



# final report

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## Monitoring and Evaluation Systems Framework for Meat & Livestock Australia

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## Acknowledgements

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QualDATA also acknowledges the input of MLA Program Managers and Project Leaders who contributed their time and thinking during the workshops and in providing considered feedback as the Framework was being developed. It further acknowledges other project personnel both internal to MLA and those external to it who also provided thoughtful input.

While the primary intent of the project was to develop a suitable MLA Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Framework for on-farm R&D, this has since taken the shape of a Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Framework Guide similar to that produced for Dairy Australia.

It has become apparent that key MLA personnel now see the value in operationalising the Framework and Guide and the next steps to do so are taking shape.

QualDATA wishes MLA well in this endeavour.

Gordon Stone  
Jeff Coutts

Directors  
**QualDATA**  
March 2014

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## Executive Summary

### Overview

The purpose of this project was to develop and document a Monitoring and Evaluation and Reporting (MER) Framework for Meat & Livestock Australia's (MLA's) On-farm R&D work. The development of an accompanying proposed MER Contracting and Reporting Guide (M&E Guide) for MLA's investment in producer engagement programs in the On-farm R&D area of MLA emerged as a vital element of the Framework development task.

The aim of the project is to maximise consistency and ease of MER across program partners, ensuring that MLA can work collaboratively with them to report effectively on the impact of MLA funded project work. Subsequently the notion of addressing the next steps to make such a Framework operational through developing the M&E Guide took shape as the ultimate outcome that would inform on-ground action.

The resultant draft MER Framework for MLA's On-farm R&D work is based on a series of principles developed from consultation with a group of internal, external and partner stakeholders. These principles were regarded as being relevant to guide the implementation over time of a final evolving Framework contained in the M&E Guide which would in turn guide Framework implementation.

MLA's MER responsibilities are guided by a Deed of Agreement with the Commonwealth 2012-16 that states the requirements of MLA to have a structured evaluation framework to guide the systematic evaluation of the costs and benefits of MLA R&D investments and to participate in evaluation undertaken by the Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations (CRRDC). During 2014 and 2015 the Meat Industry Strategic Plan version 4 (MISP4) will also be completed and will guide MLA's benchmarking and impact assessments. Key meat industry peak councils reported clear views on key elements of impact reporting for MLAs On-farm R&D.

It is recognised that any MLA evaluation framework must also be aligned with public sector MER imperatives; settings articulated by the Productivity Commission and federal Department of Agriculture; 'across RDC processes' under the umbrella of the CRRDC and aligned MER processes across the other 15 individual RDCs.

Effective framework implementation will require buy-in from MLA Program Managers and Project Leaders, partner representatives and non-MLA personnel who work for MLA at a program and project level (including the public and private sector). Therefore the implementation processes will have to recognise the varied drivers and organisational responsibilities for MER across these groups. This very defined and clear guidance on 'what needs to be done, why and how' has been built into the M&E Guide to support its implementation over time.

Key findings and Recommendations were made to guide this next phase of the project in which the M&E Framework and Guide can / will be implemented. A series of Action Steps are proposed.

### Key implementation steps

The Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Framework Guide has been favourably received by MLA personnel who are the expected users of the Guide and Framework.

They are supportive of an implementation strategy based on:

- Use of a common and consistent language

- The reporting systems and metrics are defined and common so that reporting upwards from project level can be undertaken simply and consistently by key personnel (MLA and non-MLA)
- The processes and resultant data have common multipurpose usage, including for eventual Benefit: Cost Analysis and assessing technology adoption purposes
- Impacts can be assessed consistently in the cascade up from project to Industry level and vice versa
- The data management and systems is simple and easy to use and common across all red meat species with application to partners / collaborators / stakeholders
- The strategy covers R&D as well as extension and adoption
- It can be implemented across MLA internal systems (at an MLA governance level) to be reflected in milestone reporting; against MLA organisational KPIs and with relevance and consistently across all internal systems and processes including AOPs, business plans and POPs, etc
- It is a living document / system / process that reflects changing needs over time including interactions with key stakeholders.

In terms of implementation, it was noted that the implementation process would need to reflect internal MLA governance issues that surround MLA project contracting, reporting and current impact assessments. This would be integral to both across MLA needs and developing a seamless set of processes and procedures.

**Recommendation 1**

*That MLA commence an implementation strategy to operationalise the Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Framework Guide that has been completed and that includes the MLA On-farm R&D M&E Framework.*

Initial interest was expressed by the Off-farm R&D (processing) group which demonstrated that there is clearly scope to expand the thinking about MER across MLA – potentially commencing with the Off-farm R&D group. QualDATA's experience in establishing a task of this scope is that it is important to hasten slowly. Accordingly QualDATA proposes that the first task is to embed the operationalisation of the On-farm R&D group approach into its daily activities before expanding elsewhere into MLA, recognising that there may be organisational imperatives that dictate the process and timing to be used.

**Recommendation 2**

*That at the appropriate time, after embedding the operationalisation of the MER Framework and Guide into the MLA On-farm R&D group, this process is further expanded into the MLA organisation.*

A range of the On-farm R&D groups expressed interest in piloting the implementation process. Therefore a piloting process could be effectively used to address and validate emerging systems and operations issues that are expected to emerge once operationalisation commences. Once that process has been successfully embedded, it is proposed that further piloting occurs before a wider roll-out.

It was noted that some form of incentivisation may be appropriate to support a piloting process amongst stakeholders / collaborators. It is proposed that the meaning and implementation of 'some form of incentivisation'; is canvassed and clarified for use during the piloting.

**Recommendation 3**

*That the operationalisation process occurs using an incentive based piloting process of 2-3 handpicked programs; of which MSA may be one due to their expressed interest in doing so, in addition to programs managed by key personnel involved in this project to-date.*

During the course of this project a number of MLA systems, current and proposed, and personnel, have been considered as potentially part of the operationalisation. These include involving the MLA IT and the Contracts and Legal teams to consider how to establish an internal management system for the Framework.

It is known that impending appointments of key internal personnel and use of external advisers, potentially including QualDATA, could contribute to timely implementation.

**Recommendation 4**

*That before commencement of the operationalisation process, MLA defines the key internal and external personnel necessary to engage with and support the operationalisation, then use those skills in the form of a Working Group (or Implementation Team or Reference Group) of appropriately key skilled personnel.*

**Recommendation 5**

*That before commencement of the operationalisation process, MLA considers how / which systems and processes would need to be revised / reviewed / used / addressed in order to operationalise the M&E Guide, including how best to use the resources of the proposed Working Group.*

It is recognised that a number of current internal systems of data collection / content management and reporting already exist in MLA. A further important step is therefore to review those systems and consider the potential to customise or tailor their use for the MER data collection, collation and reporting during the implementation phase.

To operationalise the M&E Guide and Framework it is important to consider the time-based steps needed to develop or customise an appropriate MER Management and Reporting System to be accessible and useable by key stakeholders of MLA.

In order to manage this process an Action Plan is proposed to include: defining suitable members of the proposed Working Group; reviewing all internal aspects of the current systems available to be used and any intended and unintended consequences in customising or tailoring those systems compared with establishing new systems; canvassing internal governance systems and scoping how best to implement and embed the Guide and Framework into On-farm R&D work processes.

**Recommendation 6**

*That the proposed Working Group is identified and undertakes a scoping exercise to develop, then have sign-off, of an Action Plan for MER Implementation.*

One of the key project findings is related to the importance of using consistent, common MER language. Key related principles include: minimising complexity to ensure relevance to industry needs; linkages internally to MLA business plans, AOPs and POPs, etc; alignment to the CRRDC evaluation processes; embedding of MER in MLA culture, people, systems and documents; Incentives for this process; an internal change management plan to support and guide the inevitable operational changes and ensure strong fit with MISP 4, MLA plans and other industry strategic plans.

**Recommendation 7**

*As the implementation the M&E Guide is a significant cultural shift there ought to be a Change Management Process developed and implemented to support seamless integration of the Framework over time into normal MLA processes, systems and the psyche of key personnel.*

Key elements of a Change Management Process were identified. To address these a range of key elements were identified as being: training of internal and external responsible personnel; set-up systems then ground truth them; ensure an Industry context is built in; get buy-in from key stakeholders; define a value proposition; then define roles and responsibilities for 'Who drives what during implementation'.

**Recommendation 8**

*That the implementation of the Change Management Process is an early part of any next phase of seamless integration of the Framework over time into normal MLA processes.*

In summary, the proposed Action Plan provides the focus for 'who needs to do what when' to effect the implementation of the M&E Guide. Based on these projections, MLA will need to recognise that the Guide implementation process is expected to take shape 6-months after project commencement, with completion up to 9-months after commencement in order to successfully integrate these plans into MLA functions and activities. The proposed Action Plan therefore forms the basis of a second project which is likely to be needed to oversee implementation of MER Framework and the M&E Guide that resulted from this project.

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## Part A – Project Objectives and Process

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to document the development of the accompanying proposed Monitoring and Evaluation (MER) Contract and Reporting Guide for the Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) investment in producer engagement programs in the On-farm R&D area of MLA.

The aim of an MER Framework is to maximise consistency and ease of MER across program partners, ensuring that MLA can work collaboratively with partners to report effectively on the impact of MLA funded project work.

The project scope excluded the Off-farm R&D, Nutrition R&D and Marketing activities of MLA. During the course of the project some interest in the Framework was expressed by the meat processing personnel of MLA.

Subsequently the notion of addressing the next steps to make such a Framework operational through developing a Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Guide took shape as the ultimate outcome that would inform on-ground action.

### Background

MLA and its various partners invest significant resources into communication and extension efforts. This involves packaging of R&D outcomes for industry adoption in ways that align with MLA's strategic plan priorities and contribute to the MLA producer engagement business plan. Examples include *FutureBeef*, *More Beef from Pastures*, *Making More from Sheep*, *EDGEnetwork* and *Producer Demonstration Sites*.

To underpin this process and ensure it is cohesive, MLA seeks to improve consistency in key performance indicators, the effectiveness and efficiency of data collection, plus storage and robust reporting systems across its portfolio of funded work to demonstrate value for money to contributors, funders and end users. This process will form part of a broader monitoring and evaluation strategy to establish and monitor baseline data about the economic, environmental and social performance and attributes of the beef and sheepmeat industries – all focussed on the simplest and most effective ways of reporting.

Currently, projects are reporting against a variety of process, output and impact categories at different levels and with varying degrees of rigour and usefulness. It is seen as critical that a more structured process is implemented to enable MLA and partners to maximise effective reporting to all stakeholders in a consistent manner.

The core of this project is to develop an integrated approach to maximise effective reporting in the simplest and easiest manner.

In terms of context, the current MLA Project Evaluation and Approval Policy (as at 20/6/2013) formed the basis of the approach (see Appendix 1).

In the interests of consistency QualDATA uses its preferred term of Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting or MER (this covers all elements of reporting on Impact) in this report while recognising that M&E is a term that MLA uses. Both can be considered interchangeably.

### Methods

This project covered a range of components:

#### Workshops with MLA program Managers and Stakeholders

A range of workshops were undertaken with key MLA personnel and stakeholders:

- A Scoping Workshop: to outline the project scope to key internal MLA personnel expected to be interested and affected by the development of the framework – July 2013
- An MLA MER Straw Man workshop: to outline a draft framework and invite input to review and revise the thinking – December 2012
- A workshop to test the relevance of the final draft framework using case studies – March 2014.

Informed stakeholders were invited to the December workshop. An MLA processor representative attended the July workshop and expressed interest in the process.

### Project Evaluation Reviews

A range of MLA funded projects were reviewed to gain insights into the type and scope of data being collected – in order to inform the content of the framework:

- BeefUp Forums
- Bred Well Fed Well
- Business EDGE
- Producer Engagement Business Plan
- It's Ewe Time
- Majority Market Programs – Making More From Sheep; More Beef from Pastures
- The Monitoring and Evaluation Standard Operating Procedures.

### Informed Person Interviews

Thirteen respondents from partner organisations and programs were involved in this review of MLA's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems implemented for extension and communication programs. As part of their strategic review of MER frameworks, informed persons representing the following organisations were involved: DAFWA, DAFF Queensland, DEPI Victoria, NSW DPI, NT DPIF, Tasmania Institute of Agriculture and private consultants including: AgResults, Holmes and Co, Inspiring Excellence and Rural Directions.

Participants were involved in the following MLA programs and projects:

- More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) including; Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS), State Coordinator (5 mentions)
- Making More from Sheep (MMfS) (3 mentions)
- Future Beef Projects (QLD) (2 mentions)
- Producer Demonstration Sites (3 mentions)
- Business Edge Course Delivery (1 mention)
- Other; Sustainable Grazing Systems (1 mention), Northern Beef Situational Analysis (1 mention).

### Peak Body interviews

Interviews were undertaken with the Cattle Council of Australia, R&D Sub Committee and the former CEO of the Sheepmeat Council of Australia.

### Project Steps

The focus of the project was to move logically through the development of a framework. The process was to: engage with key personnel (industry and MLA and partner); consider the needs of the industry and those personnel in terms of developing a robust approach to M&E; to structure, review and trial a suitable framework; then ensure it would meet the emerging MLA needs at an organisational level.

QualDATA's rationale was to focus on 'useability and simplicity' and the capacity of a framework to be embedded in MLA so as to serve its mid-term needs. It was also to ensure alignment with current organisational initiatives through these steps.

### **Step 1: Establish KPIs**

Clearly articulate the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at MLA program levels (these link to the national objectives) and the associated performance metrics that will be benchmarked over time to track progress against the KPIs.

Determine how these metrics will be measured and monitored at the national level. These benchmarks may be drawn from existing processes (for example ABARES surveys), or may require new processes/components to be put into place.

### **Step 2: Define the related practice categories that can influence these KPIs**

RD&E programs improve performances against KPIs because they influence what is happening at the farm or enterprise level. They influence this by providing improved technologies or practices and facilitating their (faster) adoption and (most effective) use and/or by increasing the uptake and use of already existing technologies and practices that are not fully being utilised across the industry.

Each change can generally be described within an agreed practice category (which also embodies the associated understanding and skills associated with that practice). Changes in these practices as a result of on-ground activities provide a pathway to improving the industry KPIs at the national level.

By defining these categories in a consistent way, then changes can be captured and reported in a consistent way – and in a way which has direct relevance to the target KPIs.

### **Step 3: Link KPIs, performance and practice targets to investments**

Ensure that the relevant KPI, performance metrics and relevant practice categories are made clear to delivery partners and how they need to be reported. This includes clarity and consistency on the "demographics" associated with the reporting – for example: regional location; property size; property type.

This would include a clear reporting guide with required categories embedded into it.

Note that reporting also needs to include factors such as: barriers to adoption; research gaps; emerging opportunities; feedback/learning on process used etc.

This could be associated with guides or models which could be used for data collection and collation – but the actual mechanisms used should ultimately be the responsibility of the delivery partner. It may also mean that partners are provided with the training needed to use these resources and to be able to report back in the way that is needed.

This step is also to provide feedback to the delivery partners on all aspects of their reporting.

### **Step 4: Have an internal system for collating and reporting up**

Given that data will be coming to MLA in a more consistent manner in terms of demographics, capacity and practice categories and performance metrics, the internal system will need to be able to capitalise on this by being able to capture and collate across the data from the various states, projects and programs.

Feedback from the Board, Government and Industry stakeholders will assist in continuing to improve the system over time.

Guidance on an internal system to implement the framework is to be provided to inform future steps and thinking about how to best develop a robust, simple yet useable MER system that has links back to key MLA MER processes and operations at an organisational level.

## Report Structure and Approach

The report is structured in three parts – a Part A that outlines the project objectives and process; a Part B that defines how the Framework was developed and Part C which covers making the Framework operational.

## Part B – Developing a Framework

### Components of a Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting System

In summary, a **Framework** creates context so the data collection is targeted; the **Reporting** is against the Objectives on which the framework is created and the **Collection and Collation** is focussed on systematically collecting the minimum of the right data in the most cost effective way to support **Reporting** against objectives.

### MER Framework

An MER Framework lays out program and performance objectives and the specific practices that are being targeted to achieve them. It guides how investments/contracts are framed – that is, what specifically is being targeted from the investment, and hence what reporting is required to demonstrate that gains have been made in the defined practices and performance areas.

Being specific about practices and performance metrics ensures that there is a consistency with reporting, allowing data to be collated for reporting at the higher program, organisation or industry level.

### MER Data Collection

MER data collection is guided by the MER framework and the specified practice categories and performance metrics associated with the project investment. This tells personnel **what** evaluation data to collect. If a delivery partner is clear that MLA wants reporting of activities, capacity gains, practice changes and performance gains against such specified categories and metrics, then it provides a basis for them to develop their monitoring and evaluation tools and approaches to ensure that they capture the data in this way for reporting back.

For example, a follow-up survey from a weaner management activity at project level could include:

7. As a result of the information you received through this project or project activities you participated in, which of the following actions, if any, have you taken in the last 2 years?

- Changed the timing of weaning (or advice – if an EO or private consultant)
- Changed the vaccination and handling of weaners (or advice)
- Changed the weaner supplements (or advice)
- Considered alternative approaches to weaner management
- Discussed possibilities of changes with consultant/advisor/clients
- Undertook extra information or training on weaning
- Other actions:

8. If you have made a change in practice/advice, please provide some more details:

9. If you have made changes, and you are a property owner or manager, what proportion (%) of your property will be affected by this change?

10. How much sooner did you make this change as a result of the project information or activities than you may have done otherwise?

- Number of years (0 if it was planned for the current year anyway):
- Never:

11. Overall, what influence (%) would you attribute to the project information and/or activities to you making the change?

12. If you have made a change on your own or with your advice, what benefits or impact has...

Note this example includes questions on specific practice changes as well as project influence. Elsewhere it also asks about barriers, further support needs and impacts/benefits arising.

The data collected through such mechanisms can then be captured on a central web based system (which could be the organisation's data management system) that includes data from across project activities over time through a range of data collection tools. In the *Grazing*

BMP & Extension Support Project example below, the data collection tools used include: extension activity feedback forms; narratives; staff capacity feedback forms; practice change surveys; reporting forms for capacity building with other organisations and forms capturing media activity.



Logout

**Grazing BMP & Extension Support Project**

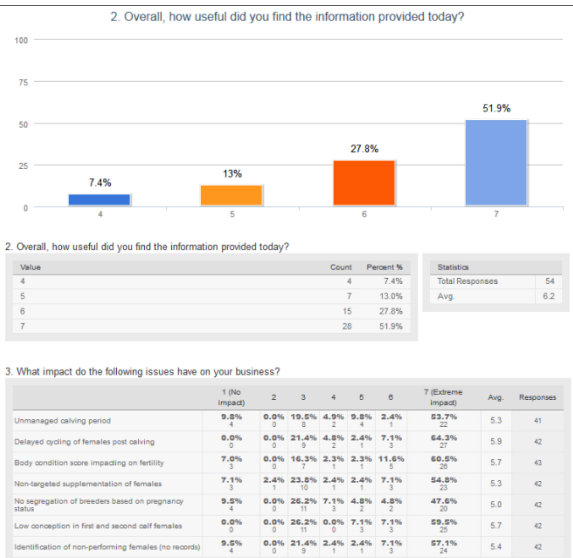
Home (FAQ) Core Data Collection Participant Responses Pro Forma Contact Us

Form	Input Data	Edit Responses	Summary Reports	Download Data
Activity Form	<a href="#">Add new activity</a>	<a href="#">View activities</a>	<a href="#">Overall summary report</a> <a href="#">2012/13 - Overall summary report</a>	<a href="#">Download overall data</a> <a href="#">Download funder data</a>
Narrative Form	<a href="#">Add new narrative</a>	<a href="#">View narratives</a>	<a href="#">Overall summary report</a>	<a href="#">Download overall data</a>
Case Study Form	<a href="#">Add new case study</a>	<a href="#">View case studies</a>	<a href="#">Overall summary report</a>	<a href="#">Download overall data</a> <a href="#">Download responses as individual PDFs</a>
Staff Capacity Building	<a href="#">Add new staff member</a>	<a href="#">View responses</a>	<a href="#">Overall summary report</a> <a href="#">New Staff - Summary Report</a> <a href="#">Existing Staff - Summary Report</a>	<a href="#">Download overall data</a>
Practice Change Survey 2013	<a href="#">Add new</a>	<a href="#">View responses</a>	<a href="#">Overall summary report</a>	<a href="#">Download overall data</a>
Capacity Building With Other Organisations	<a href="#">Add new</a>	<a href="#">View responses</a>	<a href="#">Overall summary report</a>	<a href="#">Download overall data</a>
Media Activities	<a href="#">Add new</a>	<a href="#">View responses</a>	<a href="#">Overall summary report</a>	<a href="#">Download overall data</a>

Note: The 'Summary Reports' and 'Download Data' may take a few minutes to update after survey data is submitted  
Tip: If you would like to open the Input forms or Reports in a separate window or tab (rather than the embedded popup), simply right click the link and select 'Open Link in New Tab/Window'

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Raw data is entered and then collated and presented as tables, graphs and contained in a spreadsheet for further analysis as required.



Note, the MER framework does not specify **how** delivery partners will necessarily capture this data. Decisions will be made based on the type of project, budget, experience, geographical and target group considerations. There are many different evaluation methods and tools that can be used and adapted for different purposes. The important thing is to provide evidence based reporting against the practice categories and performance metrics identified / specified. Common MER data tools are shown in the following table and choices can be made depending on individual circumstances.

Grouping of methods	Examples
1. Activity and output reporting	This includes program/project records of what activities have been undertaken and outputs achieved. It also encompasses the quality of activities and outputs – through peer assessment and review, and feedback from those involved.
2. Event feedback	This includes methods to capture and record reactions and changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills or Aspirations (KASA) by event participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Event participant feedback sheets</li> <li>❖ Dartboards (quick indications of gains on a circular chart)</li> <li>❖ ORID (Objective, Reactive, Interpretive, Decisional) – group debrief.</li> <li>❖ Organiser reflection sheets</li> <li>❖ Observers.</li> </ul>
3. Direct impact assessment	This grouping captures examples and extent of practice change amongst those engaged in some way: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Surveys</li> <li>❖ Narratives (short structured vignettes)</li> <li>❖ Case studies</li> <li>❖ Stakeholder 'debriefs'</li> <li>❖ Focus groups.</li> </ul>
4. Consequences - social, economic and biophysical	These methods capture changes in context and higher level impacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Regional or state statistics</li> <li>❖ Satellite imagery/GIS</li> <li>❖ Computer modeling (including Benefit/Cost)</li> <li>❖ Broad program/community level surveys</li> <li>❖ Secondary data – related reviews and reports.</li> </ul>

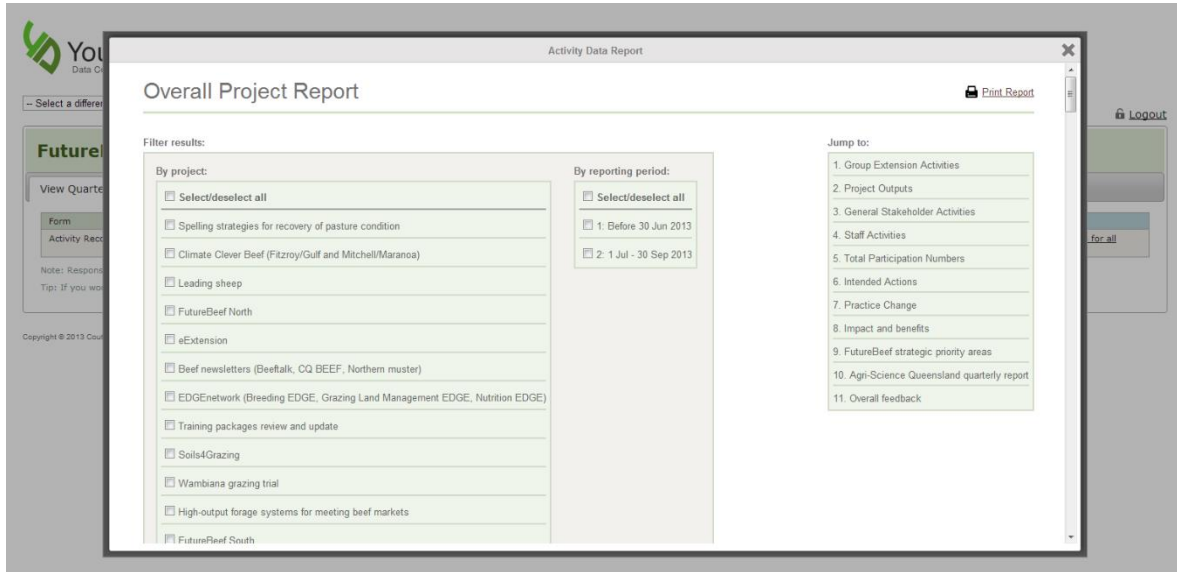
## Data collation

The purpose of having specific performance metrics and associated practice categories is to assist in data collation for consistent reporting – within projects and across projects and programs.

**Project/organisational levels:** For example, a project might have many different activities in different locations. By ensuring that the project team are capturing data in a consistent way, data from a range of activities and regions can then be easily collated by the project leader for project level reporting to their organisations and funding bodies. ***Different projects and their organisations have different ways of managing this data collation.*** For example, EverGraze used an online system where evaluation data from each activity was entered by project team members using consistent categories to allow ease of collation at project level. Other projects, such as the *Grazing BMP and Extension Support Project* in the Burdekin, use similar systems. Some government departments have their own on-line systems where project team leaders input six monthly data in the format stated for government and funder reporting needs. In Queensland, some FutureBeef projects use on-line systems; others use spreadsheets and all input is summarised quarterly into a common on-line system for overall reporting purposes. The critical aspect is that the data is collated in such a way that it allows consistent reporting against required activity and impact parameters.

FutureBeef Queensland has a number of different projects collecting their individual data in a consistent way to allow ease of collation at a state level. ***This is to allow reporting for organisational and government needs as well as for reporting to funding bodies.***

Their collating system allows for results to be grouped according to time periods and all or subsets of projects against the reporting categories in tables which provide totals for the periods.



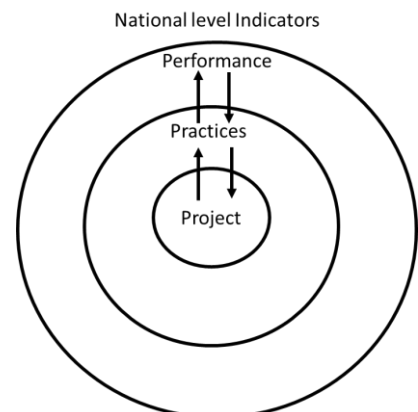
**MLA/National levels:** MLA funds a range of projects in different states with overlaps in performance and practice areas. If all projects used the same categories and metrics for reporting impacts on practice and performance, then the data can be matched and collated to demonstrate impact at an MLA program level. ***This would require MLA to have its data management system capable of bringing this data together*** – rather than having data from individual project reports hidden in pdf / other formats in their information management systems.

### Project/program level versus national

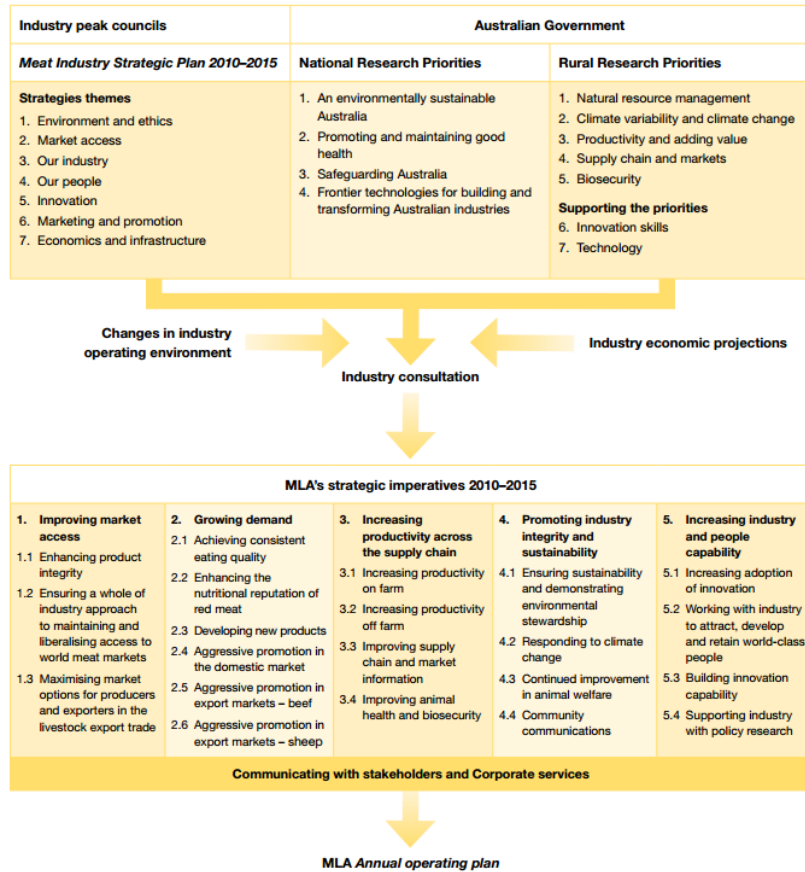
Evaluation reporting at the *project level* then, is about demonstrating that the project activities are making a difference related to the targeted practices with a potential – or measured – impact in the desired performance metrics. It demonstrates that the investment, via the project outcomes, is adding value to the move in the direction of national targets and goals.

Projects are limited in how far they can take their impacts towards national level gains because of the localised nature of their activities, time factors and the “noise” of seasons, markets and policies etc.

MLA has the responsibility to monitor changes in national industry performance indicators (from the Meat Industry Strategic Plan to MLA Strategic Objectives and related Annual Operating Plans) in line with program (a collection of projects) goals and objectives. This level of monitoring is above the individual projects or programs and is looking at shifting trends in key indicators and their influencing factors in the direction of the Program goals.







The full picture then is gained through a **combination** of (several) project level evaluation/s of activities to changes on farm/enterprise and indicative impacts in local performance **and** higher level monitoring of indicators, trends and indicators linking back down towards project contributions.

### Implications

The implications of this discussion is that MLA is **not responsible** for managing raw data from the range of projects which it funds with delivery partners – nor for how this is collected and collated by the partners for reporting back to them. They **could** provide resources which could guide/assist delivery partners in how best to undertake these tasks – or point them to available resources.

MLA **is responsible** for clearly articulating what they want from their investment and in what categories and metrics this should be reported. Equally they are responsible for ensuring that the outcomes / impacts can be clearly articulated to those responsible for reporting to them – which is where the Framework comes in. They are then also responsible to ensure that they can capitalise on this consistency by being able to effectively and efficiently collate reported data across investments for reporting at program level. Their other evaluation responsibility is to measure and monitor trends and influences at the MLA organisational level and at the national level against national industry indicators for which they are responsible for successfully meeting key industry objectives.

### Analysis of Selected Project Evaluations

During the initial Scoping Workshops a range of projects (Appendix 2) were identified as 'Gems' and 'Potential Gems' – to signify the extent to which they had to go to reach some form of best practice. QualDATA reviewed their level of MER and the apparent impact they are reporting to examine the breadth and depth of current MER. This informed the thinking about the extent to which a proposed MLA Framework would be needed and its scope.

The key findings, when they were reviewed, were that there was:

- Little direct reporting against KRAs/KPIs/objectives
- Mixed and missing demographic data
- Mixed data on property size (ha; no. head; no. breeders; bales wool)
- Some good examples of activity, KASA and intentions reporting (MMfB; Business Edge; EverGraze)
- Some practice change reporting (MMfS; EverGraze)
- Limited extrapolation to productivity gain (exc - MMfS) and MLA targets
- Limited addressing of barriers etc (exc - Business Edge).

### Feedback from Informed Persons

Those who somehow benefit from this work were categorised into – the wider public (public good – influencing the social licence to operate); direct beneficiaries; funders and co-funders; deliverers; partners (putting in money or in-kind) and co-investors (mostly connected with joint funding with MLA).

The chief customer beneficiaries were identified as – peak bodies (CCA, SMCA, ALFA, Livecorp, GICA, AMPC and AMIC); federal gov't, and the private sector (processors, co-investors, and deliverers).

#### Key Findings:

- Evidence suggested a need for improved clarity in terms of MLA reporting requirements as well as a more formalised process which contributes towards identifying the benefits and desired outcomes for proposed / current projects. Clear guidelines and templates to ensure explicit requirements during reporting were suggested as being critical.
- The value of clear reporting guidelines and the purpose of MER reporting should be further explained to ensure all are aware of MLA's specific reporting requirements, with data collected shown to have a direct link to outcomes and consequences.
- There were strongly held opinions regarding the communication element of the MLA framework. From the perspective of extension and delivery agents as well as producers, it is important that learnings and findings are being passed on. This has the added impact of gaining improved producer participation and attitudes towards MER. The perception is that outcomes are not being used to underpin decisions at an agency or MLA level and information is being lost in *corporate black holes* (DAFFQ).
- The need for a review of Category A, B and C pathways was highlighted. These are not as clearly aligned as they could be in terms of MER requirements. In particular Category C defines a different pathway to MER outcomes and indicators that constitute a Category C event are different to those for identifying Category C in the MER process.

### Overall Findings of project analysis and Informed Persons

#### Need for more clarity of MLA MER requirements from onset

Although participants generally agreed that MLA MER reporting requirements were fairly clear (weighted average rating 7.6 where 1 was *unclear* and 10 was *very clear*), discussion regarding the clarity of requirements was varied. Some noted the ease and clarity of requirements in submitting milestone and final reports, using templates provided and the availability of MLA for discussion; while others expressed the view that the current MLA framework processes lacked clear guidelines resulting in varied levels of reporting.

In particular, several commented on *teething issues* associated with MMfS. It was suggested that MER requirements be made more clear at the start instead of being developed over the

course of a program. Input into designing frameworks and involvement in initial MER requirements is noted as being important to extension staff and consultants in understanding outcomes required and to *assist in developing stronger projects*.

#### **Satisfaction with MLA reporting requirements and feedback**

Participants tended to view MLA MER requirements as being good and mostly clear, *now*, indicating a progression over time to a current satisfactory, efficient level. In terms of feedback regarding reporting, there were concerns that in the past project or milestone reports were not read or acted on.

The lack of feedback from MLA to participants received in response to reports and projects being submitted, except for an *'approved without comment'* were also noted. This issue was raised by several regarding the lack of clarity about what happens to MER data collected; how it is used and how it informs future funding and projects. The question raised was *how do others learn about what came out of projects?* (DAFFQ).

#### **Contribution of the Category A, B and C events to key performance indicators**

The impact of the MER framework in contributing to Key Performance Indicators, with particular reference to the category A, B and C events was widely discussed during this review, in reference to the MMfS Project. It was suggested that there is a need to align A and B Category pathways with the MER intent and measurement.

The National Coordinator for MMfS discussed the fact that the program has arguably moved from awareness, knowledge and skills to on farm adoption, *yet it seems this is not reflected in (the) MER data (collected)*.

#### **Comparing MLA MER requirements to other organisation reporting requirements**

Several participants noted they had no formal MER requirements from their own organisations, with one noting they *have always been an ad hoc agency* (DAFWA) and another that progress reporting is undertaken, but *MER is something still being developed* (TIA). Sole operators involved also noted no formal MER frameworks in existence, instead relying on verbal feedback and providing *good outcomes to clients*. Several who have MER requirements from other funders noted MLA requirements to be the *most comprehensive; clear and precise; robust and rigorous*.

Different frameworks that were considered by participants, found MLA to be more concerned with knowledge and skills developed, compared to AWI (demographics focus) and Evergraze (process issues).

#### **Achieving more efficiency in alignment between MER frameworks**

Some participants raised the question as to the lack of formality and specific needs to be met by evaluation. Some were unsure about the specific needs of MLA and expressed frustration at the purpose of MER reporting. At an operational level, participants discussed the need for more agreement on what is being measured and what are the *key things to know* (MMfS).

The concern was again raised that information is being collected and not used (*collected in anticipation, but is not necessarily important to the program - MMfS*), resulting in wasted time and frustrations.

It is suggested that MLA develop common reporting guidelines, *directly linked to consequences* (DAFFQ). The need for more qualitative comments was noted.

#### **MER outcomes sought by participants**

In discussing outcomes sought from MER processes, participants generally focused on the requirement to demonstrate program impact, the achievements of program outcomes in terms of producer practice, knowledge and skill changes as well as the need for MER to contribute to continual improvements in program delivery.

Discussion included the need to demonstrate impact to investors, showing the return on every dollar invested into a program. Further this is also about ensuring that an understanding of

program achievements can be demonstrated – and more specific outcomes included meeting client expectations and project KPIs and program objectives can be reported.

### **Data collected, type, importance and issues**

Overall participants agreed that all data categories are important, with varied degrees of relevance to their programs and projects.

- *Demographics*: people, enterprise and financial data were noted as important, particularly age (are they entering or leaving industry), gender (understanding level of female participation), location and size (is program achieving relevant regional spread amongst target audience).
- *Creating Awareness*: Category B and C type feedback, methods of communication and where information is sought, were mentioned. It was suggested that there is a role for awareness, but the aim is to have already achieved awareness to now focus on knowledge and skill development.
- *Building Knowledge and Skills*: Category B and C type feedback was again mentioned as was data collection type, as well as understanding intent to change. Described as *pivotal* in determining program success, this data category was noted as being difficult to measure.
- *Practice Change*: Category B and C type feedback, understanding of intentions, weaning percentages, implementation of practices across property. Again this data category was noted as important to determining effective extension; however concerns included the fact that data is *not often volunteered in detail*.
- *Performance Indicators*: enterprise and market focused data. Participants agreed that performance indicators are important, however they are often focused on the difficulties and challenges in collecting this type of data: *majority of participants would not be able to provide this level of detail and hard to get good quantitative data from producers (often don't record it or might not want to share it)*.
- *Economic, Social or Environmental Indicators*: cost of production, ROI, gross margins and triple bottom lines. Most agreed on the importance of this data, but commented on the difficulties associated with collecting it.

### **Barriers and frustrations in MER**

*Data Collection*: Several participants discussed the difficulties associated with gathering relevant data for MER processes. Participants noted low return rates as a result of producer attitudes towards MER. Although MLA may have good systems in place, it is suggested that there is a need to demonstrate to producers the value of their participation.

*MLA Timeframes*: Some participants commented on MLA timelines and timeliness. In terms of data analysis, it was suggested this needs to be improved to ensure a faster turnaround time so extension staff are able to take action to make improvements.

### **Important principles to consider when developing an MLA MER framework**

A commonly mentioned principle considered important in developing an MLA Evaluation Framework was the ability to demonstrate the value of both the financial investments into activities as well as producer engagement. Reporting to funding bodies should highlight the value of change, what is working and what has been achieved. The return on investment and economic benefits to industry should be noticeable.

In addition, the outcomes of MER should be communicated to extension providers and the producers involved.

It is suggested that MLA maintain the local relevance of work completed and maintain the flexibility to accommodate other investors. The view was expressed that more empowerment should be given to state organisations to *develop lower level MER requirements*. Many participants commented on the need for more *clarity* and a greater consideration of purpose to be incorporated into the MLA framework. Specific areas mentioned included clarity about data collection, sample sizes and more defined client profiling. Clear *industry objectives* and a focus on economics and profitability vs production driven outcomes were also noted.

## Input from Industry bodies

In consultations with Cattle and Sheepmeat Industry Peak Councils – see Appendix 3, a common view became apparent:

- MLA does a *reasonable job* of measuring and reporting on Return on Investment / Impact
- Further improvements would be valuable particularly in articulating the extent of technology adoption; Benefit:Cost at a triple bottom line level; unintended consequences of work undertaken; adaptations that occur; and consistency of information and process for reporting
- There appears to be a limitation on the data available to underpin these claims – the acquisition of it needs to be as streamlined as possible from known baselines with defined KPIs
- Similarly there is a limitation on being able to capture impacts of grower practices – and the factors that may have prevented uptake of technologies
- A key common concern of peak councils is the ease of / barriers to adoption – the available data on which they can assess this is also emerging as a further limitation
- It was acknowledged that the MISP 4 will need to have suitable KPIs to create an appropriate context in which to better measure impact, adoption, etc
- The next step is having suitable structures and systems to enable linkage / measurement back to the high level targets.

### Key findings:

The development of the MLA MER Framework was undertaken in a way that also reflects the issues raised by the Cattle and Sheepmeat Industry Peak Councils and recognises the focus on addressing the stronger KPIs that are expected to emerge from MISP 4 which is currently under development.

## Input from MLA Program staff

Detailed findings of the Scoping Workshop, July 2013 are contained in Appendix 4 with the key outcomes outlined below:

### Key principles identified by Program Managers

For a structured MER process to be successful key principles are:

- A strong evidence base is required to make the claims
- These form the basis of a good story that can be told – to demonstrate change over time as a result of the work undertaken
- Therefore good data must be captured at ground level
- This has to be focussed on answering key impact questions – via the framework
- Data capture to be / perceived to be simple, easy, flexible and embedded in everyday process (the current paradigm is that it is complex and painful, thus inconsistent approaches are taken)
- Data then to be useable for a range of reporting from the one data capture / collation source
- Dedicated resources and structures to be made available / created to facilitate MER
- This will require an overall cultural change – within MLA and project partners
- MER to become part of an accountability culture – which therefore shows the benefit and value of RD&E through articulating Impact

### An MER framework

The thinking about the MER framework is that it ought to:

- Integrate with AOPs – and at Peak Council level – and link across RMAC, MISP, via program managers to operational KPIs
- Fit with MLA Board / senior executive evaluation policy / process and thinking – and speak to the next three yearreview due shortly (last one in 2010) and next strategic plan
- Cover production and processing so both are integrated in a Triple Bottom Line (TBL) context
- Be comprehensive, accurate, accountable and self-perpetuating
- Embedded in daily operations – thus very functional at project and operational level
- Support continuous improvement and robust measurement of impact
- Support thinking about benchmarks
- Be consistent nationally and cascade up and down from industry to project level
- Support identifying future R&D priorities along the value chain and provide robust feedback
- Create self evident and clear KPIs
- Support consistency of approach across MLA and its co-investment partners as well as peak councils, government, etc.

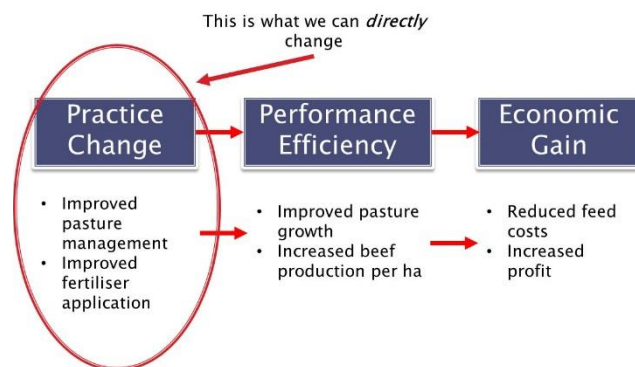
## The Emerging Logic of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

### Cascade

A critical element in a Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting System is to ensure that there is a clear *'cascading'* within an overall evaluation framework – so that project level activities clearly contribute to strategic priorities at program and organisational levels; and that data collected can easily be collated up across projects and programs to allow consistent reporting at all levels. Cascading down ensures project work reflects the organisational priorities.

### Return on Investment

Investment in RD&E is based on the premise that change will happen more quickly, across a greater number of enterprises/locations and will be implemented in a more effective manner than might otherwise have been the case should that work not have been undertaken. These factors significantly impact on Benefit/Cost (BCA) calculations – therefore robust MER data must be available to support such BCA work.



The logic of the diagram is the same whether the desired change is for improved economic, environmental or social outcomes. In today's settings there is an increasing need to be able to report against Triple Bottom Line improvements.

### Practice Change is the focus

Impact of investment in extension programs must be firmly centred on specific *practice changes* that directly relate to the strategic objectives of the organisation, which through cascading are the focus of program and project level activities. This is what can generally be measured within the life of a project – providing tangible evidence that change has occurred thereby providing the most immediate possible calculated benefits in context of meeting the agreed objectives at project, program or organisational levels. The challenge then is defining

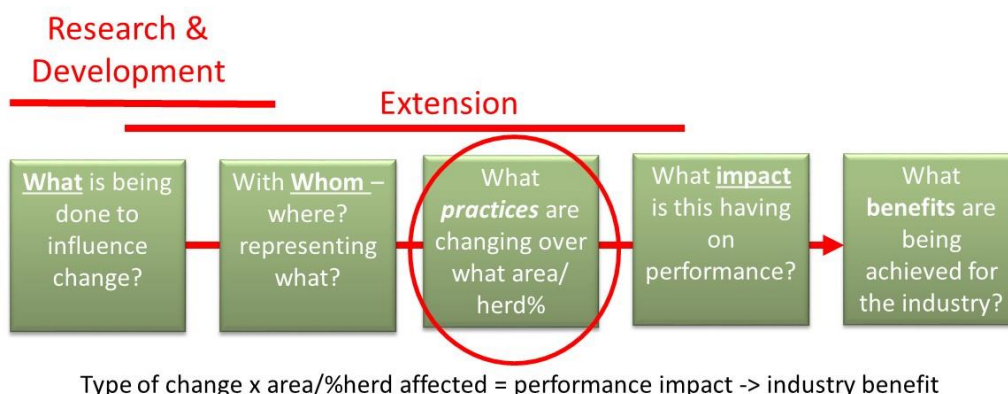
and capturing the practice changes that impact on strategic priorities and gaining consistency in reporting against the extent of these practice changes based on summative evaluation across a number of projects that contribute to more strategic outcomes at program and organisational level.

Focussing on agreed practice change categories provides a basis for defining the necessary capacity changes (knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations) as well as likely benefits to arise from such changes into the future. This will contribute to the extent of change / adoption of new practices as the ultimate measure of level of success.

### Impact Logic

To be able to effectively report on the impact of investment in producer engagement programs, information is needed in the following parts of the logic chain. This is shown in the following diagram. It should also be noted that for data to be collated across activities and projects for *cumulative reporting* against strategic objectives, then there needs to be a consistency in categories used. Consistency is a critical element of the MER process.

## Impact of RD&E



### Categories

The key levels of **categories** to populate this logic are:

- **Activities and Outputs – to facilitate engagement and change**
  - Describing the type and range of activities, tools and products developed and their quality and usefulness
- **Demographics – for engagement and practice change**
  - Describing the **scale** of impact – geographical location; property type; property size; herd size – across the key agreed targeted stakeholder categories
- **Capacity and Practice change categories – to be able to report change**
  - Reporting the **type** of practice change (*and* related capacity gains) – and hence what potential benefits could result – against stakeholders
- **Performance metrics – to be able to calculate gains**
  - Calculating the gains in performance that should result from practice changes reported – could be related to productivity, environmental indicators (e.g. ground cover), or social (e.g. employment conditions).
- **Industry Benefits – to be able to assess industry benefits**

- Estimating the resulting benefits to profitability; environmental conditions; social contexts – including contribution to public and private benefits and potential spin-offs.

An MER framework then should define the categories and metrics needed to populate these levels in a consistent manner across investments. This will create clarity regarding the agreed outcomes of key investments, then guide reporting against those achievements – and focus the data collation across like investments so that the aggregated data supports reporting against expected outcomes.

### Counterfactual

Change over the life of a project cannot all necessarily be attributed to specific project activities. Other projects, information sources, market incentives, climate and other factors can influence change (positively or negatively) activities and impact on specific target groups. The challenge is to be able to demonstrate how a project has *added value* to other specific activities, events, etc to assist change in terms of:

- Speed of change – how has intervention increased the rate of uptake?
- Reach of change – how have activities engaged more people/businesses?
- Effectiveness of change – how have tools and processes improved the *application* of changes made?

Currently, economists make this call in consultation with informed persons and use the term counterfactual – what would have been the situation if this intervention/s had not occurred. The more a project can capture and report evidence regarding the extent to which it can claim responsibility for these factors taking place, the stronger any impact statements and resulting Benefit Cost Analysis will be.

### Benchmarks

To be able to guide investments and track improvements in the different categories over time as a result of investments made in producer engagement projects, MLA needs to have robust benchmarks of targeted practices being undertaken across the industry over time. An initial position or baseline from which to measure change via subsequent benchmarking over time, becomes a critical process. By using industry wide surveys and other benchmarking tools, MLA can clearly define these practices and changes over time, to tie in with robust reporting against investments made; against changes that have occurred (or through evidence that they are now occurring).

### Investment Guidelines and Reporting

There are a range of different Logical Frameworks that are being used to lay out the logic of projects and hence help to define monitoring and reporting requirements against the project objectives. These are sometimes dictated by funders (e.g. the MERI plan for CFoC) and sometimes chosen by projects themselves.

However, if the categories described above are used and become ‘common to all MLA projects and programs’, then project proposals and subsequent contracted projects would be based around defined and consistent metrics in these categories:

Project Investment Level	Reporting Requirement
<p><b>Strategic Investment Area</b> Define the MLA strategic objective and defined target practice areas which the project will contribute to.</p>	How did the project directly impact on this strategic investment area – using defined categories and metrics captured as below?
<p><b>Activities and Outputs</b> Describe the type and range of development and engagement activities and tools and products to be developed.</p>	<p>What type of development and engagement activities were delivered and what tools and products were developed?</p> <p><i>What was the quality and usefulness of the</i></p>



	<i>activities and outputs?</i>
<b>Demographics</b> Describe the <b>scale</b> of planned awareness raising and engagement and expected impact – geographical location; property type; property size; herd size; type of producer / adviser, etc	What was the <i>extent</i> of reach and engagement across defined demographics?  <i>How did the project increase the reach? What barriers were met – and how were these overcome?</i>
<b>Capacity and Practice change categories</b> Define the <b>type(s)</b> of practice change ( <i>and</i> related capacity gains) being targeted (consistent with MLA category descriptions)	What relevant capacity and targeted practice changes were actually made (or indications that they will follow-on from activities) – across what demographic, herd size etc?  <i>How has the project influenced the rate and effectiveness of this uptake?</i>
<b>Performance metrics</b> Calculate the gains in performance that should result from practice changes reported – related to defined productivity, environmental indicators (e.g. ground cover), or social (e.g. employment conditions) metrics.	Given the reported and expected practice changes (in the demographic described) achieved in the project, what performance gains have been measured and/or calculated over what area or % of herd as a result?  <i>Given the estimated project influence on this uptake, what benefits can be attributed to the project?</i>
<b>Industry Benefits – to be able to assess industry benefits</b>  Describe the expected contribution to the overall profitability; environmental conditions; social contexts at the project and overall industry level in terms of MLA metrics.	Given the expected gains in performance, and any evidence of flow on-benefits, what economic, environmental, or social benefits can you report/calculate/estimate as a result of the project?  <i>What other factors have/may influence(d) these benefits (positively or negatively)?</i>

Such a logic links the investment made to defined strategic objectives and clearly provides guidelines for reporting against these objectives. As noted above, for reporting to be effective and support collation across project investments directed at similar practice changes, it is critical to have a consistent set of categories and metrics to support reporting against the level of success or otherwise of those investments.

**Additional information** around these impacts is generally needed to complete the picture and includes: key learnings, feedback on barriers, new research needs and any evidence of the extent to which the project influenced the outcome (against the counterfactual) – speed of uptake, reach and effectiveness of implementation on property, etc.

## Reporting

To provide an insight into the end point of undertaking MER, the *summary* of an **example** impact report might read like the below:

### Strategic Investment Area

This project contributed to the MLA Focus Area *Increasing productivity across the supply chain* and the specific objective contributed to *Improve reproduction efficiency in northern beef (by five percentage points)*

### Project funding

This project was undertaken over three years at a total cost of \$300,000 with MLA contributing 50%. The other 50% was made up of equal contributions from Queensland, WA and NT State/Territory Governments.

### Activities and Outputs

The project ran a series of 5 workshops across Northern Australia, supported by a Facebook page and a consultant follow up visit to all participants. The project developed a workbook on *improving reproduction efficiency to improve profits*. This was also made available for downloading on the project Facebook page. Peer review rated the workshop process and content highly and participants rated relevance as 9/10.

### **Demographics**

The project focused on the properties around 5 key regional centres across Northern Australia: Charters Towers; Longreach; Katherine; Broome; and Wyndham. 50 people representing 35 businesses comprising of a total of 550,000 ha and 50,000 head of cattle participated in the training. A further 20 properties (200,000 ha and 20,000 head) joined in the conversation and downloaded material from Facebook. This comprises a total of X% of the cattle industry in northern Australia.

### **Capacity and Practice change**

As a result of the project activities, all participants have reported a gain in their understanding and confidence in making changes in the area of reproductive practice (including the practice categories of: mating management; bull selection; cow nutrition; and weaner management) with 15 businesses (150,000 ha and 15,000 head) already having made one or more of these changes and 5 more (5,000 ha, 500 head) planning to in the next 12 months.

### **Performance metrics**

As a result of these reported and intended practice changes, it is calculated that by the end of 2014, reproductive performance would improve across 20,000 head of cattle in Northern Australia by a factor of 10 percentage points. This is equivalent to an increased turn-off of 900 extra head of store cattle from 200,000 ha of northern grazing land.

### **Industry Benefits – to be able to assess industry benefits**

The increased 10 percentage points in the reproduction rate from those who made changes as a result of the project activities and subsequent productivity from the project by 2014, is calculated to increase net income to each property of \$5,000 per year or a total of \$100,000/year across the properties involved. A stronger and more profitable beef industry in North Queensland has the potential to improve employment in the regions providing a positive community benefit.

### **Project influence**

Feedback from producers who made changes indicate that exposure to the project information, activities and follow up support, resulted in them making the changes on average 5 years earlier than they would have otherwise. Five properties indicated they had not even considered making these changes prior to their participation. These property owners rated the influence of the project on them making the change/s plus making them as effectively as they did, as 70% in relation to other sources of information and influence.

### **Key Learnings**

The project demonstrated the value of targeted training followed by individual follow up on farm. This allowed producers to work through how the learning from the workshop could be best integrated into their specific circumstances then use a consultant to validate these learnings. The project also highlighted the importance of weighing cows prior to mating to best provide nutritional supplements and maximise calving percentages. The project report and key learnings has been made available on the Facebook page, MLA's website and is the basis for a paper to be delivered at the national Beef Conference in Rockhampton in 2014. The report continues to be downloaded from both the Facebook page x months after project completion at a rate of y/ month and from the MLA website (anecdotal data only).

### **Barriers and opportunities**

The main barriers encountered were the dry conditions which limited producer motivation and financial capacity to make changes such as improved fencing to manage mating and improve cow nutrition. There is an opportunity to expand the impact of this project by developing case studies and videos on You Tube on the changes made and how producers adapted practices to suit their individual needs. These materials could be made available through different outlets, e.g. stock and station agents; to expand the reach.

### **Research Needs**

The project identified the need for further research to be taken on breed x nutrition impacts on the timing of changes in nutritional supplements for cows in dry conditions.

These could also provide the basis for a program logic template (one pager) on a program basis that programs could complete that summarises their MER plan (i.e. if this is what they are planning to undertake, achieve and report on, then how will they collect the MER data for this purpose).

### **Testing the application of the final draft framework using case studies**

The final project activity was to review the operationalisation of the proposed MLA Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Guide (M&E Guide) including the Framework, which was undertaken in Sydney on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2014 with a key group of Program Managers. A series of case studies were used to test the efficacy of the Framework and Guide. The outcomes are outlined in Appendix 5.

The meeting objectives were to ensure:

- The M&E Guide met Program Manager and wider MLA MER needs
- The M&E Guide could be implemented efficiently and effectively
- The M&E Guide implementation process would assure key personnel of appropriate recording and reporting processes
- MLA personnel outlined future initiatives on which the project could have input.

Relevant recommendations were then made that would ensure the useability and usefulness of the project outcomes across MLA and partners, would support robust reporting against industry needs in context of MLA overall reporting requirements and ensure relevant metrics were in place.

The key meeting outcomes can be categorised as:

- A Common consistent language / terminology / meaning is required – to ensure all internal and external personnel have a common understanding of terms / meaning across all aspects of the tasks MLA undertakes on behalf of all stakeholders. This is crucial for reasons of – ensuring contracting processes are explicit; milestone reporting is unambiguous; communication and adoption of research findings is unambiguous; internal workflow / team reporting / MLA Board reporting are consistent and impact reporting is also consistent amongst MLA, its partners and the wider industry / government.
- Reporting systems are consistent and effectively managed – and supports use of the strongest possible Performance and Practice Metrics against indicators used in the Annual Operating Plan, the MLA Strategic Plan and Meat Industry Strategic Plan in a consistent manner. This will ensure MLA and the industry can consider progress against objectives readily and longer term with consistency; MLA Board members and industry peak bodies can understand and reflect on the MLA project and program outcomes to judge the level of success of in meeting industry indicators of success, benchmarked over time.

- Sufficient robust data to allow for a meaningful BCA and to assess extent of technology adoption – and ‘cascading up’ of impact assessments from project to MISP level against common Key Performance Indicators or KPIs.
- Demonstrating a cascade from project level impacts to industry level impacts – and cascading down to on-ground work so that the ‘fit’ of work and objectives is readily apparent.
- Ease of data management – collection, collation, reporting and interpretation within MLA and in partner organisations; including the public and private sector. This includes simple and easy to manage systems with basic clear instructions and a simple collection, collation and data review systems. This system must be able to operate across a range of projects and programs – from both base R&D work to tasks that include some extension and adoption. The systems must also operate across, beef, sheep meats and goat industry sectors.
- The R&D and E&A continuum – these processes must operate throughout the research , development, extension and adoption system with measures of success assessed against industry wide indicators including impact at a triple bottom line level.
- Internal governance – MLA has developed a comprehensive review, contracting and reporting system for its project and program work. The embedding of an M&E culture through this whole process is essential to an all-of-industry approach that is able to demonstrate impact, operate across the internal governance processes and systems of MLA so that it is seamless and consistent, then ideally extend across partners.
- A living document – while the development of this Framework and M&E Guide is a significant innovation for MLA and the industry, inevitably ways of streamlining the framework, Guide and internal processes and systems will become apparent with use. This process must also be embedded in the culture of its use.

An implementation process of ensuring the Framework and M&E Guide is accurately made operational and ‘ironing out the bugs’ will inevitably be required. Accordingly a ‘guided and inclusive implementation process’ is proposed to:

- Ensure the Principles are adhered to
- The MER management systems are designed and tested and demonstrably able deliver against the Framework
- A suitable data collection and collation process is created and shown to work through trials by key on-ground personnel
- The reporting works to complement current internal reporting for other MLA purposes while demonstrating that the impacts sought by the Annual Operating Plan against the Strategic Plan can be demonstrated (or otherwise)
- The MER Guide will operate effectively in key MLA and partner work areas.

The ultimate test is the extent to which the Framework and MER Guide can and will contribute to strong and effective reporting in Key MLA Work Areas.

## Part C – Implementing a MER Framework

### Guiding principles for implementing the Framework and Guide

As a result of this review of the draft framework a series of principles were confirmed as being relevant to guide the implementation of the final (living) framework as contained in the MLA Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Guide (M&E Guide).

The overarching principles governing MLA's MER responsibility are that the Deed of Agreement with the Commonwealth 2012-16 states that it is a requirement of MLA that a structured evaluation framework is developed so that systematic evaluation of the costs and benefits of MLA R&D investments occurs. In this regard MLA must also participate in any evaluation project established by the Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations (CRRDC) and provide adequate funds for this purpose.

At an industry wide level and at an across RDC / public sector level there are a range of MER imperatives. These include direction setting by the Productivity Commission and federal Department of Agriculture; across RDC processes under the umbrella of the CRRDC and aligned processes being planned and undertaken by the 15 individual RDCs.

A number of personnel have responsibility for MLA MER. These include MLA Program Managers and Project Leaders, partner representatives and non-MLA personnel who work for MLA at a program and project level (including the public and private sector). All have varied drivers and organisational responsibilities for MER – at an Informed Persons level most reported that they seek very defined and clear guidance on 'what needs to be done, why and how'.

While this project has developed an MLA MER framework to guide MLA Contracting and Reporting; the success of this work can only be gauged by its implementation over time. It is proposed that this implementation is based on a set of guiding principles developed during the project.

In consultation with key MLA personnel managing this project, a number of other important factors that could affect the successful implementation or otherwise have been developed.

Key findings and Recommendations are made to guide this next phase of the project. A series of Action Steps are proposed.

### Rural Industry settings

In terms of the development of monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes being used / to be used in rural industry; there are a range of initiatives occurring with varied degrees of complexity, engagement and rigour. It is apparent from personal communication by QualDATA directors amongst a number (not all) of the organisations undertaking these initiatives, that both MLA and Dairy Australia are taking lead roles in the development of MER frameworks, systems and reporting processes. At a state level the Queensland Future Beef program is also taking a lead.

At a rural industry wide level the **Productivity Commission Inquiry** Report No. 52, 10 February 2011 into the Rural Research and Development Corporation arrangements in Australia <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/rural-research/report> articulated a series of the principles governing MER. They proposed that all RDCs would be required to participate in a cross-RDC project evaluation process; that each RDC is mandated to undertake an independent performance review every three to five years and oblige the then Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to publish an annual monitoring report on the RDCs' collective activities and the outcomes they have delivered. The Productivity Commission concluded that this would support best practice investment and transparency.

In the interim the CRRDC has continued the development of its evaluation policy/guidelines. In February 2014 the CRRDC released a consultation draft of proposed procedures to

increase the level of rigour of the impact assessment process called *Impact Assessment Program Management Procedures*. The procedures have been adjusted over time to clarify the administration and where possible, integration of the CRRDC Program with other evaluation activities that RDCs undertake. It also released its *Guidelines for Impact Assessment* which sets out the most recent methodology by which cost-benefit analyses should be undertaken for the purposes of the CRRDC Impact Assessment Program. It is understood that a strong focus of this process is the economic impact and that more is needed to include a framework for guiding the evaluation and reporting of on-farm programs and other assessments, including social factors.

MLA has reacted accordingly and added further rigour to its internal processes including ensuring that its contractors and service providers / partners also adopt a higher level of rigour. Accordingly the MLA MER Framework becomes a more crucial element of ensuring this rigour is implemented.

Equally national activities including the development of the *National Primary Industries R, D & E Framework* are being undertaken that include a component of MER.

**Key findings**

The development of the MLA MER Framework was undertaken in a way that reflects current thinking about the way in which MLA interacts with the CRRDC evaluation policy/guidelines. These in turn reflect the position advocated by the Productivity Commission and through the federal Department of Agriculture.

**Red Meat Industry settings**

The Meat Industry Strategic Plan or MISP is undergoing a transition from version 3 (MISP3) to MISP4 during 2014 with expected launch in mid 2015. It is based on moving forward from certain agreed baselines and is aligned with key MLA strategic imperatives.

In consultations with Cattle and Sheepmeat Industry Peak Councils, a common view became apparent:

- MLA does a *reasonable job* of measuring and reporting on Return on Investment / Impact
- Further improvements would be valuable, particularly in articulating the extent of technology adoption; Benefit:Cost at a triple bottom line level; unintended consequences of work undertaken; adaptations that occur; and consistency of information and process for reporting
- There appears to be a limitation on the data available to underpin MLA impact claims – the acquisition of it needs to be as streamlined as possible, from known baselines, with defined KPIs
- Similarly there appears a limitation on the extent to which MLA is able to capture impacts of grower practices – and the factors that may have prevented uptake of technologies
- A common concern of peak councils is the ease of / barriers to adoption – the available data on which they can assess this is also emerging as a further limitation
- It was acknowledged that the MISP 4 will need to have suitable KPIs to create an appropriate context in which to better measure impact, adoption, etc
- The next step is having suitable structures and systems to enable linkage / measurement back to the high level targets.

**Key findings**

The development of the MLA MER Framework was undertaken in a way that also reflects the issues raised by the Cattle and Sheepmeat Industry Peak Councils and recognises the focus on addressing the stronger KPIs that are expected to emerge from MISP 4 which is currently under development.

## Key implementation steps

A Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Framework Guide has been completed that includes the MLA On-farm R&D M&E Framework. This has been favourably received by MLA personnel who are the expected users of the Guide and Framework.

They are supportive of an implementation strategy on the basis that it meets their needs as articulated in this report; namely:

- Uses common and consistent language
- The reporting systems and metrics are defined and common so that reporting upwards from project level can be undertaken simply and consistently by key personnel (MLA and non-MLA)
- The processes and resultant data have common multipurpose usage, including for BCA and assessing technology adoption purposes
- Impacts can be assessed consistently in the cascade up from project to Industry level and vice versa
- The data management and systems is simple and easy to use and common across all red meat species with application to partners / collaborators / stakeholders
- The strategy covers R&D as well as extension and adoption
- It can be implemented across MLA internal systems (at an MLA governance level) to be reflected in milestone reporting; against MLA organisational KPIs and with relevance and consistently across all internal systems and processes including AOPs, business plans and POPs, etc
- It is a living document / system / process that reflects changing needs over time including interactions with key stakeholders.

During the course of the project it became apparent that the implementation process would need to reflect internal MLA governance issues surrounding MLA project contracting, reporting and current impact assessments. In developing the Framework and M&E Guide a number of corporate documents were reviewed to ensure consistency of approach and language. These documents are defined in Appendix 6.

### **Recommendation 1**

*That MLA commence an implementation strategy to operationalise the Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Framework Guide that has been completed and that includes the MLA On-farm R&D M&E Framework.*

Due to the interest expressed initially by the Off-farm R&D (processing) group, there is clearly scope to expand the thinking about MER across MLA – potentially commencing with the Off-farm R&D group. It is QualDATA's experience that in establishing a task of this scope it is important to hasten slowly. Accordingly QualDATA proposes that the first task is to embed the operationalisation of the On-farm R&D group approach into its daily activities before expanding elsewhere into MLA.

QualDATA recognises that there may be organisational imperatives that dictate the process and timing to be used.

### **Recommendation 2**

*That at the appropriate time, after embedding the operationalisation of the MER Framework and Guide into the MLA On-farm R&D group, this process is further expanded into the MLA organisation.*

It is understood that the MSA Team are interested in piloting the implementation process whilst other groups involved in On-farm R&D are also interested in undertaking such piloting.

In accord with QualDATA's proposed hasten slowly strategy, it is proposed that a piloting process is used to address and validate emerging systems and operations issues that are expected to emerge once operationalisation commences. Once that process has been successfully embedded, it is proposed that further piloting occurs before a wider roll-out.

It was noted by some Informed Persons that some form of incentivisation (their terms) may be appropriate to support a piloting process amongst stakeholders / collaborators. This process was poorly explored and it is proposed that the meaning of implementing some form or incentivisation is canvassed for use during the piloting.

**Recommendation 3**

*That the operationalisation process occurs using an incentive based piloting process of 2-3 handpicked programs; of which MSA may be one due to their expressed interest in doing so, in addition to programs managed by key personnel involved in this project to-date.*

During the course of this project a number of MLA systems, current and proposed, and personnel, have been considered as potentially part of the operationalisation. These include involving the MLA IT team to consider how to establish an internal management system for the Framework.

In addition a range of processes have already been considered for inclusion, as part of how best to engage with key personnel in MLA, including:

1. Meet with other business units to go through the framework and get their input/buy in e.g. Industry systems
2. Meet with the IT team and iShare / CRM teams to give them an overview of the outcomes being sought in order to ensure their engagement and seek their input to provide technical advice on the data management system. This would include a discussion on whether Inteum should/could provide a role in the process.
3. Meet with the Contracts and Legal teams to go through various changes required to application forms, milestone reports, final reports, agreements, etc so these can also be embedded at the operationalisation stage.

It was proposed that key meetings may usefully include QualDATA as external advisers, to support the effective implementation of the recommendations of this project report.

QualDATA was also made aware of the impending appointment of a Business Process Manager who will have responsibility for improvement of systems across MLA. In addition there may be potential for employment of a specialist who is responsible for managing the MER framework activity internally and externally. Having such a person responsible for the management of this system will be critical to its success, plus would support integrating with wider MLA and industry MER activities / initiatives.

**Recommendation 4**

*That before commencement of the operationalisation process, MLA defines the key internal and external personnel necessary to engage with and support the operationalisation, then use those skills in the form of a Working Group (or Implementation Team or Reference Group) of appropriately key skilled personnel.*

**Recommendation 5**

*That before commencement of the operationalisation process, MLA considers how / which systems and processes would need to be revised / reviewed / used / addressed in order to operationalise the M&E Guide, including how best to use the resources of the proposed Working Group.*



## Systems

In this report, it is recognised that a number of current internal systems of data collection / content management and reporting already exist in MLA. While it is QualDATA's experience that only a few content management systems can be readily tailored / customised to meet MER needs; it is important to review those systems and consider the potential to do so.

The next step in the process of operationalising the M&E Guide and Framework is to consider the time-based steps needed to develop or customise an appropriate MER Management and Reporting System that is accessible by key stakeholders of MLA.

In order to manage this process it is proposed that:

- Suitable members of the proposed Working Group are identified
- The Group could reasonably be expected to include a key internal systems specialist; likely the proposed Business Process Manager; an On-farm R&D Manager such as Dr Jane Weatherley, the R&D Communication and Adoption Manager; an internal MER specialist who engages at senior industry and MLA levels such as Dr Lewë Atkinson, Manager Knowledge and Program Evaluation; external project consultants who can advise on MER implementation through drawing on national and international experience; On-farm R&D Managers who are prepared to test / pilot projects to test the system and key Contracts / Legal's personnel
- This group reviews all internal aspects of the current systems available to be used, the implications of using those systems in terms of intended and unintended consequences and the capacity to customise or tailor those systems compared with establishing new systems
- Concurrently the group canvasses the internal governance related documents outlined in Appendix 6 and determines the legal and operational consequences of making the necessary changes to ensure impact evaluation and its reporting are fully embedded across On-farm R&D documents and materials
- The group scopes how best to implement and embed the Guide and Framework into On-farm R&D work processes
- It finalises and signs off on an Action Plan for MER Implementation.

### **Recommendation 6**

*That the proposed Working Group is identified and undertakes a scoping exercise to develop, then have sign-off, of an Action Plan for MER Implementation.*

## Language and culture change

One of the key project findings is related to the importance of using consistent, common MER language to be used. Key proposed language principles to be implemented are:

- Seek to use a lower level of jargon with simpler terminology at industry level to minimise complexity
- Ensure the language is linked internally to MLA business plans, AOPs and POPs, etc
- Ensure language alignment to the CRRDC evaluation processes
- As the intent is for the MER processes to become embedded in MLA culture, people, systems and documents – take steps to ensure this is part of the strategy
- Consider Incentives for use of the MER processes and systems. For example it became apparent that there are many enthusiastic personnel who want to self-monitor the impact of their work. This was apparent both internally among key MLA personnel and through a range of external personnel interviewed by QualDATA.
- Develop some form of internal change management plan – to support the systems and operations changes that will be inevitable around this Guide implementation

- Ensure strong fit with MISP and other industry strategic plans – as well as MLA plans.

**Recommendation 7**

*As the implementation the M&E Guide is a significant cultural shift there ought to be a Change Management Process developed and implemented to support seamless integration of the Framework over time into normal MLA processes, systems and the psyche of key personnel.*

**Change management processes**

As noted above some form of change is inevitable. Therefore it is important to pre-empt, plan for and implement key elements of a Change Management Process. In QualDATA's experience key elements of this Change Management Process are expected to be:

- Training – of internal and external responsible personnel
- Set-up systems – that are pre-planned to the best possible extent
- Ground truth those systems – to ensure they can seamlessly develop impact statements and processes
- Ensure an Industry context is built in
- Get buy-in from key stakeholders including – CRRDC, MLA partners, collaborators and contractors
- Define a value proposition – to be part of the incentivisation
- Create responsibility for 'Who drives implementation'?
- Consider the role of the proposed Business Process Manager – and also the possible MER specialist position.

**Recommendation 8**

*That the implementation of the Change Management Process is an early part of any next phase of seamless integration of the Framework over time into normal MLA processes.*

As part of the Change Management Process, it is considered important that MLA, through the proposed Working Group considers key management strategies to embed the operations of the M&E Guide into On-farm R&D by:

- Providing Training – for key individuals and organizations delivering MLA on-farm projects to meet MER requirements
- Considering possible use of both PowerPoint based and video/webcast based processes operating remotely – including structured training outlining the requirements, reasons and steps to use the Guide
- Including potential face-to-face workshops – say up to three; with key organisations, such as QDAFF and follow up mentoring as needed.
- During this process, the Guide would be added to – by providing an MER Data collection guide (methods) to show how best to capture data from feedback sheets, follow-up surveys, narratives and case studies – so reporting is undertaken in the way MLA wants.
- Recognising the importance of revising the M&E Guide as needed – to take into account limitations of information management systems and practical considerations of delivering / partner organisations. Over time this will sharpen the guide itself and require modifications to better explain and modify categories etc. The aim is that, over time, the M&E Guide will become as simple as possible to use, while providing the level of information needed.
- Working with program level managers – to show how the data can be used to best report against MLA higher level objectives and KPIs

- Potentially 'mocking up' higher level reports – to model how this type of data can best be used at that level as well as at ground level.

### Next Steps

The following next steps are considered to be a possible implementation process or Action Plan for MLA to consider. They can be managed internally in MLA or outsourced as part of a second project; potentially known as the MLA Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Framework Guide Implementation Project:

When	Task	Notes
Month 1	Agree that an Implementation Strategy is needed	
	Determine which project piloting is needed to ground truth the process	Identify projects from this report / collaborators during this project
	Agree need for / members of proposed Working Group / Implementation Team / Reference Group	Invite and confirm roles
	Consider need for / process of incentivisation for stakeholders / others to engage	Group role
Month 2	Engage with internal non-core stakeholders – IT, legal's, contracts, etc	Crucial role to get their buy-in to embed the Framework
	Engage with Business Process Manager as key operative	Determine if MER specialist officer appointed; if so this key role to be defined
	First meeting of proposed Working Group / Implementation Team / Reference Group	Define their individual roles
Month 3	Review which current systems, process, operations need to be reviewed for implementation	Only across On-farm R&D
	Determine how to make necessary changes	Commence work over 2-3 months
	Action changes	
	Consider internal systems that could be customised for MER purposes	Commence work over 2-3 months
	Review governance issues for alterations needed	Commence work over 2-3 months
	Finalise Action Plan that defines who does what when, why and how to effect the changes	
Months 4-5	Undertake work on above issues	
	Also develop and implement the Change Management Process	
Month 6	Review the pilots for progress against objectives	
Month 7	Finalise changes based on pilot feedback	
Month 8	Finalise the implementation process	
	Project completed	

### Summary

In summary, the Action Plan provides the focus for 'who needs to do what when' to effect the implementation of the MLA Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Framework Guide Implementation Project and the M&E Guide. Based on these projections, MLA may need to recognise that the Guide implementation process is likely to take shape 6-months after project commencement, with completion up to 9-months after commencement.

## Appendices

## Appendix 1: Current MLA Project Evaluation and Approval Policy

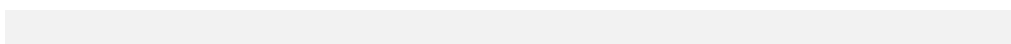
This policy is effective at 20 June 2013.

<b>POLICY STATEMENT</b>	
<b>Purpose</b>	This policy sets out the requirements for the evaluation of RD&E projects and their approval. The policy requires consistent application where appropriate across all RD&E project evaluations having regard for risk and the expected timing of the flow of benefits.
<b>Policy statement</b>	<p>The evaluation of RD&amp;E projects will incorporate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A risk assessment process;</li> <li>• Provide a framework for financial assessment;</li> <li>• Support the different categories of investment outcome including environmental and social stewardship parameters;</li> <li>• Ensure that projects fit with MLA's strategy including clear linkage to strategic imperatives and their high level measures;</li> <li>• Provide for both qualitative and quantitative measures; and</li> <li>• Recognise and measure benefit attribution across stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Scope</b>	<p>The Policy covers MLA investment in RD&amp;E projects both on-farm and off-farm and specifically relating to the following management tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-investment approvals of projects for various investment levels of project with increasingly detailed Items For Determination templates as investments become larger;</li> <li>• Approval of related or multi-stage projects that lead to the same RD&amp;E outcome;</li> <li>• Project assessment at major go/no go contract milestone points; and</li> <li>• Review of 'off-track' projects that may require significant repositioning and/or termination.</li> </ul>
<b>Standardised areas of policy application and link to MLA strategy</b>	<p>Standard RD&amp;E investment time horizons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Default is minimum 25 years for all investment and any alternative time horizons must be justified on a case by case basis</li> </ul> <p>Standard discount rates and hurdle rates in real terms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MLA's policy is for all NPV assessments a 7% real discount rate is to be used for all R&amp;D investments.</li> </ul> <p>Standard definition of project success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate alignment with MLA strategic imperatives;</li> <li>• Define scope, timeframes, and what technical and adoption success would look like;</li> <li>• Define the assumptions that underpin importance of the project within the context of the contribution of project success to the value of the industry;</li> <li>• Articulate key assumptions underpinning the value of the opportunity</li> </ul>

	<p>provided by the project in terms of industry benefit;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight critical times/dates for go/no go milestone review points throughout the investment and expected lifecycle of the innovation to be produced; and</li> <li>• Define the assumptions supporting the case for project delivering benefit to levy payers: clearly articulated path to success by being explicit about value proposition for adoption, milestones/outcomes expected etc.</li> </ul> <p>Standard for expressing linkage to MLA’s strategic intent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define outcomes and associated KPIs confirming alignment with relevant strategic imperatives and their high level measures;</li> <li>• Outline the process of achieving industry endorsement for both the value and industry demand driving the reasons to adopt the project outputs if successful;</li> <li>• Show any interdependence with other projects (either completed, active or planned) as part of the pathway to strategic success (marginal value, necessary condition, enabling, capability building, collaboration);</li> <li>• Show the relationship with past MLA investments and outcome clusters;</li> <li>• Highlight the linkage to specific items in the MLA Risk Management Plan in terms of risks for MLA and risks for the industry pursuing or not pursuing; and</li> <li>• Provide justification for the project being allocated to a category within the standard MLA % portfolio split: Strategic Basic (“new knowledge”); Strategic Applied (“proof-of-concept”); Development (“market-ready”); Capability Building; and Adoption and Commercialisation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Standard criteria for assessing the value of project investment</b></p>	<p>The project evaluation will assess the proposed project’s in terms of its:</p> <p>Eligibility for funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with MLA strategy (strategic buckets, AOP, 3-5 year business plans);</li> <li>• Estimate of scale of potential benefits and their likely contribution to levy payer value;</li> <li>• Safety/risk compliance (corporate governance/Commonwealth funding test); and</li> <li>• Market failure test (market gap may be a social inequity, a market failure or other areas of research that it is in the public interest to support).</li> </ul> <p>Risk profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical risk (likelihood of meeting project deliverables);</li> <li>• Project complexity (service provider and project management rating);</li> <li>• Go/no go points to provide exit (based on risk assessment) and clear exit criteria; and</li> <li>• Adoption/extension risk (likelihood of target market adoption).</li> </ul> <p>Financial assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimate all RD&amp;E costs for all parties to date and also project the level of</li> </ul>

	<p>adoption costs required from the industry in order to deliver outcomes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic (financial) assessment and benefits, assuming achievement of forecasted adoption target);</li> <li>• Predict time to maximum adoption and/or highlight key assumption underpinning delivery of outcomes;</li> <li>• A sensitivity analysis will be required to test the impact of assumptions made about the levels of critical parameters used in the BCA (Benefit Cost Analysis) described below; and</li> <li>• Standard set of traditional BCA investment criteria and all dollar values expressed in the year of the analysis; Net Present Value (NPV), Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR), and Internal Rate of Return (%IRR and /or Modified IRR%)</li> </ul> <p>Non-financial or qualitative benefits (triple bottom line and other stakeholder values such as social, welfare, sustainability stewardship parameters).</p> <p>A qualitative assessment, using agreed indicators, of the likely impact on these stewardship parameters is to be scored as part of the project assessment process so as to assess industry outcomes that are not readily captured by economic assessment alone.</p> <p>An appropriate database will store these project assessment results and generate reports across projects.</p>
<p><b>Standard process for on-going management review</b></p>	<p>The role of the management team in implementing and maintaining this policy will be:</p> <p>Peer review project milestones within the context of their claimed contribution to achievement AOP milestones and 3-5 year business plan KPIs;</p> <p>Peer review of significant ex-ante project evaluations for compliance with MLA policy for evaluation</p> <p>Annual investment status reporting to board re:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- by investment category split; and</li> <li>- on-going compliance with agreed criteria for project acceptance with a view to potentially reallocating funds to alternative options for industry investment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diversifying methods for assessment of the risk-reward trade-off</b></p>	<p>Alternative methods can be applied to better assess the risk reward trade-off for MLA ‘insurance’ investments which more fully quantify risk within programs/projects. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stochastic modelling which reports an “expected return” and an associated measure of deviation; and</li> <li>- Decision Tree Analysis and Real Options Analysis; and</li> <li>- Evaluation results that are expressed as a range rather than a single number, based on evaluations from several locations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Responsibilities arising from the Project Evaluation and Approval Policy</b></p>	<p>The Project Evaluation and Approval Policy requires staff, contractors and consultants to use the following tools (in addition to this Policy):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructions, guidelines, procedures and conventions;</li> <li>• Attend training on tools, policies and procedures.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Review of the Policy</b></p>	<p>This policy will be reviewed by the Manager Knowledge &amp; Program Evaluation Coordinator with the support of nominated members of LPI, CIS, ICE and IS business units annually or more frequently if required. It will be updated as needed to take account of any regulatory or business changes that affect its application.</p>
<p><b>Interpretation &amp; Advice</b></p>	<p>Routine advice on the implementation of this policy is available from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager Knowledge &amp; Program Evaluation; and</li> <li>• Project Manager – Evaluation, LPI.</li> </ul> <p>More complex interpretation and advice is available from the Manager Knowledge &amp; Program Evaluation.</p> <p>MLA Project Evaluation and Approval Guidelines provide more detailed advice about project evaluation in the MLA and about how this policy is to be implemented.</p>





## Appendix 2: Analysis of Selected Project Evaluations

During the initial Scoping Workshops the following projects were identified as 'Gems' and 'Potential Gems' – to signify the extent to which they had to go to reach some form of best practice. QualDATA reviewed their level of MER and the apparent impact they are reporting to examine the breadth and depth of current MER. This informed the thinking about the extent to which a proposed MLA Framework would be needed and its scope:

### *Gems*

- Majority programs, e.g. More Beef from Pastures
- Beef-up
- Business Edge
- Bred well and Fed well
- Ewe time forums
- Genetics in general
- EverGraze
- Participatory R&D such as the feed base programs
- Grass seeds

### *Potential Gems*

- Collaborative partners e.g. UofQ
- Health Check
- Bench marking in processor companies
- Pasture Run Down – Dave Lawrence
- 3x Edge projects
- PDSs
- Feedback Magazine
- All publications, incl YouTube, webinars, etc
- Annual legumes work in WA and NSW – consider the % of MLA funding going in
- Sub-tropical pastures work
- Labour practices
- Lambex Convention, Beef Australia events – check all events

The key findings, when they were reviewed, were that there was:

- Little direct reporting against KRAs/KPIs/objectives
- Mixed demographic data
- Age; sex
- Property size (ha; no. head; no. breeders; bales wool)
- Some good examples of activity, KASA and intentions reporting (MMfB; Business Edge; EverGraze)
- Some practice change reporting (MMfS; EverGraze)
- Limited extrapolation to productivity gain (exc - MMfS) and MLA targets
- Limited addressing of barriers etc (exc - Business Edge)

## Appendix 3: Input from Peak Councils

### Summary of Discussion with Cattle Council of Australia, R&D Sub Committee

**Topic:** MLA MER

#### View of current reporting

There was view that MLA did a *reasonable job* of Return on Investment although there was a limitation on the data that was available (to underpin these).

#### Gaps

There was an identified gap in the lack of follow up capture of impacts of activities in grower practices – and the factors that may have prevented uptake.

#### Desirable information

There was a general feeling that it was important to know how much of R&D was taken up by industry over time (for example a year after an R&D event) – including the ease of adoption and barriers to adoption which needed to be addressed. The need to be able to report on the triple bottom line (economic; environmental and social) impacts was also raised.

High level plans were seen to require the economic impacts resulting from activities supporting them. There were advantages seen in having individual property case studies to demonstrate how individuals have – and could – benefited from the adoption of new technologies or management approaches.

Although reporting against set objectives was seen as critical – capturing unintended consequences/ benefits – and *adaptations* - was also raised an important consideration.

The need to have a consistency in information to ensure ease of reporting against the Meat Industry- beef Industry – operational plan was also raised. Being able to use the same MER data for a range of reporting needs was seen as necessary.

The broader community was also seen as needing information on how the industry was progressing over time.

#### Issues

It was pointed out that funds put to evaluation needed to be considered against the need to get RD&E done – there was a balance. The general view was that evaluation was underdone and the balance needed to be adjusted in that direction. Evaluation spending was seen to need to be efficient and effective.

There was also a need not to “annoy” producers with too many evaluation demands.

The lack of clear KPIs in the strategic plans was considered to be a problem for reporting back – and it was seen that there was a need to develop these for the next plan. Annual Task Force Meetings were not seen to have delved into issues around monitoring and evaluation – and there was an opportunity for more transparency. The point was made that information was needed well in advance of regional forums to be able to effectively discuss and report.

The lack of baselines was raised an issue in terms of assessing gains over time.

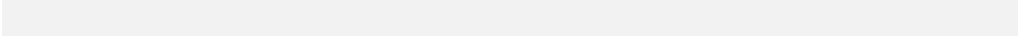
The issue of how you capture and report on gains in areas such as animal welfare was also mentioned.

#### Indicators

It was suggested that performance indicators needed to be reviewed – for example, \$/annum might be a better indicator than \$/ha.

**Summary of Discussion with Ron Cullen former CEO, Sheepmeat Council of Australia:**

**Overall the position of Sheepmeat Council of Australia** was consistent with the CCA, focussing on:

- MISP needs to have high level KPIs which any MER within MLA should link to – this will happen with MISP 4
  - Any new MER should link with the MISP and updated SISP
  - Reporting structures and systems should enable linkage back to the high level targets
  - Current reporting back to the SCA is adequate though could always be better.
- 

## Appendix 4: Input from MLA Program staff

Detailed findings / outcomes of the Scoping Workshop, July 2013 are outlined below:

### Key principles identified by Program Managers

For a structured MER process to be successful key principles are:

- A strong evidence base is required to make the claims
- These form the basis of a good story that can be told – to demonstrate change over time as a result of the work undertaken
- Therefore good data must be captured at ground level
- This has to be focussed on answering key impact questions – via the framework
- Data capture to be / perceived to be simple, easy, flexible and embedded in everyday process (the current paradigm is that it is complex and painful, thus inconsistent approaches are taken)
- Data then to be useable for a range of reporting from the one data capture / collation source
- Dedicated resources and structures to be made available / created to facilitate MER
- This will require an overall cultural change – within MLA and project partners
- MER to become part of an accountability culture – which therefore shows the benefit and value of RD&E through articulating Impact

### Current situation in MLA MER – SWO(T):

#### *Strengths*

- MLA understands we need good robust MER at organisation and program level
- Processes do exist at these levels – it is about maximising value
- Ownership of need by delivery partners – at least in general terms
- A cultural change in this direction is occurring amongst some partners, others in industry
- The membership survey does acquire data – does need linking to project and program level activities to support reporting on impact
- Immediate relevance in northern Australia
- There is understanding of the value of BCAs – therefore it is not a big step to defined impact from thinking about BCAs
- Starting to develop processor MER capability, especially for their R&D – completes the industry loop
- The concept of KPIs is understood and agreed.

#### *Weaknesses*

- Things are disjointed / discontinuous
- No common MER embedded across all key agencies / bodies
- No robust before and after benchmarking to support continuous improvement
- No real logic / causality in place
- A multitude of discontinuous KPIs
- No structured way of linking on-ground outcomes with KPIs at board level
- Multitude of databases
- Uncertainty about type of information required – level of intensity, consistency, etc
- Therefore poor integration of data capture
- Poor links back to 'level of adoptability'

- Important to double check if the LPI framework is suitable for wider use
- Important to get key baseline data – where from? Membership survey, ABARES, ABS, etc? Then at what level – project, program, etc?
- Important to truthfully define TBL impacts – to be consistent.

#### *Opportunities*

- Giving people BCA capability is a good first step
- Use BCA process as a stepping stone to true impact identification
- Will help create base assumptions / objectives / KPIs / Goals etc on which to build the programs into more robust and impact based
- Quantify the resourcing needed – look at links with membership survey and other existing processes
- Review current KPIs to make them more structured
- Create one common database to be used – to define impact, monitor change, report against KPIs, etc
- Set future R&D priorities to more clearly reflect robustly established industry KPIs – that stick long term and guide industry work
- Make the framework time based
- Each project to be integrated to add to the richness of telling the wider industry stories to show change, benefits, and impacts of the work done
- Therefore practice change becomes a strong indicator at a TBL level.

#### **An MER framework**

The thinking about the MER framework is that it ought to:

- Integrate with AOPs – and at Peak Ccl level
- Cover production and processing so both are integrated in a TBL context
- Be comprehensive, accurate, accountable and self-perpetuating
- Embedded in daily operations
- Support continuous improvement and robust measurement of impact
- Be consistent nationally and cascade up and down from industry to project level
- Support identifying future R&D priorities along the value chain and provide robust feedback
- Create self evident and clear KPIs.

#### **Other factors to consider:**

- Has to be a fit with MLA Board / senior executive evaluation policy / process and thinking
- Also links across RMAC, MISP, via program managers to operational KPIs
- Has to be very functional at project and operational level
- Speaks to the next 3-yr review due shortly (last one in 2010)
- Has to support Board thinking into next strategic plan – and look as far out as 2020
- Support thinking about benchmarks
- Support consistency of approach across MLA and its co-investment partners as well as peak councils, government, etc.

## Appendix 5: Testing the relevance of the final draft framework using case studies – March 2014

The final project activity was to review the operationalisation of the proposed MLA Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Guide (M&E Guide) including the Framework, which was undertaken in Sydney on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2014 with a key group of Program Managers.

The meeting objectives were to ensure:

- The M&E Guide met Program Manager and wider MLA MER needs
- The M&E Guide could be implemented efficiently and effectively
- The M&E Guide implementation process would assure key personnel of appropriate recording and reporting processes
- MLA personnel outlined future initiatives on which the project could have input

Relevant recommendations were then made that would ensure the useability and usefulness of the project outcomes across MLA and partners, would support robust reporting against industry needs in context of MLA overall reporting requirements and ensure relevant metrics were in place.

### Key meeting outcomes

The key meeting outcomes can be categorised as:

#### **Common language / terminology / meaning required**

It is apparent that across both MLA and the industry there is a need for consistent language to be used to ensure all personnel have a common understanding of terms / meaning across all aspects of the tasks MLA undertakes on behalf of stakeholders. This common language is regarded as crucial for reasons of being able to:

- ensure contracting processes between MLA and research providers is explicit
- reporting at milestone level on project processes, outputs and outcomes is unambiguous
- the communication and adoption of research findings can be clearly articulated and is also unambiguous
- internal workflow / team reporting / MLA Board reporting is consistent
- The reporting of impact in occurs using consistent terms amongst MLA, its partners and the wider industry / government.

#### **Reporting systems are consistent and effectively managed**

It is important that all meat industry stakeholders use the consistent language and terminology noted above and that there is a known and consistent process for reporting on Impact against Objectives. This supports robust reporting at the project level, by project personnel so that upwards reporting can be readily undertaken from projects via programs, then more strategically against MLA-wide KPIs and impacts.

This supports use of the strongest possible Performance and Practice Metrics to assist reporting against the indicators used in the Annual Operating Plan, the MLA Strategic Plan and Meat Industry Strategic Plan in a consistent manner. This will ensure MLA and the industry can consider progress against objectives readily and longer term with consistency.

Equally Board members of MLA and industry peak bodies must be able to understand and reflect on the MER findings in order to judge the level of success of MLA projects and programs in meeting industry indicators of success as outlined in industry plans. Similarly it is important that this process facilitates industry benchmarking over time.

#### **Sufficient robust data to allow for a meaningful BCA and to assess extent of technology adoption**

It is apparent that the facility to undertake a Benefit:Cost Analysis (BCA) is required for all work. Accordingly the data acquired must always include the capacity to use such data for a

BCA, if required at any time. Therefore having a known, agreed and systematic approach to BCAs is required, as is defining the type and detail of suitable data being collected.

Similarly being able to readily access suitable data that allows for an assessment of the extent of technology adoption is another essential element of data collection and collation at project level.

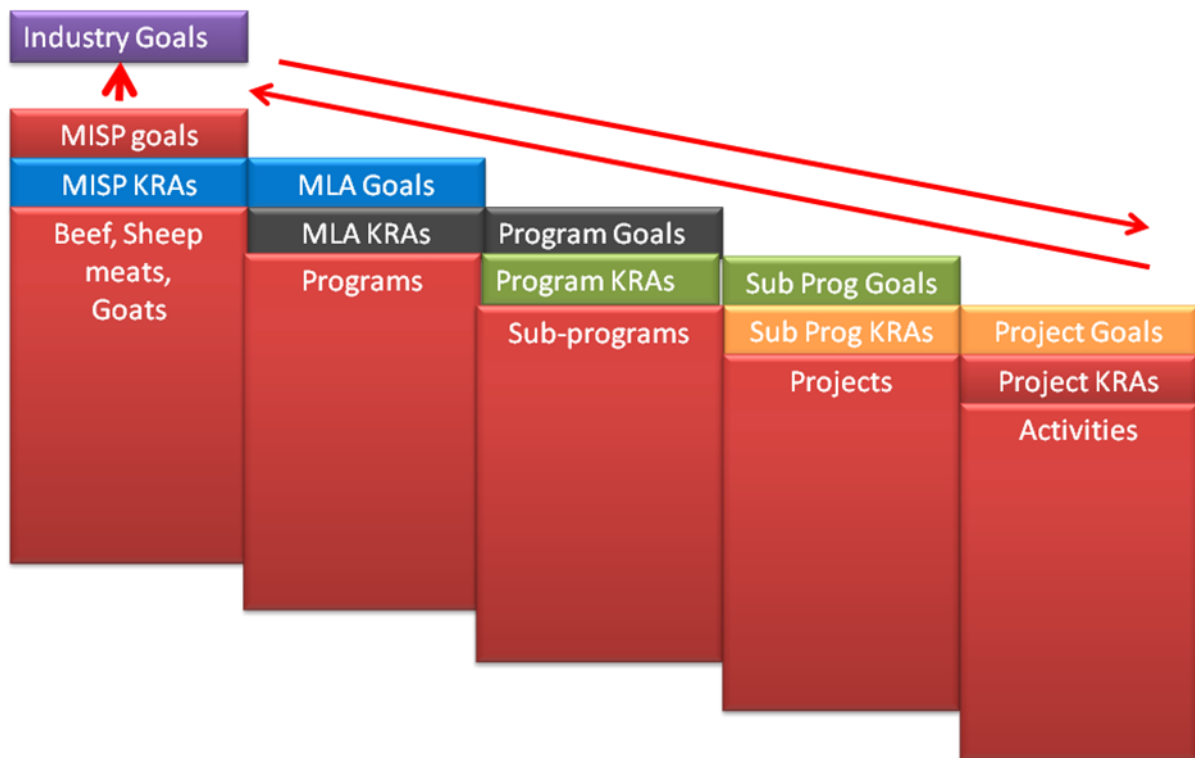
Equally the data being collected must allow for ‘cascading up’ of impact assessments from project to MISP level against common Key Performance Indicators or KPIs.

***Demonstrating a cascade from project level impacts to industry level impacts***

It has already been noted that the concept of data cascading from project level to program level to MLA organisation level and then up to industry level through the MISP is a crucial test of demonstrating impact from on-ground to strategic levels. Equally the MER objectives must cascade down to on-ground work so that the ‘fit’ of work and objectives is readily apparent.

QualDATA has a simple test through this question – Can on-ground project work be demonstrated to contribute in an obvious manner to industry needs; and vice versa?

The principle can be clearly shown below:



***Ease of data management – collection, collation, reporting and interpretation***

Personnel within MLA and in partner organisations; public and private sector; are time poor with limited understanding of MER. While some training in MER is expected, staff churn means that to be effective, all MER processes must be ‘free-standing and self-explanatory to new personnel’. As well all systems have to be simple to follow and to interact with.

All MER processes must be designed to be simple and easy to manage through the use of basic clear instructions and a simple collection, collation and data review system. Such a system must be able to operate across a range of projects and programs – from both base R&D work to tasks that include some extension and adoption.

Equally the systems must also operate across, beef, sheep meats and goat industry sectors. Therefore common approaches, indicators of success and uptake strategies must be capable

of being transposed across species. In some cases robust data is unavailable; this may necessitate starting from a robust process from the very beginning.

***The R&D and E&A continuum***

As noted earlier project proponents, partner organisations and industry decision makers must all be in a position to understand how the data being presented allows them to measure success against industry wide indicators.

For some, an understanding the R&D process, outputs and outcomes are their area of expertise and a default position for them to readily understand and measure success. For others an understanding of the extension and communication process is their forte. For yet others the extent of adoption of new technologies / R&D outcomes is their area of expertise and comfort. Overall, few people appreciate and understand the continuum.

Consistency in understanding the concept of impact and embedding the intention to create impact – right from the time of proposing a project (at the proponent level) that aligns to industry strategic plans right through to demonstrated adoption of a technology being shown at Board level – is crucial to the embedding of an MER culture and processes in the organisation, its partners and the wider industry.

***Internal governance***

MLA has developed a comprehensive review, contracting and reporting system for its project and program work. The embedding of an MER culture through this whole process is essential to an all-of-industry approach that is able to demonstrate impact based on common elements. While the Framework, subject of this project, is essential; the concepts and contents of the framework must be translated across the internal governance processes and systems of MLA so that it is seamless and consistent. Ideally this process ought to extend across partners.

For example the language, the meaning of certain terms, consistent data collection and collation methods across all MLA and partner personnel, then common reporting and interpretation is required. This leads further identification of ways of streamlining the processes and systems internally and across the industry where MLA funded work is undertaken.

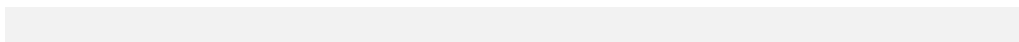
***A living document***

While the development of this Framework and MER Guide is a significant innovation for MLA and the industry, inevitably ways of streamlining the framework, Guide and internal processes and systems will become apparent with use.

An implementation process of ensuring the Framework and MER Guide is accurately made operational and ‘ironing out the bugs’ will inevitably be required. Accordingly a ‘guided and inclusive implementation process’ is proposed to:

- ensure the Principles are adhered to
- the MER management systems are designed and tested and demonstrably able deliver against the Framework
- a suitable data collection and collation process is created and shown to work through trials by key on-ground personnel, and
- the reporting works to complement current internal reporting for other MLA purposes while demonstrating that the impacts sought by the Annual Operating Plan against the Strategic Plan can be demonstrated (or otherwise)
- The MER Guide will operate effectively in key MLA and partner work areas.

The ultimate test is the extent to which the Framework and MER Guide can and will contribute to strong and effective reporting in Key MLA Work Areas.





**Appendix 6: Key internal MLA governance related documents**

The following documents were reviewed when developing the Monitoring and Evaluation Contracting and Reporting Framework Guide for MLA On-farm R&D.

- CRRDC Evaluation Guidelines and MLA feedback
- CRRDC Evaluation Procedures
- CRRDC Evaluation Guidelines
- MLA Final Report Guidelines
- MLA Research Agreement Schedule
- MLA Contract Approval Processes
- MLA R&D Health Check Report
- MLA Milestone Report Template
- MLA Preliminary Application Template
- MLA Full Application Template
- MLA Full Application Guidelines
- MLA Final Reporting – Communication Of Project Outputs
- Agreed Glossary For MLA Performance
- MLA Strategic Plan
- MLA Annual Operating Plans
- RMAC Baseline Indicators.