

On farm

An Evaluation of the SGS Regional Producer Network from the perspective of the Chairs of Regional Committees

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1. THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The power of this program is that it is a collaborative program working WITH people in the grazing community. This means strategies and actions have to be arrived at through a designing process which gives participants ownership of the problems and solutions.

Overall this evaluation shows the development of an outstanding extension program in a collaborative partnership between the producers, Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) and the other partners. The program has brought together a group of producers of high calibre who are enthusiastic about grazing management systems and their sustainability. They have designed and developed a program that is relevant to producers because as self directed learners they have determined what is important to them in their individual regions and localities. These processes have given them strong ownership of the Regional Producer Network and high levels of commitment to it. The program is reaching across the grazing community and starting to effect meaningful change in an industry traditionally conservative.

The key success factors for the Regional Producer Network are:

1. That this is a **collaborative partnership** in which producers' knowledge is acknowledged and validated
2. It is producer driven and producers have **strong ownership** because of good processes used
3. **Producers were involved from the outset** to design the program and to address their needs and ensure relevance
4. The formation process attracted people:
 - who were **enthusiastic** about grazing management systems and their sustainability
 - who represented the range of localities and grazing systems
5. The program is based on **experiential group learning principles** based around **paddock sized demonstrations** in local regions
6. Regional committees have **paid facilitators** to provide executive support and to facilitate the group learning process
7. The program is supported by a **management team committed to the collaborative process**
8. It is building a **national knowledge sharing system** that is increasing the knowledge pool for the grazing industry and is minimising reinventing the wheel.

Changing cultures is a long term process and to do this will take a strong commitment and leadership by the industry and MLA and its collaborating partners. They will need to continue to evolve the Sustainable Grazing Systems (SGS) program and its processes to further develop the grazing community as a learning community where change, learning and knowledge generation are cultural norms.

The evaluation shows a considerably commonality in most areas between what the management team set out to achieve and what the ex-chairs of the Regional Producer Network see that the program has achieved so far.

It shows great alignment and success in achieving ownership and enthusiasm by producers of the regional network; and in creating an integrated effective extension program that is developing knowledge and skills to improve grazing management in the high rainfall zone.

A Major Improvement

A common theme in this evaluation was for **more connection** between the parts - the sub-programs of extension and research, the National Steering Group and MLA, the regions and the national research sites. This would give an improved context for the overall program and the people who make it up. Improved connectedness will come from improving networks, relationships; and improve knowledge sharing within the overall SGS program.

A good solution to this problem would be to combine annual meetings and forums (eg Annual Producer Forum) to a common time and place with plenary sessions and functions, and separate workshops for individual group business. **An Annual SGS FORUM**. This will be a major improver of knowledge generation, synergy and enthusiasm and assist in overcoming some weaknesses of the program. It should be cost neutral as these meetings are now held separately and convergence may improve sponsorship potential.

We strongly recommend that the SGS management, Regional Producer Network and National Steering Group considers instituting an Annual SGS FORUM.

A Good Start

MLA has shown courage and commitment by taking the risk and funding this innovative and inclusive national extension program. Chairs are concerned about the threat of cessation of the funding after July 2001 and this is potentially inhibiting. MLA board and council members could add value to the program, and gain knowledge and kudos for their industry structures by publicly and personally acknowledging they are committed to supporting effective change with the levy paying producers; and acknowledging the producers efforts in building and designing this program with MLA and its funding partners. Producers can use their political power as levy payers to ensure that their voices are heard in supporting the value they see in their program and give leadership to achieve greater penetration.

Collaboration and Ownership

This program validates modern extension theory about the value of professionals working with producers in a collaborative partnership and sharing each others knowledge and experience in processes that are well designed and involve the producers in meaningful ways. It is very apparent that when these processes are short circuited and the historical top down approach is reverted to it has caused major conflict and is not productive.

Facilitators

Facilitators are a key factor in the program and are highly valued by their committees. They are the glue for committees and are the networks nodes which have a key role in the smooth running of the network, including knowledge and information sharing.

Culture

The independent nature of the grazing community was mentioned by some chairs as a historical barrier to change and sharing of knowledge. Management believes that as the producers designed the Regional Producer Network then this has taken account of the grazing communities cultures. It is better to have conscious knowledge of the culture you are trying to change; and therefore we believe that there would be value in commissioning social research to understand this aspect better.

Extension, research and knowledge sharing

Although both producers and SGS management want the research and extension sub programs more closely connected, this hasn't really happened yet. In fact these sub programs needed to be developed separately within the overall program and it is now time to close the gap.

The evidence is that the research program is very successful. The Regional Producer Network is becoming an excellent extension program which can effect change. Together they can assist rapid change and show new ways of R&D&E. Producers see the potential to improve the knowledge sharing across the whole network. Prograzier and the National Farm Walk are examples of this already happening. The challenge is to further this exchange within the program - especially new research knowledge.

Renewal and resilience of Regional Producer Network committees

There was considerable comment on producer "burn out" and the limits of voluntarism for Regional Producer Network committee members. At this stage it appeared that their sense of achievement from creating the network and sites and the rewards from working in a dedicated team, and improving their own personal development and leadership skills were enough. To overcome these issues the Network needs to ensure adequate unpaid rewards for lost time and commitment and a process of renewal on committees to ensure new blood, ideas and enthusiasm are added to the team.

Administration

The level of funding of the individual committees is not inhibiting the effectiveness of the committees activities. The incorporation of the committees and their autonomous financial arrangements means that they can accrue funds and this is a strength of the program.

Accountability of the producer network is something that chairs and management are in agreement about. However there is a strong difference in the amount of paperwork that is **perceived** to be necessary by the partners to achieve this. SGS management believes that its requirements are minimal and they do not appear excessive. It is important that the partners **address this difference in perceptions** and come to a common view.

Is this model repeatable?

The RPN model validates modern theories of good extension and the concept of working **with** stakeholders in collaborative partnerships. It is not a recipe and is only repeatable if the same principles are designed into the next program using processes involving the end users, from the beginning, in learning and designing the improvements envisioned.

1.1 Challenges

These challenges and strategies are given in the context that this is a collaborative program and they are our insights and thoughts for the collaborating partners to use as input to their processes to improve their program.

The Overall Challenge For All Collaborating Partners:

To build on what has been achieved and continue to develop the full potential of the Regional Producer Network

To accept responsibility as equal partners for building the necessary relationships and trust and work together in a spirit of cooperation and respect for each other that enhances the program for their mutual benefit.

To develop better ways to improve the dialogue and learning between all of the sub systems, especially research groups, producers and the National Steering Group.

To do this each of the collaborating partners has key areas where they need to take leadership whilst still collaborating with each other to continue the evolution that will ensure a continuing dynamic program to meet industry needs into the future.

Regional Producer Network Challenges

To give leadership and work with the collaborating partners ensuring producer input in determining the design of the program needed after July 2001 to take it forward to meet the challenges of the next millennium and achieve a critical mass of producers farming sustainably and profitably.

To ensure renewal processes for the producer network committees so they continue to generate the necessary enthusiasm and energy voluntarily.

To work with researchers to assist to develop "best bet" management scenarios and to trial and demonstrate these at the regional demonstration sites and share the knowledge with the wider grazing community.

MLA And Funding Partners Challenge

The challenge for MLA and the funding partners is to continue to show long term commitment and leadership to enable the program to develop its full potential

Facilitators challenge

To accept the key role they all play in the success of the program and to maximise the degree of cooperation and sharing of knowledge across the network for the benefit and synergy of the whole network.

National Steering Group Challenge

To institute the planning processes to develop the post 2001 plan and to ensure Regional Producer Network and producer input, ownership and validation of this plan.

SGS Management Team Challenge

To continue to develop good process and design the learning experiences within the program to ensure that it continues to be at the cutting edge of extension and rural development practice.

To design processes to enable the groups to work together in a cost effective way that will enable the strengthening of relationships, networks and an increase in knowledge generation by the integration of best bet scenarios into the Regional Producer Network and their regional sites.

To get agreement between SGS and the Regional Producer Network committees on an acceptable level of accountability and monitoring of the program.

To know and understand the cultural barriers that inhibit achieving a critical mass of producers changing to sustainable grazing systems.

Researchers Challenge

The challenge is to interact with producers to develop 'best bet' management scenarios that can be tested at regional sites using their latest knowledge.

Strategies

Strategies these also are not necessarily a strategy for only one group - they may apply to different groups as this is a collaborative partnership but the responsibility is focused on one group.

Strategies

- *That SGS management, the Regional Producer Network and National Steering Group considers instituting an Annual SGS FORUM.*
- *MLA and funding partners commit to in principle funding for the next 3-5 year RPN program post July 2001*
- *MLA and funding partners continue to display and promote public leadership, ownership and support for the program.*
- *Planning processes need to be commenced to ensure continuity of the program.*
- *Develop a program goal that shows more vision and leadership and is not inhibiting to peoples' perceptions eg To achieve a critical mass of producers farming sustainably and profitably in an industry where learning new ways is the cultural norm by 2005.*
- *SGS management, using an outside facilitator, runs a facilitated workshop at the annual producer forum for regional facilitators and the national facilitator, to deal with differences such as bureaucracy, and to develop strong common goals for their program roles.*
- *SGS management runs a session or day within the annual FORUM for upgrading facilitators skills in a designated area. eg communication, community development, monitoring and evaluation.*
- *SGS management considers commissioning social research for a better understanding of the grazing community culture and what are its underlying beliefs and values*
- *Regional Producer Network committees should consider appointing a committee member (not the chair or designated chair) whose portfolio is research and this representative attends relevant research meetings. (The SGS FORUM makes this easier and maybe cheaper).*
- *Include Facilitators in the research process so they have commitment and knowledge of the research program. (SGS FORUM again facilitates this)*
- *The program initiating a study trip for incoming chairs, either across the producer network or to New Zealand, to build team spirit and enthusiasm.*
- *Regional Producer Network committees consciously endeavour to attract more women onto their committees when seeking new members*
- *SGS management put in place a process to assist regional committees to address what their human resource and leadership requirements will be in the future and how these could be addressed.*
- *MLA seriously consider putting in place an industry wide leadership program for women to increase the meat industries leadership capacity*
- *RPN committees and SGS work to ensure inclusion of new members and renewal of the strong team spirit by producer trips to other regions or national research sites*
- *To workshop accountability and monitoring within the annual producer forum to come to a shared understanding of what each partner needs and how this can be best done.*

2. OUTSTANDING FEATURES OF THE REGIONAL PRODUCER NETWORK

The program that the MLA and its collaborative partners have initiated is an excellent example of a how to set up a national industry extension program. It has done this in a relatively short time when compared to industries which have taken decades to evolve such a system. They deserve to be congratulated for taking this initiative to set up this innovative program at a relatively moderate funding cost.

2.1 *What stands out about this program?*

- A strong, resilient **producer owned national and regional network**, formed through a painful process, is, starting to address producers' questions and problems in ways that are relevant to them in their locality.
- This network is impacting on **improving grazing systems** with producers changing from set stocking of pastures. I am told this has often been unchanged for generations.
- Producers are seeing the power of **group learning processes**. They are learning through sharing knowledge and experiences that they can farm differently in sustainable ways, environmentally and economically.
- This program is generating enormous **energy and enthusiasm** as producers knowledge and experience is validated as being as important as the researchers and other experts.
- Producers, together with SGS management, are creating a very powerful **learning system** for the grazing industry in the high rainfall zone of temperate Australia. This system has enormous potential.
- The experience of producers in building and running this network is developing a wide range of **leadership skills** amongst the committee members
- This program has tapped into a range of highly qualified people who are committed to sustainable grazing systems

2.2 *Critical Points*

It is worth noting that there are several critical points in the overall process of the formation and evolution of the Regional Producer Network committees. These are points that stand out as events that were significant in its development.

These were the:

2.2.1 New Zealand Study Tour

This initial event was critical because it brought together ten producers, all unknown to each other, taking them outside their normal environment, welding them into a team, then giving them the key task of designing a program that would be relevant to their fellow producers. This provided the basic framework for the producer network with the Producer Planning Group finalising the business plan on their return to Australia after extensive investigation of most other extension models in use.

Process for NZ tour and regional business plans →
Responsibility & valuing of producers knowledge
→ ownership

2.2.2 Business planning for the Regional Producer Network

Here again the task of being given a fairly blank sheet and asked to design a business plan for how to do extension in their region was taking producers into unknown territory. Most had little knowledge and experience to tackle this task in this context. The process caused enormous angst and frustration and did cause some producers to resign from committees. It did give them **ownership** and an underlying strength. This process will always cause anxiety and a period of disorientation that people have to pass through. Marilyn Taylor's¹ research has defined this disorientation as four phases and transition points that people, even people who are experienced professionals, with a sound understanding of the learning process, will go through in a self directed learning experience.

A clay pot sitting in the sun will always be a clay pot.
It has to go through the white heat of the furnace to become porcelain

This process gave each region a clear focus and direction for their region and identified the local issues to address.

The business planning process, together with the WIG's course (the last three committees didn't do WIG's) developed the committees into teams with shared understandings and committed goals.

2.2.3 First sites

The setting up of the first demonstration sites was important as the committees at last felt and could see they were doing something. To them, this was their real purpose and this was the first concrete evidence and pay-off for their pain and frustration.

Achievement → *Can do it.*

2.2.4 Second Albury Annual National forum

This was a clear example of management not reading signs and Regional Producer Network deciding that they will not be dictated to. It provided a opportunity for the producers network as a whole to

Tuckman's Group Model
Forming, Storming,
Norming, Performing, and
Mourning

¹ Marilyn Taylor, *Self-Directed Learning: More than Meets the Observers Eye*; Concordia University, Montreal.

assert itself, and make a stand. The management team sees this point as a critical point in the relationship and of the Network coming of age. It fits the group model of the storming before performing. This years annual forum was run by a local regional committee.

2.3 Key Success Factors

The key success factors for the Regional Producer Network are:

1. That this is a **collaborative partnership** in which producers knowledge is acknowledged and validated.
2. It is producer driven and producers have **strong ownership** because of good processes used
3. **Producers were involved from the outset** to design the program and to address their needs and insure relevance
4. The formation process attracted people:
 - who were **enthusiastic** about grazing management systems and their sustainability
 - who represented the range of localities and grazing systems
5. The program is based on **experiential group learning principles** based around **paddock sized demonstrations** in local regions
6. Regional committees have **paid facilitators** to provide executive support and to facilitate the group learning process
7. The program is supported by a **management team committed to the collaborative process**
8. It is building a **national knowledge sharing system** that is increasing the knowledge pool for the grazing industry and is reinventing the wheel.

2.4 The SGS Program

The SGS program can be seen as a complex human activity system with a series of sub systems within. The sub systems are the:

- National Research Sites
- Regional Producer Network committees
- National Steering Group
- MLA and collaborating funding bodies
- SGS Management Team

Each of these sub systems is a learning and knowledge generation system. The National Research Sites² and the Regional Producer Network sub systems are working well but the synergy of the program will be improved if they are more closely linked.

The challenge is to improve the interaction, communication, learning and knowledge generation between the sub systems to maximise the overall learning that can take place. This will increase the size of the knowledge pool, and the rate of participation.

By interconnecting the sub-systems better into the overall system then the rate of positive change will improve because there is increased potential to build the learning from a wider knowledge base. For example by incorporating researchers knowledge with farmers practical knowledge then we would expect to get greater understanding from both groups or sub-systems.

This will give improved outcomes for regional catchments and the grazing communities as this new knowledge is generated and shared. The rate of change could compound as a critical mass is achieved, and the learning and knowledge sharing processes become the norm in the system and grazing community.

The SGS program and its Regional Producer Network has the beginnings of a learning community such as Peter Senge at MIT and others are seeing we must develop if we are to improve the way we do things to make improvements in increasingly complex environments. SGS needs to consider how it might progress this potential. Senge's³ work on systems and the place of dialogue to facilitate learning is useful for assisting with the processes needed in SGS.

Learning and knowledge sharing becomes the cultural norm in the grazing community

² Hayes mid-term review and SGS management

³Peter Senge et al (1994), *The Fifth Discipline Field Book*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, UK.

3. A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF THE REGIONAL PRODUCER NETWORK

This project is a qualitative evaluation of the processes used in the formation and life of the Regional Producer Network committees. It is not an evaluation of the content of the program. Evaluation has traditionally been done at the end of programs to see if they have delivered appropriate outcomes. A more important and dynamic role for evaluation is as part of the learning process within a program to aid in improvement of the program as it evolves in practice. This evaluation is extremely important in a collaborative partnership to assist and give process to the common alignment of the partners' needs. This evaluation fits this role.

Evaluation is a key part of the learning process in a collaborative program. It assists in keeping partners needs aligned

3.1 The overall Program

This is the start of a very sound program with enormous potential to lead the way in showing how to carry out a large scale collaborative industry program between the R&D sector and producers, effecting significant changes in producer management practices. MLA and its collaborating partners are congratulated for taking this initiative and committing more than \$10m to the SGS program and about one third of this sum to the Regional Producer Network.

MLA is having a go

The collaborating partners and the management team have done an outstanding job in setting up this national extension network for the grazing industries across the high rainfall zone. In particular Ian Simpson, the National Extension Facilitator has done an excellent job to set the network up and have it functioning in such a short time. Most agricultural industries extension networks have evolved over a considerable time; rather than being initiated as a national program and formed within 12 months. They are often not nationally focussed. **A national focus and coordination is a strong plus for this program.** It builds industry networks and generates knowledge right across the industry, thereby increasing the potential to share knowledge and reduce duplication.

The Regional Producer Network committees have done an excellent unpaid job in forming their committees, developing business plans and setting up the local demonstration sites and groups around these sites.

The outstanding success of the recent National Farm Walk held in September 1999 is evidence of the program's evolution and success.

In the longer term this program has the potential to bring about positive cultural changes in an industry which has sometimes tried maintaining farming methods long past their use-by date.

These changes to farming systems will ensure a viable and responsive grazing industry which will be sustainable in the next century. These

changes will take considerable time to affect a critical mass as they are not product type changes but changes to complex biological systems which the sustainability of catchments and producers are dependent on. The producer chairs can see the potential of the program to achieve this, but also are realising that the change process is complex and relatively slow.

Key strengths of this program are;

- that it tackles sustainability of the grazing system and profitability of the grazing enterprise in a systemic way
- Producers are seen as equal collaborating partners with skills and knowledge to bring to the partnership
- Producers have designed the extension network to ensure that it will be relevant to them
- Producers have a sense that they can affect issues and this is giving them confidence and mastery
- Producers are developing and learning leadership skills
- Producers can see the potential to change and invigorate their industry

3.1.1 A Good Start

The goal of 2000 producers effecting change (out of 22,000), with a further 5000 having trialed some change; and the program finishing date of 2001, is perceived in the minds of some producers as giving the program an end point. This perception is best summed up by "It's not worth starting new sites as the program is nearly finished." The optimists assume that something will follow, but there is a distinct lack of certainty about this and I believe this is a strong inhibition to the program achieving its potential. The present goal could be seen as a self fulfilling prophecy. The other statement oft repeated was "We have just started this process". Producers are realising the difficulty and complexity of the change process. They see that they have made **a good start** - but there is much to do if they are to develop a critical mass of producers who have changed their management positively.

The possibility of MLA stopping funding of this program was seen as a major threat

3.1.2 Leadership

It will give the program a positive push and clarity of purpose if the funding partners, especially MLA as the major funder, say that they are committed to ensuring and assisting the Regional Producer Network to develop its full potential and maximise the return on levy payers and government funds. To give the sense of continuity that we think is required, MLA and the funding partners need to commit in principle to further funding for 3-5 years post July 2001.

It's not worth starting new sites as the program is nearly finished

An Evaluation Of The SGS Regional Producer Network

There are also benefits to both MLA and its funding partners in being seen in person at SGS and Regional Producer Network events. This links them to the program and gives the industry bodies human faces and profiles. It also acknowledges the producers efforts in developing this excellent network and vehicle for change.

Producers in the Regional Producer Network committees who can see the potential of this program and are committed to its success need to show leadership in working to plan its evolution and to ensure that they use their political power as levy payers and voters to promote the program and its value to the funding partners.

The National Steering Group, as the overseeing 'Board of Management' of the program, and the SGS management need to be designing and putting in place the forward planning for the evolution of the program to build on what has been achieved and to carry this forward to meet the needs of producers after July 2001. This will give continuity to the program.

Some chairs had a perception that the producer representatives of the National Steering Group did not show a sense of ownership. Management believes that this is not so. Steering Group producer representatives now have delegated regions to liaise with and both the regional producer committees and these representatives need to build and strengthen these links to ensure good communication and to overcome the current perceptions.

This program has started to show the potential of working together for stakeholders mutual benefit. It needs to continue develop the potential that this program is now clearly showing.

OVERALL CHALLENGE FOR ALL COLLABORATING PARTNERS

To build on what has been achieved and continue to develop the full potential of the Regional Producer Network

To do this each of the collaborating partners has key areas where they need to take leadership whilst still collaborating with each other to continue the evolution and ensuring a dynamic program that will continue to meet industry needs into the future.

MLA And Funding Partners Challenge

The challenge for MLA and the funding partners is to continue to show long term commitment and leadership to enable the program to develop its full potential

National Steering Group Challenge

To institute the planning processes to develop the post 2001 plan and to ensure Regional Producer Network and producer input, ownership and validation of this plan.

Regional Producer Network Challenges

To give leadership and work with the collaborating partners ensuring producer input in determining the design of the program needed after July 2001 to achieve a critical mass of producers farming sustainably and profitably.

Strategies

- *MLA and funding partners commit to in principle funding for the next 3-5 year RPN program post July 2001*
- *MLA and funding partners continue to display and promote public leadership, ownership and support for the program.*
- *Planning processes need to be commenced to ensure continuity of the program.*
- *Develop a program goal that shows more vision and leadership and is not inhibiting to peoples' perceptions eg To achieve a critical mass of producers farming sustainably and profitably in an industry where learning new ways is the cultural norm by 2005.*

3.2 The process

The key to this programs success has been a collaborative partnership using good processes from its inception.

It has been the concept of MLA working with producers in a collaborative way that is the key to this programs success.

Any glitches have been when this process has not been followed. When the National Farm Walk was first initiated it seemed to producers that it was being imposed with a top down approach. After some due process, initiated by producers, then producers felt a greater sense of ownership and got involved.

Producers had a better chance of getting it right than MLA management

The selection process for the formation of the initial Producer Planning Group found a very able group of producers who were committed and enthusiastic about grazing management systems.

The team building process used by MRC at the commencement of the New Zealand trip, and giving producers responsibility for designing an extension program for their industry was an empowering process that

welded them into a team. The team building process was also a personally rewarding and developing experience. MRC building the program according to their design was extremely validating and gave the Producer Planning Group a great sense of achievement and confidence. The belief that producers could design it better than management has been shown to be correct.

Ian Simpson's process of calling public meetings for forming the Regional Producer Network committees was also extremely successful. It attracted people of high calibre who are enthusiastic about sustainable grazing management systems. Many of these were outside the normal agropolitical area and the process has tapped into a rich talent within the industry that has a lot to give. There is scope to attract and include more women in the network (two chairs out of twenty) as this will potentially double the mass of talent available to the industry.

Inviting outside experts to join committees was optional and this has been a plus for those who have and doesn't appear to have inhibited those who haven't. The process enabled the producers to feel that the committee was theirs and with independent facilitators and funding they are not beholden to agency people to provide time and services to ensure the running of the committee. This is important in ensuring independence and ownership.

Team forming and business planning processes were essential to establishing strong effective committees who work as teams and have a clear focus of their purpose. It is important for program managers and facilitators to ensure that producers have the support and information to guide them in these processes. It is important to understand where the producers are at and to start from there, not where managers are at. The business planning process needs a framework and guidelines to assist people to come to grips with the process. This would help to improve the process and to ease some of the pain that committees went through. This will always be a critical time in the process and will cause anxiety and unease as it was a major learning experience for producers. Most were not familiar with business planning and just wanted to get on and set up sites. Even when experienced professionals are placed in a major new learning experience they are challenged, just as the producers were. Support is important at this stage.

It has been, and will continue to be a key role of the SGS management and in particular the national extension facilitator to continue to design good processes that continue to take the program forward in a dynamic way.

There is the potential for the regional committees to become a cosy little club serving the "in" group. It is SGS management's role to ensure that it keeps designing processes into the program that ensure a dynamic evolution to generate the maximum improvements in sustainability and profitability for the industry.

3.2.1 Facilitators

Facilitators are the **pivotal point** of the Regional Producer Network committees and without them they would not function. This is because they:

- provide the committee with the means to carry out committee plans
- provide the expertise to facilitate learning around demonstration sites
- assist in giving committees autonomy
- are a key link and communication point with SGS management and other regional committees.

Facilitators are the glue of the committee

All chairs thought that they had excellent facilitators, although there must be variations of talent between the different regions. I had no way of evaluating facilitators and it was not in my brief. However it is important for the committees and the Network to have criteria and process to evaluate facilitators.

Facilitators see their allegiance is to the Regional Producer committees although they are paid by MLA. As the key link between SGS management and committees they can act as gatekeepers and there have been some tensions at times between management and facilitators. The regional facilitators and the national facilitator are the oil that keeps the communication flowing and are key relationships in the Regional Producer Network system. They are the nodes of the network. The health of these relationships is important to the overall Regional Producer Network and their commitment to program goals is as important as the committees. They are important in facilitating the flow of knowledge and information across the network.

Regional facilitators all meet at the annual producer forums and this is a time to ensure that tensions are aired and dealt with in a constructive way and a commonality of purpose is developed about their role in the program. This needs the national extension facilitator to be personally involved in this forum and a professional to facilitate the process. These are important relationships.

Facilitators' challenge

To accept the key role they all play in the success of the program and to maximise the degree of cooperation and sharing of knowledge across the network for the benefit and synergy of the whole network.

Strategies

- *SGS management, using an outside facilitator, runs a facilitated workshop at the annual producer forum for regional facilitators and the national facilitator, to deal with differences such as bureaucracy, and to develop strong common goals for their program roles.*
- *SGS management run a session or day within the Annual Forum for upgrading facilitators skills in an designated area. eg communication, community development, monitoring and evaluation.*

3.3 Ownership and the collaborative relationship

3.3.1 Ownership

Another key success factor of this program is the collaborative nature of the program where instead of others deciding what producers needed, the producers have determined their needs and have designed, after an extensive information gathering task, a structure to meet those needs. MLA and its funding partners with SGS management as the facilitators of the process have worked WITH producers to build and evolve the Regional Producer Network.

To achieve commitment it is critical in the change process to involve people in the process of defining their needs and problems and how they might improve situations. This program has done this and is reaping the benefits.

Ownership of this program by producers was a key criteria of the Management Team and MRC when designing and developing this program. They have been extremely successful in achieving this. Both the producers and the management team have a strong view that producers see it as their program. The management team also has strong ownership of the Regional Producer Network.

There are enormous commitments of energy being put into the program by the producers (unpaid), facilitators (some unpaid time) and SGS management.

3.3.2 Collaboration

The collaborative partnership is a delicate one and is more complex to manage as the management team acknowledges. The relationship is dependent on trust which needs each partner to understand and respect the others needs. There has been and there always will be tension between the collaborative partners and their respective needs.

Because the producers and the Regional Producer Network are treated as equals then the traditional hierarchical methods are no longer applicable. When it has been perceived that decisions have been thrust upon the producer network from the National Steering Group or SGS

*Producers don't talk about
MLA's program they talk
about our program*

Collaborate

To work one **with**
another, cooperate.
(Macquarie Dictionary)

management, they are not owned and there has been conflict and tension. This happened with the National Farm Walk initially, but then after some due process initiated by the producers, the Network did feel ownership and was committed to the project. There was a similar experience when monitoring and evaluation was initiated and angst was created because the collaborative process was not adhered to and **the hierarchical top down approach was reverted to**. This has been the historical norm and therefore it is easy for **all** partners to revert to the top down approach at times. All partners need to take responsibility for ensuring that this doesn't happen or flagging when they see this starting to happen.

Ownership (a sense of propriety) has evoked commitment to the program by each of the partners. Proprietorship also brings responsibility. In the collaborative partnership there is an interdependence where each partner is responsible for his actions and for trying to make the partnership work towards goals for the overall aim and success of the program.

It is a key role of SGS management to manage this tension and to continue to provide the context and **design the learning experiences** which will enable the SGS program and the Regional Producer Network committees to continue to be at the cutting edge of extension and rural development. It is because they have done this well and been responsive when they have erred that the program is so successful. **The management team is strongly committed to the collaborative concept.**

All Collaborating Partners Challenge

Accept responsibility as equal partners for building the necessary relationships and trust to work together in a spirit of cooperation and respect for each other that enhances the program for their mutual benefit.

SGS Management Team Challenge

To continue to develop good process and design the learning experiences within the program to ensure that it continues to be at the cutting edge of extension and rural development practice.

Strategy

- *An Annual SGS FORUM with well designed processes for working with issues and sufficient free time to develop personal relationships and networks will do much to further build and improve relationships within the program.*

3.4 The extension process

I am using this term extension to describe the complex process of learning, knowledge generation and change which is what a program such as SGS and the Regional Producer Network committees are seeking to do. The program is seeking to make an intervention in a human activity system, the grazing community, with the goal of helping it to learn to make sustainable improvements to this system.

The initial Producer Planning Group's business plan saw the Regional Producer Network as focussing on local groups developing demonstrations of grazing management systems to suit local environments and that these would be assisted by paid facilitators who would be employed by the local committees.

This evaluation shows that this has happened and the Regional Producer Network is showing that this model is becoming a very powerful learning tool for producers. The focus on **group learning** around a **paddock sized demonstration** is seen as **very relevant by producers** who can relate to this. This program is based on good process and this is just as evident and important at the local level as it is at the regional and national level. Experience is showing that it is important to facilitate the process at the local level to identify the local issues to ensure that the demonstration sites are relevant to local producers. It is also important to find a **key informant** who is local and provides local focus with the demonstration site. The facilitation of groups is a key factor in learning taking place. Without a facilitator to provide good process groups can be just a talkfest rather than a learning experience for participants.

3.4.1 Culture

There was some comment about the independence of the grazing community. The management team believes that it has addressed the culture issue by using the grazing producers to design the program so that the cultural issues are build into the program. I am unaware of any research into the culture of this industry.

It could be advantageous to do some social research to gain a better and more conscious understanding of the grazing community culture. Is it really so independent or is this a myth? This research may unearth underlying issues and values that may be inhibiting progress in this industry. It is better to understand the culture we are working with before we set out to change it.

SGS management Challenge

To know and understand the cultural barriers that inhibit achieving a critical mass of producers changing to sustainable grazing systems.

Strategy,

SGS consider commissioning social research for a better understanding of the grazing community culture and what are its underlying beliefs and values.

3.5 The SGS Network -

The SGS program has built the foundations for an excellent program.

The National Research Sites have in place a strong research program integrated across the high rainfall zone of temperate Australia. This is expected to deliver key research findings that will improve the profitability and sustainability of the grazing industry in the next decade. Although the program is midway, information and knowledge is being generated and this can be used now to give "best bet" scenarios that can start to be paddock trialed on Regional Producer Network regional demonstration sites.

The RPN has built an excellent extension network across the high rainfall zone of temperate Australia that is growing and strengthening and has the potential to effect substantial change with the 22,000 producers within it. At present the producers are focussed on utilising existing knowledge as this was seen as most relevant and their priority.

3.5.1 Closing the gap between research and extension

The business plan developed by the Producer Planning Group identified the key opportunity for this program as developing a "unique set of partnerships linking the producers with the researchers and other information providers across the high rainfall zone". It saw the solution to this as "a program that unites the efforts of producers, researchers and information providers, to identify common needs and solutions." This is also a key goal of SGS management for the SGS program.

The producers were told that they would have input into the research process but because of the timing of the development of the producer committees this did not eventuate. This disappointed some of the chairs. Chairs have stated that they want more interaction and input into the research. For the producers to own this research, seeing and making it relevant to their needs means that there must be processes to assist this. Otherwise, the program will revert to the old model where researchers own the research agenda and results are delivered to producers, who having had no input into the process, fail to see its relevance. We have years of experience to say that this model does not work in rural industry. It is clearly not what was envisaged for this program.

Now that the Research and Extension structures are well established, the time is ripe and appropriate to focus on bringing the two closer by strengthening relationships and interaction to enable the Regional Producer Network committees and Facilitators to start to integrate

It is only recently that I realised scientists are not the only experts in the R&D systems. Farmers are experts in farm management and farming systems.

this new research into their regional sites, test it, and to share this knowledge with the wider grazing community.

There is already some interaction between the two areas with processes such as the recent successful National Farm Walk and interregional visits; but it needs a more designed approach to maximise the potential within the overall program to further develop and share the new knowledge being developed at National Research Sites and regional demonstration sites.

This raises a challenge for researchers to, **with producers**, develop "best bet" management scenarios from the research that can be trialed by them on regional demonstration sites and innovative producer properties.

It goes against the research culture to recommend research findings before publication and peer review. However the pay offs for researchers is that producer involvement will give the research more relevance and quicker up take. In other instances this producer/scientist interaction has had major pay offs for scientists' sense of fulfilment.

To improve the overall connection of the sub-programs and systems within SGS and to bring research and extension closer together we believe that an Annual SGS FORUM is the single best improvement this program could make.

All of the sub-programs of the SGS programs meet at least annually, but separately.

At present the producers meet annually with their producer forums. These forums include the present chairs, incoming chairs and committee facilitators. Science teams from the National Research Sites meet annually with a mid term meeting of their executives. The National Steering Group also meet twice per year.

We believe that there is the potential to significantly increase the synergy of the overall SGS program by the staging of these meetings at the same time and place to enable much more interaction to take place between the people and the sub programs of SGS. We envisage **an Annual SGS FORUM**.

An Annual SGS FORUM would bring all the sub programs/systems of the SGS program together and has enormous potential to build and strengthen the networks and relationships in a program that is very dependent on these across an enormous geographic area.

We believe that this change could do more for **bringing together** the separate sub programs/systems than anything else and it would give the program a boost in synergy, energy and enthusiasm. It would make a significant improvement in overcoming a consistent theme throughout this project of insufficient connection with the separate people and groups.

The sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts

Challenges for all of the collaborating partners.

To develop better ways to improve the dialogue and learning between all of the sub systems, especially research groups, producers and the National Steering Group .

Researchers Challenge

To work WITH producers to develop 'best bet' management scenarios that can be tested at regional sites using their latest knowledge

Regional Producer Network Challenge

To work with researchers to assist to develop "best bet" management scenarios and to trial and demonstrate these at the regional demonstration sites and share the knowledge with the wider grazing community

SGS Management Team Challenge

To design processes to enable the groups to work together in a cost effective way that will enable the strengthening of relationships, networks and an increase in knowledge generation by the integration of best bet scenarios into the Regional Producer Network and their regional sites.

Strategies

- *That the SGS management, Regional Producer Network and National Steering Group considers instituting an Annual SGS FORUM.*
- *Regional Producer Network committees should consider appointing a committee member (not the chair or designated chair) whose portfolio is research and this representative attends relevant research meetings. (The SGS FORUM makes this easier and maybe cheaper)*
- *Include Facilitators in the research process so they have commitment and knowledge of the research program. (SGS FORUM again facilitates this)*

3.6 Committee renewal and resilience

There was considerable comment on producer "burn out" and the limits of voluntarism for Regional Producer Network committee members. At this stage it appeared that their sense of achievement from creating the network and sites and the rewards from working in a dedicated team, and improving their own personal development and leadership skills were enough. This will not remain so. The

committees will need renewal processes to continue to develop a high level of enthusiasm and energy. The original committees have been through good processes that created ownership and enthusiasm. These are processes that need to be repeated, not necessarily exactly the same, to continue to generate these qualities.

3.6.1 Renewing processes

The original New Zealand study tour model is certainly worth repeating. Doing it annually for incoming chairs would strengthen the incoming chair network and team for the incoming year, starting them off with renewed enthusiasm and a broader perspective. I think that a study tour across the network would be more value for incoming chairs but this is value judgement they are best to make with management. This event would also offer incentive to people to take up the chair position. Although this would cost \$30-40K (\$3-4 per region) it should add considerable value to the program. MLA could be a major funder, at least for a trial evaluation of the event with regions putting in \$1-2K each to create ownership.

At present the process of renewal on committees to ensure new blood, ideas and enthusiasm is fairly ad hoc. Committees have searched and located suitable people within their region and hoped that those who haven't performed will lose interest. Based on the process used to set up the committees this head hunting approach may be best. Attendance requirements may be another way of dispensing with people who lose interest. A discussion at an annual forum would allow people to share their experiences and assist individual regions to design appropriate strategies.

Some committees were already well aware of the need to ensure that their members get value from their input and built events such as overnight meetings, trips and events to continue the team building process. SGS management need to encourage this aspect and support this by encouraging the process, providing funding where possible, or assisting with procuring funding as it did with recent MDBC funding for looking at National Research Sites.

3.6.2 Leadership

Another important by-product from the producer network committee experience was the development of leadership experience. Many chairs commented on the personal benefits that they had developed from their personal involvement in the program. Development of leadership in an industry, especially one as large as the grazing industry is critical. Designing in opportunities for people to learn these skills would both reward the committee participants and have pay offs for the industry. There are a range of leadership opportunities for producers from WIG's courses to Marcus Oldham Leadership courses to the Australian Rural Leadership Program (one chair is an MLA funded participant in the Australian Rural Leadership Program now.) MLA and SGS management need to

ensure that producers are aware of the opportunities currently available through MLA 's human resource program and other avenues. Committees and SGS management could initiate processes to determine what their needs are in this area and how these could be best met. Continuing adequate leadership will be a vital factor in the growth, continuance and improvement of this program.

3.6.3 Involving more women

10% of chairs were women. Some committees had consciously tried to involve women and there is the possibility of doubling the number of talented people available if more women see themselves in these roles. Other industries, such as Dairy and Cotton, have initiated specific programs to ensure that women are assisted in developing leadership skills to enable them to participate in their industries programs. They have done this because research has shown that many women don't feel confident initially about the challenge of becoming involved in areas that have been traditionally dominated by men. An industry women's leadership program would have benefits to the wider industry and is something MLA should consider.

Regional Producer Network committees need to consider the talent that they are wasting if they don't endeavour to encourage more women to be involved and look at ways of doing this. The network needs to start talking about this issue.

Regional Producer Network Challenge

To improve and ensure renewal processes for the producer network committees so they continue to generate the necessary enthusiasm and energy voluntarily.

Strategies

- *The program initiating a study trip for incoming chairs, either across the producer network or to New Zealand, to build team spirit, knowledge and enthusiasm.*
- *Regional Producer Network committees consciously endeavour to attract more women onto their committees when seeking new members*
- *SGS management put in place a process to assist regional committees to address what their human resource and leadership requirements will be in the future and how these could be addressed.*
- *MLA seriously consider putting in place an industry wide leadership program for women to increase the meat industries leadership capacity*
- *RPN committees and SGS work to ensure inclusion of new members and renewal of the strong team spirit by producer trips to other regions or national research sites.*

3.7 Administrative issues

3.7.1 Adequate accountability

There is considerable energy with the producers about unnecessary paperwork and how it reduces the committees (especially the facilitators) effectiveness. Equally the SGS management team believes very strongly that they have already reduced this to a minimum and that they have tried to shield committees from the bureaucracy. Producers are committed to the need for accountability - it is the degree of paperwork that is in contention.

Because of the energy around this issue the management's requirements are listed below.

Annual Reporting Requirements for Regional Producer Network committees

1. Circulate all meeting minutes or reports to members of the Regional Committee and with a copy to the SGS Extension Facilitator within 21 days of each meeting.
2. Submit an Annual Work Plan, specifying a list of Critical Achievements for the period to 30 June 2000, and signed by the Chair of the Regional Committee, to MLA by September 1, 1999.
3. Maintain an accurate record of all income and expenditure for each MLA allocation to the Regional Committee operation and Regional Site Accounts, administered by the SGS Regional Committee.
4. Submit the following reports to MLA via the Regional Committee:
 - Six monthly facilitator reports on progress toward the Critical Achievements specified in the Annual Work Plan - must contain a Section outlining evaluation activities undertaken within the Region . These are due at MLA by February 28, and July 31.
 - An annual Site report, due on June 30, 2000 in this letter specifies a one page report per site per year with some suggested headings.
 - An annual Committee report (one page), due with MLA on June 30, 2000 Again, this specifies a report with some suggested headings.

Meeting minutes, an annual work plan, financial records, and a annual report (one page) are standard requirements for any Committee. A one page annual site report for each site and a six monthly report on progress against the annual work plan (These come with suggested headings) do seem to me to be a minimum of accountability and useful processes for the committees own effectiveness to ensure that they are on track.

This differing view about bureaucracy may be due to the difference in experiences and cultures which these two groups come from, and

We are seen as the devils from head office

hence a quite different perception of what is necessary and acceptable.

Another possibility is that this could be a vehicle for committees and facilitators to blame SGS management and MLA for some other deeper issues which is not apparent to me from my interviews or necessarily conscious to the Regional Producer Network committees or SGS management.

Regardless of the reasons there are different perspectives here and what is important is to come to a shared understanding of this issue.

This issue is important as there is considerable energy about it with strongly held views and until these differing perceptions are brought closer together this subject will continue to generate tension which will detract and weaken the relationship between the partners. It is necessary for the partners to address this issue in a positive way to align their view more closely.

3.7.2 M&E

Monitoring and evaluation is a critical part of program management and also the learning process. It is also a difficult task in complex human activity projects such as this. The original introduction of this to the committees was not received well. SGS management was too open with developing the process and producer committees saw this as lacking leadership and causing confusion. This is the paradox that SGS management walks all the time as it endeavours to strike the balance between providing leadership and giving autonomy to the committees.

3.7.3 Funding

The level of funding of the individual committees is not inhibiting the effectiveness of the committees activities. The incorporation of the committees and their autonomous financial arrangements means that they can accrue funds and many have been able to do this.

This financial autonomy is a strength of the program.

SGS Management Challenge

To get agreement between SGS and the Regional Producer Network committees on an acceptable level of accountability and monitoring of the program

Strategy

To workshop accountability and monitoring within the annual producer forum to come to a shared understanding of what each partner needs and how this can be best done.

4. Is this model repeatable?

This model that MLA and producers have designed, developed and is now operating as the Regional Producer Network is excellent. It can be repeated but only if those involved understand that this model is not a recipe. The reason this program is successful is that it is based on sound principles of extension which ensured that the program was relevant to, and owned by the grazing industry.

The processes used have ensured this success.

The SGS program is facilitating producers learning of the principles of grazing management to enable them to better understand their grazing management systems and therefore be able to adapt their system to their unique environment. Extension is similar in that we need to **understand the principles** so we can design each program to suit the unique characteristics of the industry, its needs, its culture, and the barriers to change within. To repeat the program without using key processes that have been designed into this program will be to invite failure.

*RPN is not a recipe.
It is successful because
it was built on sound
extension principles and
good collaborative
processes*

- In brief the key principles are ;
- 1 The program is relevant to end users, they designed it
 - 2 Producers expertise and knowledge has been valued and validated - MLA instituted their recommendations
 - 3 A broad selection of representatives of the grazing industry were involved in the planning processes
 - 4 MLA with its co funders, and the producers are in a collaborative partnership with each working for mutual benefits
 - 5 The program is based around adult learning principles and learning processes and styles that suit producers
 - 6 The paddock sized demonstrations are built around key informants in local regions to ensure local relevance and credibility
 - 7 The program starts where the end users are at and as they are involved in driving the program it is evolving to suit their evolving needs
 - 8 The learning processes are facilitated by professionals

To repeat this model would mean starting with a clean sheet and using a similar process taking account of the areas that needed

improvement and working it all through with the designated end users.

The commitment and ownership that gives the program its strength was derived from the learning by the producers that took place as they went through the process. There can be no short cuts.

5. Conclusion

This project shows a considerably commonality between what the management team set out to achieve and what the ex-chairs of the Regional Producer Network see that the program has achieved so far.

This evaluation shows great alignment and success in achieving ownership and enthusiasm by producers of the regional network, and in creating an integrated effective extension program that is developing knowledge and skills to improve grazing management in the high rainfall zone.

The processes used to set up the program were very successful and the only small improvements needed were some more support and guidance for the business planning process and more leadership from management for the monitoring and evaluation process.

There are still some different perceptions about bureaucratic requirements and accountability between management and these need attention to come to a common view.

The program needs to continue to evolve and develop as it has been - as a collaborative partnership. This is the key reason for its success and when partners have been reverted to the old paradigm it has caused conflict and been unproductive.

The next major challenges are to bring the research and extension sub programs closer together to maximise the development and sharing of knowledge and to develop the post 2001 program to enable a critical mass of producers to practise profitable and sustainable grazing systems.

This is a very successful foundation to do this. All of the partners deserve credit for what they have achieved so far.

6. THE SGS PROGRAM - BACKGROUND AND INPUTS

6.1 Background

SGS (Sustainable Grazing Systems) is an integrated research, development and extension program with the goal "by 2001, at least 2000 producers in the high rainfall zone will have adopted changes to their grazing systems that are at least 10% more profitable, and more sustainable, and that a further 5000 will have trialed at least part of the recommended changes." The strategic goal is to provide red meat producers in the high rainfall zone with the tools, ability and confidence to sustainably manage their grazing systems for profit.

The program was initiated by Meat & Livestock Australia, but with a range of other participants including producers and producer groups, LWRRDC, MDBC, State Departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Universities and CSIRO.

SGS operates through a network of Regional Committees – these committees were established in 1996/97, initially with only producer members, but in many cases the producers then invited other individuals (from State Departments, agribusiness etc) onto their committee. This broadened the membership without diluting the producer ownership, and the chair is always a producer.

The regions are Northern Tablelands, NW Slopes, Central Tablelands, Southern Tablelands & Monaro, and SW Slopes in NSW; North East Victoria, Central Western Victoria and Western Vic/South Australia, plus Tasmania and south west Western Australia.

Each Committee supports the three key Program components needed to gain adoption. These are:

Development of appropriate technologies. Technologies need to be adapted to suit variations in soil type, climate and enterprise, so each committee supports regional activities which provide the opportunity to identify and trial possible solutions to local grazing and pasture management issues.

Building understanding and skills. Every farm is different and therefore no single technology will fit perfectly. Producers need to fully understand the principles so any practice can be successfully adapted and adopted to their particular situation. SGS provides this opportunity through formal courses such as PROGRAZE, and backs this up with Regional Sites and activities where producers are involved in monitoring and assessment and share information and observations:

Fostering a positive attitude. For broad adoption, each producer must believe it is the best thing to do on their farm. Regional Committees provide the opportunity for information exchange via farm walks, field days and Regional Site activities.

Each committee employs a part time facilitator to assist the committee achieve their goals.

6.2 Method

The twenty ex chairs were interviewed using a semi structured interview to elicit the story of their experiences as either, the inaugural chair, or the second chair of the Regional Producer Network committees. These interviews ranged from 1 1/2 to 2 hours in length and in most cases, unless it was inconvenient, the interview was taped.

A summary of the discussion, with key issues noted, was written up, and then returned to each ex chair for its validation as being an accurate representation of the conversation and what they thought. Some minor changes were suggested sometimes. Silence was taken as acceptance.

The key issues were then grouped into appropriate themes and written up to give a consolidated picture of conversations and the key issues that emerged from the data.

As an addition to the original project brief it was decided that interviewing Warren Mason and Ian Simpson of the SGS management team would add context to the evaluation of the program. The same process was used with the management team and this has been included in the report. Their contributions have been kept separate because of different perspectives and to highlight different points of convergence and divergence.

This report should be seen as another tool for dialogue to continue to promote and stimulate learning within the program between the collaborating partners and the sub systems of the SGS program.

This report is a learning tool

6.3 An Illustrative Time Line

New Zealand Producer Planning Group Study Tour

9/96	Central Tablelands, NSW
10/96	North East Victoria
10/96	Tasmania
11/96	Northern Tablelands, NSW
12/96	Western Victoria & SE South Australia
12/96	Western Australia
1/97	North West Slopes, NSW
2/97	South West Slopes, NSW
2/97	Southern Tablelands & Monaro
4/97	Central Western Victoria
11/97	First National Producer Forum Albury
11/98	Second National Producer Forum Albury
7/99	Third National Producer Forum Hamilton
9/99	National Farm Walk

6.4 What the Regional Producer Network committee ex chairs said about:

6.4.1 The program overall

The producer chairs all see the Regional Producer Network as a very good program that is addressing the grazing industry's need to improve the productivity and sustainability of its grazing systems. At last they are making a start in doing something about these issues.

This is the first time that the industry is tackling its problems in a positive

A major strength of the program is that it is producer driven and they feel a strong sense of ownership from MLA handing them responsibility for their region. The program is addressing issues that they have determined are important to their region and locality. There is also a strong sense that their knowledge and experience is being given credence and validated by the process of giving them the task of designing this program.

Another key strength is the program taking a whole systems approach to grazing management and sustainability. One or two people see a need to take a whole farm systems approach as a producer does on his own property.

SGS aligns with my values about sustainability and grazing management

Some see the potential of the program and how this is a start of a change process. They believe that the industry needs to built on the successes so far and what it has created to maximise the multiplier effect.

The major threat is that a key stakeholder, ie MLA, the SGS management team or the producers, may lose interest in the program.

6.4.2 The process overall

There is a very strong overview that the formation process is a very good one, except for varying amounts of pain and frustration suffered by most people interviewed, and their committees, surrounding the production of a business plan for each region.

In spite of this pain, there is a philosophical attitude that some of this discomfort is necessary for the process.

6.4.2.1 The Producer Planning Group

Six of the chairs interviewed had been part of the ten producer members of the Producer Planning Group which went to New Zealand and formulated the business plan for the Regional Producer Network. This was a very rewarding and personally developing experience for these producers. In particular the three younger members see the trip as a key life developing experience.

I have never worked so hard in my life

They were very complementary of the process used to select the team and of the calibre of the people involved who were all grazing management enthusiasts. It was a very unique and challenging experience with an enormous amount packed into a short time. They

It seemed like you had known them all your life, not just a few days. We have continued to be friends.

all learned a lot and gained important insights such as the feeling of working in a team, the feeling of anxiousness, and then empowerment when they were given the responsibility of developing a **business plan** for carrying out the extension aspect of the SGS program (They hadn't named it then). They didn't really appreciate the importance of their task until much later.

I saw for the first time the value of facilitation compared to my previously one to one experience with agency people.

It was not only that they were given the task, but that MRC did actually take their recommendations, and turn them into reality was extremely empowering for them. There was some letdown on completion, and a feeling that MRC could have made more use of the team and its knowledge and experience - maximise the investment. They knew the process had been important in developing the team.

MRC must have had great confidence in us.

6.4.2.2 The formation of the Regional Producer Network committees

After the development of the business plan for the Regional Producer Network committees, Ian Simpson was appointed as National Facilitator to take the vision and create the producer network in the 10 regions in the high rainfall zone of Australia.

6.4.2.3 Formation meetings

There is a general consensus that the selection process is a very good one which brings together groups of enthusiastic and committed people interested in grazing systems, but outside the normal industry political system. They see this as positive. Several express the wish to see more women involved, and in one case it was reported that there is resistance to this on their committee.

I felt in awe of the calibre of the other producers at the Albury forum

The process at a community meeting was for Ian Simpson to call for volunteers and people talked about being put on the committee or "dobbled on" by their peers. (Ian Simpson says he observed that this was a very powerful process as a grazing community put peer pressure on to ensure that they got a credible person to represent them for what they saw as an important task.)

It was a good process and we got like minded people who were enthusiastic about grazing systems

The producer committees had the option of inviting outside experts to join if this was seen as advantageous, and the majority of them did. The committees who did invite outsider experts did not feel their ownership compromised. They say that the knowledge and different views and perspectives these outsiders brought had strengthened their committees, and relationships with outside bodies.

6.4.2.4 Team Forming & Business Planning

These are the areas that caused most angst for all committees, in varying degrees. The committees were offered a Working in Groups course and also told they had to do a business plan for their region before they could start "on ground" works. Many members had no experience of the planning process and just wanted to get on and do

The WIGs course from hell

something. Planning was seen as a waste of time. At the same time MRC was going through its own transition to become MLA.

Seven of the committees did a WIG's course trying to combine it with the beginning of putting their business plan together. There were varying experiences from good to bad. With hindsight most thought that the WIGs course had helped to bring their committee together as a team and given them valuable insights into group processes and the human psyche. This helped to improve tolerance of each other and gave an appreciation of each others strengths and weaknesses and how these can be utilised in a group to improve effectiveness. The WIGs course run by Ralph Shannon in the Northern Tablelands seemed to be able to combine the team building process and planning with good results. All of the others had varying success and a couple of committees had a conflict with the WIG's presenters. Some thought that the team building needed to be separated from the planning process and some thought that the planning process would have provided sufficient team building. The last three regions formed were not encouraged to do the WIGs course and they didn't.

We felt like guinea pigs

The planning process generated intense angst and this also varied between committees. It almost destroyed one or two committees, and it certainly resulted in some resignations caused by frustration. There was a state of anxiety where people felt that MRC was learning as it went along and that the guidelines kept changing.

The goal posts kept shifting

In spite of the angst, there is now on reflection, a view that planning was very necessary to focus the regions program. The pressure of doing the plan did improve the committees thinking and hence its effectiveness. They can see that MRC was also learning as it went and they are philosophical about it now, and can see that to a degree, some pain was a necessary part of the process.

We did our business plan time and time again

Most people thought that this part of the process needed to be improved by more support in the form of better guidelines and a template for the business planning process.

6.4.2.5 Committees

A key issue here is the personal satisfaction and development that people gain from their involvement in the chair and committee. The process is bringing in some younger people who have not been involved in committees and has provided all committee members with opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge about people, groups, planning, extension processes, and grazing systems.

I'd certainly do it again. I have learnt life skills, such as planning that have greatly assisted me in my personal life.

Another key issue is the amount of time and energy the chairs are putting into the Regional Producer Network committees and a concern about whether these volunteer efforts are sustainable in the longer term - **committee burn out**. There was some discussion about the need for processes to enable people who aren't performing to be removed from the committee and for new producers to be installed.

There is a widespread realisation that they all need to feel adequately rewarded for their efforts. Except in one or two cases these rewards are seen as personal development and learning, fellowship, a sense of achievement and community service. The possibility of a daily fee was raised as a future need. One person queried if the outcomes so far had justified the efforts.

The policy of annually rotating the chair is seen by most as very sound and with several advantages. These are that;

- it gives a time limit for commitment
- that it brings new ideas to the chair
- It gives others the chance to develop leadership skills

Other points made are that the committees need to be dynamic to avoid stagnating and ensure development and utilisation of members skills. Developing members facilitation skills could be advantageous for the program.

6.4.2.6 Facilitators

Facilitators are seen, without exception, as a key success factor of a regional committee. They are seen as the glue that keeps a regional committee and program together. All ex chairs see their facilitators as excellent performers and wondered how they would be replaced. The North East Victorian region was in this process at the time and other regions were looking on with interest. Most say that their facilitators give their committees more time than they are paid for. They are also seen as being committed to the committees needs, rather than agency or agribusiness people who may have their own agenda. Facilitators provide the means for the regional committees ideas and plans to be carried out. Producers have their own businesses and properties to run and do not have the time or energy to do much on ground work and to consistently give of their time.

Our facilitator kept us together when we nearly fell apart in the formation period

We come up with the ideas and the facilitator makes it happen

6.4.3 Extension in the Grazing Industry

I am using this term extension to describe the complex process of learning, knowledge generation and change which is what a program such as SGS and the Regional Producer Network committees are seeking to do. The program is seeking to make an intervention in a human activity system, the grazing community, with the goal of helping it to learn to make sustainable improvements to this system.

6.4.3.1 Group Learning and Demonstration Sites

One person calls this the "honey pot extension method" where you put in place sites that address the perceived local issues. Even if it is a very mundane issue, it is their issue, and by starting at where they are at, then there is potential to move forward to more complex issues as the group develops its understanding of grazing management.

Producers feel comfortable with it. It helps them to change themselves

These groups and sites are much more effective learning tools than Meat for Profit Days

Some also see potential for the program to evolve to address other issues that producers face.

There is a strong belief in the value and power of group learning and how it helps learning when issues are discussed using a facilitator. There was positive comparison made when this was compared with the previous experience of one to one agency activity. The more groups then the greater potential for the program make an impact.

There is also a strongly positive view of the value of paddock size demonstrations and how producers could relate to this compared to two metre plots. The chairs see demonstrations as the front line learning tool which represents what the average producer faces. Experience is showing committees how it is important to find the right site cooperator (key informant) and to allow the local producers to identify **their** issues to continue the process of producer driven and producer ownership. SGS management guidelines for demonstration sites are seen as inhibitive sometimes.

Producers see this as much more relevant than the white peg model.

All committees are committed to cooperating with and utilising other groups such as Landcare, PPP, etc and collaborating with other agencies.

6.4.3.2 Cultures within the Grazing industry

6.4.3.2.1 Producers

There is comment about the grazing community culture. This ranges from increased awareness of the difficulty and time involved in making changes in this industry to how they feel they had made a start in an industry that hasn't changed in 100 years.

The grazing industry needs a changed mind set.

The normal producer is seen as an individualistic person who believes that if you didn't know how to farm yourself then you shouldn't be doing it. You don't really share the nitty gritty of your operation with other producers. Although this is not a key issue in the chair's minds it is mentioned as a background issue that is a barrier to the change process in this industry. They see the groups and demonstration sites starting to overcome this.

This has been the toughest time in the grazing industry in my life time

Change is seen as increasing risk and therefore to reduce risk you do not initiate change. These attitudes, with tough economic conditions, are seen as a significant barriers to change.

6.4.3.2.2 Researchers

The research culture is perceived by several chairs as a culture that sees itself as the custodian of grazing knowledge, and producers as irrelevant to research. They see that more interaction between the researchers and producers is needed. Positive comment was made about the recent bus trip to the Carcoar site (using MDBC funds) and the interaction that took place between people.

6.4.4 The Network and its Communication/Knowledge Sharing Process

The SGS network and the Regional Producer Network of committees is seen as a good structure and network for the sharing and interchange of information and knowledge. Chairs commented on the lack of interaction between the National Research Sites and the Regional Producer Network committees and their research sites and groups.

Using information from another region to set up our site saved us 18 months. We would have eventually gotten there, but they were able to say use this, or do that, and we didn't have to reinvent the wheel

There is awareness of the need to increase the sharing of knowledge and information across groups; and the need for funding and processes to enable this to improve. Some regions have a National Research Site and a close relationship with it; but others see that an interstate site may be more relevant than their closest site. They want to see that this knowledge is shared across the network and available to all.

There is recognition of the need to improve communication across all of the collaborators in the program so that there were less communication breakdowns and that relationships are strengthened.

The management team would not be known to committee members other than the chairs

Producers feel that they have had no real input into national research sites.

6.4.4.1 Nationally

There is specific mention of the separation between the National Steering Group and the Regional Producer Network committees. There was comment that a producer member of the National Steering Group had been allocated to each committee to link them more closely but in one case there had been no contact.

The faceless ones

The Prograzier and Tips and Tools were seen as a very useful vehicle for communicating with all producers, especially with its evolutionary improvements.

6.4.4.2 The Annual Forum

The annual forums which had been held at Albury are seen as useful for networking and sharing of experiences. The second Albury forum was seen as a disaster and people are concerned that if they give up their time then they need to feel they are investing it for a worthwhile outcome.

It wasn't until attending the first Albury conference that I was able to see fully the context that the RPN fitted into

6.4.4.3 SGS image and credibility

The ex chairs see that their regions effectiveness is dependent on the credibility of SGS and that this is a reputation that takes time to build up. They feel that this is happening but it is a slow process. They also see that this credibility gives MLA a very significant face with its levy payers.

6.4.4.4 National Farm Walk

There are a range of views, including some scepticism about this event. Some see that it may improve the image and credibility of SGS and raise its profile. It is also seen as an MLA "flag waving feel good" exercise which puts more workload on the grassroots and isn't perceived as relevant to their purpose or needs. (This may need to be viewed in the larger context that this was a major source of conflict at the second Albury forum.)

6.4.5 MLA

6.4.5.1 MLA's Commitment and Continuity

The cessation of funding of the Regional Producer Network is seen as **the major threat to the program** and concern was expressed about what happens after July, 2001. Some are optimistic that something will evolve to succeed the present program.

There was a strong belief that the program needs sufficient time and funds for the program to build on the foundation that has been laid and compound the outcomes to achieve the full potential of the program.

The SGS management team is seen as being very committed to the Regional Producer Network and it is important for the senior management and board to be committed to the principles of producer driven extension and the concepts of SGS.

There was also comment by some that the program goal of 10% of producers adopting changes was limiting and "it would be a pity if we shut up shop then and went home".

6.4.5.2 Relationships in a Collaborative Partnership with MLA

This is best summed up by "producer driven means producer driven".

Comments around this subject relate to the relationship between MLA and SGS management and the committees. The committees have a strong sense of ownership of their region and its issues and they want the MLA and SGS management to be dynamic and supportive, but not intrusive or heavy handed, as this destroys their ownership and enthusiasm. They see SGS as a **partnership** and a collaborative relationship which will have tensions from time to time. They want these tensions to be handled sensitively and in a way that brings a positive resolution of the issues to meet the needs of the key partners

There is also potential conflict with other major agency stakeholders eg. Ag. Depts., over who is seen to get the kudos from Regional Producer Network activities.

*Its not worth starting up
new sites because there
isn't time to show and
achieve anything before
2001*

**Producer driven
means producer**

*SGS is a partnership
and needs inclusive
ways*

*Our business plan was
criticised and we came
home thinking what have
we wasted our time on in
the last 12 months*

6.4.5.3 Administrative Issues

6.4.5.3.1 Bureaucracy

The committees have a love hate relationship with bureaucracy. They are very clear that they have to be accountable for what they do and the funds they expend. They are very opposed to what they see as unnecessary paperwork that takes up their volunteered time and reduces the effectiveness of their facilitators limited time of approximately two days per week. They are very clear that the paperwork must be kept to a minimum and it was suggested that it is the outcomes that are what they should be judged on.

Producers have no trouble with the concept of accountability, just what is seen as unproductive

6.4.5.3.2 Funding

Quite clearly in almost all regions funding is not seen as a factor that had limited the effectiveness of the committees. Most have found that they had been able to elicit sponsorship from farm suppliers and fertiliser companies to supplement their budgets. One or two commented they were always told of limited funding and that this in itself curtails thoughts of imaginative projects.

The MRC budget cuts at the beginning of the program were perceived as destabilising at the time, but this was when committees were still defining issues and business plans and it didn't affect their budgets or outcomes. (In reality the RPN's budget wasn't cut). The initial financial administration was seen as very unsatisfactory but the present incorporated model that gives them ownership and the ability to accrue funds from one year to another is seen as good.

6.4.5.3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

This is not a large issue but committees see it as important to enable them to see if they are achieving their goals. Their need is for something that is easy, clear and time effective. They are unsure how to do it and they were critical of MLA's efforts of informing them of its requirements at the second Albury conference. They saw that this was an issue for MLA to give clear leadership on what its needs were to evaluate the program; and then to collaborate with them to work out what is possible.

6.4.5.3.4 Large Regions

The two largest regions, Western Australia, and Western Victoria/South Australia, highlight their size and the inherent problems of meeting and getting across their regions. The South Australians now appreciated the advantages of the different perspectives and culture that the Victorians brought to their committee.

6.5 What the SGS Management Team said

This is a synthesis of what the SGS management team, Warren Mason, National Program Coordinator, and Ian Simpson, National Extension Facilitator, say about the thinking behind what they are trying to do in this program, and their experience in doing it.

The management team see that with their guidance and MLA support the producers have formed a dynamic network of groups determining and addressing their grazing management issues in their regions. The management team have strong ownership of this program and pride in what they have helped to create. They see clearly and acknowledge that the producers have these feelings about the program too. They see the producers on the committees as being of high calibre and outstanding representatives of their profession and industry.

We wanted to have a real go at integrating the research and extension process in this program

I want to see the day when set stocking is seen as anti-social behaviour by the grazing community

6.5.1 The Process Overall

Ownership of this program by producers is a key criteria. Attempts in the previous program to get producer input had been insignificant and flawed upon investigation. We don't think that researchers or management could design a program that would meet producers needs and capture their imagination and ownership. We believe that it is essential for producers involved in this process to be truly representative of all the various grazing philosophies, systems and environments, so we made a determined effort to achieve this with the Producer Planning Group and the Regional Producer Network committees.

Producers had a better chance of getting it right than MLA management

We want to see SGS continue to evolve dynamically to meet the needs of the grazing industries in the high rainfall zone of Temperate Australia.

6.5.1.1 Shifting goal posts

This program did evolve and it was like climbing a mountain, as it evolved we saw more of the shape of the program and where to go and what to do next. In the beginning we didn't know everything and how it would be, there was the framework and principles, but the detail we had to design as it evolved. There were as many shifts of the goalposts at producer insistence as there were to meet management needs - often at producer instigation.

6.5.1.2 Team forming and business planning

We knew that the committees would have to struggle to develop as a group and have ownership of their issues. With hindsight we should have made this easier than it was but we erred on the side of autonomous freedom. The committees did need a business plan and

Everybody struggles when given a blank sheet

we needed to give them an open framework or model to guide them. They didn't need to re-invent planning.

We should have separated the WIGs' course from the business planning process to enable sufficient time for both processes. Team building and planning are essential to the formation process.

I found doing a WIGs course a positive experience

6.5.2 Committees and facilitators

Facilitators are key people in the effectiveness of the committees providing the role of executive officer and although they are paid by MLA their allegiance is clearly to the committee. Facilitators have the potential to be gate keepers of information and we have tried to improve communication of important issues to committee chairs.

We have tried to provide the producers involved in the committees with some benefits that will help to offset their lost time. These are an opportunity to manage their regions program, a WIGs course, and earlier access to information and learning from the national research sites.

Succession planning is essential to bring in new people, energy and ideas into the program.

6.5.3 Extension in the grazing industry

The theory behind the program is based on an interpretation by Cam Nicholson of the *Kolb Learning Cycle* model of experiential learning. We are trying to assist producers to learn the principles of grazing management so they can better understand the system that they are interacting with, and how what they do affects that system. The importance of the program is that it is **teaching skills and knowledge and principles - not recipes**. This approach should enable them to make improvements to their system to improve their sustainability, both profitably and environmentally. The aim is to get producers involved in learning in groups around regional demonstration sites to overcome their isolation and to bring about a paradigm shift in the grazing industry.

See appendix P48 for Kolb Learning Cycle

*learn → trial it back home
--→ adapt it --→ then adopt
the principles in your*

The other part of our theory behind what is an experiment for MLA was to see if by using producers to identify what they saw as the important issues for their industry and then letting them design a program to address their perceived issues; we could get ownership of the program. Through this ownership we hoped that the grass roots graziers would see the program as relevant to their needs and credible in the issues and processes it was working with.

Now we have had a real go at producers doing it

It is too early to see highly measurable outcomes, but there is clearly an extraordinary level of enthusiasm, innovation, and commitment to make the program work and at this stage it looks nominally successful.

There is not way you could get this level of commitment and activity through agencies

6.5.3.1 The Network Communication & knowledge sharing processes

A key program aim is to better integrate the research and extension process in the SGS program.. SGS is doing excellent research at its National Research Sites and we need to capitalise on this research and new knowledge. We want processes and vehicles that will enable us to share this knowledge and information across all producers and enable new knowledge generated from our findings to maximise the return on investment. Producers want to be able to interact with the research to know what is going on, what it might mean to their farming system and the reliability and credibility of the information from the research.

We are doing some fabulous research at our National Research Sites

We have recently initiated improved links between the National Steering Group and Regional Producer Network committees by delegating designated producer members of the NSG to liaise with individual regional committees.

The challenge is how to keep adding the learning to the pool of knowledge and develop a process whereby all can benefit from the pool by sucking what they want when they need to

6.5.3.2 National Forums - Albury

We acknowledge the second forum was not well organised due to time pressure, and the National Farm Walk needed to be handled better. Although it was seen as a disaster by many, it did signify the producer network asserting its ownership of the program and confronting us about not respecting it as a true partner in this venture.

6.5.4 Relationships in a collaborative Partnership

The producer network is fragile and it is important that we understand that as it is dependent on the producers volunteer efforts and commitment. We need to respect that it can only do what producers want it to do.

The degree of tension that exists between the different components of SGS makes it more difficult and complex to manage at times.

6.5.4.1 The Bureaucracy

We have tried to protect the producers from the bureaucracy, especially the machinations in the transition of MRC to MLA. Accountability of all parties, including producers, is necessary and sometimes we wonder if producers confuse bureaucracy with accountability. We see the current level of bureaucratic activities as reasonable and minimal for the programs requirements. Since incorporating they have a high degree of financial autonomy and can accrue funds.

Accountability is necessary

6.5.4.2 Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is another example where we didn't give the regions enough guidance. We should have told them what we needed and worked with them to see how we could do it together.

We are seen as the devils from head office

After the mid term review we have prepared a set of guidelines of the essential and desirable features of Regional Sites but there does not seem to be strong ownership of these by the regional committees.

7. Appendices

7.1 People interviewed

Name	Regional Producer Network committee	Position
Murray Scherf	Northern Tablelands NSW	Inaugural Chair
Tony Gauldron	Northern Tablelands NSW	Second Chair
Stephen Millar	North West Slopes NSW	Inaugural Chair
Ian Macdonald	North West Slopes NSW	Second Chair
Howard Sinclair	Central Tablelands NSW	Inaugural Chair
John Lowe	Central Tablelands NSW	Second Chair
Margie Mullins	Southern Tablelands & Monaro NSW	Inaugural Chair
Tony Prell	Southern Tablelands & Monaro NSW	Second Chair
Mark McClintock	South West Slopes NSW	Inaugural Chair
Lucinda Corrigan	South West Slopes NSW	Second Chair
Tony Ransom	NE Victoria	Inaugural Chair
Peter Tallis	NE Victoria	Second Chair
Chris Lang	Central Victoria	Inaugural Chair
Peter Hirth	Central Victoria	Second Chair
Robin Martin	Western Victoria & South Aust.	Inaugural Chair
Jack Speirs	Western Victoria & South Aust.	Second Chair
Simon Burgess	Tasmania	Inaugural Chair
Steve Crawford	Tasmania	Second Chair
David Johnson	Western Australia	Inaugural Chair
Tony Hiscock	Western Australia	Second Chair
Ian Simpson	National RPN Extension Facilitator	SGS Management Team
Warren Mason	National SGS Program Coordinator	SGS Management Team

7.2 Terms of reference

The objective of the consultancy is to provide MLA with an evaluation of the Regional Producer Network, from the perspectives of the producers who have been most intimately involved in the establishment and operations of the Regional Committees – ie the first two chairs.

7.2.1 Project Tasks and Key Deliverables

Briefly review selected information on SGS, including the Business Plans for each region, and the report from a whole program review conducted in 1998. This briefing is considered essential to provide the consultant with sufficient knowledge of SGS so they can explore issues raised by the ex chairs.

Prepare (in consultation with the SGS Management Team) an outline of the interviews, possible with different emphases for initial and second year chairs. The interview might seek information on such things as:

Personal reflections of achievements/disappointments, successes/failures of their time in the chair, and what they think most contributed to the achievements/successes

Reflections on the processes used to set up the committees, the committee performance, and the contribution/value from the facilitator

Reflections on what they would do differently if they were transported back in time, and why, and what extra they think they might have achieved if they had done things differently

Reflections on the role of MLA in the process, what it did well, and what it could have done differently to improve the outcomes

What advice would they give to incoming chairs in their region or more generally

Conduct the interviews with the approximately 20 ex chairs – these interviews will be face to face, not via telephone or questionnaire – though follow up might be needed by phone.

Summarise the 20 interviews into succinct reports that can be sent back to the interviewees for confirmation.

Preparation of a consolidated report for circulation across the network, and for use in the evaluation of the program. The Report must provide an integration of the issues, identifying the common themes, and specifically providing MLA with an assessment of what was done well, what could have been done better and how, and any advice for how to improve the system for the final years of SGS. In addition, the report should include advice to MLA as to whether the regional committee model should be used again for future programs, and if so, how the model could be improved.

7.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of an Annual SGS FORUM

The advantages are:

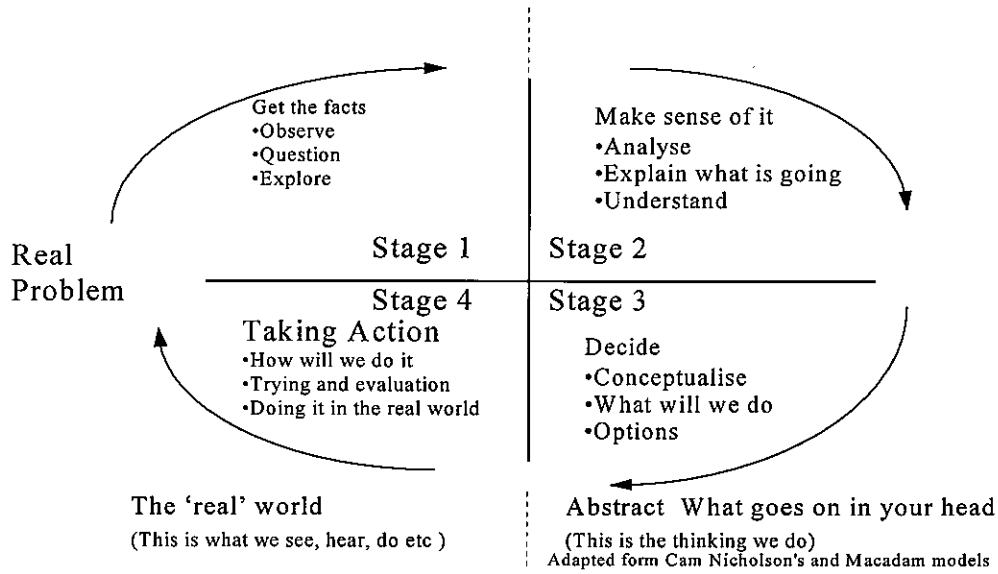
1. *These meetings are already happening individually and therefore any increase in costs due to an amalgamation should be minimal*
2. *It maximises the opportunity and return on the investment of the travel and time of participants. (It is always difficult and expensive to have national meetings in Australia because of distance.)*
3. *All key people being able to meet and improve networking and relationships building in designed plenary sessions and in social and free time. (sufficient free time needs to be allowed for this eg a long lunch hour, 2 hours as much of this will take place outside the formal sessions)*
4. *Daily opening plenary sessions of evening dinners can be places to stimulate with challenging speakers*
5. *The program would be strengthened by the networks developed. People are more inclined to communicate in other ways if they have met face to face previously*
6. *The over context of the program would be clearer to more people involved in it*
7. *There is a much greater chance to share knowledge eg*
 - *scientists can provide overviews of their research. Best bet scenarios can be developed with producer input.*
 - *Producer chairs could have input and increased interaction into*
 - *National Steering Group can interact with Regional Producer Network chairs and facilitators*
 -
8. *Individual sub-programs can still have time and meetings scheduled for their own purposes either during or before or after plenary sessions*
9. *Synergy should develop in the program because of the capacity to increase the knowledge sharing, learning and generating new ideas and knowledge.*
10. *There is the opportunity to schedule an MLA board meeting or sheep and cattle producer council meetings in a region at the same time and venue and this would also overcome the lack of profile and visibility of some of these structures and their personnel.*
11. *Senior industry people can see and hear about the program first hand from grass roots people in an effective way*
12. *It will increase the profile of the SGS program and collaborating partners to each other and the industry and wider community*
13. *It would improve the sense and context of SGS being a complete entity with a common vision to improve the sustainability and profitability of the grazing industry in the high rainfall zone.*

Disadvantages are

1. *More difficult to organise to enable plenary sessions and separate program sessions to occur. It could take a year or so to shift meeting dates to a common time.*
2. *FORUM would necessitate a longer time - one extra day minimum*

7.4 Kolb Learning Cycle

The Adult Learning Cycle (Kolb 84)



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