MLA's substantial portfolio of livestock production R&D projects focuses on both on-farm and feedlot livestock production, as well as the welfare of livestock exported live. Broad areas of research in this portfolio include: pasture management and production in northern and southern Australia; natural resource management; animal health and welfare; feedlots; live export; and strategic science – where relevant basic research is supported, particularly in the field of genomics. The table opposite provides further details for each program area.

MLA's livestock production R&D portfolio is compiled so as to deliver short, medium and long-term outcomes in line with the key drivers of on-farm profitability, outlined as follows.

Consulting with industry

MLA's R&D portfolio is developed with input from levy payers' representatives, including the Cattle Council of Australia, the Sheepmeat Council of Australia, the Australian Lot Feeders' Association and the Goat Industry Council of Australia. In addition, groups such as the Southern Australia Beef Research Council, the Northern Australia Beef Research Council and the Lamb and Sheepmeat Research Advisory Committee provide strategic R&D advice.

The key drivers of on-farm profitability

- Increasing reproductive rates and decreasing mortality rates
- Increasing growth rates
- Maximising the product's value
- Reducing the cost of production
- Increasing the environmental and social sustainability of the whole farm system
- Contributing to demand growth and sustainability by addressing concerns relating to food safety, disease and animal welfare

MLA's current portfolio of livestock production R&D programs and their objectives is outlined in the following table. For further information, call MLA and ask to speak to the program manager for your area of interest.

| PROGRAMS | OBJECTIVES |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Environment – resource management | To undertake research into priority environmental issues for the red meat industry and implement appropriate communication and commercialisation initiatives to support industry adoption of research outcomes. |
| Animal welfare – on-farm | To support productivity, product quality and market access by providing tools and knowledge to improve the wellbeing of Australian livestock and address issues of community concern. |
| Animal welfare – live export | To improve the welfare of livestock during the process of export, from assembly on-farm through to transport overseas, and after arrival in the destination market. |
| Improving productivity | To identify profit drivers by species and region, then focus R&D activities appropriately on herd/flock productivity, improved reproductive performance and reduced losses due to internal parasites (especially in sheep). |
| Adoption and capacity | To communicate and help deliver the tools and information resulting from MLA's R&D to its stakeholders, including livestock producers, the feedlot sector, processors, value adders, retailers and foodservice operators; contribute to the building of innovation capability and human capacity within the industry in collaboration with other RDCs, CRCs, the education sector and industry-based mentors; and accelerate adoption of R&D outcomes at the enterprise level via a variety of innovation transfer/commercialisation activities. |
| Supply chain management | To assist the Australian red meat industry to achieve world leadership in supply chain management by enhancing social, environmental and food safety systems; improving product, quality and consumer responsiveness; increasing through-chain efficiency; and lowering the cost of production. |
| Strategic research and development | To develop basic and emerging technologies to improve the long-term productivity, profitability and sustainability of the red meat industry. |

Already more than 500 individuals, state departments, universities and companies from all sectors of the industry are partnering with MLA's livestock production R&D program.

Project application, assessment and contracting

Who is eligible to apply?

Any organisation or individual can apply if their project fits within MLA's specified R&D program areas and addresses the targeted objectives. Part of the livestock production R&D portfolio is allocated to research adoption deliverers (EDGE*network*), producer research support and post-graduate students.

What types of projects qualify?

Eligible project proposals addressing target areas may cover a range of R&D and research adoption development stages including: basic research, applied research, and communication, extension and demonstration of research findings. Projects may arise out of ideas from the proposing company, or MLA may seek expressions of interest to advance the development of innovations arising from our R&D programs.

How to apply?

Those wishing to apply may submit a project outline using the **preliminary project application form** available from MLA's website at www.mla.com.au (go to "Research & Development" and select "funding opportunities").

If the concept is well advanced, a **full project application form** should be completed, which is available from the same page. Alternatively you can email an application form request to applications@mla.com.au

What is the application evaluation process?

Applications are peer reviewed and also go through a detailed financial analysis to quantify the potential returns from the financial investment provided by MLA and partners. In an effort to achieve broader relevance of R&D output, MLA on many occasions looks to aggregate related projects or develop a program structure of activities, rather than simply funding discrete research projects.

The evaluation process is based on the following criteria:

Further consultation may be undertaken with a range of industry based research and development advisory committees.

- proposed method
- links with industry strategy
- technical feasibility and risk assessment
- industry benefit
- track record of investigator
- industry groups likely to benefit
- communication/delivery/extension strategy
- quoted price of project

In straightforward cases, the approval process normally takes 6–10 weeks. See figure 1 for a breakdown of the process timeline.




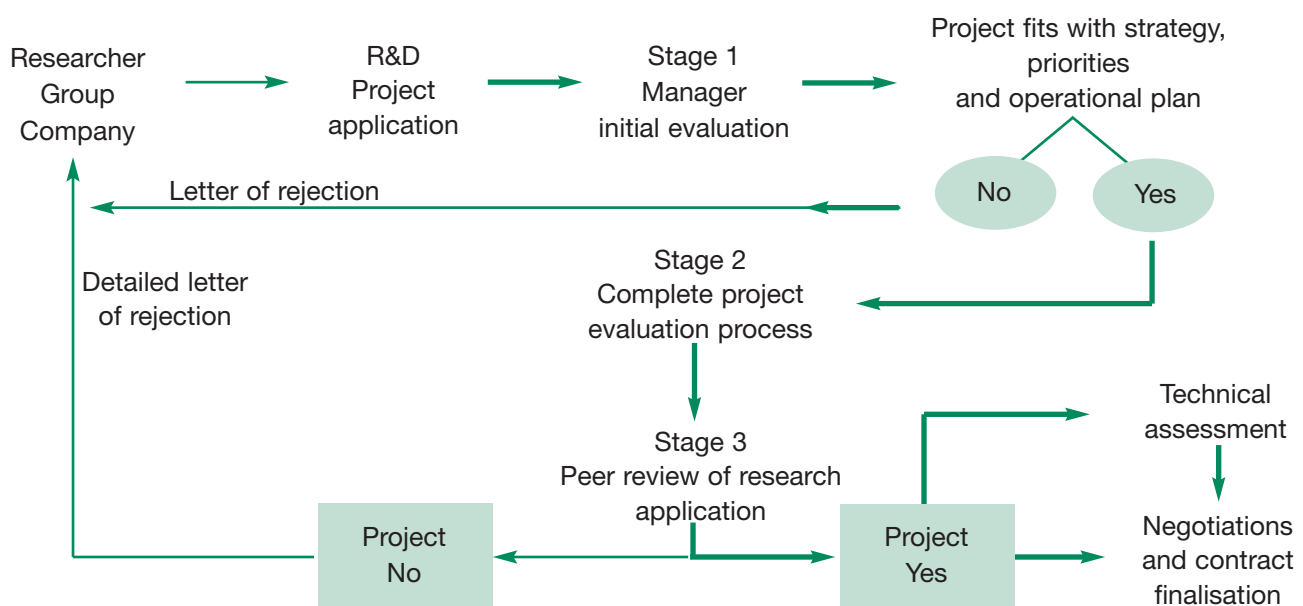
Figure 1: Application evaluation process timeline

| Time (weeks) | Process |
|--------------|---|
| 2–3 | review of the initial proposal or expression of interest |
| 3–4 | researcher prepares formal application with budget and milestone development in consultation with MLA |
| 2–8 | evaluation of the project, drafting the contract, legal review and negotiation of project details |
| 1–2 | formal MLA internal approval and subsequent contract execution |

This process timeline is likely to be extended if:

- the project concept is not yet well developed;
- external review is required;
- contractual negotiations are complex; or
- multi-party arrangements are involved.

The process is outlined in the figure below.



A project goes through the following stages to be included in MLA's livestock production R&D portfolio:

Initial contact

- Initial contact made between MLA and applicant
- Overview of program mechanism provided to applicant
- Initial project concept provided to MLA by applicant
- Initial project concept reviewed by MLA for suitability for inclusion in MLA R&D program
- Project concept discussed between MLA and applicant

Project development

- Confidentiality agreement entered into by MLA and applicant, if required
- Full project application form completed by applicant
- MLA assists applicant with proposal details
- Key issues/questions resolved between MLA and applicant
- Generic MLA contract templates provided to the applicant

Project submission

- Project assessed by MLA including industry advisory groups where relevant
- Further information/clarification of proposal by MLA requested from the applicant if required
- Project approved in principle or rejected

Project approval

- Referred to key personnel within MLA for assessment and approval as required

Contracting

- Details of the contract and project agreed and finalised between MLA and applicant

Project commences

- Contracts signed by all parties
- Work on project commenced; work must not commence until a contract has been signed

Once the application is approved, what is the contracting process?

If the R&D project is approved, a standard research contract is developed and sent to the project leader or administration contact.

All projects funded by MLA will be governed by MLA's standard contractual arrangements. Work must not commence on a project until a contract has been signed.

What are some fundamental MLA terms to consider prior to submitting an application?

There are some key terms in MLA's contracts that are fundamental to MLA's processes and should be considered before submitting an application.

These include:

Intellectual property

MLA must ensure that any intellectual property (IP) benefits from an MLA-funded project are returned to its stakeholders.

Warranties

The researcher is required to give certain warranties in relation to MLA's use of IP and the conduct of the project.

Indemnities

MLA requires an indemnity from the researcher that protects it against potential liability.

Subcontracting

If a right to subcontract is granted to a researcher, the terms of the subcontract should be substantially similar to those of the head contract. In particular, subcontracts should include an assignment of IP and confidentiality terms reflecting the arrangements in the research contract.

Schedule

The project details will be contained in the schedule that forms part of the contract. The schedule will outline the description of the project, key objectives, IP ownership, milestones and cash flow. Guidelines for developing the schedule, which forms part of the legal agreement, are included in the instructions section of the application form.

Work in progress

How is the project monitored?

An important area of the research contract is the number and timing of project milestones. A satisfactorily completed milestone, evaluated by one of the MLA managers or an external reviewer, is the basis for a payment being made to the researcher.

Timely provision of milestones is required in the MLA format (a template is available from the relevant MLA manager). It is very important that proposed milestones for any project are linked to critical decision points, and an invoice from the researcher is required to enable payment. It is recommended that a tax invoice accompanies the milestone report.

If milestones are not being achieved, or if there are delays, personal contact with the relevant manager is very important. Indeed, personal contact with the relevant MLA manager is strongly encouraged during the implementation of the project to avoid development of issues with contracted obligations.

The relationship between the principal investigator of a research project and the relevant manager in MLA is very important to the success of the project and ensuring the relevance of the research outcomes for the red meat industry. All research projects have unforeseen events and, if there are problems with the progress of the project, it is important to contact the relevant MLA manager.

Communicating progress and outcomes of research

Communication briefs on the project are described in all contracts. These are usually infrequent 'user friendly' updates that can be used for broader communication. Similarly, all research projects are required to produce a final report, which should be written in a style that is appropriate to MLA's audience, ranging from producers to researchers. MLA provides a template for the production of the final report.

Further information

For further information about MLA's livestock production R&D go to our website or contact:

Manager, Research Administration & Operations,

Ph: 02 9463 9213

Fax: 02 9463 9100

Email: applications@mla.com.au

For further information about MLA's off-farm R&D portfolio, including processing innovation, product quality and integrity, red meat innovation and human nutrition, contact MLA via the details below.



Level 1, 165 Walker Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
Ph: 02 9463 9333
Fax: 02 9463 9393
www.mla.com.au

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ABN 39 081 678 364