



# final report

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## Pasture Updates NSW 2013-2015

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## Executive Summary

The Grassland Society of NSW Inc. is in a unique position to deliver on the pasture updates program. The society has approximately 400 members across NSW and the majority of the memberships are producers. The society attracts membership from all sectors of agriculture because it operates above industry politics and prides itself on disseminating good, scientifically based, pasture information. This diverse membership means we have an existing and ongoing relationship with commercial agriculture.

As a society, we feel the need to continue the dissemination of pasture based information, particularly in light of the decline in other advisory services. There will be an increasing need for our society to continue this work partnering with NSW Department of Primary Industries, Local Land Services and Regional Producer Networks.

The Grassland Society of NSW completed 15 pasture updates across NSW with a total of 831 participants who were both producers and advisors. The advisors and resellers who attend these updates are a vital link to a much wider audience.

The updates provided an opportunity to hear the latest research being conducted by universities and private institutes, state and commonwealth agencies and private advisors, all reinforcing important messages in managing the feedbase. Producers were also able to witness the wide range of research that is funded by MLA and co investors such as AWI. The updates all featured formal presentations and farm walks to see and hear how producers were implementing research.

Evaluations were completed by participants to provide feedback on the content and relevance for the pasture update participants. The evaluations asked participants to rate each speaker's topics on content and relevance to their business, using a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very good. Content and relevance for speakers' topics across all updates on average, was 4 and above, which reflects the ability of the local organising committee to organise an update that has relevant regional information.

It is difficult to achieve a good return of evaluations and remains a challenge to the society and the local organising committee. It appears that as the participation numbers increase, the percentage of returns decrease.

The evaluations completed across the 15 updates strongly supported the pasture update format of a split between formal presentations and presentations in the field. Across all updates they were rated above 80% as very good to excellent days.

The evaluations returned indicated a large commitment to a change in the business as a direct result of attending the pasture update.

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# **1 Background**

The delivery of pasture technical information and engagement of industry in pasture related issues was identified as ad hoc and fragmented both locally and nationally. Developing a series of Pasture Updates was seen as a way to coordinate the delivery of timely, scientifically based, information and highlight MLA's investment in pasture research.

Regionally based pasture forums were also seen as a more effective way to reach a wider audience and deliver pasture technologies with a regional focus.

## **2 Projective objectives**

### **2.1 Coordinate**

The development and implementation of 5 technical pasture updates per annum in NSW. Locations are to be varied across the State providing broad coverage enabling access by as many producers as possible.

### **2.2 250 producers**

To have participated at the Pasture Updates each year (goal over 3 years of 750 producers).

### **2.3 Present MLA research**

Other relevant research output and local practises that are scientifically based, at each of the Updates related to increasing pasture production and converting pasture into product. Information presented also supports NRM objectives

### **2.4 Partner**

With regional producer networks and other organisations to support the development and delivery of the updates.

### **2.5 Annual reporting**

Of monitoring and evaluation results that demonstrate shifts in knowledge, skills and confidence and where appropriate, practice change and participant's reflections on direction and research needs around the topics presented

## **3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Pasture Updates**

#### **3.1.1 Coordination**

State coordination was provided by The Grassland Society of NSW Inc. To deliver the updates we partnered with NSW Department of Primary Industries, Central West Catchment Management Authority, Border Rivers Gwydir Catchment Management Authority, Upper Gwydir Landcare Association, Hunter Valley Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority, North Coast TAFE, Central West and Central Tablelands Local Land Services, Riverina Local Land Services, Southern Riverina Sheep Breeders, Hunter Local Land Services, North West Local Land Services, Monaro Farming Systems, South East Local

Land Services and Glen Innes Natural Resources Advisory Committee. A number of private agronomists also assisted.

### 3.1.2 Topics, agenda, speakers

The local committee was charged with developing the program and speakers. The program was approved by MLA. Travel costs and accommodation were up to the local committee.

### 3.1.3 Advertising

There was a combination of advertising. Locally it was undertaken by the organising committee and in some instances the field day flier was mailed out. Importantly the flier was added to The Grassland Society Inc. and MLA's websites. Extensive email lists were also utilised by our networks.

### 3.1.4 Venues and field trips

The local committee were responsible for organising the venues, buses and any meals. The invoices were sent to the Grassland Secretary for payment.

### 3.1.5 Evaluation and reporting

The evaluation forms were sent through to the local committee and returned collated, so the milestone report could be written for MLA.

## 4 Results

The location and information for each of the fifteen pasture updates follows. The updates attracted both producers and advisers. Evaluations were completed at each update and the speaker's topic was rated on content and relevance using a score of 1 to 5 with 5 being excellent. Scores above 3 were considered satisfactory in meeting expectations.

### 4.1 Orange

The first of our updates was held at Orange Agricultural Institute, 4 February 2013. The theme was manipulating pastures for a targeted outcome. There were 50 participants. The evaluations overall were 4.4 for content and 4.5 for relevance to the business.

### 4.2 Trangie

The theme for this update, 12 September 2013 was integrating perennial pastures and dual forage species into the feedbase. Formal presentations were made at the Trangie Agricultural Institute. This update attracted 30 participants. The evaluations overall were 4.2 for content and 4.1 for relevance to the business.

### 4.3 Bingara

The RSL Club in Bingara was the venue for formal presentations, 8 November 2013. The theme was "Better pastures for a variable climate" which attracted 47 participants. The field tour looked at the MLA funded trial 'Increase production and feed quality in subtropical grass based pastures'. The evaluations overall were 4.1 for content and 4.3 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.4 Taree**

Club Taree was the venue for formal presentations. The theme followed on from The Grassland Societies Conference in 2009, “the grass is still greener”. The day attracted 70 participants. The evaluations overall were 3.6 for content and 3.9 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.5 Bathurst**

This update was held 29 May 2014 at the Bathurst Panthers Club. The day attracted 62 participants. The focus of this included pasture species and management. The field tour was held at the MLA PVTN site. The evaluations overall were 3.9 for content and 3.9 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.6 Eurongilly**

Eurongilly hall was the venue for the update. The theme for this update was “Mixed farming” and attracted 27 participants. The CRC Evercrop site featured in the field tour. The evaluations overall were 4.4 for content and 4.3 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.7 Burrumbuttock**

The theme of this day was “Pasture, livestock and production”. The venue was the Burrumbuttock hall, 28 August 2014 and attracted 32 participants. The evaluations overall were 4.3 for content and 4.2 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.8 Tocal**

Tocal College was chosen for the pasture update 16 October 2014. There were 60 participants in attendance. The program included reports on many smaller projects in the area that the wider audience would not normally hear about. The evaluations overall were 4.0 for content and 3.8 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.9 Narrabri**

This update attracted 35 participants and the theme was “The impact of climate, the variability and managing around drought”. This was a follow on from information presented at The Grassland Society of NSW Inc. annual conference at Inverell 2014. The Narrabri golf club was the venue. The evaluations overall were 3.9 for content and 3.9 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.10 Tamworth**

The Tamworth update attracted 43 participants to the Tamworth Agricultural Institute. The themes followed on from Narrabri, but included alternative fertilisers. The evaluations overall were 3.9 for content and 3.9 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.11 Nimmitabel**

Held in the Nimmitabel hall this update attracted 60 participants 7 May 2015. A key focus of this update was soil fertility. The evaluations overall were 4.0 for content and 3.8 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.12 Bomaderry**

The Bomaderry Bowling Club, 8 May 2015, was the venue for the update which attracted 85 participants. The theme was “Pasture, livestock and production”. The evaluations overall were 4.3 for content and 4.1 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.13 Glen Innes**

This update was held 13 May 2015 at the Glen Innes Agricultural Institute. The day attracted 80 participants. This day included getting inputs right for pasture and covered results from alternative fertiliser trials. The average session evaluation was 4.3.

#### **4.14 Collerreina**

The Collerreina hall, 29 July 2015, was the venue for the update which attracted 50 participants. The day focused on pastures in cropping systems and livestock health. The evaluations overall were 4.4 for content and 4.5 for relevance to the business.

#### **4.15 Mandurama**

The last of our updates was held 15 September 2015 and attracted 100 participants. It was held on the property “Chesney” with a key focus on resilience. The evaluations overall were 4.1 for content and 4.3 for relevance to the business.

### **5 Discussion**

#### **5.1 Coordinate**

The development and implementation of 5 technical pasture updates per annum in NSW.

This was achieved, with a total of 15 pasture updates. Locations are to be varied across the State providing broad coverage enabling access by as many producers as possible. The 15 updates were held at fifteen different locations across the state. In some cropping areas the comment was made by producers that they never have any field days held with a pasture focus.

#### **5.2 250 producers**

To have participated at the Pasture Updates each year (goal over 3 years of 750 producers).

In 2013 there were 259 participants, 2014 participants totalled 197 and 2015 there were 375. Over the 3 years total participation was 831.

#### **5.3 Present MLA research**

Other relevant research output and local practises that are scientifically based, at each of the Updates related to increasing pasture production and converting pasture into product. Information presented also supports NRM objectives.

Presentations on the results of MLA funded research dominated the 15 updates. On farm adoption of technologies also featured in the field tours. MLA publications were also distributed, where relevant.



## **5.4 Partner**

With regional producer networks and other organisations to support the development and delivery of the updates.

The Grassland Society of NSW Inc. partnered with 15 different agencies or groups. These partnerships ensured we had good email coverage across the producer network.

## **5.5 Annual reporting**

Of monitoring and evaluation results that demonstrate shifts in knowledge, skills and confidence and where appropriate, practice change and participant's reflections on direction and research needs around the topics presented.

The milestone reports have all been submitted with collated evaluations. The evaluations can only report on the intended changes producers were going to make as a result of the pasture update they attended.

# **6 Conclusions/recommendations**

## **6.1 Conclusions**

The pasture updates provided an opportunity for a coordinated approach to the extension of both new and old research outcomes. The format of delivery of the pasture updates formal presentations and field trips were well received by participants. The field trips provided information on how producers had adopted and adapted the technologies to their own situation. Most participants who completed evaluations (80-100%) indicated they would make changes as a result of the pasture update they attended.

The decline in public extension on pastures is well recognised, if good practise and new science based technologies are going to be promoted for pastures then pasture updates, using our network of partners, is seen as an important tool for MLA.

### **6.1.1 Recommendations**

The pasture updates have been successful in providing coordinated approach to the delivery of scientifically supported information on pastures and we recommend the pasture update series be continued.