

final report

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Abstract

A report on a national survey of producers on their on-farm environmental practices is expected in August/September 2010. This report will allow MLA and its stakeholders to gauge its performance against its performance indicators for environmental practice change on farm. In addition, in close cooperation with industry and AUS-MEAT, an optional environmental stewardship module as part of AgriSure will be further developed and tested by producers during the latter half of 2010.

Project objectives

The **first objective** of this project is to coordinate a **national survey** of red meat producers on their on-farm environmental practices, which will address the following issues:

- the measurement of environmental practice change against targets set in current MLA strategic and operational plans.
- help MLA to formulate future strategies and plans to achieve environmental practice adoption targets, which are realistic and timely.
- assist producers to be more aware of important environmental risks, which may affect their management of the on-farm natural resource base.
- demonstrate to all stakeholders including the Commonwealth government that the adoption of environmental practice change is being monitored so as to measure a continual improvement in adoption rates

The **second objective** of this project is to assist MLA where necessary in the development of an optional **environmental management module** as part of AgriSure (Livestock Production Assurance).

Success in achieving milestone

The criteria of this second and final milestone report are to report on coordination of the completed survey.

First objective – national survey of on-farm environmental practices

As reported in the Milestone 2 report, with the formation of a small project steering group, a project terms of reference was finalised. Also previously reported was the mapping of a framework for the survey which set out Signpost/MLA components, Signpost indicators and Signpost/MLA management practices. The four principal Signpost/MLA components are water, soil, biodiversity and atmosphere. The mapped management practices include seven practices determined by the Centre for International Economics (CIE) for which MLA has historical data and should continue to be surveyed into the future.

A list of survey questions which links to this framework was finalised with the help of the project steering group. In December 2009, a terms of reference for the survey was circulated to nine qualified organisations and expressions of interest to complete the survey were obtained from eight of these organisations. Based on value for money and capability, Solutions Research and Marketing was contracted to undertake the survey.

At about this time, Andrew Freeman was appointed as the Project Manager – Environmental Systems. Andrew took on the management and coordination of this survey from this point forward. The consultant has continued to provide support and advice where required.

The completion of the survey is running behind schedule; however the telephone survey should be complete by 30 June with a draft final report together with the raw data expected during late July.

Second objective – development of environmental module within AgriSure

The Cattle Council of Australia has requested MLA pilot an environmental stewardship module within LPA, now called AgriSure. A draft module for both southern and northern Australia has been developed over recent years and is continuing to be refined. This is occurring through close consultation with small producer groups in southern and northern Australia.

Since December 2009, Andrew Freeman has taken on the role to manage and coordinate the development of the environmental module.

Planning is taking place with AgriSure and AUS-MEAT staff on a number of issues including:

- The revised AgriSure standard
- Refinement of the environment module
- Training of auditors
- Piloting of the module.

Wherever possible, the AgriSure module will align with existing and proposed environmental regulations, self-assessment accreditation and best management practice codes. This is currently particularly important in Queensland, where the new reef regulatory requirements and the Delbessie land management requirements for leasehold land have recently been introduced. In addition, DEEDI and the Fitzroy

Basin Association are developing a grazing best practice manual for Central Queensland.

To date, a mock audit has occurred on one property in southern Australia. The piloting of the module will occur during 2010-2011 following a workshop to further refine the module and plan its rollout.

Overall progress of the project

First objective – national survey of on-farm environmental practices

The telephone survey should be completed by the end of June 2010 after which Solutions Research and Marketing will produce a draft, final report. A final report taking into account comments from the project steering group is not expected until August/September.

Second objective – development of environmental module within AgriSure

Depending on the extent of industry cooperation to pilot the module in southern and northern Australia, a workable environmental module should be possible early in 2011.

A consortium of environmental groups including WWF, Bush Heritage Australia and Nature Conservancy Australia has previously expressed an interest in working with MLA on the development of the environmental accreditation. At some stage, if industry is agreeable, there may be scope to collaborate on minimum standards of practice or tiers of practice and possibly the labelling of livestock or red meat.

Recommendations

First objective – national survey of on-farm environmental practices

Aim to provide comprehensive and timely feedback to Solutions on their draft, final report so that a final report can be made available to key MLA staff and peak councils as soon as possible.

Second objective – development of environmental module within AgriSure

A workshop involving industry players and AUS-MEAT is being planned to further fine-tune the module before it is piloted in both southern and northern Australia. At this point in time, the element dealing with climate change and energy is listed as voluntary due to industry policy and a lack of information on what constitutes best practice pertaining to this element. Given the perception by the community that red meat is a significant contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, it would appear prudent to work towards making this element in the module, mandatory.