



WARREN STRAW CONSULTING



Final Report

Back to Business Program Impact Assessment

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Executive Summary

Background

The 2019–20 Australian bushfire season, known as Black Summer, was a period of unusually intense bushfires which impacted heavily on livestock producers across New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, South Australia (SA), Western Australia (WA) and Tasmania. The major fires peaked during December 2019 and January 2020, with around 18 million hectares impacted nationally. In response to the devastating impact of Black Summer on Australian red meat producers, Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) launched the Back to Business Program (B2B) in January 2020 to provide support to producers for the journey to recovery. The program provided a range of support activities for fire affected farm businesses, which included information sessions and a series of webinars and podcasts, an MLA website portal to provide easy access to information, and up to three free one-on-one specialist farm management consulting sessions.

Objectives

MLA engaged Beattie Consulting Services, Inspiring Excellence and Warren Straw Consulting to conduct an evaluation of the B2B program to assess the effectiveness of program delivery and to quantify the triple bottom line benefits attributable to producers who made practice changes due to participation in the program.

Methodology

The evaluation involved three key stages. The first stage involved a review of all project documentation and data relating to project planning, delivery and evaluation. The second stage involved completion of 186 stakeholder interviews including 95 producer participants, 30 participating consultants, MLA project staff, project State Co-ordinators and 26 external service providers representing organisations who were also supporting impacted producers during fire recovery. In addition, 22 producers who were impacted by the Black Summer fires but did not participate in the B2B program were also interviewed. The feedback from these non-participating producers was used to develop three state-based cases studies for NSW, SA and Victoria. The third stage of the evaluation involved completion of a triple bottom line impact assessment of the one-on-one consulting sessions.

Key Findings

In total, 132 producers and 35 consultants participated in the B2B program between January and December 2020. Overall, B2B was widely acknowledged by stakeholders as a worthwhile program that delivered triple bottom line benefits to industry. The review found that the B2B program increased the capacity and capability of producers to not only recover from the impacts of the bushfire, but also to manage and improve their businesses into the future. While the program was developed at very short notice in response to the impact of the Black Summer bushfires on red meat producers across Australia, the concept of B2B was soundly based and fit for purpose. Producers and other stakeholders were very appreciative of MLA making the program available.

Benefits to Industry

Eighty-two percent of producers interviewed have implemented or intend to implement their B2B action plan, either in part or in full, with 18% not intending to implement their plan. The average net benefit for those producers who received an economic benefit as a result of participating in the B2B one-on-one sessions was \$6.21 per hectare across 52,284 hectares. Further key findings from the evaluation are summarised in Appendix A.

Recommendations

A total of 34 recommendations have been made based on the assumption that MLA intends to deploy the B2B program again in the future. These recommendations are summarised as seven key recommendations below. The recommendations for program planning are considered to be the highest priority, and can be actioned immediately in preparation for a future disaster event. Further detail on individual recommendations is provided in Section 4.0 of this report.

Key Recommendation 1: MLA to review and clarify the intended purpose of the program, the project objectives and intended outcomes and the target audience.

Key Recommendation 2: MLA to implement planning strategies that allow for the B2B program to be made available within 2 weeks of a natural disaster.

Key Recommendation 3: MLA to investigate opportunities to seek project funding partners and explore and seek out opportunities to engage with national and state disaster recovery organisations

Key Recommendation 4: MLA to develop a project Communication and Marketing Plan and a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

Key Recommendation 5: MLA to retain the four key elements of the B2B project and to investigate improvements such as offering a further review session and/or phone support to some or all B2B producers, providing better support for the mental health of participating producers and engaging and working more closely with the RFCS as part of the B2B delivery model.

Key Recommendation 6: MLA to explore opportunities for improving program delivery via review and clarification of state-coordinator roles and responsibilities, improving consultant awareness of their roles and responsibilities and improving producers' ability to maximise their value from their participation in the program.

Key Recommendation 7: MLA to explore and implement strategies for improved data collection and collation for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

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1.0 Background

The 2019–20 Australian bushfire season, known as Black Summer, was a period of unusually intense bushfires which impacted heavily on livestock producers across New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, South Australia (SA), Western Australia (WA) and Tasmania. The major fires peaked during December and January, with around 18 million hectares impacted nationally.

In response to the devastating impact of Black Summer on Australian red meat producers, Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) launched the Back to Business Program (B2B) in January 2020 to provide support to producers for the journey to recovery. The program provided a range of support activities for fire affected farm businesses, which included information sessions and a series of webinars and podcasts, an MLA website portal to provide easy access to information and up to three free one-on-one specialist farm management consulting sessions.

In delivering these activities, MLA partnered with a range of industry service providers, including state governments and various other stakeholders. MLA aimed to assist up to 2,500 of the estimated 26,000 producers impacted by Black Summer to make positive changes to fast-track business recovery.

MLA engaged Beattie Consulting Services, Inspiring Excellence and Warren Straw Consulting to conduct a program impact assessment with the following objectives:

- 1) Provide a triple bottom line or economic, social, sustainability impact assessment, aligned with MLA's Producer Adoption Monitoring & Evaluation Reporting (MER) framework and triple bottom line framework for social and sustainability impacts.
- 2) Provide an assessment of the program (including each component) in relation to the following areas:
 - Each program component's contribution to the above impacts i.e. what delivered adoption and impact and what didn't.
 - Identify and report on the success of the program to generate awareness, promote change and provide support to red meat producers affected by bushfire.
 - Collect and provide feedback from producers and advisors involved in the Back to Business program.
 - Provide recommendations for what the next iteration of a recovery program would need to include to be successful.
 - Identify the impact of COVID-19 on the success of the Back to Business program.
 - Meet milestone and budget targets.

This report presents the methodology employed in delivering on these project objectives and the results of the assessment.

2.0 Methodology

The methodology in delivering on project objectives involved the following key elements:

1. Collation and review of all existing documentation and data relating to the B2B program.
2. Engagement with program stakeholders.

3. Conducting a triple bottom line assessment of program impacts.

Existing Program Documentation and Data

The following sources of existing program information were utilised during project delivery:

- Background planning documentation
- B2B program delivery guidelines
- Consultant session reports
- Producer action plans developed by consultants
- Producer registration details
- Producer feedback survey results
- State coordinator final reports
- MLA communication and marketing assets
- Delivery statistics for the sponsorship program
- Delivery statistics and participant feedback for the webinars

Engagement with Program Stakeholders

Producer Participant Interviews: Phone interviews were conducted with 95 of the 132 producer participants across 4 of the 5 participating states (total participants included NSW - 63, VIC - 27, SA - 40, TAS - 1 and WA - 1). The one producer participant in WA was not interviewed. This represents a statistically valid sample size relative to the population, providing a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error.

Consultant Interviews: Interviews were completed with 30 of the 35 registered consultants who delivered one-on-one sessions to producers. Note that a further two consultants were interviewed regarding their role as state co-ordinators rather than as consultants, as they conducted dual roles within project delivery, however many of the same questions were asked of both consultants and co-ordinators.

Internal Stakeholders: Six MLA staff involved in the planning, development and delivery of the B2B program were interviewed.

External Stakeholders:

Interviews were conducted with each of the program state co-ordinators for NSW, SA, Victoria, WA and Tasmania.

Interviews were also conducted with 26 other service providers who were involved in some way with supporting producers to recover from the bushfires in SA, Victoria and NSW. Organisations represented included:

- NSW Rural Financial Counselling Service (southern NSW)
- Local Land Services (LLS)
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
- Agriculture Victoria
- Department of Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA)

- Victorian Rural Financial Counselling Service (Gippsland and North East services)
- Gateway Health (Case Management and Mental Health Support Services)
- Elders
- Rural Finance
- National Recovery and Resilience Agency
- SA Housing Authority Emergency Relief Unit
- Dairy Australia
- Ag Kangaroo Island
- Rural Business Support SA
- Bushfire Recovery Victoria
- Towong Shire Council (Victoria)
- Snowy Shire Council (NSW)
- Murray Regional Development Association
- Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF)

Case Studies: Twenty-two non-participating producers were interviewed across three states (SA - 7, NSW - 8 and Victoria – 7) to help assess reasons for non-participation and to gather feedback on what changes could be made to increase future participation. Results from these interviews were collated and analysed to develop a case study for each state.

Triple Bottom Line Assessment of Program Impact

A triple bottom line impact assessment was completed on the one-on-one consultant sessions only. Insufficient information was available for the other program components (i.e. MLA website, event sponsorship program and webinars/podcasts) to assess attributable on farm benefits due to participation in these activities.

The approach in undertaking the assessment of economic impact of the B2B program was to evaluate the benefits in terms of expected profitability of participants in the B2B one-on-one sessions in a ‘with B2B’ scenario, compared to the profitability of the same businesses in a ‘without B2B’, or counterfactual scenario. The difference between the annual flow of benefits for the ‘with B2B’ and ‘without B2B’ scenarios was valued over the period of 2019/2020 to 2044/45.

All past dollars were expressed in current dollar terms using the CPI and all costs and benefits were discounted or compounded to present value terms using a discount rate of 5%, with the overall net benefit reported as an annuity per hectare. A sensitivity analysis was undertaken to evaluate the sensitivity of investment criteria to changes in several of the key assumptions.

Data collected during the 95 producer interviews, along with data reported by consultants in session reports and additional data provided by consultants for their producer clients as part of a validation process, was used to estimate the economic impact of participation in the B2B program for producers.

Producers were asked to provide an estimate of the following variables during interviews:

- Pre-fire average levels of farm profitability and/or production levels.
- Had they implemented their B2B action plan. If not, did they intend to, and if so, when.

- The types of changes made as a result of participating in the one-on-one sessions.
- The expected timelines for benefits to be realised as a result of changes made, including reduced time to recover from the fires as a result of participation in B2B.
- Estimates of the economic and/or production benefits already achieved and/or expected to be achieved in the future.
- Whether they would still have employed a consultant after the fires if they had not participated in B2B.
- Any grant funding received as a result of information provided by the B2B consultant.

Producers were also asked if their B2B consultant had put together any budgets around their action plan, and if so, to provide permission for their consultant to be contacted to assist with providing estimates of the economic impact of the changes made on farm. Consultants were subsequently contacted and asked to either validate the producer estimates, or where producers were unable to provide an estimate, the consultant was asked to provide an estimate based on the data they had and their knowledge of the business.

Where producers and their B2B consultant were unable to provide dollar estimates of profitability or impact (some consultants did not do any financial analysis around action plans) the following information and data was used to estimate additional profit:

- Producer productivity data
- Average farm benchmarking data from Holmes and Sackett and the Victorian Livestock Farm Monitor Project
- Reviewer estimates of implementation costs based on the type of change/s made

Producers were also asked to identify any social, animal welfare and environmental/sustainability impacts associated with participating in the B2B program and implementing their action plans.

3.0 Results

3.1 Program Planning and Design

3.1.1 Overview

Table 1 provides a summary of the review findings in relation to project planning and design presented as an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis).

Table 1: SWOT analysis of B2B program planning and design

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear direction provided by the MLA board with high-level support to roll the project out as quickly as possible • A small team of dedicated and enthusiastic project staff at MLA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clarity around the purpose of the program • Lack of clarity around who the target audience was for the one-on-one sessions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of project guidelines for delivery of the one-on-one sessions • Availability of an appropriate budget for program delivery • The four elements of the B2B program (website, event sponsorship program, webinars/podcasts, one-on-one consultant sessions) provided a broad range of support that catered to impacted producers • One-on-one consultant session was a fit for purpose means of effectively supporting individual producers to recover from the fires • Collaboration with other organisations through the webinars/podcasts • Eligibility requirements for consultants • One-on-one sessions were available to all states impacted • One-on-one sessions were available to all impacted red meat producers • Having a coordinator to drive the process at a state level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of SMART¹ project objectives and target outcomes • Limited collaboration with other organisations for the one-on-one part of the program • Difficulty engaging with some organisations for collaboration • Lack of clarity around aspects of producer eligibility • Perception that consultant eligibility requirements were too strict (SA only) • Lack of sufficient focus on mental health as part of the program delivery • Slow contracting processes for both state coordinators and consultants • No project communication plan • No project monitoring and evaluation plan • Limited budget available for program marketing and promotion
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear timeline post disaster for rolling the program out and for providing the ongoing support required to facilitate recovery • Increase MLA engagement with national and state disaster recovery committees/groups • Increase readiness to deploy the B2B program at short notice in the event of a disaster (e.g. list of pre-approved consultants) • Co-funding of the project with other organisations/programs • Clarify and refine project purpose, objectives, intended outcomes and target audience • Improve planning around communication and marketing and monitoring and evaluation activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of available funding to deploy the project following the next substantial natural disaster • Lack of MLA staff availability

3.1.2 Program Inception and Planning

According to stakeholders engaged during the review process, MLA had decided to provide a response to the national bushfire emergency to assist red meat producers in early January 2020. After

¹Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Bound (SMART)

consideration of various response options, it was decided that a combination of offerings would best support the range of needs producers were likely to have at the time. As a result, the four B2B project offerings included:

- One-on-one consultant advice
- Information provided on the MLA website
- Producer information workshops (later delivered as webinars/podcasts)
- Event sponsorship program

The one-on-one consultant sessions were considered to be important in terms of not only supporting producers to recover from the bushfires, but also to support them to become more prepared for future natural disasters.

Stakeholders identified the following factors as being important to successful planning of the B2B program:

- A clear direction provided by the MLA board with high-level support to roll the project out as quickly as possible.
- A small team of dedicated and enthusiastic staff at MLA who worked diligently to get the project up and running in a very short amount of time.
- Development of project guidelines for delivery of the one-on-one sessions with input from state coordinators.
- Availability of sufficient funding to address the project objective of supporting fire impacted producers to recover from the bushfires.
- One-on-one sessions were available to all states impacted, even though only a small number of producers were impacted in Tasmania and WA.

***Finding:** Key success factors around initial project planning included a combination of clear direction and support (including financial support) from the MLA board to roll the project out as quickly as possible, a dedicated and enthusiastic team who got the project up and running in a very short amount of time, equity across all states impacted in being able to access available support and development of guidelines to support delivery of the one-on-one sessions.*

Stakeholders also identified several key challenges associated with project planning, which largely related to the limited time that was available to plan and commence delivery of the project:

- Limited MLA staff available at the time given many were away on holidays, so those staff that were involved were over-extended, and in some cases also still had other work commitments for existing roles prior to the fires
- Difficulty and limited time to engage with other service providers during planning e.g. other Rural Development Corporations (RDCs), state departments
- Time required to identify and access eligible consultants
- Difficulty engaging with some consultants who felt that the requirements for consultant eligibility were 'too strict'
- Contracting processes for engaging state coordinators and individual consultants
- Challenges presented by COVID-19
- Limited budget available for program marketing and promotion

Given the timing of the B2B project planning in early January, many staff were still away on leave at the time, thus limiting the availability of staff to assist with initial planning. Some staff were diverted from other core roles to assist with B2B, however were still required to deliver on their other roles, thus were over extended at times.

To avoid this situation in future, it is suggested that core roles and responsibilities be established for disaster responses within MLA, along with deployment processes such that pre-existing work is either put on hold, or re-assigned across other positions for the duration of the disaster response. There may also be a requirement for some brief training activities for specific staff members identified to take on these roles in the event of an emergency. Less time commitment is likely to be required for such disaster response planning in future given the B2B product has already been developed.

MLA stakeholders reported a key challenge during the B2B planning phase was engagement with other service providers also delivering, or wanting to deliver, emergency responses to the bushfires. One challenge was the limited time available for consultation and engagement with other organisations, and the other reported challenge was the difficulty in coordinating responses and willingness to collaborate across agencies, such as other RDCs and state agriculture departments. It was also reported that COVID-19 'did not help' when attempting to seek cooperation and coordination of other agencies in delivering the B2B program. COVID-19 also provided challenges with planning face-to-face workshops and events.

It was reported that it took some time initially to identify and engage with eligible consultants to register for the one-on-one advisory sessions. MLA is now in a much better position to quickly identify and engage with consultants for future programs given the list of past consultants, but also through the new Livestock Advisor Updates program.

***Finding:** Key challenges associated with initial B2B project planning were largely related to the time of year (early January) when many people were on holidays, the short timeframe to plan and make the program available to producers and challenges with engaging project stakeholders, including consultants and other fire recovery service providers.*

3.1.3 Program Purpose, Objectives and Target Outcomes

Program Purpose

The purpose of the B2B program is unclear to stakeholders, and is not clearly articulated in any project documentation provided by MLA. All MLA staff members engaged during the review identified assisting producers to recover more quickly from the bushfires as a purpose of the program, however the following purposes were also identified by one or more MLA staff:

- To assist producers to increase long term profit
- To increase producer participation in other MLA programs
- To increase producer use of consultants post fire recovery
- To increase producer preparedness for future natural disasters
- To support delivery of other fire recovery services to producers
- To provide mental health/emotional support to fire affected producers
- To be seen to be providing support to MLA levy payers

Figure 1 provides a summary of all non-producer stakeholder responses when asked what the purpose of the B2B program was. Beyond assisting producers to recover more quickly from the bushfires, which 85% of stakeholders identified as a purpose of the program, there was variability among stakeholders as to other perceived intended purposes of the program.

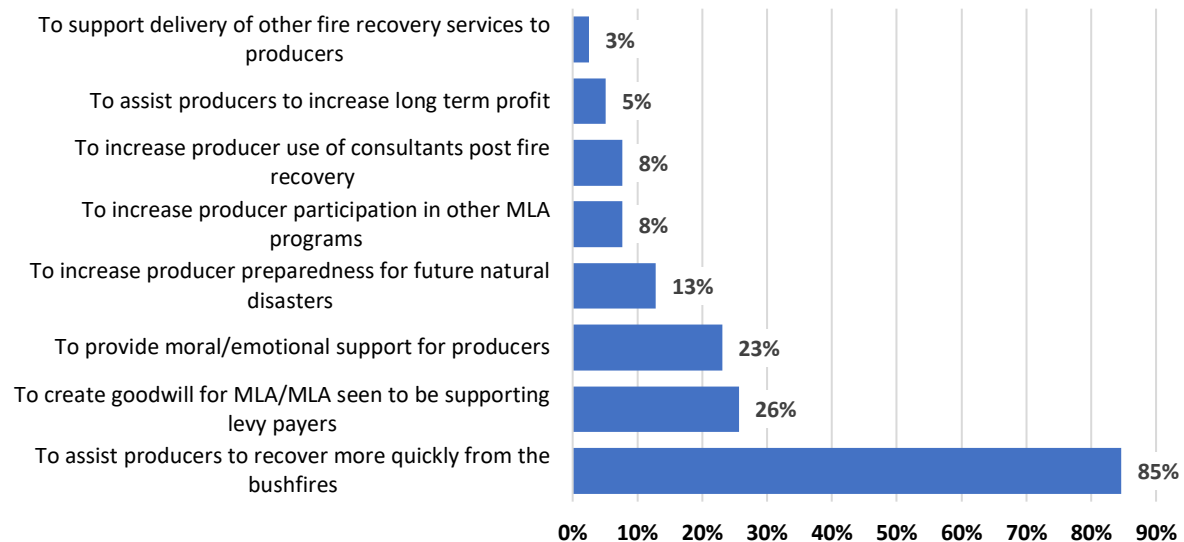


Figure 1: Stakeholder perceptions of the purpose of the B2B program

Note that no consultants identified increasing producer long-term profit as an objective of the program, however most consultants provided advice to at least one producer to achieve this outcome.

Finding: There was a lack of clarity among stakeholders, including MLA staff, as to the purpose of the B2B program.

Program Objectives and Target Outcomes

The objectives of the B2B program, as stated in the program guidelines are:

1. To provide the opportunity for producers in fire affected areas to participate
2. To deploy a state coordinator to partner producers with local farm management consultants
3. To increase the capability of producers to understand their situation and develop a recovery plan to assist them in getting their business back on track; and
4. To provide the opportunity for ongoing support from a farm management consultant over three sessions.

The target outcomes from meeting these objectives, again as stated in the program guidelines, are provided below, along with some key questions/comments identified by the reviewers:

1. **Fire-affected producers will have implemented a farm management program to rebuild their businesses**
 - How many/what proportion of fire affected producers?
 - What is a farm management program?

- Over what time period?
- For what purpose e.g. to reduce the time to recover from fires, to increase long term profit?

2. Producers may progress into MLA adoption programs, particularly ‘Involve and Partner’ programs such as Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS)

- The intention is that they do progress not that they may
- Using what process/facilitated how?
- How many/what proportion?
- Over what time period?

3. A final report outlining the outcomes of the ‘Back to Business’ Initiative will be published

- This is a project delivery objective as opposed to a target outcome

The outcomes of the project should represent what success looks like as a result of achieving project objectives during delivery. Target outcomes should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound.

Measuring Success Against Outcome 1: Fire-affected producers will have implemented a farm management program to rebuild their businesses

Outcome 1 does not specify the target number or proportion of producers engaged that will have implemented a ‘farm management program’ to rebuild their business against which success is measured, nor the time period over which implementation should occur. For example, is it satisfactory for 50% of producers to have implemented a ‘farm management program’? In addition, what is a ‘farm management program’? The only mention of a ‘farm management program’ in the B2B program guidelines is in this objective. Presumably it is the fire recovery ‘action plan’ referred to elsewhere in the guidelines, however this is ambiguous.

The number and proportion of producers who have implemented their action plan has been measured as part of this review, however no conclusions can be drawn regarding the degree of success this measure represents to MLA.

Measuring Success Against Outcome 2: Producers may progress into MLA adoption programs, particularly ‘Involve and Partner’ programs such as Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS)

Outcome 2 is similarly unclear and is really a statement rather than a target outcome insofar as it says that producers ‘may’ progress into MLA adoption programs, and although MLA would clearly want producers to progress from B2B into other adoption programs, this outcome does not specify if the aim is for them to do this or not. As with outcome 1, this outcome also does not specify a measurable target against which success can be measured.

This outcome was difficult to measure accurately during this review as many producers could not recall what training events or activities they participated in over the past two years and/or whether or not MLA was involved in funding any activities they had participated in. One way that MLA could measure the number of B2B participants who had participated in other MLA adoption programs would be to cross check registrations for other activities against the names of B2B participants, however this

information was not available for this review. In any case, even if producers had gone on to participate in other MLA adoption programs, this action on behalf of producers may not have been related to their participation in the B2B program, therefore could not be considered to be an outcome of this program. As such, it is suggested that this outcome is very difficult to accurately measure success against unless there is a specific process or pathway used to facilitate B2B producers to participate in MLA adoption programs.

The producer interviews revealed that producers were more likely to recall being directed to training programs and producer groups (which may or may not have been funded by MLA) at the recommendation of their consultant. Thus, if this is a future target outcome for MLA, it is suggested by the reviewers that achieving this transition of producers into other adoption programs would most effectively be facilitated via the B2B consultant. This could be achieved by providing consultants with a list of relevant events, courses, and groups available to producers over a pre-determined period of time along with a communication strategy. This would require the consultant to liaise with the producers at set intervals to determine their learning needs in order to best direct and encourage them to participate in relevant MLA adoption programs.

Measuring Success Against Outcome 3: A final report outlining the outcomes of the 'Back to Business' Initiative will be published

Outcome 3 simply states that a final report of the B2B outcomes be published, which is an objective, or project delivery action, not a target outcome. There are state coordinator reports for B2B but they do not report against the two outcomes identified above.

It is suggested by the reviewers that the 4th objective of the B2B program, 'To increase the capability of producers to understand their situation and develop a recovery plan to assist them in getting their business back on track' could be reworded as an additional outcome. Other desirable outcomes from delivery of the program were also identified during this review and could be included as future target outcomes (e.g. increasing producer use of consultants after the fires, increasing future preparedness of participants for natural disasters in general). There was also no engagement objective or target outcome as a measure of the intended target audience.

Finding: The B2B project target outcomes against which success is to be measured are measurable, but are not specific in that there are no metrics to identify what the target level of achievement is.

3.1.4 Program Structure

The general consensus from stakeholders engaged for this review was that the approach of having four types of support provided through the B2B program was an effective means of providing producers with a range of opportunities to engage with the program on terms that worked for them. Some stakeholders did offer additional comments regarding the relative success of these offerings, which are discussed in subsequent sections of this report. This report largely focuses on the delivery of the one-on-one consultant sessions, however the other three elements of the program are discussed in Section 3.4.

Finding: The general consensus from stakeholders engaged for this review was that offering the four types of support (website, event sponsorship, webinars/podcasts and one-on-one consultant sessions)

provided by MLA through the B2B program was an effective means of supporting producers impacted by the fires.

3.1.5 Role of B2B in Supporting Producers Impacted by Fires

Two thirds of state coordinators and consultants interviewed indicated that in retrospect, the B2B program was either 'definitely' (32%) or 'probably' (36%) the best way for MLA to support producers impacted by the bushfires, while the remaining third were unsure. No alternative approaches were suggested by stakeholders, however it was noted by many that there are opportunities to improve the program for future delivery.

Finding: *Two thirds of state coordinators and consultants interviewed stated that the B2B program was either 'definitely' or 'probably' the best way for MLA to support producers impacted by the bushfires, while the remaining third were unsure.*

The only issue identified by stakeholders in terms of MLA's role in supporting producers impacted by fires was a perceived lack of advocacy for red meat producers to access an additional grant for fire recovery in NSW. The NSW Government funded Supply Chain Support Grants of up to \$200,000 per eligible business through the Bushfire Industry Recovery Package. Eligible industries for the grants included apiculture, aquaculture, dairy, forestry, horticulture and viticulture.

After a period of assessment and consultation between government, local communities and industry, these sectors were identified as being the most critical sectors to support economic recovery in fire-affected regions. Through this program, 73 dairy farms received an average of \$162,658 each to support recovery from the fires. These dairy businesses were able to use grant funding for a range of fire recovery activities including re-stocking, re-establishing pastures, clearing debris, repair and replacement of critical infrastructure, purchasing fodder and accessing technical and business advice. Feedback provided during this review reported that Dairy Australia had advocated for dairy farms to be included as eligible businesses, whereas MLA was not involved and did not advocate for red meat producers to be eligible for the grant. It was reported that the red meat industry was not able to access any funding through this program because 'they didn't have a seat at the table'.

Finding: *Producer and service provider feedback indicates some frustration toward MLA for a perceived lack of support in advocating for NSW red meat producers to be eligible for the Bushfire Industry Recovery Package Supply Chain Support Grants. It was reported that Dairy Australia successfully advocated for dairy producers to be included as an eligible industry for the program.*

Figure 2 reveals that most stakeholders perceived that the B2B program did address a gap in service delivery to producers impacted by fires, with mixed views as to whether that gap was primarily to increase access to existing services or to provide services that did not already exist.

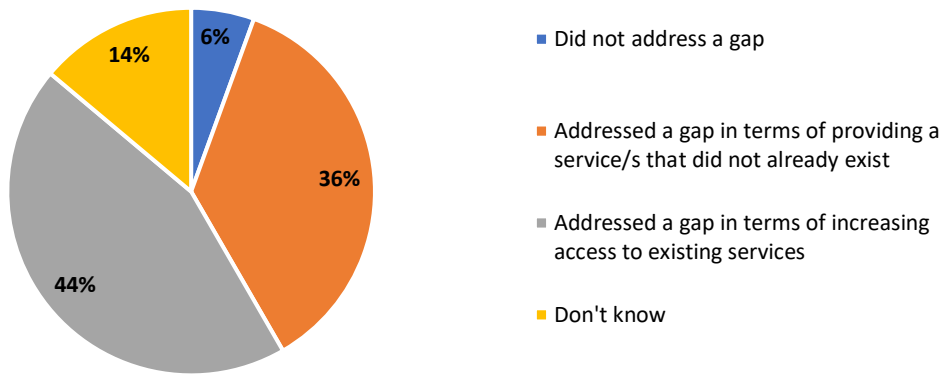


Figure 2: Stakeholder views (MLA staff, state coordinators and consultants) on what, if any, gap in service delivery the B2B program addressed

Finding: Most stakeholders (80%) perceived that the B2B program did address a gap in service delivery to producers impacted by fires, with mixed views as to whether that gap was primarily to increase access to existing services or to provide services that did not already exist.

In relation to addressing a gap by providing services that did not already exist, the two comparable services most often identified by stakeholders were the Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) and state departments of agriculture/LLS. Commentary from stakeholders suggested that post fire services provided by state departments of agriculture/LLS were generally very limited in scope and specific in nature, such as addressing animal wellbeing and advice on feed budgets, and that COVID-19 had limited the ability for producer access to one-on-one advice through these services, particularly in Victoria. It was also mentioned that state department of agriculture/LLS staff are typically less experienced and less broadly skilled than consultants.

In relation to the RFCS, comments related to the fact that they are not allowed to provide specific advice to producers, and that many do not have the technical skills required to provide broad options for action across relevant areas of a business for fire recovery. Stakeholders suggested that services to fire impacted producers provided by the RFCS mainly related to assistance with budgets, identifying grants and completing grant applications.

In terms of increasing access to existing services, stakeholders most often referred to the free service provided through the program when many producers were heavily impacted financially by the fires. They also mentioned the increased accessibility of consulting services in that they were promoted directly to producers and packaged up into three sessions, with producers able to choose from a list of pre-approved, and therefore presumably qualified and trustworthy, consultants.

Many of the fire affected areas were relatively isolated and normally not particularly well serviced by agricultural consultants, so this program also assisted by bringing the consultants into these areas. It was also noted that free one-on-one production-based services were also available through other service providers, such as supply company agronomists, but that this advice may not be independent, was not holistic across the business, did not involve setting priorities and key steps to recovery and could be difficult to access for some smaller producers.

3.1.6 Requirements for Producer and Consultant Eligibility for One-on-One Sessions

Producer Eligibility

According to the B2B delivery guidelines, to be eligible to participate in the program producers were required to meet the following criteria:

- Be a red meat producer (cattle, sheep, goat)
- Be situated in fire-affected regions as determined by postcode (MLA to provide eligible postcodes)
- Be able to demonstrate that they have been affected by bushfires during 2019/2020

The vast majority of state coordinators and consultants interviewed (91%) felt that these requirements for producer eligibility were appropriate, though many were unclear as to what MLA's purpose in funding the program was, and who the target audience was. For example, if MLA's purpose was simply to offer assistance to all red meat producers impacted by fires with no preference for enterprise scale or degree of need, then stakeholders commented that the eligibility criteria were appropriate.

However, there were mixed views as to whether the program should have targeted larger properties to a greater degree to generate a higher return on investment from the program through on-farm productivity improvements. Some stakeholders felt that a scaled offering should be delivered whereby larger producers receive more sessions than smaller 'lifestyle' type producers. Others felt that the program should be offered equally to all producers regardless of scale and level of off-farm income.

Finding: *The vast majority of state coordinators and consultants interviewed (91%) felt that the requirements for producer eligibility were appropriate, with the caveat that many were unclear of the program's purpose and target audience.*

It was noted by some stakeholders that the smaller farms impacted by fires generally had less access to support for recovery from service providers, and were often not eligible for grants. Larger properties with full time managers were likely to have received grants and support from suppliers and service providers, such as consultants, agronomists and stock agents, because they are bigger clients.

Consultants reported that some producer participants were only minimally impacted by the fires, and questioned whether MLA's priority should be to provide support to those producers most in need of support. This issue was largely a moot point however, given that the program was well undersubscribed.

Several consultants were unclear of the eligibility criteria around postcode in terms of whether a producer who had property in an eligible postcode but resided in a different ineligible postcode, was eligible or not. Example stakeholder quotes are provided below:

If MLA was happy for it to be anyone, then it was fine, and it didn't matter because it was undersubscribed anyway. But if uptake was huge, potentially then smaller farms are taking space from bigger farms where MLA could have had a greater economic impact for the industry, but is that an issue for MLA, I don't know.

Maybe MLA could offer a scaled service offer, so the offer to someone with 20 ha versus 5,000 ha would be different i.e. less sessions if smaller, more sessions if larger.

I would just question what level of fire impact qualified as some were very minimally impacted and didn't need much help with direct fire recovery.

I think it was great that it was available to everyone because it doesn't matter how big or small the farm was, they were all impacted by the same fire and the animals don't know how much land the farmer has, they still need help all the same.

Consider the question of scale i.e. who is the target for this assistance package? Consider only targeting those in most need.

State Coordinator and Consultant Quotes

Finding: *There were mixed views among stakeholders as to whether MLA should have targeted larger producers to a greater degree to generate a higher return on program investment, and prioritised providing support to those producers most impacted by the fires and perceived to be most in need of support.*

Consultant Eligibility

The program delivery model involved categorisation of consultants delivering the program into two groups:

1. Farm management consultant (FMC): An experienced consultant that specialises in farm business management with in-depth understanding of livestock farming systems from an integrated technical and financial perspective.
2. Specialist technical consultant (STC): A consultant with technical expertise, but without farm business financial management expertise.

The requirements for FMC eligibility, as described in the project guidelines, included:

- At least five (5) years' experience in sheep and/or beef consulting and farm business management with an in depth understanding of livestock farming systems from an integrated technical and financial perspective; and
- Provide three (3) referees, two (2) of which must be producers (clients)
- Provide evidence of daily billing rate
- Have adequate levels of Professional Indemnity Insurance (minimum of \$2M).

The requirements for STC eligibility included:

- Demonstrated consulting experience (>2 years) in their specific area of expertise; and
- Provide three referees, two of which must be producers (clients)

- Provide evidence of daily billing rate
- Have adequate levels of Professional Indemnity Insurance (\$2M) – certificate of currency required.

Stakeholder feedback indicates broad consensus that criteria were required for consultant eligibility for the B2B program, with the only feedback obtained on the criteria used being that some consultants in SA felt that the requirements were ‘too strict’. This view resulted in less than desirable numbers of FMC and STC consultants registering for the program in that state.

Finding: There was broad consensus among stakeholders interviewed that eligibility criteria were required for B2B consultants. A view among some consultants in SA that the eligibility criteria for consultants were too strict resulted in fewer than expected consultant registrations in that state.

3.2 Program Delivery: One-on-One Sessions

3.2.1 Overview

The following table provides an overview of the review findings in relation to delivery of the one-on-one consultant sessions presented as a SWOT analysis.

Table 2: SWOT analysis of delivery of the one-on-one consultant sessions

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shed meetings run by Livestock SA (and sponsored events in other states) were perceived as being an effective way to engage with producers and promote the program • Most consultants felt well supported by their state coordinator • State coordinators generally felt well supported by MLA • Flexibility in delivery of the one-on-one sessions to producers • Majority of producers reported that the format of the one-on-one consultant sessions was what they needed to support their recovery from the fires. • Majority of producers were satisfied with their consultants and the advice they provided • Timing of program delivery suited the majority of producer participants • No concerns were raised by MLA or any of the state coordinators regarding how conflicts of interest were addressed during project delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program was undersubscribed relative to funding available to support a greater number of producers impacted by the bushfires. • Perceived insufficient vetting of consultants prior to approval • MLA did not have an on-the-ground presence or representation in fire impacted regions. • Criticism of some consultants by producer clients • Perception among non-producer stakeholders that some consultants were not well suited to the task • Lack of sufficient support provided to some consultants by the state coordinators • Low level monitoring of consultant activities by state coordinators • Lack of sufficient and appropriate communication and marketing activities, with an over reliance on electronic communications for promotion • Lower than desired number of consultants in SA

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor awareness among some consultants of their role requirements • Lack of awareness among some producer participants of their entitled offering through the program and/or how to maximise that value • Insufficient engagement with other fire recovery service providers • COVID-19 reduced the value of one-on-one sessions for some producers • There were administrative inefficiencies which resulted in inconsistent delivery processes between states and reduced return on investment of funds spent. • Communication and marketing activities to promote the program and its value proposition to producers and other service providers could have been better.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with key service providers and organisations involved in initial disaster response and early recovery activities before a natural disaster occurs and immediately after an event. • Develop partnerships with other service providers for delivery of the program on the ground and/or for program funding. • Involve more consultants with the desirable skills and experience in the program and consider pathways for younger or less experienced consultants to enter the program • Create clearer administrative processes and protocols for project delivery. • Improve communication and marketing assets, plans and activities (e.g. face-to-face promotion) to create greater awareness and understanding of the program among producers and other service providers. • Incorporate mental health support more formally into program delivery. • Increase support provided to consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than target numbers of producers willing and able to gain value from the program. • Emotional trauma of producers after a natural disaster as a barrier for program participation. • Lack of sufficient appropriately skilled consultants involved in the program. • Lack of sufficient engagement with other fire recovery support services. • Lack of time and funding for effective communication and marketing activities to promote the program and providing a clear value proposition for producers.

3.2.2 Communication and Marketing

Figure 3 indicates that of those producers who completed a feedback form (45% of producers), the most common means of program awareness was via an advisor/personal contact, followed by via MLA email/Friday Feedback.

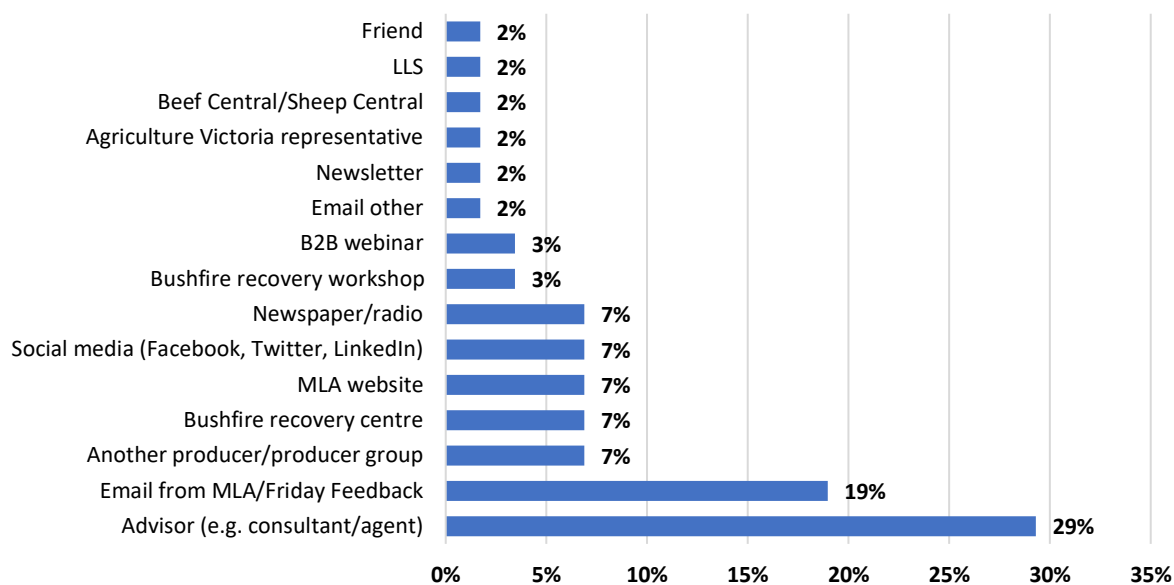


Figure 3: Means of becoming aware of the B2B program as reported by producers in the post program feedback forms (n=60)

While there was no communication or marketing plan developed by MLA for the B2B program, according to MLA communications and marketing staff, the following promotional activities for the program were undertaken by MLA:

- Small advertisements in the March-April 2020 and July-August 2020 MLA Feedback Magazine
- Large article in the May-June 2020 MLA Feedback Magazine
- MLA website promotions
- Two MLA Feedback podcast episodes
- Online Friday Feedback email sent out to MLA membership database each Friday. B2B content in 5 of these emails during 2020 (27/3, 24/4, 15/5, 14/8, and 25/9)

Three of the five state coordinators identified promotion of the program to producers/consultants as a required part of their role, though all state coordinators did promote the program in one way or another. Three state coordinators reported development of a communication plan/strategy for the project.

Three state coordinators reported use of direct emails and phone calls to impacted producers, use of social media/website and promotion through producer groups as methods of state-based promotion. Four of the five state coordinators reported use of radio and/or newspaper advertising, use of newsletters/e-newsletters and promotion via third parties, including B2B consultants, resellers and stock agents. One state completed a letterbox drop of the MLA B2B flier, and another state reported use of SMS to affected producers, in addition to holding 'tailgate/shed meetings' to promote the program directly to producers.

The aim of the tailgate/shed meetings was to connect with fire affected producers and talk about the range of support measures available, including the B2B program. They were either a breakfast meeting or evening BBQ. Each meeting included a guest speaker as a 'carrot' to attract producers to attend. Mental health service providers and other fire recovery service providers also attended the meetings. While these meetings were viewed as being highly successful, there was criticism that it took too long to roll them out and that they should have been run much earlier after the fires.

According to MLA stakeholders, it was expected that state coordinators did promote the program to producers as part of their role, however this was not clearly stated in the state-coordinator role objectives, which contained the following wording: '*Engage and verify eligibility of fire affected red meat producers*'. There was no mention in state coordinator role objectives of promoting the program to other service providers or disaster recovery support services, though as noted above some state coordinators did do this to some degree. Clarifying this role, along with a requirement for state coordinators to develop and provide a communication plan with support from MLA, would assist to improve promotion of the program in future.

***Finding:** While there was an expectation on behalf of MLA that state coordinators would actively promote the B2B program to producers/consultants, this was not clearly identified in state coordinator role objectives. While all state coordinators did promote the program in one way or another, only three of the five identified promotion of the program to producers/consultants as a required part of their role.*

Overall, stakeholder feedback across the board indicated that the promotion and marketing of the program was a factor in limiting the potential uptake among eligible participants. Key limitations of the communication and marketing activities were perceived as:

- Marketing and promotion of the program should have commenced sooner than it did, while acknowledging the short timeframe within which the program was developed and offered
- Too much reliance on generic communications rather than more targeted marketing to specific locations and audiences impacted by the fires
- Too heavy a reliance on non-personal forms of communications e.g. social media/websites, newsletters, newspapers/magazines, as opposed to more personal communication methods such as personalised emails, phone calls and face-to-face
- Insufficient engagement with other fire recovery support services and producer service providers to assist with promotion, identification of producers most in need and cross referrals
- Lack of a clear value proposition provided to producers for their participation in the program
- Lack of clarity around what the program offered and what participation involved in practical terms
- Insufficient promotion of the program in general in terms of frequency and depth of advertising and promotion
- Lack of an in-person MLA presence on the ground in fire affected regions

***Finding:** Stakeholder feedback suggests that uptake of the B2B program would have been higher with improved promotion and marketing of the program to producers, other fire recovery support services and producer service providers.*

Stakeholders across several states identified that had the program been available and promoted earlier, they would have been able to approach producers directly to inform them of its availability as part of their role as first responders. While it was acknowledged that this was not possible given the timeline for development and availability of the program, it was identified that MLA should engage with key first responder agencies now to provide them with relevant information and marketing materials so that they are well informed in the event of any future deployment of the B2B program. For example, Agriculture Victoria provides all producers impacted by a natural disaster with a folder containing key support information. Information on the B2B program could be sitting in those folders ready to go as needed.

A major limitation to producers being able to absorb any promotional material they may have been exposed to via email or newsletter etc was their impaired cognitive capacity at the time due to the emotional trauma they were experiencing. This was evidenced by the Victorian non-participant case study finding that several producers who were known to have received direct emails to inform them of the program's availability reported no prior awareness of the program.

Many producers reported that they only participated in the program because a known and trusted source had informed them directly of its availability and recommended they participate. Thus, an important feature of any future successful marketing program for B2B will need to consider the emotional state of the target audience and the subsequent need for direct, personalised marketing, preferably via a known source. Interviews with other fire recovery service providers indicated that many were unaware of the B2B program, but would have promoted it or referred clients to it if they had been aware (Section 3.2.10).

***Finding:** A major limitation to producers being able to absorb any promotional material that they may have been exposed to was their impaired cognitive capacity at the time due to the emotional trauma they were experiencing. Thus, an important feature of any future successful marketing program for B2B will need to consider the emotional state of the target audience and the subsequent need for direct, personalised marketing, preferably via a known source.*

Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for how more direct marketing and promotion could be provided to eligible producers in future:

- Presence of an MLA representative at key community locations such as disaster recovery centres, BlazeAid depots, fodder drop locations.
- MLA to engage early, either in person or via the state coordinator, with state-based recovery committees where all key recovery agencies are represented.
- Holding local information sessions face-to-face, similar to the tailgate/shed sessions held in SA.
- Engaging with agencies offering and distributing grants to impacted producers to promote the B2B program as offering support and assistance as to where best to spend grant funds to maximise their value to the business.
- Engaging with insurance companies to promote the B2B program as offering support and assistance as to where best to spend insurance funds to maximise their value to the business.
- Engaging with producers' key service providers to promote the program e.g. local agronomists, merchandise sellers, stock agents, accountants, banks, farmer group facilitators, Landcare.
- An increased focus on marketing to farming women via relevant channels.

- Direct emails or phone calls by MLA to members in impacted postcodes.
- Engaging with disaster first responders as early as possible, provide them with B2B promotional material (e.g. fliers) and sufficient background information about the program (i.e. purpose, value proposition for producers, how it works in practice) so that they can recommend it to producers as part of their first responder activities.
- Provide first responders with the means to capture producer registrations of interest in the program for subsequent follow-up.
- Directly engage with case management support agencies.
- Engage with other fire recovery service providers to support cross-referral and promotion between programs.

Finding: Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for how more direct marketing and promotion could be directed to eligible producers in future.

Producer feedback indicated that there was a lack of clarity about what the program offered, how it would work in practice and what value producers could expect to receive. Example producer quotes are provided below:

It was unclear as to how it would work and what was involved. When I first looked at it I thought, what does it really mean, and what can I get out of this, and how much of my soul do I have to sell for this?

It was a bit of an unknown as to how this program could help, and there was a fair bit going on so people might have just let it slide on past.

People were unsure what was what with it. You are too busy to look at everything else so people were picking and choosing what to focus on, and if it didn't immediately make sense what was involved, they were likely to have moved on to the next offering, especially since it didn't involve a grant.

The roll out was a bit vague and hard for people to pick up on and what it meant for helping people recover. I couldn't really follow what it was about but I left it in 'consultants' hands to organise as I knew they'd do the right thing by us but it took a while to get my head around it and what it meant and what it was about. Others without a consultant they knew and trusted may have just pushed it aside.

I didn't understand what type of help it meant. It was called 'Business' and I thought, I've got my books in order I've done that all my life, I don't need help with admin so when I got the email I just pushed it aside. I was focused more on things like BlazeAid - it's easy and straightforward, you know what you're getting, help with putting fences up. So when I first saw it I thought, I can't be bothered with that. When 'consultant' asked me about it I said I haven't got time for that, and they said, 'no you should do it, I'll help sort it out for you'. So I just went along with it and glad that I did because it was helpful, but I wouldn't have done it if they hadn't have pushed me to.

Producer Participant Quotes

***Finding:** Producer feedback indicated that there was a lack of clarity about what the program offered, how it would work in practice and what value producers could expect to get out of participating. This resulted in some producers needing their local consultant to really encourage them to apply or to actually apply for them with their permission.*

Even though the B2B program was free, there were still emotional and time costs associated with producer participation. Overcoming producer concerns and clarifying expected value for producers are therefore important elements of a successful marketing campaign in order to overcome potential barriers to adoption. Suggestions for addressing some of these limitations in future marketing campaigns include:

- Use promotional material involving past participants describing how the program works, what was involved and what they got out of it. This could be provided either in person as a speaker at an information session and/or as promotional videos, articles and podcasts etc.
- Provide opportunities for producer concerns to be addressed/questions answered e.g. provide a 'hotline' where producers and service providers can call and have their questions answered
- Provide a one-page summary of what the program is offering, how it works in practice and what value producers can expect from participating, to relevant service providers and disaster recovery support services to assist with their promotion of the program to producers
- Provide a series of Frequently Asked Questions and responses to pre-emptively address likely producer questions/concerns
- Review the program title
- Review use of the words 'business consultant' in promotional material

The word 'business' in the program title did elicit perceptions among some producers that the program was just about, or mainly about, financial or administration type advice, which was a deterrent to participation. Changing the name of the program could thus present an opportunity to reduce misconceptions among producers around what the program is offering. However, any advantages of a name change would need to be weighed up against potential disadvantages given existing recognition of the 'Back to Business' name and advantages that this may offer. A suggested option for a name change provided by the reviewers to minimise the difference between the current 'Back to Business' name and a new name is 'Back on Track'. It is suggested that this title also aligns better with the intent of the program.

***Finding:** Stakeholders reported that the word 'business' in the program title elicited perceptions among some producers that the program was just about, or mainly about financial or administration type of advice, which was a deterrent to participation.*

As noted previously, many producers are wary of consultants and uncertain about their potential value to their business. There may be an opportunity to avoid some of this wariness by changing the label of 'farm business consultant' to another term, however given that MLA is wanting to encourage increased use of consultants among producers this may be counterproductive.

Producer feedback indicates other initial concerns among producers that could have been barriers to adoption for other producers that did not participate in the program. It is therefore considered important to predict what producer concerns are likely to be, and to pre-emptively address those

concerns, for example by providing a list of frequently asked questions as part of the communication and marketing activities. For example:

- **Concern:** Producer concern that their private business would be made public and/or their neighbours would find out they were 'getting help' if a local consultant was used
Promo: Both local consultants and consultants from other parts of the state are available to producers
- **Concern:** Producers will be told what to do by consultants
Promo: The program is about having another set of eyes to help make key decisions, and that it is just advice or another opinion - you can take it or leave it. There is no obligation to do anything differently.
- **Concern:** A requirement to share financial information with the consultant
Promo: The program offers a range of types of assistance, including specific technical advice associated with pasture or animal management for example, and the opportunity for assistance with financial management and budgeting to assist with fire recovery. The type of assistance provided is up to the producer to decide.

Finding: It is important to predict what producer concerns are likely to be, and to pre-emptively address those concerns as part of project communication and marketing activities.

3.2.3 Producer Participation

In total, 132 producers participated in the B2B program: 63 in NSW, 40 in SA, 27 in Victoria, and 1 in both WA and Tasmania. This was well below the program target of 2,500.

Figure 4 reveals that B2B producer participants felt that the main reasons for the relatively low participation rate were that producers were too stressed or traumatised after the fires to engage with the program, they were not aware of the program, they did not want or need outside help, and a lack of understanding of what the program offered, how it would work in practice and understanding the potential benefits for the producer. Program timing was not perceived to be an important factor.

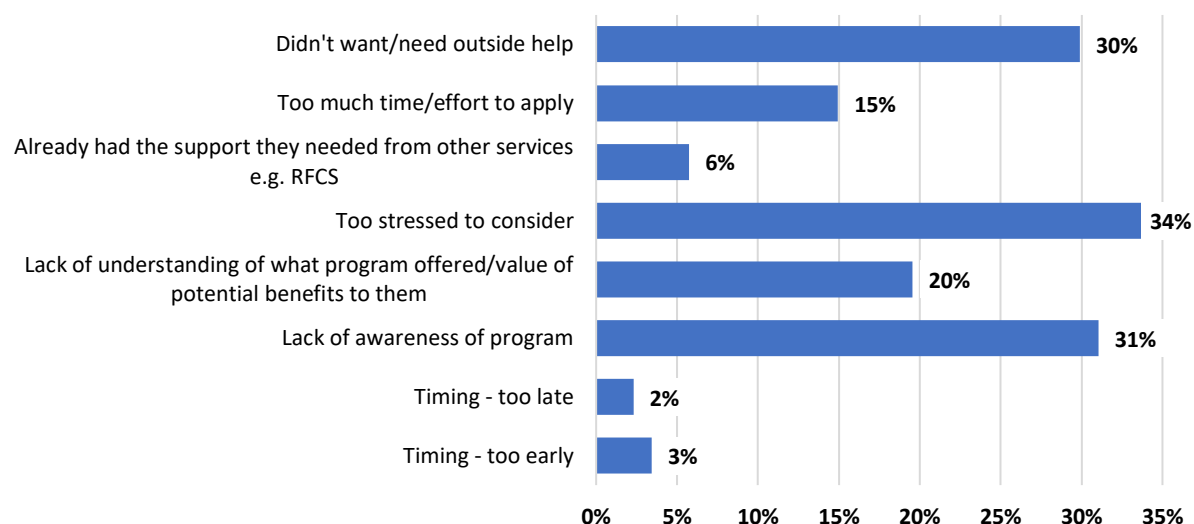


Figure 4: Producer participant views on reasons for low participation rate in the program

Finding: *Producer participant feedback suggests that the main reasons for the relatively low participation rate among eligible producers were that they were too stressed/traumatised to engage with the program, lack of awareness of the program and/or lack of understanding of what the program offered/value of potential benefits or that they did not need or want outside help.*

This feedback also aligned with that from consultants and other fire recovery service providers interviewed regarding key reasons for the low participation rate, though some other fire recovery service providers also felt that the program finished too soon for many producers, and ideally would have been made available for a longer period of time.

Comments from these service providers highlighted the observation that many producers were in deep trauma following the fires, especially if they had lost livestock or had to dispose/sell burnt livestock and/or had a close encounter with the fire front. For these producers, recovery was slower and their readiness to engage with anything other than the day to day was difficult. They were more likely to be unable to take in the offers of help at the time. Some also noted that COVID-19 impacted the willingness of some producers to participate. Example quotes from other fire recovery service providers are provided below:

While it is important to promote these opportunities, most fire affected farmers were overwhelmed with offers of assistance early on after the fires. People were also suffering from trauma and could not take in and remember what they were being offered. There was too much 'noise'.

Timing was all wrong (for B2B) - people were too concerned about putting up fences etc. It was what they need but too early for them to utilise it.

A scheme with a focus on agricultural support has to have been a good idea. The real problem was farmers capacity to embrace such a program after the emotion and trauma of being burnt out.

Too much else on offer. People were being stoic and also there was a bit of 'others need it more than I do'. The name (Back to Business) didn't resonate with people either - business was the last thing on their mind. COVID-19 had a huge impact on people - some were reluctant to let others on their farms. COVID-19 meant that it was online - this put some people off.

The B2B program was too early for the Corryong fires. People were overwhelmed and just wanted to put up their fences and care for their livestock after the fires rather than engage in planning/recovery of their businesses. Some of the more switched-on farmers were in this head space but most were overwhelmed with the support offerings and B2B possibly got lost in the mix. It was a good program so not sure really why there wasn't more uptake.

Other Fire Recovery Service Provider Quotes

Finding: *In addition to the key reasons for the relatively low producer participation rate in B2B provided by producers and consultants, other fire recovery service providers interviewed also suggested that COVID-19 impacted on the willingness of some producer to participate, and that it was too early for many producers and ideally would have been offered over a longer period of time.*

Additional producer feedback indicated the following initial concerns producer participants had prior to enrolling in the program, or reasons why other producers they know did not participate:

- Unclear as to how much effort and preparation they would be required to provide and/or how it would work in practice
- Concern that they would be required to provide their financial information, or that the program would just be about financial aspects because of the word 'business' in the title.
- Negative attitude of producers toward MLA
- Producer lack of familiarity with the consultants on offer (73% of producers interviewed either knew or knew of their B2B consultant)
- A distrust/lack of perceived value of consultants on offer and/or in general
- Producers not wanting to be seen by others to be needing or seeking help
- Altruism – not wanting to take the place of someone else in greater need

Many producers also commented that there were producers who they knew of who needed the kind of help provided through the B2B program the most, but did not participate in the program. It was suggested that these heavily impacted producers were also the most stressed and traumatised and had the most immediate workloads so were less likely to have noticed, or had the time and capacity to enrol in the program.

Several producers and consultants also commented that uptake may well have been higher if a different area of their state had been impacted. Feedback suggests that the particular producer demographic in some of the fire impacted areas meant that uptake was going to be limited as farmers were perceived to be: 'less progressive and less focused on learning and making a profit', 'typically one-man bands and closed minded', 'very secretive with their financials' and 'more of an older demographic'.

Many producers commented that they only became aware of and participated in the program because they had been approached directly, either by the B2B consultant or another trusted source, who identified the program and recommended that they should participate. Other producers reported that they may not or would not have participated in the program had they not known their B2B consultant.

Example producer quotes are provided below:

I think people fear that consultants are just trying to get them to spend money, that it's going to cost them more money to change things, but it doesn't have to.

Most families here have been here forever and don't welcome strangers. Their attitude would be that their grandfather etc did it this way and that's the way they're going to keep doing it.

Some people don't want to admit they are getting help or that they need help.

I think lower than expected uptake was probably because of the trauma and people trying to recover from that, and/or they didn't have a relationship with or know the consultant so it was another stress they didn't need to have an unknown person come to the farm.

Some people don't really want any kind of regulatory body involved in their business because everything is so tied up in government bureaucracy. I'm not saying MLA doesn't care about the farmers, but farmers might be very wary about whether MLA has another agenda and they don't want to take the risk of having them involved with their business in case it leads to places they don't like or don't want to go.

A lot of farmers around here were upset with MLA at the time for not coming in to bat for us to get the extra \$200,000 grant that neighbouring dairy farmers got. MLA didn't bat for us beef producers as we could have done with someone on our side. LLS were very good.

Based on the farmers I know, I think that for the ones that did know about it they didn't do it because it was MLA. Farmers around here are very cynical about MLA.

I nearly didn't do it because I felt somebody else could use the help instead of me - I didn't want to take up a spot when there were others a lot worse impacted than me. I would have felt guilty if someone in more need missed out because of me, and I suggest others on the land would probably have had a similar view.

My father before me was of the mindset, don't burden others with our stuff and we don't ask for help and I think that's a typical view of farmers.

Producer Participant Quotes

Stakeholder suggestions for increasing future uptake of the B2B program included:

- Increase producer awareness of the program
- Use direct sources of promotion using a trusted source, ideally face-to-face
- Offer the program over a longer period of time
- Promote the program in waves using feedback from other producers who are already involved or have been involved in the past
- Increase producer and service provider familiarity with MLA as an organisation/increase MLA presence on the ground
- Increase the number of consultants to choose from (specific to SA)
- Remove the enrolment process as a barrier by getting producer agreement to participate and doing it for them
- Increase producer familiarity with the B2B consultants on offer/provide more assistance to producers for choosing a consultant
- Provide a clear value proposition to producers for their participation in the program
- Provide more information on what the program is about and how it works in practice
- Increase engagement with other disaster recovery service providers to promote the program and to provide referrals e.g. RFCS, federal agencies, local government, mental health services, volunteer relief organisations.
- Change the name of the program/change the word 'consultant' in promotion

It was also noted by some stakeholders that participation rates are likely to increase over time organically as people become more familiar with the program, the values associated with the 'brand' and the positive stories from previous participants.

***Finding:** Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for increasing future participation in the B2B program. These largely involved increasing awareness and understanding of the program via a more personal approach from a trusted source, increasing engagement with other disaster recovery service providers, offering the program over a longer period of time, and increase the number of consultants available and producer familiarity with those consultants on offer.*

To further assess the reasons for the relatively low participation rate in the program, a series of phone interviews were completed with producers who did not participate in the B2B program. The results of these interviews have been presented in Appendix B as three regional case studies for NSW, SA and Victoria. A summary of the case study findings in relation to participation in the B2B program is discussed below.

The non-participant producer case studies revealed that 59% of producers interviewed were aware of the B2B program while 41% were not (Figure 5). The main reasons provided for not participating in the B2B program among those producers who were aware of it were that they felt they did not need it or that they were too busy with fire recovery to engage with the program. One producer registered to participate but was considered ineligible.

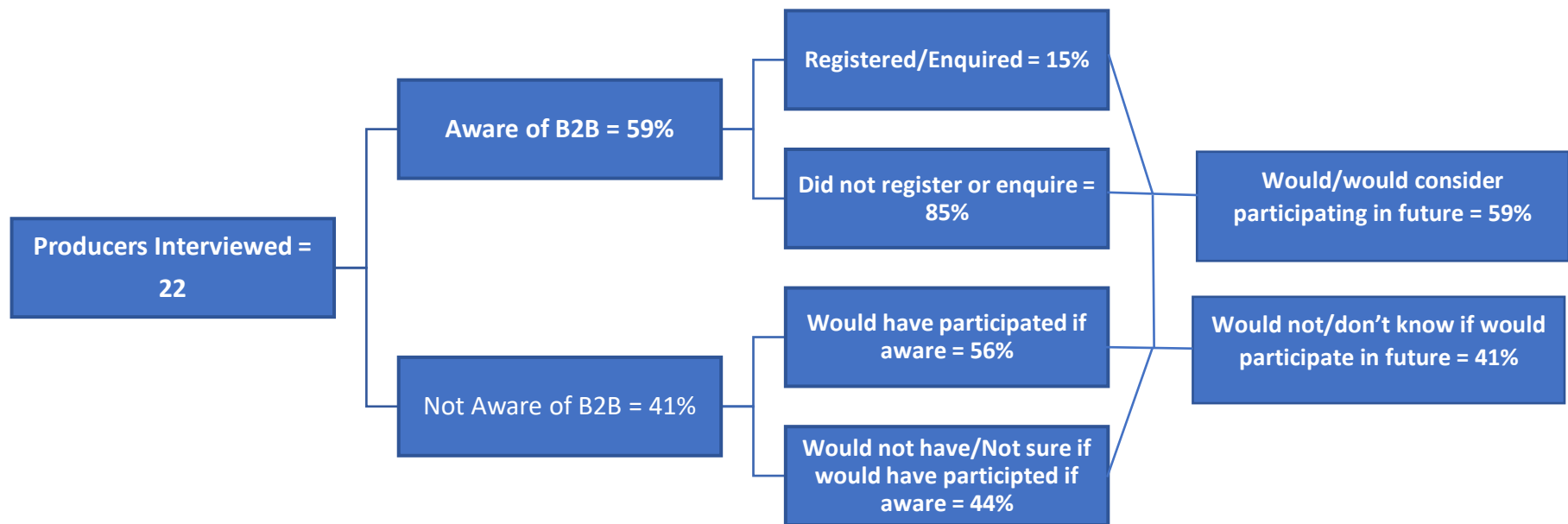


Figure 5: Summary of non-producer case study results

Among the Victorian case study participants, it is known that half of the producers who reported a lack of awareness of the B2B program were exposed to program promotion via email, text and/or Facebook. This suggests that being exposed to program promotion in this way does not necessarily lead to cognitive awareness. Producers may need to be exposed to promotional material multiple times before becoming aware, or more likely need to be exposed in a more direct way i.e. face-to-face promotion, particularly given access to the internet is often compromised after a natural disaster.

Finding: *Some producers who did not participate in the B2B program and reported not being aware of the program, were exposed to promotional information about the program via email, text and/or social media. This suggests that being exposed to program promotion in this way does not necessarily lead to cognitive awareness. Producers may need to be exposed to promotional material multiple times before becoming aware, or more likely need to be exposed in a more direct way i.e. face-to-face promotion, particularly given access to the internet is often compromised after a natural disaster.*

Had they been aware of the B2B program, 56% of producers interviewed reported that that would have, or would likely have participated in the program. This is an important finding in that increasing program awareness among impacted producers is likely to translate to increased participation rates. Across all non-participating producers, 59% reported that they would participate or would consider participating in a similar program in the future if the need ever arose.

Finding: *Forty-one percent of non-participating producers were unaware of the B2B program at the time it was available. Among these producers, 56% reported that they would have, or would likely have, participated in the program had they been aware of it. A focus on increasing program awareness is therefore likely to drive increased participation rates.*

Case study participant views on why the participation rate in the B2B program was low largely aligned with those provided by other stakeholders engaged during the review, and included:

- It was too early for a lot of producers, many of whom were 'too busy fencing and feeding livestock'. Also, there was a lot on offer early and this was confusing.
- Lack of awareness of the program in general. It seems that unless the program was getting a lot of word of mouth from other service providers or through the media/social media, many were too inundated with other offers and activities to take notice of electronic communications. Landline, phone tower and internet outages also restricted viewing of communications sent.
- Lack of understanding of what it was about. The word 'business' was reported to be 'off-putting' to some, and did not 'resonate' with what was needed for immediate fire recovery. Some thought it involved 'work' around their financial records that they did not want to do
- Lack of trust in program providers: Some producers reported trust issues with MLA/state coordinator organisations, in particular noting that if there was no local representative, there was less trust.
- Too much time and effort to apply. This related back to not understanding what B2B was about and what value it offered.
- Too busy with immediate fire recovery activities to pay attention to extra support on offer and/or missed the deadlines.
- Already had the support they needed from other services e.g. RFCS and Business Enterprise Centres who were offering a similar service.
- Some producers do not want or need outside help with the refrain 'other people need it more than me' a common one. Also, some are proud of their ability to be stoic and sort it out themselves, others are isolated in valleys and are an older demographic unused to accepting help from strangers or are non-receptive to new ideas. Some also had the skills and resources to do it themselves and did.
- Unable to attend sessions due to off farm work commitments
- Producers were too stressed, overwhelmed and traumatised to engage with the program

Finding: Case study producer views on why the participation rate in the B2B program was low largely aligned with those provided by other stakeholders engaged during the review. Key reasons included lack of awareness, lack of understanding of what was involved and what value there was in participating, producers too stressed/traumatised and/or too busy with immediate fire recovery to engage or producers either already had the support they needed from other sources or did not need or want any support for fire recovery.

3.2.4 Consultants

Participating Consultants

A total of 63 consultants registered for the B2B program, and 35 consultants delivered sessions. Table 3 presents the number of consultants delivering sessions in each state and the ratio of producer participants to delivering consultants.

Table 3: Number of B2B consultants delivering sessions in each state and the ratio of producer participants to delivering consultants

STATE	No. Consultants Delivering	Ratio of Producers to Consultant
NSW	16	3.9
SA	7	5.7
VIC	10	2.7
TAS	1	1.0
WA	1	1.0
TOTAL	35	3.8

South Australia had the highest ratio of producers relative to consultants. It was reported by several producer and non-producer stakeholders that fewer than expected consultants, and less than the number desired, registered in SA. One stakeholder commented that: *“The initial call for consultants was too narrow, there weren’t a lot on offer. I think the net should have been cast wider”*. Further feedback indicates that some consultants in SA felt that the eligibility criteria for consultants was too strict.

There were no registered consultants on Kangaroo Island, which was badly impacted by the fires. This meant that consultants were required to travel from the mainland, which involved the additional expense of the ferry trip, and often overnight accommodation was required. It was also reported that producers were not overly positive about having people coming onto the Island after the fires.

Finding: The number of approved consultants in SA was less than expected and less than what was ideally required, particularly given no consultants from Kangaroo Island registered for the program which meant additional costs associated with consultants coming from the mainland.

Matching Producers with Consultants

Eligible producers were paired with an approved consultant in one of the following ways:

- Producer requested an unregistered consultant who subsequently registered and was approved

- Producer was already working with their consultant and continued to do that through B2B
- Producer chose their consultant from a list of approved consultants
- Producer was assigned a consultant by the state coordinator
- Consultant was recommended to producer by a third party e.g. another producer, a Rural Financial Counsellor (RFC)

Seventy-three percent of producer participants interviewed either knew or knew of their B2B consultant prior to participating in the program. Among those who did not know or know of their consultant, and chose from the list provided by their state coordinator, the reasons for choosing their B2B consultant included:

- Nearest location to producer
- Required skills and expertise
- Gender (female preferred)

Finding: *Seventy-three percent of producer participants interviewed either knew or knew of their B2B consultant prior to participating in the program.*

Around half of the consultants interviewed were comfortable with the process for matching consultants with producers, while around a third were uncertain, and the remainder felt that the process was either ‘somewhat effective’ or ‘not so effective’ (Figure 6).

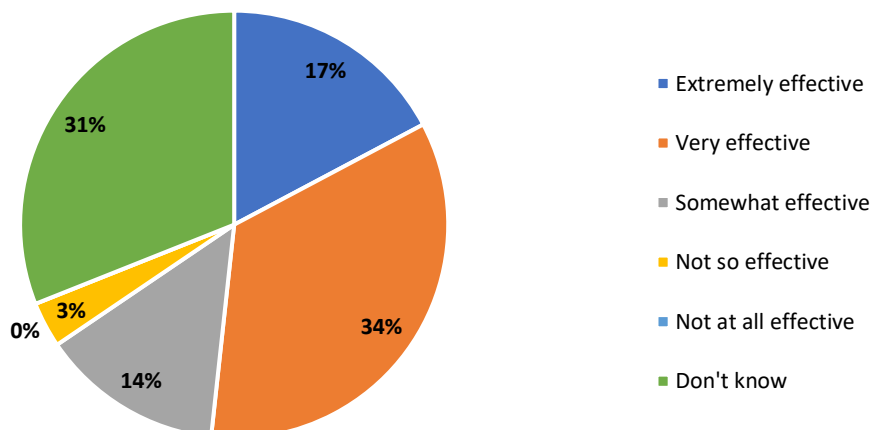


Figure 6: Consultant views on the effectiveness of the process for matching B2B consultants with producers

Consultant concerns involved producers often choosing a consultant based on proximity to them, when this may not have been the best person to address their needs, and producers choosing someone that they knew or knew of, who again may not have been the best person to meet their immediate needs. It was suggested that state coordinators could play more of a role in assisting producers to identify the consultant that best aligns with their needs. It was also suggested that more information should be provided to producers about the consultants and their areas of interest, and more opportunities should be provided for producers to meet consultants in person and/or to hear them speak.

Finding: *Consultant feedback suggests that the process of matching consultants to producers could be improved by providing producers with more information on consultants, proving opportunities for*

producers to meet consultants and/or hear them speak, and for state coordinators to play more of a role in assisting producers to identify the consultant that best aligns with their needs.

Types of Consultants

The intention of the program was for the first session to be held with an approved farm management consultant (FMC) that specialises in farm business management with an in-depth understanding of livestock farming systems from an integrated technical and financial perspective. Subsequent sessions were to be delivered either by the FMC or by a specialist technical consultant (STC) based on specific technical needs identified by either the producer or the FMC.

In practice, session referrals to a technical consultant were few, with the same consultant delivering all sessions in 91% of cases where more than one session was delivered (Figure 7).

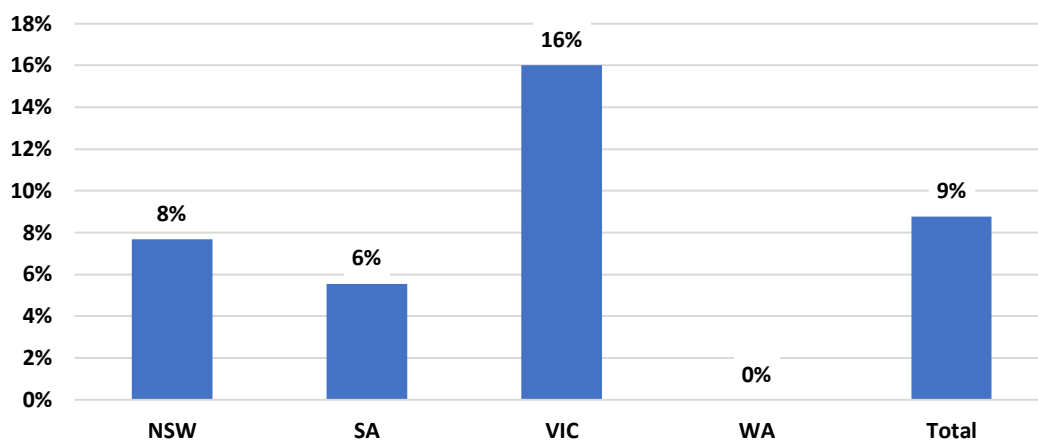


Figure 7: Proportion of participants who received more than one session where a technical consultant was used

Victoria had the highest rate of referral to a technical consultant, being double that of both NSW and SA. Technical specialist referrals made were for advice on agronomy (50%), finance/accounting (30%) and vet/animal health (20%).

It appears that FMCs were not separated from STCs on lists provided to producers to select their consultant from for their first session. Many producers accessed specialist agronomy advice or veterinary/animal health advice during session one that did not involve any overall assessment of priority needs and capability and capacity to meet those needs from a physical, financial, knowledge/skills and emotional perspective.

Finding: *The intention of the program was for the first session to be delivered by a farm management consultant (FMC), with subsequent sessions to be delivered either by the FMC or by a specialist technical consultant (STC) based on specific technical needs identified by either the producer or the FMC, however this did not occur in practice.*

It has been estimated by the reviewers that approximately 55% of first sessions were delivered by a STC as opposed to a FMC as defined in the B2B selection criteria. While this was not how the program was intended to be delivered, it likely did meet the immediate needs of those producers for the type

of advice they were seeking. There was no information available to the reviewers regarding how many consultants were approved as FMCs compared to STCs, but there may have been too few FMCs to meet demand.

Finding: *It has been estimated by the reviewers that approximately 55% of first sessions were delivered by a specialist technical consultant as opposed to a farm management consultant as defined in the B2B selection criteria.*

It also appears that some producers were not aware that they had the option to select a different consultant for sessions 2 and/or 3, given that none of the producers who were not satisfied with their consultant after the first session completed any other sessions with a different consultant. Some producers were unaware that they had the option of up to three consultant sessions. Some only received one session with no subsequent follow-up provided by their consultant to determine if they wanted additional sessions, either with them, or with a different consultant. One consultant commented during their interview that they had told producers they could use a technical specialist consultant for their final session, but did not know if the producers ended up doing this, or if they knew what other consultants they were able to access through the program.

Finding: *Some producers were unaware of the option of having up to three sessions, and there was a lack of awareness among some producers of the option to use a different consultant for some sessions, and/or how to go about arranging for a different consultant.*

Producer and consultant feedback also indicates a view that some consultants were unwilling to refer their producers to other consultants for sessions, preferring to deliver all sessions themselves. This was certainly evidenced by the data in Figure 7. Example quotes are provided below:

It was good, but not sure if the original consultant was the one I needed after that first session, but how do you go about then identifying who the right person is that you do need after that first session, so how do I change direction through the program?

They only visited me once and I didn't hear back - I think they assumed I didn't need further help, but I did need help on other issues that probably weren't their specialty.

We only had one session. We didn't know you could get more.

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *Producer and consultant feedback indicates that some consultants were reluctant to refer producers to other technical consultants, preferring to deliver all sessions themselves regardless of what may have been in the best interests of the producer.*

Consultant Skills and Knowledge

Figure 8 reveals that the majority of producers were either 'very satisfied' (62%) or 'satisfied' (27%) that their B2B consultant/s had the required range of skills and knowledge that they needed.

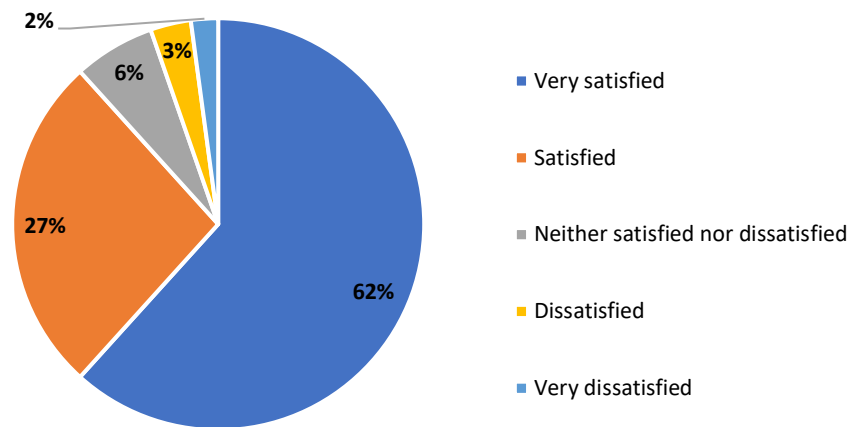


Figure 8: Degree of producer satisfaction that their consultant/s had the required range of skills and knowledge they needed

Among the 11% of producers surveyed who were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', or 'dissatisfied/very dissatisfied', the key reasons provided for their response included:

- Producer was only offered one session and wanted advice in other areas that were not the speciality of the original consultant
- Perceived lack of required skills and knowledge compared to what the consultant promoted themselves as having
- Perceived lack of consultant practical, as opposed to theoretical, skills and knowledge
- No new ideas or advice provided
- Consultant advice was:
 - o not practical
 - o did not align with what the producer was able to physically and financially implement
 - o perceived as being too risky to implement
- Consultant had a set plan of what they wanted the producer to do that had nothing to do with the kind of help the producer asked for
- Consultant did not deliver on what they promised

Finding: *The majority of producers interviewed (89%) were satisfied that their consultant/s had the required range of skills and knowledge to meet their needs.*

Figure 9 reveals that by far the highest proportion of producers who were either 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' or 'dissatisfied/very dissatisfied' with the skills and knowledge of their consultant/s came from South Australia.

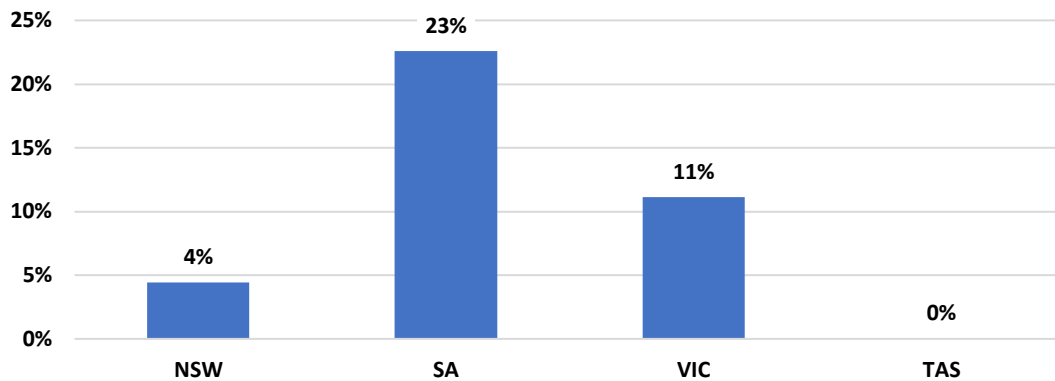


Figure 9: Proportion of producers interviewed in each state who were either 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' or 'dissatisfied/very dissatisfied' with the skills and knowledge of their consultant

A review of consultant session reports revealed that some consultants certainly appeared to provide the same or similar advice to all clients, suggesting that perhaps they were not tailoring their advice sufficiently to meet individual producer needs, wants and capacity and capability to make particular changes.

Finding: Among those producers who were not satisfied with their consultant/s skills and knowledge (11%), reasons included: a perceived mismatch between what the consultant promoted their skills to be relative to what the producer perceived them to be; consultants not delivering on their promises; consultants perceived to be 'pushing their own barrow' rather than providing bespoke advice; advice provided was not useful or able to be implemented; no new ideas were generated; producer was unable to access the range of skills required from the one consultant and was not offered access to other consultants.

Figure 10 reveals that 45% of consultants interviewed reported that they were able to fully address all of the needs of their B2B clients, while the remaining 55% of consultants employed a range of measures to address perceived gaps between producer needs and what the consultant was able to offer.

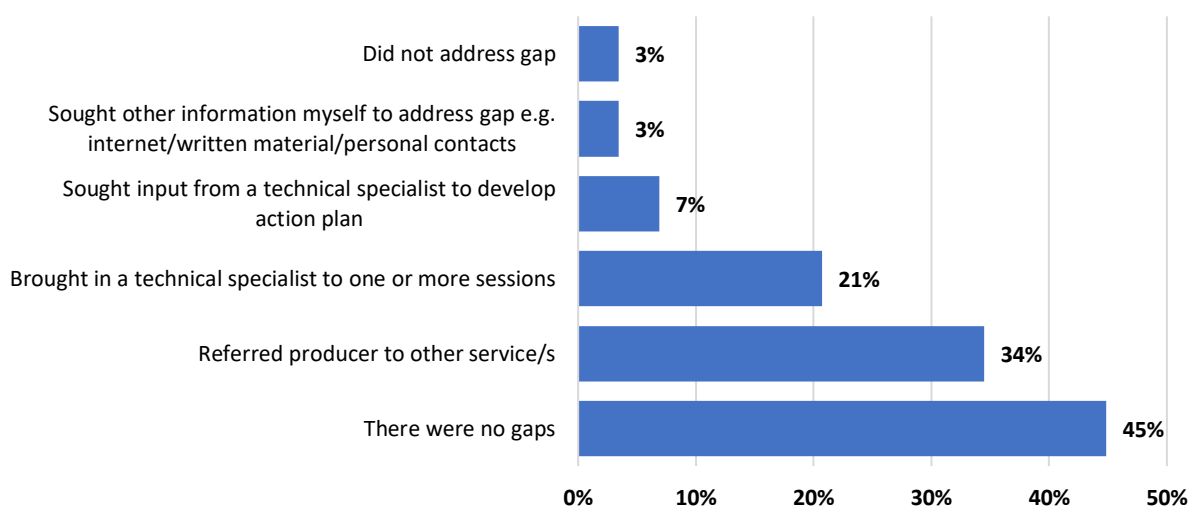


Figure 10: Consultant interviewee responses as to how they addressed any gaps in what producers needed and what they were able to provide

The most common means of addressing information or skill gaps were to refer producers to other services and to bring in a STC for one or more sessions. Services typically referred to by consultants were accounting, agronomy, bank, RFCS, state department of agriculture and various natural resource management service providers (e.g. Trees for Life, Landscape Board, Landcare).

Finding: Just under half of the consultants interviewed (45%) reported no skills or knowledge gap between what they could offer and what their producer clients needed. Among those who did perceive a gap, the most common means of addressing the gap was to bring in a STC for one or more sessions and/or to refer producers to other services.

Consultant Engagement with Other Service Providers

Figure 11 indicates that a third of the consultants interviewed reported that they had worked directly with another service provider/s during their one-on-one sessions, with the most common services engaged being the RFCS, followed by other private consultants, supply company agronomists and mental health service providers.

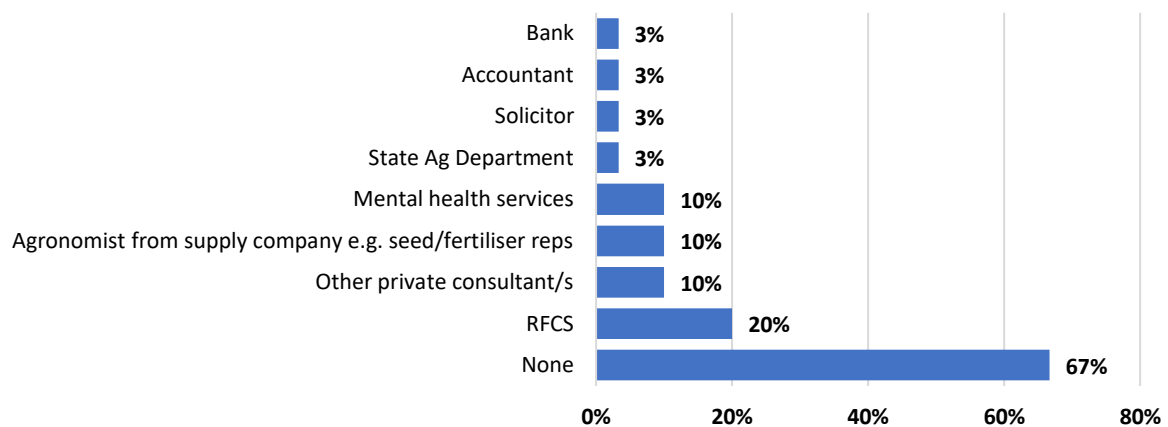


Figure 11: Other service providers worked directly with by consultants interviewed

Finding: A third of consultants interviewed reported having worked directly with another service provider/s during session delivery, most often the RFCS, which was engaged by 20% of consultants interviewed.

3.2.5 Timing of Program Availability

Delivery of the one-on-one sessions commenced in February 2020, with an original funding period up to the end of June 2020. After consultation with the program state coordinators and industry groups during June 2020, it was determined that a six-month extension to the program until December 2020 was warranted to assist additional producers who were either as yet unaware of the program, or who had not previously been in a position to seek support through the program. No further budget was required to support this extension as the original budget was well underspent at the end of June 2020 (Refer to Table 5).

Figure 12 presents the distribution of session one delivery dates for participants. A small number of producer session reports did not provide the date for session one and are classified in Figure 12 as 'unknown'.

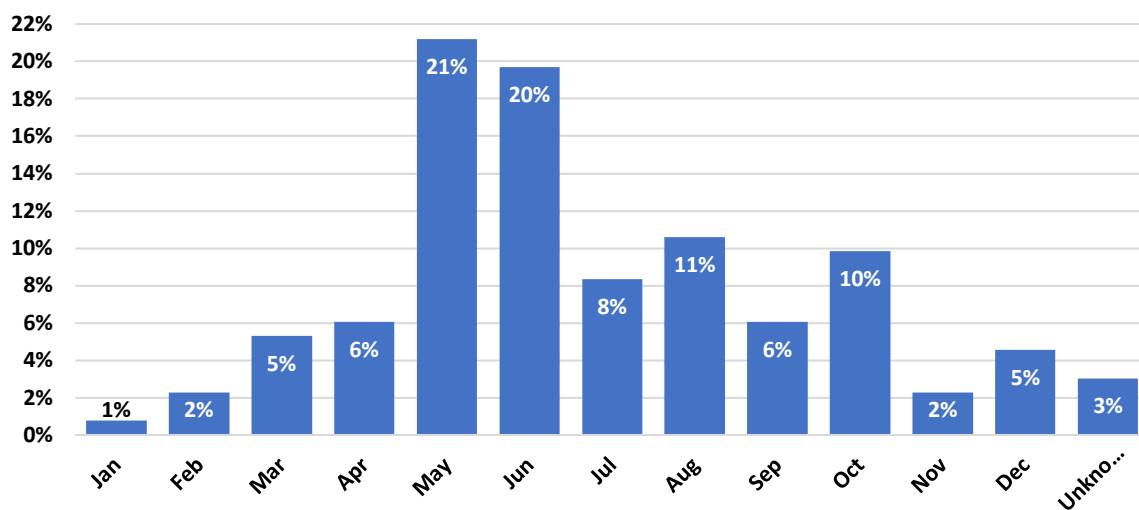


Figure 12: Proportion of first one-on-one sessions held in each month during 2020

The earliest reported date for session one was the 14th of January 2020, which was before the program had actually commenced. This date was either a reporting error, or the consultant included a meeting held prior to the program commencing as part of the three funded sessions for the producer.

The data in Figure 12 indicates that the number of sessions grew gradually from February, with the bulk of first sessions delivered during May and June coming up to the end of the initial funding period. Numbers dropped off considerably into the next financial year, and tapered off into November and December.

The drop off in numbers in the second half of the financial year may have been impacted to some degree by the perception that the program had finished at the original date. Interviews with other fire recovery service providers indicated some confusion as to how long the program was running for whereby some had ceased referring producers to the program only to discover it had been extended.

Finding: *The peak months for delivery of the first one-on-one consultant sessions were May (21%) and June (20%) 2020, with numbers dropping off in July (8%) before small surges in August (11%) and October (10%), then tapering off into November and December.*

During the stakeholder engagement phase of this review, producers were asked their views around the timing of availability of the B2B program in relation to meeting their needs for fire recovery.

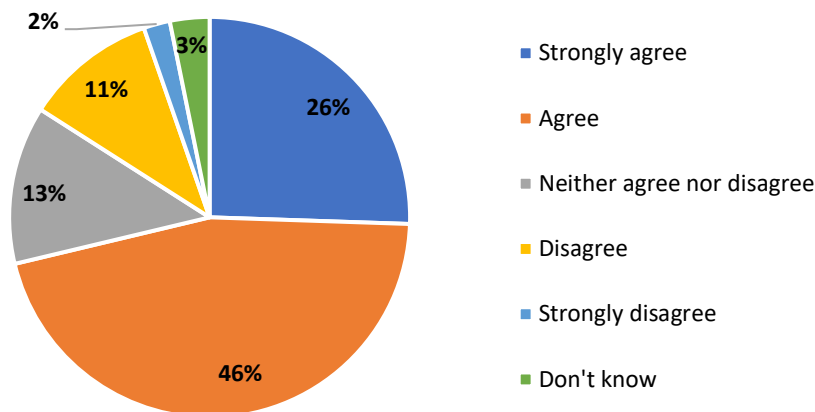


Figure 13: Extent to which producers surveyed agreed/disagreed that the timing of delivery of the B2B program was ideal for assisting with their recovery from the bushfires

Almost three-quarters of respondents agreed that the timing of delivery of the B2B program was ideal for assisting with their recovery (Figure 13). Thirteen percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and 13% disagreed. Three percent provided a 'don't know' response.

Among those who agreed or strongly agreed that the timing was right for them, the date of first sessions held represented a similar spread of times to the average across all producers, thus indicating that the 'right' time was different for different producers. Example producer quotes are provided below with month of first session held provided in brackets.

Timing was spot on - earlier I wouldn't have wanted help, I would have thought it was the least of my concerns. By the time 'consultant' came I'd had time to re-adjust to the initial trauma. It was the worst 3 weeks of my life and I'll never forget it. I'm actually feeling emotional now just talking to you about it, it brings back awful memories. (March)

Perfect. No earlier and no later because otherwise I would have started to implement some things on my own that may not have been the best actions. (May)

It was about right. A lot of people were stunned for a month or six weeks. It took a lot of people a couple of months to start to realise they had to get into decision making if they weren't going to sell up. I think people were in a daze initially. When this became available people were starting to switch on so I think it was good timing. (June)

If earlier I wasn't ready - I was too busy getting water and power and boundary fences organised and I wasn't ready to look at the bigger picture of productivity and design of internal fences etc, but if it was later on I would have been really stressed about where to put my internal fences and replaced infrastructure because I just didn't know which way to go with it and it would have been a real headache and worry for me. (Jul)

It was perfect for us. Any earlier and you're still in a crisis situation so you have to wait for the initial fog to lift, or smoke in this case, before you can get in that role of decision making. (Sept)

Timing was just right (about six months after the fires). We were coming out the end of a massive workload, and we were at the point where we wanted to sit down and reassess things and look at what we needed to do to plan the next phase of recovery after the immediate stuff was complete i.e. fencing, immediate needs of livestock, house rebuild etc. (Oct)

It was good timing. We'd done a lot of work already and it was good to then see if we keep going down this path, this is where it will take us, so it validated what we were doing and helped us see what the end result might be. (Dec)

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *Almost three-quarters of producers interviewed felt that the timing of delivery of the B2B program was ideal for assisting with their recovery. The date of first sessions held among these producers represented a similar spread of times to the average across all producers, indicating that the 'right' time was different for different producers.*

Producer feedback indicates that the ideal timing for seeking advice was influenced by the degree to which the business was physically impacted by the fires and the degree to which the producers were emotionally traumatised by the event. Some producers noted that making key decisions around pastures and breeding early had enabled them to get ahead of others who had not made those key decisions early enough, and that getting advice early assisted to put fencing and key infrastructure back better than what it was before the fires. Example quotes are provided below with the month of the first session in brackets:

'Consultant' was there in Feb, and that was before the fencing contractors came. If they'd got here after the fencing had been done we would have missed a big opportunity to improve our fencing. (Feb)

It was early and it needs to be early to make those key decisions, even if those decisions are to wait and see rather than act, which in my case I was ready to resow a particular pasture and was advised that it would come back well, and it did. Whereas other pastures did require resowing early so there's a small window to make those decisions and you need that advice early. 'Consultant' was there within a month of the fires I think it was. (March)

At the time we didn't think we were ready for it. It seemed like, why are we doing this now, we have other more important things to deal with? But 'consultant' encouraged us to do it and if we hadn't done it then we would have missed a season of pasture and breeding because we hadn't made those crucial decisions early enough. (May)

I can't remember exactly when we first had 'consultant', but if we engaged with it (the program), it must have been the right time otherwise I wouldn't have. You wouldn't have wanted it to be any later though, but at the same time I understand that everyone is different and maybe some people weren't ready to deal with it earlier, but the problem is that those producers are then left behind and that makes a big difference to their recovery. If they can get the help earlier rather than later it sets them

up better for the next season and can make a massive difference to how quickly they recover because the effects are cumulative over time. (May)

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *Producer feedback indicates that while the ideal timing for seeking advice was influenced by the degree of physical impact of the fires and the degree to which producers were emotionally traumatised, making key decisions around pastures and breeding early enabled producers to get ahead of others who had not made those key decisions early enough, and that getting advice early provided an opportunity to put fencing and key infrastructure back better than what it was before the fires.*

Among those who disagreed with the timing, or who 'neither agreed nor disagreed' but made a comment regarding ideal timing, 89% reported that it would have been better if the program was made available to producers earlier than it was, and 11% reported that it was too early and would have suited them better a bit later on. Example producer quotes are provided below:

Available Earlier

Better if it was earlier and I don't think people around me knew about it, it was only that 'consultant' was asking around who needed help that we heard about it.

It was all pretty much in hand by the time 'consultant' got there, which was fine, but probably better earlier if you weren't sure what you were doing.

I think it would have been better if it was made available much earlier. I realise not everyone might be ready earlier but those key decisions that need to be made in the immediate aftermath of the fire is where the support could really help.

I have heard feedback from some other producers who were part of this program that it was too focused on longer term planning and looking at plans for the next 5 years, whereas if they had of made it available earlier it would have assisted more with that immediate decision making on what to do with livestock, refencing etc which make a real difference to recovery.

I think it needed to be earlier to have someone there as soon as possible to help with those critical decisions around fencing, livestock health and selling/feeding, and pasture/soil. You could then have a decent time break and come back to them when they were ready, but important to get someone there as soon as possible to make that connection and to know you had this person there to help make any key decisions you needed to make.

I think the earlier the better. For some people early might not suit them, maybe too much going on, but it was so important for us to act early and that was the key to our rapid recovery, so I think it should be made available as early as possible for those that wish to get help with that early planning.

People need to know that's it's available early, but timing of uptake is then up to the individual.

It was a bit late, it took a while. We needed seed in the ground pretty soon so by April/May I'd already made a lot of those decisions on pastures before 'consultant' came. It would have been perfect in about Feb because I wasn't sure what to plant and when, but I had to make some decisions. Maybe I would still have made the same decisions with 'consultant's' input, I don't know.

Ideally if I had spoken to 'consultant' earlier before I had got an agronomist in to resow my pasture I may have done a few things differently, but then again, I may not have.

I needed it earlier and I registered a long time before 'consultant' actually turned up. I can't remember if the problem was that it took them a while to register and I'd already asked if they could be my consultant, but I was waiting a long time to the point where I paid another consultant to come help me.

Available Later

It was two months too early so I actually put the consultant off until I was ready for that kind of help.

It was too early for me. I thought I was ready to take it on but I realised I needed more time to process and decompress and it all hit me later on that we weren't as OK as we thought we were.

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *Among the 25% of producers who disagreed with the timing, or who 'neither agreed nor disagreed', 89% reported that it would have been better if the program was made available to producers earlier than it was, while 11% reported that it was too early and would have suited them better a bit later on.*

For those who provided a 'don't know' response, one producer commented that it was really an individual choice as to when would best suit producers to source assistance through this program, while the other producers who provided this response could not recall the timing of the service provided relative to their needs at the time.

Consultant feedback was consistent with that provided by producers in so far as producers were ready and able to engage with the program at different times based on their awareness of the offer, the degree to which they were impacted by the fires and their emotional state. Some consultants felt that the program should ideally be made available earlier so that it was there for those producers who needed to and wanted to act earlier. Consultant feedback also suggested that the program could run for a longer period of time to allow more time between sessions and/or to allow more people to access the program later on. Example consultant quotes regarding the timing and/or duration of the program are provided below:

I think it needed to be made available earlier for those that were ready for it earlier.

There was such a variation in how they were impacted, and some are still not coping with it. The ability to get on that farm within a month to help them prioritise and then have the next couple of

visits to spread out based on the individual needs of the famers is what is needed. It was not one size fits all, so more flexibility with an earlier availability for those that were ready for it, and then a longer timeframe and more flexibility with when those other two sessions were held based on the farmer needs.

One size does not fit all and I think it was too structured in terms of the timelines and if felt too rushed, so need more flexibility and the option for those that need it to have it over an extended period of time rather than crammed in to a set timeline.

I think it probably could have run for longer, I know some more people would have utilised it, but also understand that there needed to be an end date.

Timeframes to have it done by were too tight to cram three sessions in and some changes were long term so too big a commitment to get it done too quickly.

Consultant Quotes

Other fire recovery service provider feedback also suggested that the program be offered over a longer period of time to enable producers more time to recover emotionally to the point where they were willing and able to seek support for recovery.

Finding: *The most common feedback from consultants and other service providers around program timing and duration was that the program should be made available to producers sooner than what it was and should run for a longer period of time to allow more producers to engage with the program later on and/or to allow more flexibility for time between sessions.*

3.2.6 Session Delivery

Session Format

The design of the one-on-one consultant advice was for provision of up to 3 sessions on farm over a six-month period.

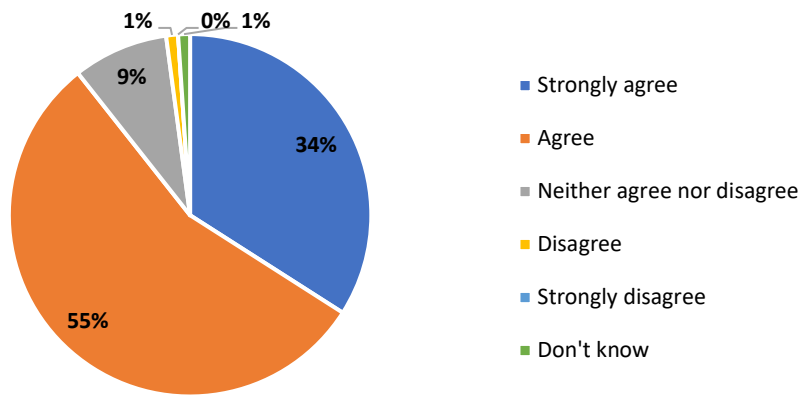


Figure 14: Degree to which producers agreed/disagreed that the format of the one-on-one consultant sessions was what they needed to support their recovery from the fires? i.e. 3 sessions, 3hrs each session, length of gap between sessions

Figure 14 reveals that the vast majority of producers surveyed either strongly agreed (34%) or agreed (55%) that the format of the one-on-one consultant sessions was what they needed to support their recovery from the fires. The most frequently mentioned positive aspects of the program structure included:

- It was one-on-one and face-to-face
- The flexibility of what was focused on during the sessions and timing and format of those sessions
- The motivation to get things done between sessions knowing that the consultant would be coming back
- The time allowed to build trust and understanding across multiple sessions
- The follow-up phone support provided by some consultants
- The relative ease of enrolling in the program

Although it was not a requirement of B2B, some consultants provided free follow-up phone support and/or offered for producers to contact them if needed between sessions and/or after the program was completed, which was greatly appreciated by those producers. Example producer comments are provided below:

I think one-on-one was the key to the value of this program.

The one-on-one was important in that the support was tailored to individuals because everyone's situation was so unique. We had a zoom session in the middle and then a few phone calls here and there and I think that worked well.

When you have six million things on your plate you need a deadline so knowing 'consultant' was coming back made sure I did what we agreed to do. I didn't know them before and you can't build a relationship after one visit, you need to build faith and trust in that person, so having the three sessions was very important.

It was one-on-one and I really liked that - that was the best part of it. Because it was one-on-one I was able to say, I don't understand this, and 'consultant' was really good, whereas I don't put my hand up in a group so one-on-one was best for me.

It was a balance between what we needed to know without overwhelming us with too much information. If it was just a single session it would have been a waste in that we would have picked up a few things and lost the rest. They gave us things to do and follow-up and think about between sessions and that worked well, it gave us the right balance of needing to move things along but not making it seem overwhelming and difficult. Because we knew they were coming back we had to make sure we did what we said we would before they came back and that was good for us.

Having someone one-on-one was what I needed. I wouldn't have been in the right mental state to have attended anything in a group at the time, and our internet is no good so there was no accessing anything online. The three sessions gave 'consultant' time to understand my situation and to explore options and think about things.

We didn't follow the guidelines we just did it how it suited us but reported as was needed. It was pretty broad on what we could have got advice on, it was self-directed so you could direct the service to what you wanted.

'Consultant' rang regularly to see how I was tracking - that follow-up really helped with motivation and accountability.

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *The vast majority of producers surveyed (89%) agreed that the format of the one-on-one consultant sessions was what they needed to support their recovery from the fires. The most commonly mentioned positive aspects of the format by producers were that it was one-on-one and face-to-face.*

Among those producers who offered suggested improvements to the session format, the most common was for more sessions, with 7% of producers interviewed making this suggestion. A further 2% of producers interviewed also noted additional sessions would have been preferred, however these producers only had one session and were not offered or were unaware that additional sessions were available.

Several producers commented that they would have preferred more or less time between sessions, with this timing presumably directed by the consultant not the producer. One producer referred to a neighbour who was struggling with their recovery as they were also still working full time off-farm, and suggested that the B2B format may not cater for this situation if the producer is unable to attend a face-to-face meeting during work hours. Another producer identified that the reporting consultants were required to do for MLA, although needed, seemed to take a lot of time, and that some of that time would be better spent assisting producers.

Finding: *The most frequently reported suggested improvement to the structure of the one-on-one consultant program was for additional sessions, suggested by 9% of producers interviewed.*

Number of Sessions

Producers were eligible for up to \$6,000 worth of consulting advice delivered over 3 sessions. The number of sessions delivered was by agreement between the producer and the consultant. Figure 15 presents a summary of the proportion of participants who received 1, 2 or 3 sessions in each state and in total.

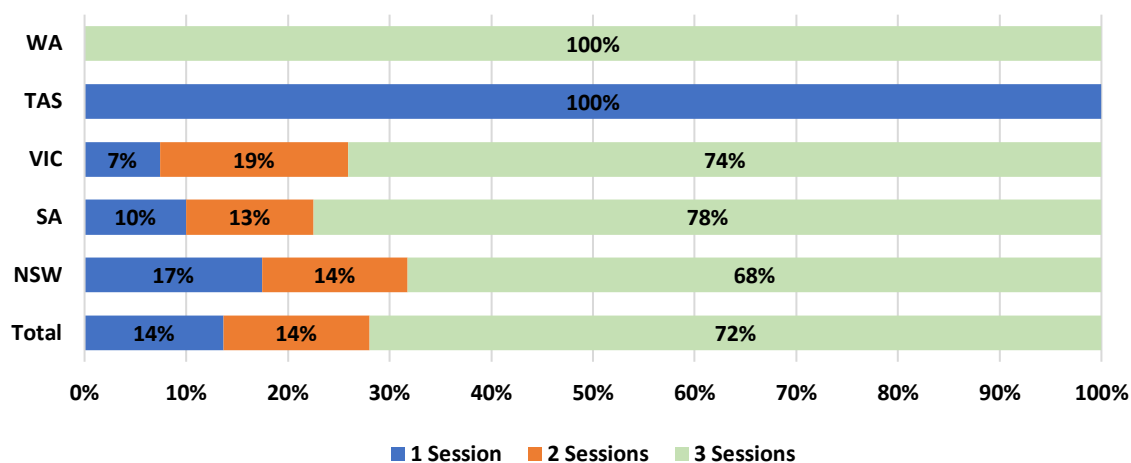


Figure 15: Proportion of producers who received 1, 2 or 3 one-on-one sessions by state and in total

The proportion of producers receiving less than three sessions was highest in NSW, with 17% of producers receiving only one session and 14% receiving two sessions. In most cases where only one session was delivered, the consultant was providing agronomic advice around pasture recovery and/or longer-term fertiliser and pasture resowing strategies as a once off advisory service, or where the producer did not want any further advice from the consultant as they did not value the advice provided in earlier sessions.

Several observations were made by the reviewers based on feedback provided by both producers and consultants during the review process and by information contained in the consultant session reports:

- There was a missed opportunity to further assist some of the producers who received only one or two sessions through the program via a second or third session respectively with a different consultant.
- Some producers who received three sessions from the same consultant did not need all three sessions to achieve the outcomes that resulted
- Some producers who received three sessions from the same consultant may have received more value from their participation if a different consultant/s had been used for one or two of those sessions.

As previously noted, some producers were unaware that they were eligible to receive three sessions. In contrast, at least one consultant was unaware that they were able to provide less than three sessions if all three were not required. There was different wording provided in consultant contracts which may have contributed to this lack of clarity. Some contracts stated that consultants were required to deliver three sessions, while others stated delivery of between one and three sessions.

Finding: There were missed opportunities to increase the value of the program for producers and the return on investment to MLA by providing some producers with additional sessions with a different consultant where they received less than three sessions, providing some producers with less sessions, or using a different consultant for one or more sessions.

Gap Between Sessions

The project guidelines suggested that session two be delivered within one month of session one, and that session three be delivered after producers had commenced implementing their action plan.

An analysis of the timing between delivery of sessions one and two is presented in Figure 15, and reveals that 58% of second sessions were delivered within a month of the first session, with the vast majority of second sessions being delivered within two months of the first session (86%). For the remaining proportion of producers, timing stretched out up to six months, presumably largely due to challenges of coordinating a suitable time for both parties to meet where those sessions were held in person.

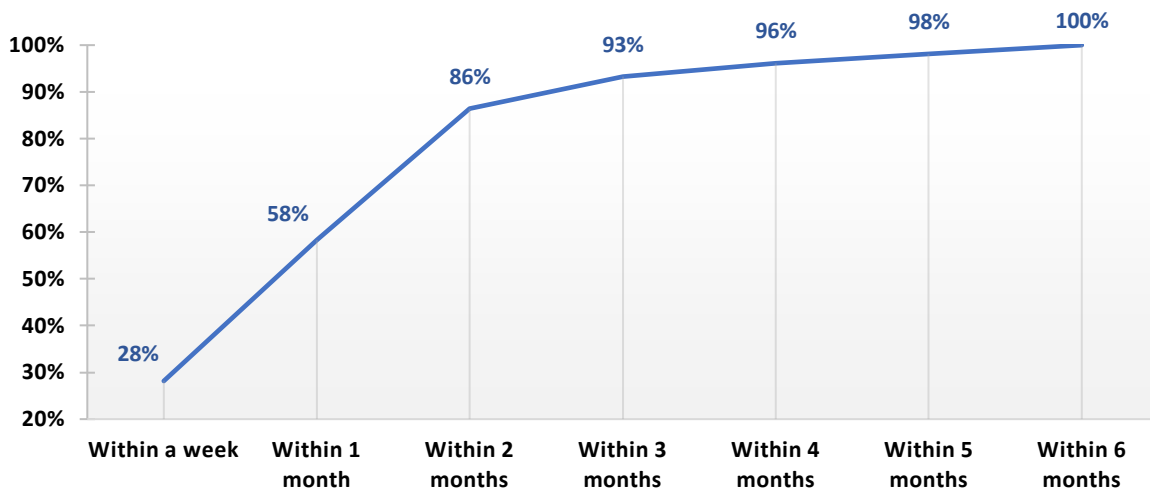


Figure 15: Timing of delivery of session two after delivery of session one

Ten percent of second sessions were delivered on either the same day (3%) or on the day after (7%) the first session. This was efficient for the consultant, but unless the producer specifically requested same day or following day delivery of session two, it may not have been in the best interests of the producer. Many producers commented positively on having a gap between sessions to allow them to digest information and to think about key decisions before reengaging with their consultant for session two.

Figure 16 presents the analysis of the timing between sessions two and three for those producers who had three sessions, revealing a more drawn-out timeframe as expected as producers were given time to at least commence implementation of their action plan before the third session. The majority of third sessions were delivered within three months of the second session (83%), with all third sessions completed within seven months of the second session.

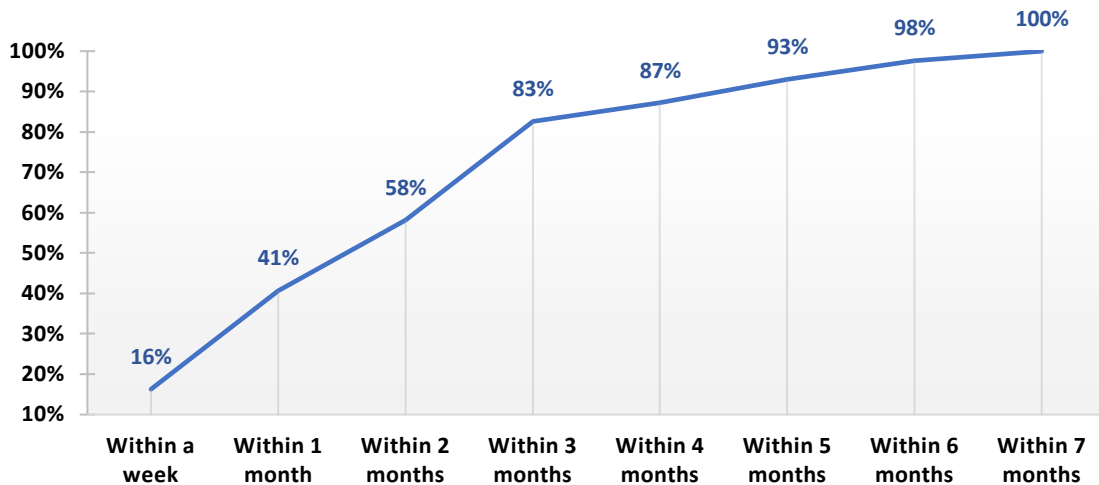


Figure 16: Timing of delivery of session three after delivery of session two

Figure 17 reveals that just under half of all producers who received three sessions had those sessions delivered within a two-month period, building to three-quarters all producers having their three sessions delivered within a four-month period. Over six months, which was the original project funding period, 87% of producers had completed all three of their sessions, with a period of eight months required for completion of all sessions.

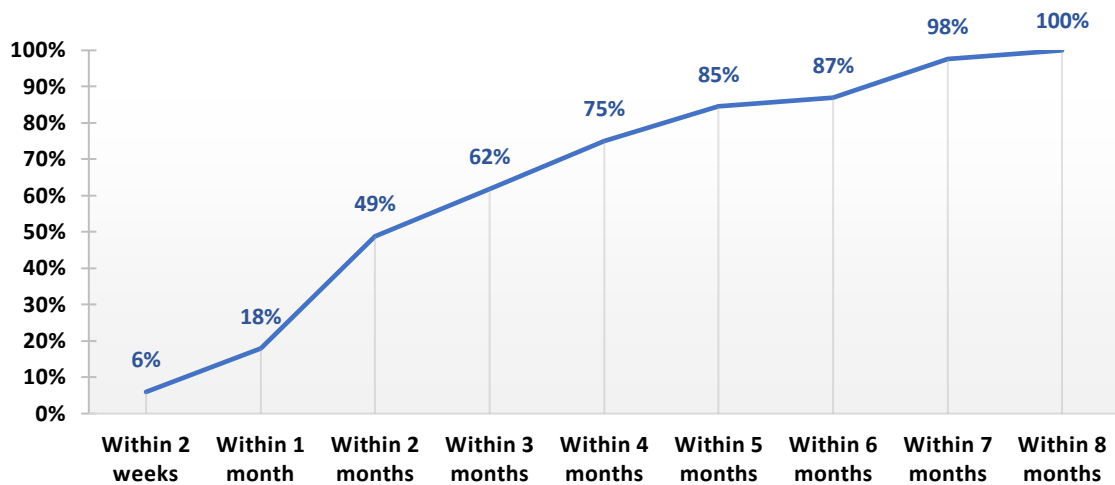


Figure 17: Timing of delivery of between session one and session three

The total time between delivery of the first and third sessions for those producers who had three sessions ranged from 7 days up to 244 days.

Finding: The project guidelines suggested that session two be delivered within one month of session one, and that session three be delivered after producers had commenced implementing their action plan. Fifty-eight percent of second sessions were delivered within a month of the first session, with the vast majority of second sessions being delivered within two months of the first session (86%). The majority of third sessions were delivered within three months of the second session (83%), with all third sessions completed within seven months of the second session.

Type of Advice Provided

One of the requirements for consultants related to the type of advice they were able to provide to producers during the one-on-one sessions, described in the B2B guidelines as:

'Back to business sessions should focus on the immediate actions and support required to assist with the recovery of bushfire affected producers and not investigate large scale changes to farm businesses and systems'

No further advice was provided in the guidelines as to what types of actions and support were out of scope, other than that the focus should be on advice focused specifically on fire recovery.

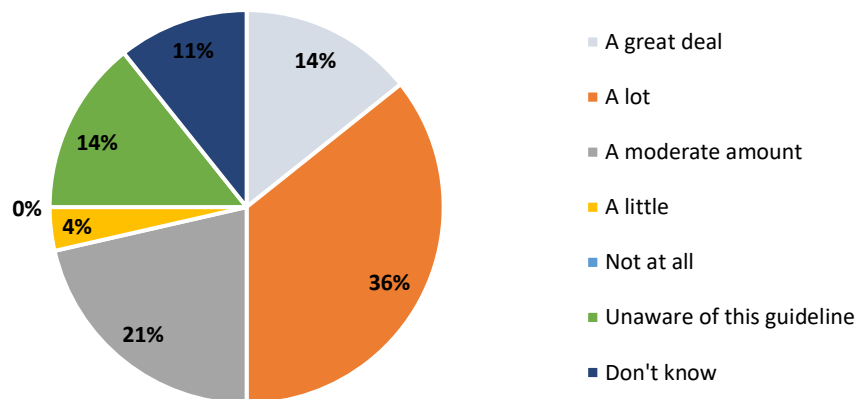


Figure 18: Extent to which consultants reported that they followed the B2B guideline that consultant sessions should focus on the immediate actions and support required to assist with recovery of bushfire affected producers and not investigate large scale changes to farm businesses and systems

Figure 18 indicates that 25% of consultants surveyed were either unaware of this guideline or did not know the extent to which they followed it. A further 25% reported that they had complied with this guideline only 'a little' or 'a moderate amount'. Example consultant quotes are provided below:

I didn't know this was a guideline.

I can't remember the detail about MLA guidelines.

Not everyone I saw had suffered as much. Some were totally burnt, and some were only 20% burnt. The 20% burnt got advice for whole farm changes that were independent of the fire - they got my services for free. The burnt-out ones got specific help with recovery from the fire.

The succession planning I did might fit on the edge of the guidelines, but my ethical approach was to do more for the money if I could help.

There was lots of flexibility. I didn't do anything that wasn't justified. Where there was opportunity to help them build back better, I did.

There were good farmers that had things under control with the fire recovery so I did some long-term planning.

It was hard because a producer that signed up for me was only minimally impacted, so didn't really need support with recovery. They wanted to start getting a succession plan going, which does help with future business resilience.

Everyone had initial things that could be addressed but a lot of it meant you had to focus on the long term as well as the short term.

Consultant Quotes

This guideline was provided to all consultants, and was also included in the MLA contract for NSW consultants, who were contracted directly by MLA. It was however, not included in the contract for all consultants as some were contracted directly by the state coordinator.

Consultants were also asked for their interpretation of the scope of advice/support that was to be provided to producers in one-on-one sessions versus the type of advice or support they perceived to be out of scope. Some consultants were clear on what was in and out of scope, some provided descriptions that did not completely align with the guidelines, while others did not know. Consultant responses to this question largely reflected the categories shown in Figure 18 above. Examples of consultant responses include:

Scope of advice was about getting back to business - that was clear.

I think there needed to be a lot of freedom for the consultant.

It was a guideline we did kind of stick to, but there was a bit of variability in terms of what people needed, but the framework was helpful.

If it affected them immediately it was in scope e.g. fencing, but longer-term plans for business improvement were probably out of scope. Though in one case the fire was a trigger for them to get a succession plan done - they wanted to do it anyway and this funding created an opportunity for them to actually get it started.

My impression was it wasn't restricted. It was to help them out with whatever their issue was at the time.

I can't remember that guideline - I don't know.

Consultant Quotes

Finding: *Many consultants were unclear as to what type of advice they were not able to provide during the B2B sessions, with some completely unaware that there were guidelines regarding what type of advice was in and out of scope. Other consultants were aware of the guidelines and followed them as best they could, while others appeared to do what they thought was best for the producer or what the producer wanted regardless of the guidelines.*

An analysis of the information provided in consultant session reports and producer action plans, combined with information provided by producers during interviews revealed the following information regarding the type of advice provided by consultants (Table 4):

- Advice relating to fire recovery was not provided to 27% of B2B producer participants
- Excluding Tasmania, the proportion of producers not receiving advice relating to fire recovery was highest in SA (38%) and lowest in NSW (21%)
- Eighteen percent of producers received advice to increase long term profit without any advice relating to fire recovery
- Fifty-six percent of producers received advice on immediate fire recovery in addition to advice on increasing long term profit
- Twelve percent of producers received advice relating to succession planning, and half of these producers (6% of all producers) only received advice on succession planning and nothing else.
- Almost a third of producers received other types of advice, and around 20% of these producers (6% of all producers) only received this 'other' advice and nothing else.

Table 4: Summary of the type of advice provided to B2B producer participants

	SA	NSW	VIC	TAS	WA	TOTAL
Fire recovery						
Yes	63%	79%	74%	0%	100%	73%
No	38%	21%	26%	100%	0%	27%
Increasing long term profit						
Yes	78%	76%	70%	0%	0%	74%
No	23%	24%	30%	100%	100%	26%
Succession planning						
Yes	15%	5%	22%	100%	0%	12%
No	85%	95%	78%	0%	100%	88%
Other						
Yes	28%	32%	26%	0%	0%	29%
No	73%	68%	74%	100%	100%	71%

The distribution of timing of the first session influenced the ability and/or need for the consultants to provide advice on fire recovery. If fire recovery was in hand by the time the consultant arrived, advice was still provided but on other issues. Figure 19 reveals that a much greater proportion of producers who received their first B2B session before the end of June 2020 received consultant advice relating to fire recovery (65%) compared to if the first session was held after June 30th, where only 35% of those producers received advice relating to fire recovery.

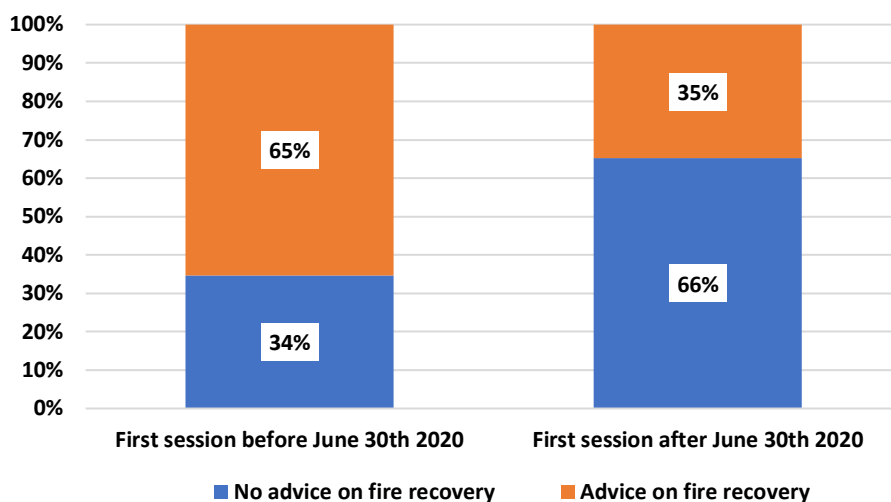


Figure 19: Proportion of first B2B sessions held before and after June 30th 2020 for producers who received advice on fire recovery and those who did not

Twelve percent of producers worked on succession planning activities with their Back to Business consultant. In some cases, the succession planning was part of the actions required for fire recovery where decisions needed to be made regarding who was going to be responsible moving forward for the recovery actions, including finance and labour, and what replacement infrastructure was needed based on who was going to be living on the farm. In other cases, however, succession planning activities were not related to fire recovery. The B2B program simply provided an opportunity for free support to either continue with succession planning actions which had already commenced, or to commence succession planning activities that producers were planning to undertake in the near future anyway.

Other types of advice and support provided that did not relate specifically to fire recovery included:

- Assessment of farm expansion/land purchase options and related finance
- Advice on off-farm investments
- Advice on starting new businesses not directly related to the farm
- Advice on business structure, loans, estate and tax planning (e.g. life insurance, wills, leasing arrangements, refinancing, trading partnerships)
- Assistance to find and organise a new location and share-farming arrangement after previous arrangement expired (dairy business)
- Advice on farm biosecurity/animal welfare plans for LPA
- Implementation of new ag technology
- Building stock containment areas for future risk mitigation against drought, fire and flood
- Support to assist with maximising the value of human capital in the business
- Advice for improved record keeping

Many of these 'other' types of advice would appear to be out of the intended scope of the B2B program, however greater clarity is required regarding exactly what type of advice is within scope, particularly relating to advice on increasing long term profit, which mainly related to pasture renovation and soil testing for fertiliser recommendations, grazing management, enterprise mix, genetics and risk management/business planning. The question also arises as to whether a consultant

should provide sessions to producers who were impacted by the fires, but who do not want or need advice to support their immediate recovery from the fires. As identified above, this is likely to be influenced by the timing of the first one-on-one session.

***Finding:** Specific advice relating to fire recovery was not provided to 27% of producer participants. These participants instead received advice relating to increasing long term farm productivity and profitability, succession planning and/or other types of advice that may or may not have related directly to the farm business. The timing of the first session influenced the ability and/or need for the consultants to provide advice on fire recovery for at least some producers.*

Feedback from MLA and state-coordinators indicates that the type of advice being provided by consultants was not well monitored in relation to the guideline for the type of advice that was able to be provided. There was a general tendency for state coordinators to not want to be seen to be 'looking over consultant shoulders' by monitoring their activities.

Some consultants asked state coordinators if providing particular advice or services was within scope when they were uncertain, but in other cases consultants did not check with state coordinators, and no state coordinators with more than one producer participant monitored adherence to this guideline. As an example, one consultant indicated during their interview that a producer wanted them to assist with applying for a grant, which was identified as being out of scope, however other consultants did assist producers to apply for grants and loans through the program. State coordinator comments on this issue included:

There was a bit of a challenge with this in that producers did want to look at bigger picture stuff but I left it up to the advisor and farmer to do what they thought was appropriate. The consultants knew what the required parameters were - I didn't want to be too prescriptive.

I didn't specifically go back to people to say it didn't fit scope, should I have? I don't know.

I would have thought it's a bonus if they did get out of scope, that's the time when there's an opportunity for one-on-one free advice from a consultant to make strategic changes, so I thought this was an outcome they (MLA) were trying to achieve, to get some big practice changes happening to improve profits.

We didn't want to jump down consultants throats because maybe there was context, maybe everything else was fine regarding fire recovery so they looked at other things. We wanted to have good rapport with the consultants so didn't want to be 'policing' them.

Expect that most were within scope.

State Coordinator Quotes

***Finding:** Consultant compliance with the B2B guideline relating to what kind of advice was within and out of project scope was not actively monitored by either MLA or state coordinators.*

Opportunities for Increasing Value for Producers

Thirty one percent of producers interviewed provided suggestions for how the program could provide additional support or be improved for other producers in the future. Suggestions provided are summarised below:

- Make the program available earlier for those producers who are ready and needing assistance
- An additional session (4 sessions) and/or a later follow-up session/s 6-24 months after the final session
- On-going phone support provided by consultants to answer any questions producers may have/'check-in' phone calls from consultant at agreed intervals to see how producer is going
- Increased focus on providing sufficient information and support to assist producers to select the 'right' consultant to meet their needs
- Improved communication and marketing to increase awareness of the program among eligible producers sooner rather than later
- Increase producer awareness of the opportunity to use different consultants for different sessions and the process by which this is facilitated
- A list of key service providers in relevant regions/locations to assist producers with recovery activities, including available grants and financial support e.g. transport companies, feed suppliers, fencing contractors, how to get short term agistment
- An increased focus on actively supporting improved mental health among participants, including a process for identifying producers who are perceived to need mental health support and assisting them to access that support
- A list of key sources of Information and advice on a range of specific issues relating to fire recovery, including key tools and how they can be used e.g. information available on MLA website and state department of agriculture websites, MLA feed demand calculator. Specific types of information mentioned by producers included pasture recovery, containment feeding, identifying animal welfare issues e.g. burnt udders/hoof issues post floods, options for restocking, types of feed options for ration development and associated costs and ways to administer feed.
- Collation of the learnings from the Black Saturday fires around the impact of the fires on specific pasture species and their recovery and on soils to assist producers and advisors in the event of future fires
- The opportunity for B2B participants to connect with each other through the program and share their learnings and experiences.

Some producers felt that they still needed additional support with fire recovery and thus suggested a fourth session would have benefitted them, however most were satisfied with the three sessions offered through the program. A more frequent comment from producers related to provision of a farm session later on, or a phone call from the consultant to review where they were up to with recovery and to assist with any further needs. Several producers commented that knowing there

would be follow-up contact through the program later on, whether that be six, 12 and/or 24 months later, would provide them with motivation and a sense of accountability to follow-through with their action plans. Producers also commented on the value of moral support that follow-up contact from their consultant would provide. Example producer quotes are provided below:

When people think people aren't thinking about them anymore, it makes it very challenging, so it's important to be there over the whole recovery period. People get tired and they decide to move on as they've had their dreams smashed so they need ongoing support to redefine themselves and the way forward.

Accountability is so powerful, so some sort of consolidation later on via another session 6 to 12 months later, or whatever time is considered appropriate given the situation, would add value.

I think ideally, we would have liked a 4th session a bit later on as a review kind of session. It felt like we'd just got things moving and then it was over. To have an external set of eyes over what we've done later on would have been valuable and also to know that there was that follow-up session would have provided further motivation to implement the plan as well.

Producer Participant Quotes

Agriculture Victoria published a document titled 'Recovery after fire – Practical steps for farmers'² in December 2020 which is available via their website. This document could potentially be updated to cover disaster recovery in general and made available nationally as a key resource to provide to producers as part of future program delivery. Hard copies could be made available to provide to producers during the first session as many producers may not have access to internet or may not be looking at the internet for assistance.

Finding: *The most frequently mentioned producer suggestions for increasing the value of the B2B program for other producers in the future included:*

- *Make the program available earlier*
- *Include provision for ongoing consultant follow-up phone support and/or an additional follow-up session 6-24 months later*
- *Increase awareness of the program among eligible producers*
- *Provide more information and support for producers when selecting their B2B consultant*
- *Ensure that producers understand that they have up to three sessions available*
- *Ensure that producers understand that they are able to use different consultants across the three sessions and provide a process to facilitate this in practice*
- *Provide producers with additional resources to support fire recovery e.g. list of local service providers, sources of key types of information, available grants/financial support*
- *Increase the focus on providing mental health support to producers through the program*

² <https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/>

3.2.7 Impact of COVID-19 on Program Delivery

Most MLA staff and state coordinators reported that COVID-19 had either no impact or only a minor impact on their ability to fulfil their roles in planning and delivering the B2B program. Reported impacts included:

- Reduced ability to promote the program to producers via face-to-face meetings/workshops
- Reduced ability to access consultants
- Increased time to establish requirements for delivery during COVID19

***Finding:** COVID-19 had either no impact, or only a minor impact, on the ability of most MLA staff and state coordinators to fulfil their roles in planning and delivering the B2B program.*

However, one area where COVID-19 did impact on considerably was the delivery of the event sponsorship program, whereby the ability to hold face-to-face workshop was severely hampered. As a result, planned face-to-face workshops were replaced with a B2B webinar and podcast series. These activities are discussed further in Section 3.5.3.

***Finding:** COVID-19 impacted considerably on delivery of the B2B event sponsorship program, such that planned face-to-face workshops were replaced with a B2B webinar and podcast series.*

According to MLA, it was anticipated that B2B sessions would ideally be delivered on farm, however noting that in some situations this would not be possible due to COVID-19 restrictions, or that in some cases it may be more convenient for the producer to deliver a session remotely. However, the B2B guidelines provided no clear direction to consultants regarding expectations for mode of session delivery.

***Finding:** It was anticipated by MLA that B2B sessions would ideally be delivered on farm, however the B2B guidelines provided no clear directive to consultants regarding expectations for mode of session delivery.*

COVID-19 did impact on the ability of some producer sessions to be held on farm, particularly in Victoria where COVID-19 restrictions were most limiting. An analysis of information provided in consultant reports revealed the following information regarding mode of sessions delivered (note in some cases the mode of session delivery was not identified in session reports and the following figures have excluded these cases):

- 23% of all sessions were delivered remotely
- 15% of first sessions were delivered remotely
- 29% of second sessions were delivered remotely
- 28% of third sessions were delivered remotely
- 8% of producers had all sessions delivered remotely

Excluding Tasmania and WA where participant numbers were low, Figure 20 reveals that unsurprisingly, Victoria had the highest proportion of all sessions delivered remotely due to the length and severity of COVID-19 restrictions in that state which limited opportunities for face-to-face meetings. Perhaps surprising is the relatively high proportion of all sessions delivered remotely in

NSW, particularly compared to South Australia where the vast majority of sessions were delivered on farm. A key reason for the relatively high rate of remote delivery in NSW was not due to COVID-19 or producer preference, but rather due to several key consultants' method of delivery, which automatically involved at least one session being spent in the office undertaking desktop analysis.

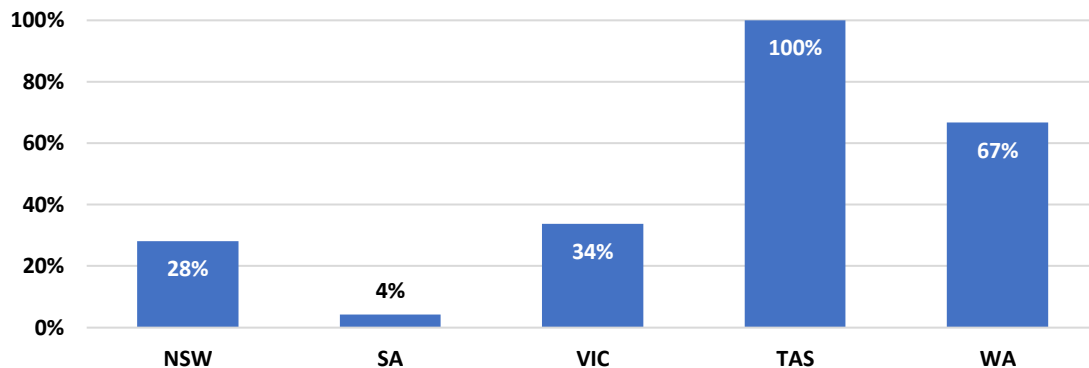


Figure 20: Proportion of all sessions delivered in each state that were delivered remotely

Finding: COVID-19 impacted on the ability of some producer sessions to be held on farm, particularly in Victoria where 34% of all sessions were delivered remotely.

Among producers interviewed during this review, 25% reported having no B2B sessions delivered remotely, with a further 3% who could not recall. In total, 12% of producers reported a decrease in session value for remotely delivered sessions, however only 1% of producers reported that the value of sessions was reduced by 'a great deal' due to remote delivery (Figure 21). This producer had all sessions delivered remotely due to COVID-19 during Victoria's lockdown period.

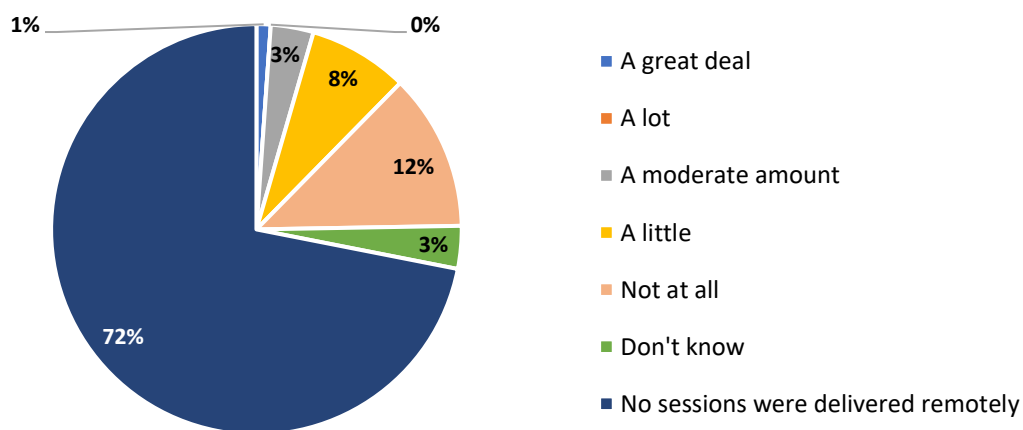


Figure 21: Producer perception of reduced value of any sessions that were delivered remotely (i.e. via phone or zoom etc)

In some cases, remote delivery was due to COVID-19, but in other cases it was by agreement between both parties that one or two sessions were delivered remotely due to availability of both parties, and in some cases the remote location of farms.

There were differences in method of delivery between consultants in that some scheduled one session as office time with no producer contact to complete analysis/planning/reporting activities, while other

consultants engaged with producers either face-to-face or remotely (phone/zoom) for all sessions and completed analysis/planning/reporting activities during the remainder of the session time. There were also some consultants who consistently included one session as a visit to another farm to view specific infrastructure or management practices as part of their delivery method.

In most cases where one or two sessions were delivered remotely, at least one session was held on farm, with only two of the producers interviewed having all three sessions delivered remotely. Producers commented that remote session delivery was less of an issue if they already knew the consultant prior to B2B, and/or if they had already had at least one session on farm beforehand. Example producer quotes are provided below:

They were delivered remotely and that made it really hard I think, especially since we didn't know 'consultant' and they didn't know us.

It was harder over the phone and we had to spend a bit of time in the following session to clarify things and taking time to understand what they had sent me last time, so it was more time consuming and probably more frustrating than it would be if meeting in person.

I think in person is always preferred but we live quite remotely, and with COVID as well we are quite used to engaging remotely anyway, but in person is best for sure.

If it had of been the first session that was delivered remotely it would have made it more difficult, but because it was a follow-up session and we already knew them anyway it wasn't such a big deal.

Producer Participant Quotes

It was also reported by non-producer stakeholders that COVID-19 was also likely to have reduced the willingness of at least some producers to participate in the program.

Finding: *Twelve percent of producers interviewed reported a decrease in session value for remotely delivered sessions. Producers commented that remote session delivery was less of an issue if they already knew the consultant prior to B2B, and/or if they had already had at least one session on farm beforehand. It was also reported by non-producer stakeholders that COVID-19 was also likely to have reduced the willingness of at least some producers to participate in the program.*

3.2.8 B2B Role in the Context of Other Fire Recovery Support Services

Figure 22 reveals that the majority of stakeholders interviewed perceived that the B2B program did not compete with any other similar services offered, while around a quarter were unsure. Only one stakeholder interviewed perceived that the B2B program competed with other service providers, specifically with the RFCS, while 12% of stakeholders felt that it may have competed with other services. These stakeholders commented that at the very least there was some 'overlap' of services provided, but the extent to which this overlap created direct competition was unclear.

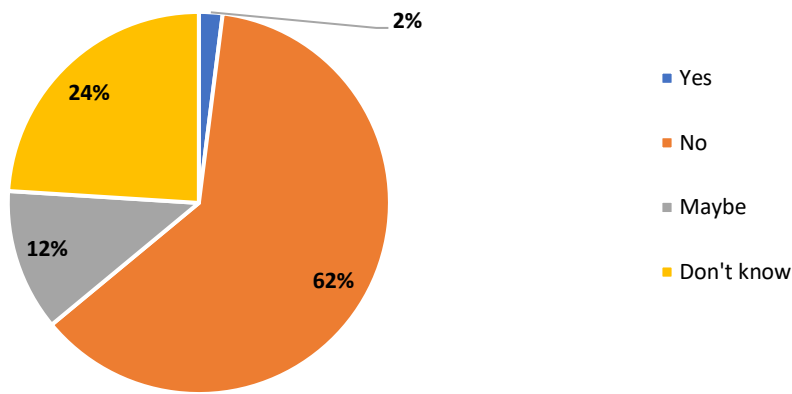


Figure 22: Stakeholder (MLA staff, state coordinators, consultants and other fire recovery service providers supporting producers during fire recovery) perceptions as to whether the B2B program competed with other service providers supporting producers to recover from the fires

Finding: The majority of stakeholders interviewed (62%) perceived that the B2B program did not compete with any other fire recovery services offered, while around a quarter were unsure. Twelve percent of stakeholders felt that B2B may have competed with other services, commenting that at the very least there was some ‘overlap’ in services provided.

The types of services offered to fire affected producers by the ‘other service providers’ engaged for this review is presented in Figure 23. Half of the ‘other service providers’ interviewed reported that the B2B program did not compete with provision of their service in supporting producers to recover from the bushfires, while the other half did not know as they were not sufficiently aware of what the B2B program was offering.

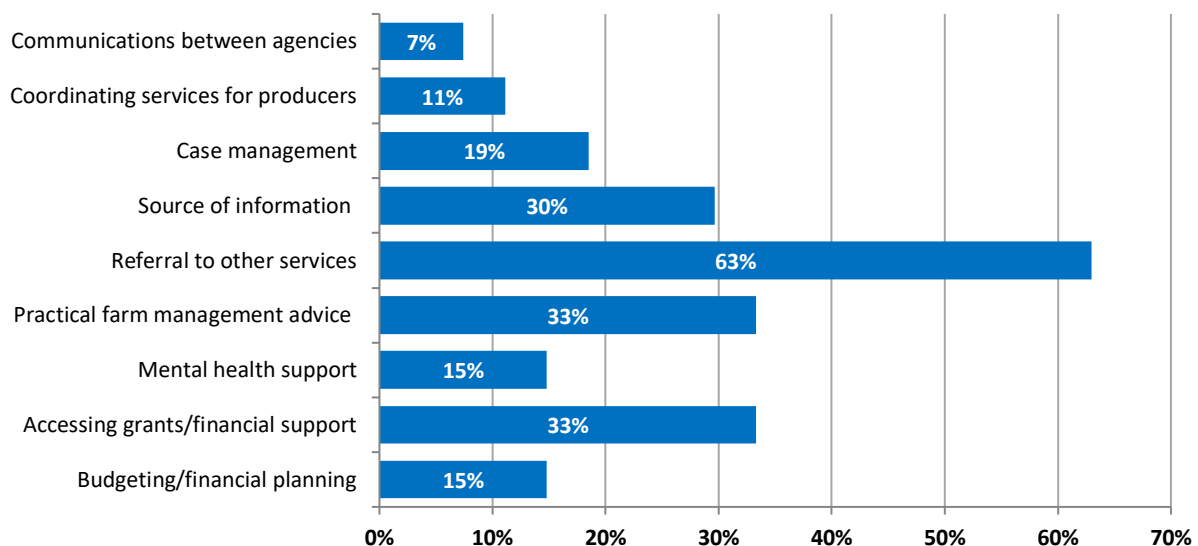


Figure 23: Types of services offered to producers by other service providers interviewed

A proportion (45%) of other fire recovery service providers that were not aware of the B2B program thought that it would have complemented or supported the delivery of their programs. In particular, the service providers that were involved in case management thought that being able to refer their clients to B2B would have complemented and supported what they were doing.

Finding: There was a general perception amongst other fire recovery service providers that B2B complemented or supported their recovery efforts, and they either did refer producers to it or would have if they had known about it.

3.2.9 Program Engagement with Other Fire Recovery Services

The majority of consultants interviewed were uncertain as to how well the B2B program had engaged with other fire recovery services (Figure 24). Of those who did have an opinion, twenty percent reported that the program did not engage well with other service providers, a further 14% reported that it engaged 'somewhat well', and 3% reported that it engaged 'very well'. No consultants reported an 'extremely well' response.

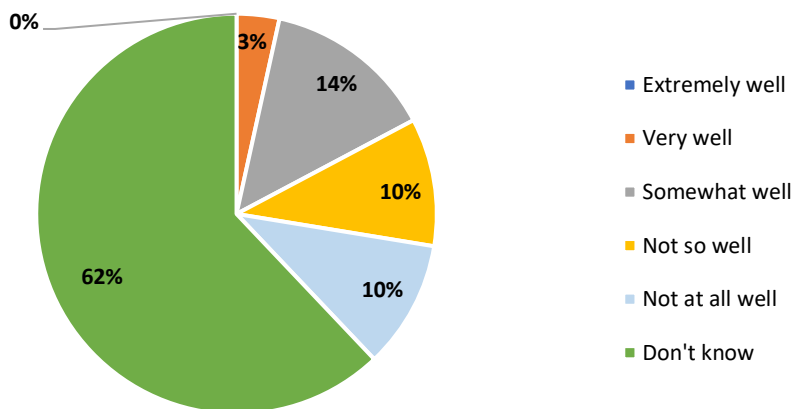


Figure 24: Perceptions of consultants interviewed as to how well the B2B program engaged with other fire recovery support services available to producers in their area

Consultant comments indicated the view that awareness of the B2B program was not as high as it should and could have been, and/or that the program did not actively seek to work with other service providers other than what individual consultants did at their own discretion. Example consultant quotes are provided below:

Ag Vic put out a regular bushfire recovery newsletter and I sent the list of services available from that to producers, so I feel people knew what else was available to connect producers into as needed.

I think people knew of what other services were available but we didn't integrate them into the program.

Felt like B2B ran in parallel rather than in conjunction with the other services. It was another program that was on offer rather than being integrated with the services.

I didn't see much engagement with other services.

That's where I felt it was lacking. MLA or state coordinator didn't provide that linkage with other services that I was able to access. I happened to be speaking to another consultant and I asked them about what other services were around and they provided me which some great links and contacts and that was really helpful.

The webinar series is where there was better engagement. It didn't really happen much with the one-on-one consulting, it was up to the discretion of the individual consultant as to what, if any, engagement they had.

It was quite autonomous. For example, BlazeAid didn't know who we were or what we did, so we didn't really have a big profile out there - we were one of many services at the time. The fire recovery centre coordinators were more interested in what immediate money was available and less interested and less knowledgeable about the Back to Business program.

I didn't really engage with other service providers so don't know.

Consultant Quotes

Finding: *The vast majority of consultants interviewed either did not know how well the B2B program had engaged with other fire recovery support services available to producers, or felt that it did not engage well with other available services. Consultant feedback suggested that other service providers assisting producers with fire recovery were either unaware of B2B, or that the program did not actively seek to engage with other relevant services, other than what individual consultants did at their own discretion.*

One of the requirements of consultants as stated in the B2B program guidelines was to 'complement and build on any rural financial counselling services currently available'. Three consultants engaged directly with the RFCS as part of their session delivery, predominantly with producers who were already engaged with the service. A further four consultants referred producers to the RFCS. These actions involved a total of 11 producer participants.

Finding: *Three consultants engaged directly with the RFCS during session delivery, mainly with producers who were already being supported by the service, and a further four consultants referred producers to the RFCS. These actions involved 8% of all producer participants.*

State coordinators reported varying degrees of formal engagement with other service providers, but very little evidence of a planned strategic approach to engagement having been taken.

Interviews with 26 'other fire recovery service provider' organisations that were supporting producers during fire recovery revealed that over half (59%) were aware of the B2B program. The majority of these service providers (37%) reported finding out about B2B from a range of external sources, such as field days where MLA was represented, state department of agriculture emails/staff and from consultants, while the remaining 22% of service providers were made aware of the program from within their own organisation.

The 41% of other service providers interviewed who had no prior awareness of B2B included representatives from the following organisations:

- Bushfire Recovery Victoria
- Gateway Health (mental health service provider) case management
- Murray Dairy

- Murray Regional Development Association
- National recovery and resilience agency
- NSW DPI
- NSW Rural Financial Counselling Service
- SA Housing Authority - Emergency Relief Unit
- Towong Shire
- Victorian Farmers Federation

The majority of these representatives were from agencies or organisations that did not necessarily have a direct linkage with state departments of agriculture or catchment management fire recovery staff who were typically more aware of the program. Example quotes from these service providers are provided below:

There is so much going on in recovery that MLA needs to get in front of the case managers as it was hard to keep up with all the electronic communication. We may have heard about it but it was lost in the chaos of all the information being shared.

Next time, ensure that all relevant organisations are aware of the service so they can refer their clients if appropriate. A face-to-face contact with someone involved with Back to Business would have been useful.

We could have made referrals to B2B if we had been aware of it. Information packs or a briefing from MLA would have been good. I didn't see anything about it in the hubs and nobody we spoke to at the hubs mentioned it to me.

Fire Recovery Service Providers

Finding: *Forty one percent of fire recovery service providers interviewed were unaware of the B2B program. The majority of these representatives were from agencies or organisations that did not necessarily have a direct linkage with state departments of agriculture/catchment management fire recovery staff, who in general had heard of B2B.*

For the service providers that knew of B2B, 38% actively promoted it to the producers they were working with, or through the work they were engaged in. Others mentioned that while they knew about B2B they did not do anything to promote it. For the service providers who were unaware of B2B, 89% reported that B2B would have supported the work they were doing in recovery if they had known about it, and 80% reported that their organisation would have potentially engaged with the B2B program. These service providers made the following comments:

I think we could have supported each other. We could have referred producers to the program that we thought may have benefited from it, and likewise I think B2B consultants could have referred to us where they felt we could help in particular cases.

This would have been great to offer our case managed farmers.

We can only work with people experiencing financial hardship. B2B could have been offered to these people. When we worked with the dairy industry, they provided an expert that worked with our RFC to provide dairy farmers with templates to fill in and helped with providing services to them beyond what the RFCS could do. It was a good partnership.

We could have referred producers to it as well as worked with the consultants in partnership to deliver the service. We were the trusted people on the ground so had an 'in' with the affected landholders so could get access to the people B2B could support.

Could have handed out flyers with fodder - we did this to promote our free advice about handling employees.

The RFCS works in with Dairy Australia with their programs that are similar to this one. They invite RFCs to a meeting at a local pub or wherever and we talk about grants available as a carrot, and then they lead into other topics and aim to get people to sign up to their one-on-one session programs - it works very well. Dairy Australia has extension officers on the ground, unlike MLA, and we (RFCS) work fairly closely with them. They sometimes refer people to us and we refer people to them for more technical information, so the winner is the farmer.

I feel like to some extent at least, everyone is running their own show and they do a similar thing so there are opportunities to work together to help each other out and add value for producers.

Other Fire Recovery Service Providers

Finding: *Among those service providers who were aware of B2B, only 38% actively promoted it. Of the service providers who were unaware of B2B, 89% reported that it would have supported the work they were doing, and 80% reported that had they been aware of the B2B program, their organisation would have potentially engaged with it.*

Stakeholders provided the following suggestions for how engagement with other services supporting producers to recover from natural disasters could be improved:

- Ensure that other relevant services are aware of the B2B and what it is offering to producers and engage with these services to champion the program and refer it to producers who needed it most.
- Identify the first responders early e.g. LLS/Agriculture Victoria, and ensure staff from these organisations are fully informed about the B2B program and are provided with information/fliers to have on hand as soon as possible to provide to both producers and other service providers.
- Be clear about the purpose of the B2B program so that relevant service providers can be identified that will assist the program to achieve its purpose.
- Ensure there is a focus on engagement with other relevant service providers at the local/regional level, not just the state level.
- Provide B2B consultants with a list of other local services, available grants/concessional loans and key links/contacts to assist with better referral of producers to other service providers.

- Increase engagement with the RFCS as a key provider of services that were considered to complement those provided by B2B.
- A proactive role for MLA to integrate with state fire recovery coordinators and to ask the frontline services providers what support they need, and how they can support each other to better assist producers.

In particular, many stakeholders felt that there was an opportunity for MLA to work more closely with the RFCS through the B2B program. Specific suggestions included:

- Invite an RFC to attend a session/s with agreement from the producer after stating that it is part of the program offering.
- After the final session, make an offer to the producer for the RFC to continue to support them in whatever way is needed

Having the RFC present during a session, perhaps ideally the final producer session, would provide an opportunity for the producer and RFC to meet and establish a relationship, for the RFC to get an understanding of the producer situation and for the consultant to be seen by the producer to be supportive of having the RFC involved. It would then be up to producer as to what, if any, follow-on contact they had with the RFCS, but knowing that there was continuity in support available if they needed it. Even if there is no immediate follow-up from the producer, at the very least the producer has had an introduction to the service if they have not previously been engaged with it, and may therefore be more likely to reach out to them in the future if the need ever arises.

***Finding:** Many stakeholders made specific mention of the opportunity for MLA to engage and work more closely with the RFCS to provide producers with the opportunity for ongoing support after the final consultant session.*

3.2.10 Governance and Administration

MLA and State Coordinator Roles

One staff member was responsible for managing the B2B program on behalf of MLA. MLA then employed a program coordinator in each state to manage project delivery on the ground. State coordinator feedback indicates that in general, state coordinators felt well supported by MLA. There were some initial delays in rolling the program out but most coordinators appreciated the challenge associated with achieving this.

***Finding:** In general, state coordinators felt well supported by MLA in undertaking their role.*

Key responsibilities of state coordinators as stated in the B2B project guidelines included:

- Engage and subcontract appropriate consultants in fire affected regions
- Engage and verify eligibility of fire-affected red meat producers, and ensure completion of the registration form which includes producer consent
- Ensure consultants meet the eligibility criteria

- Pair bushfire-affected producers with appropriate consultants, which can include working with producers to determine the preferred consultant (this does not exclude current advisors, provided they meet consultant eligibility criteria)
- Provide MLA with email updates on the program at least monthly, reporting on the criteria detailed below, along with verbal communication to further discuss detail
- Collate reporting from consultants for a final report, summarising the outcomes of the program.
- Assess consultant applications where conflicts of interest between state coordination and consultant roles are declared in other states as directed by MLA
- Arbitrate where disputes in consultant applications occur in alternative states as directed by MLA

The majority of consultants (69%) felt 'extremely well' or 'very well' supported by their state coordinator (Figure 25). Seventeen percent of consultants felt 'somewhat well' supported and 7% did not feel well supported, while a further 7% were unsure. Many consultants commented that there were some 'teething' problems to begin with, but that once these were sorted out the state coordinator supported them in their delivery role.

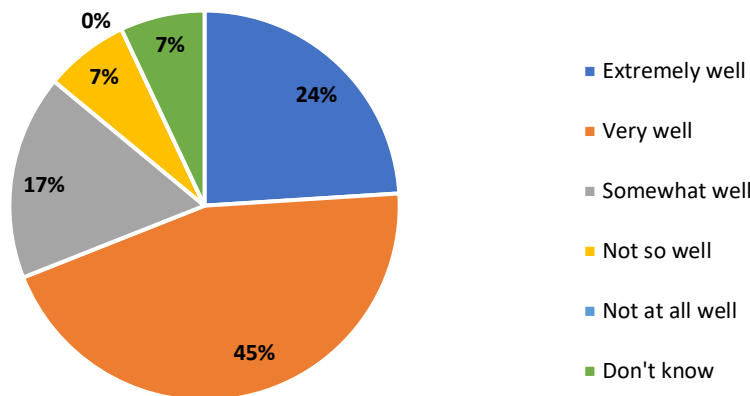


Figure 25: Degree to which consultants felt supported by their state coordinator in fulfilling their role

Among the 25% of consultants who only felt 'somewhat well' supported or 'not so well' supported, the main reasons for their lower rating included:

- Lack of clarity around what was required of consultants and what the purpose of the B2B program was
- Lack of feedback provided on consultant session reports and action plans
- Lack of advice and support on how to engage with traumatised producers
- Lack of resources as to who and where to refer producers for additional support/training
- Lack of contact/check ins to assess consultant progress and support wellbeing

An example of the lack of clarity among some consultants around what was required of them was the comment from one consultant that the program could be improved by allowing producers the option of just having one session rather than three, when this was already an option. Example consultant quotes are provided below:

There was a lack of resources given to us, but I think the coordinator had trust in us consultants and pretty much left us to it.

I got no help. I think if you're running a project involving this type of content where a traumatic experience was part of it, you need a co-ordinator who understands where people are at emotionally and not just someone who might be good at project management.

I felt that the guidelines put out by 'state coordinator' were a bit wishy washy and I got the feeling that they didn't really know what MLA wanted.

The person dealing with us was very easy to work with, but there was no support as such after initial engagement.

They didn't make it hard at all, and they were flexible in their approach and tried to help if asked, but they just seemed disorganised and uninformed really about what was going on and what the purpose of the program was.

I would have preferred to be given key resources about relevant fire recovery contacts up front.

I had no feedback. Even a welfare check phone call from the coordinator to the consultants would have been good. You get to see some pretty traumatised people.

Needed some sort of briefing about what consultants could confront - signs of stress, post-traumatic stress and a pathway if we found people really distressed. Back to Business did not provide a list of such resources or approaches.

It would have been valuable to have a debrief for consultants after visiting fire affected clients. There were a number of suicides in my area.

Maybe needed some training about how to deal with stressed individuals. What traumatic stress looks like. Even some written material on that aspect would have been a good idea.

MLA said they were going to provide some support materials for consultants, but they didn't so we were left to do it ourselves and that was inefficient. Things like key contacts because there were other programs for support and there were a lot of grants and I didn't have a list of those. I also wanted to refer clients to MLA and AWI training, so I needed to know which ones and who to contact.

Some feedback after action plans were developed would have been good.

Would have been nice to have had some feedback after completing the reporting.

Consultant Quotes

Some consultants reported a need for more guidance and advice on dealing with producers who were experiencing grief and trauma. Supporting producers who have been through a catastrophic event such as the Black Summer bushfires is very different from the extension generally undertaken by MLA and their partners. Many of the service providers interviewed during this review were very cognisant of the grief and trauma B2B producers had been through, and how it had impacted on the way they were able to respond to offers of help and advice. Appendix C provides additional information around working with people experiencing grief and trauma that may assist MLA and B2B consultants and state coordinators for future program planning and delivery.

***Finding:** Most consultants felt well supported by state coordinators (69%). Among the 25% of consultants who only felt somewhat well supported or not well supported, the key areas identified as lacking included provision of feedback on consultant reports and action plans, clarity around the purpose of the program and what was required of consultants, lack of advice and support on how to engage with traumatised producers, a lack of resources to assist with producer referrals to other support services/training activities and a lack of contact from coordinators to assess consultant progress and to support wellbeing.*

Only one state coordinator reported that they discussed session reports/actions plans with consultants and/or provided feedback to consultants on their session reports/action plans, but only to a very limited degree.

***Finding:** Only one state coordinator reported that they discussed session reports/actions plans with consultants and/or provided feedback to consultants on their session reports/action plans, but only to a very limited degree.*

The following issues and inconsistencies around delivery were identified during the review and require clarification and management for future delivery:

- Maximum number of sessions to be delivered per day per business:
 - o Up to four face-to-face sessions were delivered in one day
 - o Up to two sessions were delivered on the same day for an individual business

The vast majority of consultants delivered either one or two farm visits per day, and one session per business per day. There were five examples where two sessions for a business were delivered on the same day and one example where four sessions for two producers (2 sessions each) were delivered on the same day. While delivery of multiple sessions for an individual producer on the same day is certainly efficient for the consultant, the reviewers suggest that unless this was requested by the producers, it was unlikely to have been in their best interests.

There was also feedback from stakeholders that some consultants may have had too many producers they were assisting which impacted on their ability to provide sufficient time and follow-up with each producer. It was suggested that a limitation on the maximum number of producers allocated to a consultant may assist to ensure that individual producers receive maximum benefits from the program.

- Invoicing requirements where sessions are held simultaneously with multiple participants.

There were two cases where sessions involved producers from more than one participating business (up to three) meeting with a consultant at the same time. It is unclear what the charging requirements should be in this scenario where the same outcome applies to all businesses (e.g. a family succession plan), and meetings with multiple participants are held simultaneously.

- Invoicing MLA for additional services to producers (e.g. farm mapping/soil tests)

The reviewers did not have access to all consultant invoices but are aware of at least one instance where a consultant invoiced MLA for soil testing, while in other cases the producer paid for these additional services.

- Lack of effective communication to producers regarding the number of sessions available and the consultants used.
 - o There were instances where producers did not hear back from their consultant after the first session, and just assumed that the consultant felt they did not need any further assistance, which in some cases was true but in others was not.
 - o There were instances where producers asked their consultant not to come back after the first session because they did not value the advice provided, but were unaware and/or were not offered a second session with a different consultant.
 - o There were instances where producers would have liked a different consultant for at least one session to address a particular technical need, but were either unaware they were able to do this, or unsure how to ask without offending their consultant.
 - o There were instances where, based on producer and consultant interviews and information contained in consultant session reports, producers were provided with more sessions than was necessary with the one consultant to achieve the resulting outcomes.

As noted elsewhere in this report, at least one consultant perceived it as a requirement to deliver three sessions to all participants regardless of need. Other consultants were perceived by some stakeholders to be delivering all sessions themselves without appropriate consideration of and discussion with producers as to whether all sessions were needed or whether a different consultant for one or two sessions would add further value for the producer.

***Finding:** A range of administrative issues and inconsistencies around delivery were identified during the review which require clarification and management for future delivery. These issues included: the maximum number of sessions to be delivered per day per business; invoicing requirements where multiple businesses are attending a session simultaneously; allowances for invoicing of other services to producers (e.g. soil tests/farm mapping); and lack of effective communication with producers about the number of sessions delivered to them and the consultants used to support maximum value from program participation.*

Consultant Eligibility

Stakeholder commentary around consultant skills and assessment of eligibility relative to required criteria included:

- There are very few consultants with high level financial/business skills as well as sound practical skills across the required range of farm production systems
- There were some consultants who claimed to have skills in business analysis and financial management who in practice were perceived to have low level skills in this area
- There were some consultants who were perceived to have the *'wrong skill set'* required for the task of fire recovery
- Some consultants were perceived to be overly focused on *'pushing their own barrow'* rather than assisting producers to recover from the fires

Given these perceptions, some stakeholders felt that a greater level of scrutiny of consultant claims should be undertaken in future. One stakeholder suggested that: *"Maybe consultants needed to provide a template showing how they assess the business situation from a financial perspective then at least MLA could assess their skills and capability."* This comment related specifically to approval of FMCs.

Commentary around some consultants having the *'wrong skill set'* related to consultants who had a very specific area of expertise that was perceived to not align particularly well with the needs of producers for fire recovery, and who were used as FMCs. The concern was that important areas of need to assist with fire recovery that were outside of consultant area of interest and skill set may have been overlooked or not prioritised appropriately by these consultants.

Finding: *Stakeholder feedback regarding suitability of consultants engaged in the B2B program indicated perceptions that: there are very few consultants with high level farm business management and practical skills in farm production; some consultants who claimed to have skills in business management were relatively unskilled in this area; the skill set of some consultants did not align well with that required for the task of fire recovery; and some consultants were overly focused on pushing their own agenda rather than assisting producers to recover from the fires.*

Producer Eligibility

In conducting the producer interviews and reviewing consultant session reports, the reviewers provide the following comments on producer participation relative to eligibility:

- There were producer participants who were 100% dairy, or less than 100% dairy but utilised the consulting services for their dairy enterprise.
- There were producer participants who had purchased their property in fire affected postcodes after the fires i.e. they did not own the property at the time of the fires
- There was at least one example of a producer participant whose property was not physically affected by the fires. However, the property had been impacted as a result of neglect as the producer had contributed a significant amount of time assisting others who were directly impacted by the fires, and was also struggling with poor mental health which reduced his ability to manage his own farm

The reviewers note that the eligibility criteria, *'impacted by fire'*, was not applied consistently between states. Specifically, producers who were indirectly impacted because, for example, they were away from their properties for months with firefighting and mop up work, were considered eligible to participate in the program in one state but ineligible in another. The reviewers suggest that further clarity around producer eligibility in these scenarios for future program delivery is required.

***Finding:** There were scenarios where the producer eligibility criteria as described in the program guidelines did not provide sufficient clarity to determine whether or not producers qualified. These included properties that were not physically impacted by the fires but were still impacted in other less direct ways, inclusion of dairy enterprises/farms as being eligible, and eligibility of producers who purchased fire impacted properties after the fires.*

Conflicts of Interest

MLA provided a process for identifying and addressing consultant conflicts of interest during program delivery, which related specifically to state coordinators also acting as consultants and delivering one-on-one producer sessions. A conflict of interest register was developed to identify and record cases. Two cases were identified where the NSW and WA state coordinators also delivered one-on-one consulting sessions, and staff of the NSW state coordinator were also approved consultants.

No concerns were raised by MLA or any of the state coordinators regarding how these conflicts of interest were addressed during project delivery. However, the reviewers noted two additional potential conflicts of interest that require clarification where a producer was a relative of a consultant and where a consultant was also a producer participant.

***Finding:** No concerns were raised by MLA or any of the state coordinators regarding how conflicts of interest were addressed during project delivery, however the reviewers noted two additional potential conflicts of interest that require clarification.*

Improving Future Program Governance and Administration

Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for improving the future administration of the B2B program in the event of a natural disaster where the program is deployed:

- A flat rate offered to B2B consultants to simplify the administration process
- Pre-approved list of consultants reviewed and updated annually
- Pre-approved list of state coordinators reviewed and updated annually
- Pre-arranged and approved contracts for state coordinators and consultants updated annually
- Pre-arranged MLA staff ready to be deployed
- Pre-arranged communications assets
- Pre-established relationships with key disaster response and recovery agencies who are already aware of the B2B program, its purpose, the value proposition to producers and how it works in practice

Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for improving the future governance of the B2B program in the event of a natural disaster where the program is deployed:

- Review and update requirements for producer and consultant eligibility
- Clearly communicate these requirements to state coordinators
- Hold regular meetings between state coordinators
- Increase state coordinator engagement with consultants to support improved program delivery and to provide increased support to consultants
- Review and update the B2B program guidelines

- Clarify the role of state coordinators in monitoring consultant adherence to program guidelines

Budget

Table 5 presents the original and revised budgets for the B2B program. Including funds for state coordination roles, the original total program budget was \$3,402,600. The total budget spend during the 2019/20 FY was \$583,846.50.

Table 5: Original and revised B2B project budget by financial year against actual spend

State	Original Budget 19/20	Revised Budget 19/20 – 20/21	Actual Spend 19/20	Actual Spend 20/21	Total Actual Spend
Victoria	\$846,000	\$270,920.5	\$135,920.5	\$9,593.11	\$145,513.61
South Australia	\$847,500	\$300,000	\$150,000	\$78,614.86	\$228,614.86
Western Australia	\$275,000	\$30,001	\$20,001	\$	\$20,001
Tasmania	\$69,000	\$20,000	\$14,223.90	\$0	\$14,223.90
NSW State Coord	\$262,000	\$176,659	\$94,659.00	\$18,750.00	\$113,409
NSW Consultants	\$1,103,100	\$414,770.32	\$163,266	\$115,001.69	\$278,267.69
Total	\$3,402,600	\$1,212,350.82	\$583,846.50	\$216,182.70	\$800,029.20

Following on from the first six months of the program, it was determined that the expected uptake among eligible producers was much lower than expected, thus a revised budget of \$1,212,351 was developed for the following financial year. Total spend for the 2020-21 financial year was \$216,182.70, with a total project spend of \$800,029.20.

Finding: The original project budget of \$3,402,600 was revised down to \$1,212,350 after program uptakes was much lower than expected. Final project total spend was \$800,029.20.

In future, there may be opportunities to seek funding partners for delivery of B2B via a range of organisations, such as drought hubs, state governments, other RDCs and philanthropic organisations.

3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

3.3.1 Overview

Table 6 provides an overview of the key review findings regarding project monitoring and evaluation presented as a SWOT analysis.

Table 6: SWOT analysis of B2B program M&E

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current program review being undertaken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No M&E plan for the program • Variability in quality of consultant session reports and action plans • Missing session reports and actions plans

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultant session report and action plan templates were largely fit for purpose • State coordinator reporting requirements (i.e. final state summary report) were considered to be appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing producer registration details
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an M&E plan • Streamline and improve consultant session reports and action plans • Increase producer completion of post program feedback surveys • Improve consistency and quality of reporting • Improve type of data collected for evaluation purposes including a central participation database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of state coordinator and consultant cooperation • Lack of producer willingness to engage in evaluation activities • Lack of time/funding to effectively utilise M&E data for decision making

3.3.2 Data Available for M&E

This project review has generated a significant amount of data for M&E purposes. Positive comments were received from both producer and non-producer stakeholders around MLA investing in the current review, and some stakeholders also expressed their appreciation at being able to provide input into the review. In addition to data and information collected during the review, other existing M&E data was also available.

The key data collected during delivery of the one-on-one sessions to assist with project monitoring and evaluation included:

- Producer registration details
- Consultant reports for each producer
- Producer action plans completed by consultants for each producer
- Feedback surveys completed by producers at the end of the program

Producer registration details included:

- Producer name and contact details, including property address and PIC
- Property size (as a range) and estimated area burnt (as a range)
- Livestock numbers (cattle, sheep, goats) (as a range)
- Livestock numbers lost (as a range) by livestock type (cattle, sheep, goats)
- Fencing and infrastructure lost (range for fencing, numbers for infrastructure i.e. sheds, houses, tractors)

- Actions already taken (vast majority of actions involved contacting insurance provider and seeking advice/support for animal health and welfare issues)
- Type of consulting assistance sought (e.g. financial, property planning, agronomy, animal health/nutrition)
- Name of preferred consultant if there was one

The only suggested change to the producer registration details by the reviewers to increase the usefulness of this data for evaluation purposes is to request actual farm size and livestock numbers pre-fire rather than a range. The ranges provided to producers to select from varied by up to 4,000 hectares and head of livestock between the lower and upper end of the range. It is suggested that for these variables producers would find it just as easy to provide a single number estimate as they would selecting a range.

***Finding:** The reviewers suggest that changing the producer registration form to request actual farm size and pre-fire livestock numbers as opposed to selecting a range, would increase the value of this data for evaluation purposes. The ranges provided to producers varied by up to 4,000 hectares and head of livestock between the lower and upper end of the range, and it is suggested that producers would not find it any more difficult to provide a single value estimate than a range.*

Although it was a requirement of state coordinators to ensure that producers completed a registration form, only three of the five coordinators achieved this outcome (Table 7). In addition, almost a quarter of the producers who completed a registration form in Victoria were missing contact details.

Table 7: Proportion of producer participants who completed a program registration form

State	% Of Producers Completing a Registration Form
NSW	71%
SA	100%
VIC	78%*
WA	100%
TAS	100%
TOTAL	81%

* 24% of producers who registered were missing contact details

***Finding:** Although it was a requirement of state coordinators to ensure that all producers completed a registration form, producer registration details were missing for two states, with registration details recorded for only 81% of all producer participants.*

3.3.3 Consultant Reports and Action Plans

MLA provided templates for consultant session reports and producer action plans. Session reports and action plans were required to be signed by producers after each session. Consultant reports were required by MLA for a record that sessions had occurred and what they had involved, and to assist with program evaluation.

Consultant Reports

The reviewers provide the following comments regarding B2B consultant reports:

- Reports varied considerably in breadth and depth of content
- Some consultants used their own reporting format and not the MLA template
- Some consultants did not complete session reports at all, just a producer action plan
- There are missing consultant reports that have either not been completed, or have not been provided to the state coordinator and/or to MLA
- Some consultants completed one session report per producer which covered all sessions delivered, while others completed a separate report for each session (up to three per producer)
- Some consultant reports provided economic analysis data but most did not
- Other economic analysis was completed by some consultants but not included in consultant reports
- Many session reports were not signed by producers, however that was largely due to COVID-19 and the inability to meet with producers in person for some sessions

MLA did not require state coordinators to submit consultants reports to them, which according to MLA was an oversight during the planning phase. The intention is to require consultant session reports to be submitted to MLA if the program is delivered again in future.

Figure 26 reveals that 58% of consultants either strongly agreed (3%) or agreed (55%) that the consultant template for recording session outcomes was appropriate. These consultants appreciated having a template so that they knew what the expectations for reporting were, as opposed to having to guess by doing their own reporting.

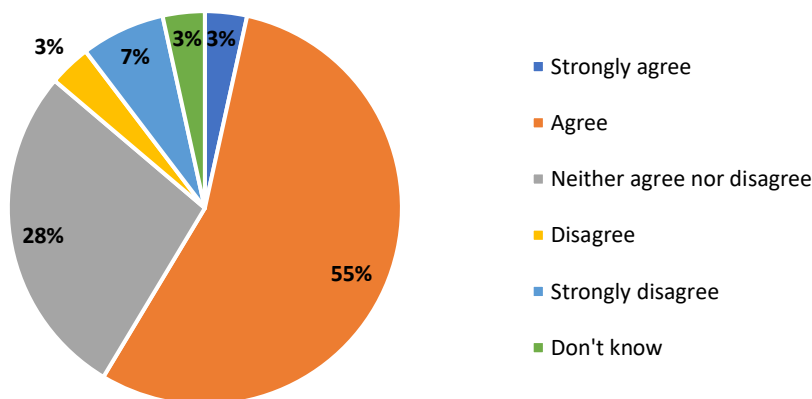


Figure 26: Degree to which consultants felt the template for recording the outcomes from each producer session was appropriate

Twenty-eight percent of consultants neither agreed nor disagreed that the template was appropriate, mostly stating that they appreciated that some reporting was required by MLA. Ten percent of consultants did not think that the templates were appropriate for recording session outcomes, with most commenting that the reporting was too onerous.

Action Plans

The reviewers provide the following comments regarding B2B producer action plans:

- Some were hand written and difficult to read
- There was a range in the breadth and depth of information provided
- There was a range in the readability/simplicity with which information was presented for a producer audience
- There were missing action plans
- Some consultants provided producers with additional, more detailed reports, that were not provided to MLA

Figure 27 indicates that the majority of consultants (62%) felt that the format of the action plan template for recording the details of producer recommended actions was fit for purpose.

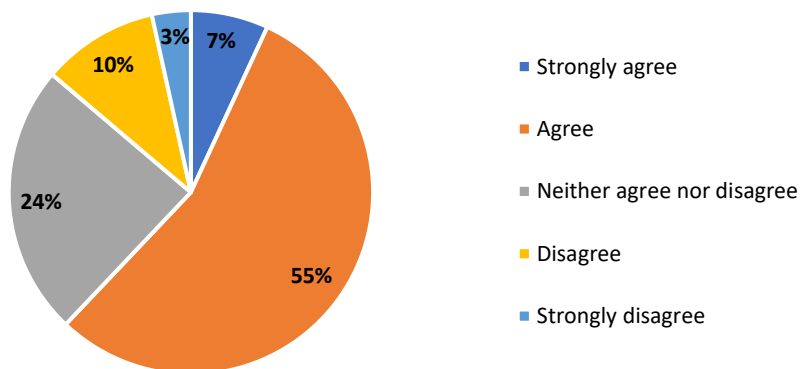


Figure 27: Degree to which consultants felt the format of the action plan template for recording the details of the required actions was appropriate

Among the 13% of consultants who felt that the format of the producer action plan was not fit for purpose, the main issue was a perception that there was too much repetition within the action plan and between the action plan and the consultant session reports and/or that consultants had their own preferences for how they liked to report back to producers.

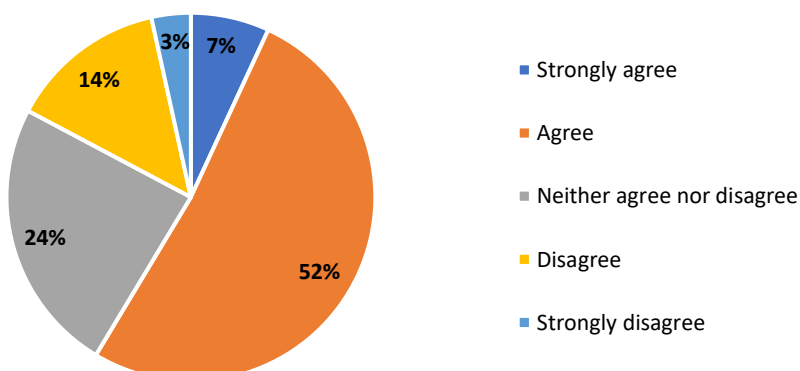


Figure 28: Degree to which consultants felt the format of the action plan template was easy for producers to understand and use

Similar responses were provided regarding the degree to which consultants felt that the format of the action plan was easy for producers to understand and use (Figure 28). The main commentary was that consultants had their own personal preferences for how they liked to report back to producers and wanted more flexibility to do it their way.

One state coordinator reported that they did not use the consultant reports or action plans at all, while the other state coordinators reported use of these documents for the following purposes:

- To validate sessions had taken place for consultant payment
- To ensure that session reports and action plans were completed to expected standards
- To validate sessions had occurred on farm where travel costs had been claimed
- To ensure that each visit report and action plan were signed by the producer
- To influence state government around future needs e.g. providing intelligence for policy advice for business resilience work as part of future drought funds.

Producer Satisfaction with Action Plans

Most producers were either satisfied (26%) or very satisfied (60%) with the level of detail provided by the consultant in their action plan such that it was easy to understand and use (Figure 29).

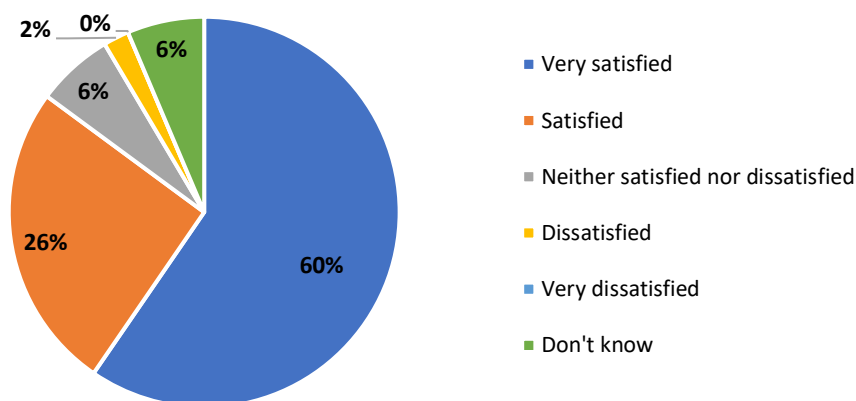


Figure 29: Extent to which producers were satisfied that the level of detail provided in their action plan made it easy to understand and use

Only a small proportion of producers were dissatisfied with the amount of detail in their action plan. This appeared mainly to relate to their disagreement with the content of the plan. One producer commented that they found some of the terminology and language used in the plan difficult to understand. Among the 6% of producers who provided a ‘don’t know’ response, the qualification was that they could not remember the content or details of their action plan.

Finding: The vast majority of producers surveyed (86%) were satisfied with the level of detail provided in their action plan. Only a small number of producers were dissatisfied, however this response related more to their disagreement with the content of the plan. One producer commented that they found some of the terminology and language used in the plan difficult to understand.

Suggested Improvements to Reporting Templates

Suggested improvements made by consultants and state coordinators to the session reporting/action plan requirements included:

- A requirement for more quality control of consultant reports and action plans via a process of review and feedback by the state coordinator and/or MLA to improve quality and consistency of reporting for evaluation purposes
- Provide different versions of the templates to allow consultants to select a format that suits them best
- Revise the structure of the templates to better meet consultant needs (simpler/less repetitive)
- Road test any revised templates with consultants first
- Do not require session reports at all. Trust consultants or use a different means to determine if sessions have been completed e.g. phone call to consultant
- Provide one session report that is updated and signed by consultant and producer after each session
- Allow flexibility for consultants to tailor the templates to meet their needs and to meet producer needs
- Combine reporting for sessions and actions plans into one template
- Provide more explanation of what should go into the reporting templates in terms of detail, with some examples of completed ones provided to consultants

***Finding:** A range of suggestions were provided by stakeholders for improving the templates for consultant session reports and producer action plans, with most relating to simplifying the reporting, reducing duplication and increasing flexibility.*

While it is recognised by the reviewers that producer financial information provided to consultants is confidential, ex-ante analyses undertaken by consultants to assess potential productivity and profitability improvements expected to occur as a result of implementing actions plans would provide useful information for program evaluation. This information would include estimated implementation costs, additional ongoing annual costs, estimated additional production and/or profitability and estimated reduced time to reach pre-disaster recovery levels of production.

3.3.4 Producer Feedback Survey

According to the B2B program guidelines: *'Following the delivery of the three sessions, producers will be required to complete a feedback survey'*. Table 8 presents a summary of the proportion of producer participants in each state who completed a feedback form.

Table 8: Proportion of producer participants who completed a post program feedback survey

State	% Producers Completing a Feedback Survey
NSW	54%
SA	30%
VIC	41%
WA	100%*
TAS	100%*
TOTAL	45%

* 1 producer only

Both producers from Tasmania and WA completed a feedback survey. Of the other three states, NSW had the highest response rate at just over half of participants, with the lowest response rate in SA, with just under a third of producers completing a survey. If MLA's intent was for all producers to complete a survey, as alluded to in the B2B guidelines, then this outcome was well below expectations. However, some consultants and state coordinators felt that the response rate achieved for their state was about what they would have expected. Others noted that for a project where delivery is one-on-one, that a much higher rate of return of feedback forms could be achieved.

***Finding:** According to the B2B program guidelines: "Following the delivery of the three sessions, producers will be required to complete a survey feedback survey". An overall producer feedback response rate of 45% was achieved.*

In using the results from these feedback surveys in their final report, some state coordinators implied that the survey results received were representative of all participants. For example, an overall finding for one state that "Ninety-two percent of participants implemented the action plan developed and the rest have partially implemented the plan" is a misrepresentation of the survey data when it did not represent a statistically valid sample size of participants.

***Finding:** When reporting producer feedback survey results in final reports, some state coordinators implied that the survey results were representative of all participants, which is inaccurate and misleading.*

While it was stated as a requirement for producers to complete a feedback survey following delivery of the consultant sessions in the program guidelines, there was no specific direction given as to who was responsible for ensuring that this occurred. Some consultant contracts required that the MLA evaluation form be completed by each client at the conclusion of their consultation, however this was not monitored or enforced, while other consultant contracts made no mention of producer feedback forms.

State coordinators and consultants were in general unclear as to whether or not it was their role to ensure feedback surveys were completed, and one consultant was unaware that there was a feedback survey. In some cases, producers were requested by the consultant to complete the survey and in others by the state coordinator, however it is highly likely that some producers were not requested to fill out the survey by anyone. There also appears to have been little follow-up reminders to request completion of the form.

Finding: The B2B guidelines and consultant/state coordinator contracts did not provide clear, consistent direction as to who was responsible for ensuring that producers completed a feedback form after their final session. As a result, there was confusion among state coordinators and consultants as to whether or not it was their role to ensure this occurred.

The most commonly provided suggestions for increasing the response rate in the future included:

- Attach consultant payment to receipt of producer surveys as part of contractual arrangements
- Clarify the role of consultants and state coordinators in requesting and following up on survey completion
- Provide an incentive for producers to complete the survey e.g. they are eligible for a follow-up session or phone support if they complete the survey
- Provide producers with the survey at the end of the final session and request completion on the spot
- Collect producer feedback via an independent third-party phone call

Finding: Consultants and state coordinators provided various suggestions for how to increase producer feedback response rates in future. These included linking consultant payment to survey completion, providing an incentive for producers to complete the form, providing the survey to producers at the end of the final session for completion on the spot, collecting producer feedback via a phone call with an independent third party, and clarifying the role of consultants and state coordinators in requesting and following up on survey completion.

3.4 Program Delivery: Other B2B Offerings

3.4.1 Overview

The following table provides an overview of the review findings in relation to delivery of the three other B2B program offerings:

- Event sponsorship program
- Webinar/podcast series
- MLA website

Table 9: SWOT analysis of delivery of the B2B program (event sponsorship, webinars/podcasts/MLA website)

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Back to Business webinars and podcasts were well received by those who accessed them. • The event sponsorship program was viewed as being a good idea, but with limited opportunity for delivery due to COVID19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID hindered the delivery of face-to-face activities and reduced participation in the sponsorship program. • Generally low level of awareness of these offerings, especially the event sponsorship program

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MLA website provided useful information and tools to those producers who accessed it. 	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with key service providers and organisations involved in initial disaster response and early recovery activities before a natural disaster occurs and immediately after an event. Develop partnerships with other service providers for delivery of the program on the ground and/or for program funding. Improve communication and marketing assets, plans and activities to create greater awareness and understanding of these program offerings among producers and other service providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional trauma of producers after a natural disaster as a barrier for engagement Lack of phone/internet services for impacted producers Lack of sufficient engagement with other service providers Lack of time and funding for effective communication and marketing activities to promote the program.

3.4.2 Awareness of Other B2B Offerings

During the stakeholder engagement process for this review, consultants and other service providers supporting producer recovery from the bushfires were asked if they could identify any other services or support that MLA was providing to producers for fire recovery in addition to the one-on-one consulting service. Figure 30 reveals that 65% of respondents were not aware of any other offerings (53%) or could not remember (12%). Among those who were able to identify other support provided by MLA, the B2B webinars were by the far the most commonly identified activity, while the sponsorship program had the lowest level of awareness among respondents.

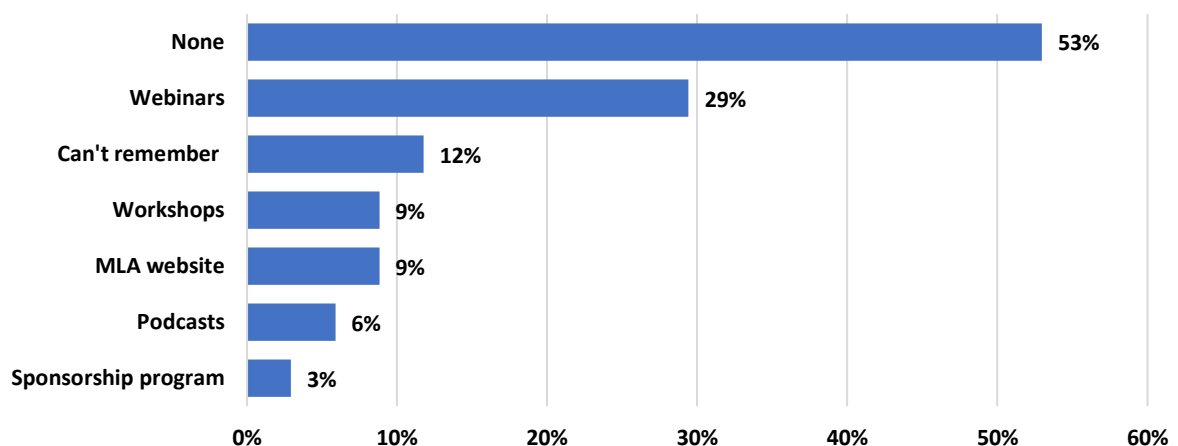


Figure 30: Level of awareness among B2B consultants and other service providers of other fire recovery support provided to producers by MLA (does not add to 100% as some respondents identified multiple services)

***Finding:** Just over half of consultants and other fire recovery service providers interviewed were unaware of any other fire recovery support provided to producers by MLA besides the one-on-one consulting sessions. Among those who were able to identify other support provided by MLA, the B2B webinars were by the far the most commonly identified activity, while the sponsorship program had the lowest level of awareness among respondents.*

3.4.3 Event Sponsorship Program

The Event Sponsorship Program provided financial and in-kind support for industry events that increased awareness and adoption of information and resources to support producers recovering from bushfires. Sponsorship of up to \$2,500 was available per event for events held up until 30th June 2021.

The eligibility criteria for event funding included:

- Event must target and engage producers with an aim of increasing awareness and adoption of resources that will support recovery from bushfire
- Event must target and engage producers in localities affected by bushfire
- Organisers must provide follow-up opportunities post-event to further enhance the information delivered
- Organisers must supply a post-event summary which includes detail of meeting /event agenda, number of attendees
- MLA to be acknowledged as a supporter of the event

MLA received 13 applications for sponsorship funding. The sponsorship program included approval of funding for 9 of these activities, six of which eventuated. One event was cancelled due to COVID, one was postponed until after the funding cut-off date, thus MLA was unable to honour the funding, and the MLA offer of funding was denied for the other activity as it was considered to be insufficient to cover the requirements of the organisers. The six events that were delivered involved a funding contribution of \$13,000 by MLA, and were delivered between 21/2/2020 and 21/6/2021. Total recorded attendees at these six events was 1,576, however it is unknown how many of these attendees were red meat producers. Table 10 provides a summary of the sponsorship events held.

Table 10: Summary of six events supported by MLA sponsorship funding

Event Organiser	Event Description	Date Held	No. Attending	Amount Sponsorship funding provided	M&E Data/Comment
Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Inc. (VIC)	Free community forum with the objective to increase awareness and adoption of resources that will support recovery from bushfire	23/2/2020	170 (expected 150+)	\$2,500	<u>Type of Attendees:</u> Community leaders, government departments/agencies e.g. DEWLP, DHHS, NE CMA, Rotary Club, Lions Club, Salvation Army, counselling services, farmers and other people impacted by fires. <u>M&E Data:</u> No feedback data was collected was from participants.
SheepConnect NSW	A series of 8 free webinars to target and engage producers in localities affected by bushfire to increase awareness and adoption of resources to support recovery from bushfire.	23/3/2020 – 30/6/2020	1313 (expected 800, satisfaction rating of 8.4/10)	\$2,500	We held 12 Back to Business webinars, with input from SCNSW, AWI, MLA, NSW DPI, NSW LLS, NSWFA, and ISC. The attendees heard from a range of speakers about different aspects of recovery from disaster. The webinars were complemented by a podcast series as well. (401 listens). Satisfaction ratings were 8.41/10 across the series of 12 webinars. Media promo: Question 13: If you promoted the event to encourage attendance, please outline the media results. We promoted via social media - on fb and twitter. Twitter posts n=37, impressions 64581, average per post 934 impressions, and an engagement rate of 2.98%.

Event Organiser	Event Description	Date Held	No. Attending	Amount Sponsorship funding provided	M&E Data/Comment
RaynerAg (NSW)	Free field day on local property with a range of speakers to target and engage producers in local area affected by bushfires.	11/12/2020	42 (expected 30-50)	\$2,500	<u>Type of Attendees:</u> Producers <u>M&E Data:</u> Post attendance evaluations reported an average rating of 4.5/5 for each of two pasture sessions and setting livestock targets, average rating of 4/5 for B2B learning, and 3.8/5 for the session on summer livestock health.
Gelantipy District Bushfire Nursing Centre Inc. (VIC)	A monthly community BBQ to offer an opportunity for raising awareness of relevant support services available, whilst also enabling local producers to come together in a relaxed environment and provide mutual support through social interaction	15/3/2021 – 21/6/2021	Between 15 and 25 (expected 10-30)	\$2,000	<u>Type of Attendees:</u> No information available on type of attendees other than producers. <u>M&E Data:</u> No feedback data was reported.
The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NSW)	A free community seminar with a range of speakers on topics including soil health, effective water management, property design, and post fire management	13/5/2021	29 (expected 60-80)	\$2,500	<u>Type of Attendees:</u> Beef and dairy farmers. <u>M&E Data:</u> No quantitative feedback data was reported.
Kempsey Shire Council (NSW)	A free Land Holders Engagement Meeting with the fire affected farmers in the Upper Macleay to discuss fire ecology and weed management after the fire, providing a space for farmers to network with each other and provide information for mental health support services.	21/2/2020	22 (expected 50)	\$1,000	<u>Type of Attendees:</u> Producers <u>M&E Data:</u> No feedback data was collected was from participants.

Regarding the four applications that were not approved for funding, one was submitted by mistake, one was withdrawn by the applicant, and two were declined as they did not fit the program criteria.

Feedback provided during the stakeholder engagement process was that the Event Sponsorship Program was a good idea, however delivery was severely hampered by COVID-19, particularly in Victoria. Stakeholders reported that once restrictions eased and more events were able to run, the perceived need for such events had declined. Figure 30 also indicates that program awareness may not have been high, however given the impact of COVID on event delivery, it is suggested that this was unlikely to have limited opportunities for sponsorship of events.

***Finding:** The event sponsorship program was viewed positively by stakeholders, however delivery of events was severely hampered by COVID 19, especially in Victoria.*

3.4.4 Webinars/Podcasts

A series of 12 B2B webinars and accompanying podcasts were delivered between March and June 2020. These activities were developed and delivered by MLA in collaboration with Australian Wool Innovation (AWI), Integrity Systems Company (ISC) and Sheep Connect NSW. The program was also supported by NSW Department of Primary Industries, NSW Local Land Services, and NSW Farmers.

The webinar content was originally planned for delivery as face-to-face 'Recovery Information Sessions', with workshops scheduled to be held throughout bushfire and drought impacted regions. Face-to-face workshops were held on Kangaroo Island, South Australia and throughout the Hunter, Murray and Riverina regions of New South Wales, however due to COVID-19, the ability to hold face-to-face meetings was reviewed, with the decision made to replace the face-to-face workshops with online webinars from late March through to June 2020.

The webinars were presented by a range of industry experts and provided practical advice around farm production and management systems, accessing available financial support, identifying opportunities to drive livestock operations, maintaining the integrity of Australia's red meat and wool industries, accessing government services and supporting mental health needs. The webinars were scheduled at 1pm every Tuesday, and were freely available to all livestock producers, service providers and interested members from the general public.

The webinar series was complemented by a series of podcasts with content supplementing webinar topics and information. A summary of the B2B webinar and podcast topics, speakers and participation numbers is provided in Appendix D.

A total of 1,334 registrations were recorded across the 12 webinars representing 684 individuals:

- 64.2% of participants registered for 1 webinar
- 35.8% of participants registered for 2 or more webinars
- 20.3% of participants registered for 3 or more webinars.

Evaluation data was collected from webinar participants after each event, with 323 feedback surveys completed. The results from these surveys are summarised in an MLA report³, the key findings of which are provided below:

- Participants believed that session topics were interesting and relevant
- Participants were highly satisfied with the session with most scores between 8-10
- Most participants across all topics said they learnt something new and would be doing something different as a result, or that the material reinforced what they were already doing.

A summary of the results from three of the key evaluation questions is provided in Figures 31 to 33.

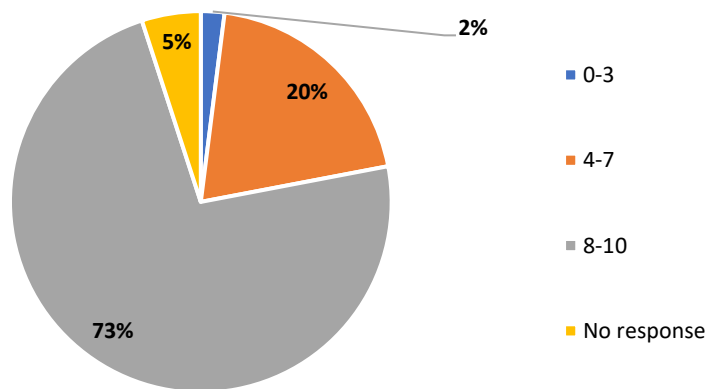


Figure 31: Participant responses to 'overall satisfaction' with the webinar

Figure 31 indicates that just under three-quarters of participants rated their overall satisfaction with the webinar at between 80 and 100%, with only 2% of participants rating their satisfaction at 30% or below.

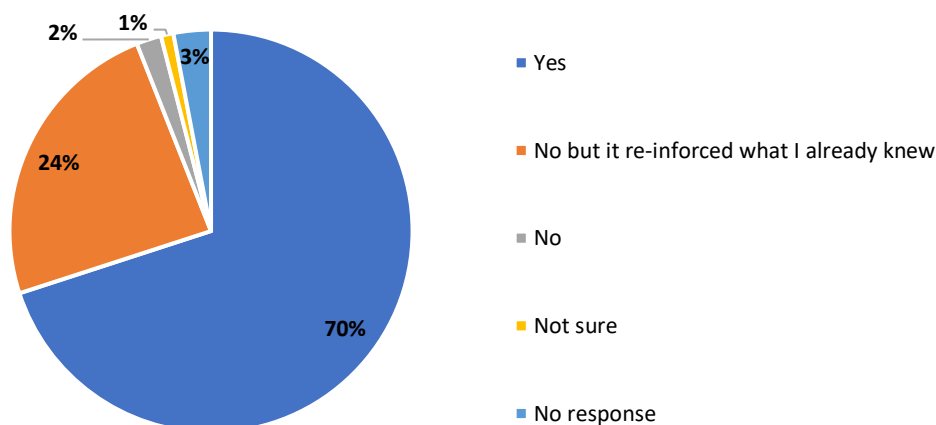


Figure 32: Participant responses to 'Did you learn something new' from the webinar

³ 'Back to Business' Webinar Report 26 June 2020 (MLA)

The results in Figure 32 indicate that the vast majority of respondents learnt something new as a result of attending the webinar, or at the very least the webinar had reinforced what they already knew.

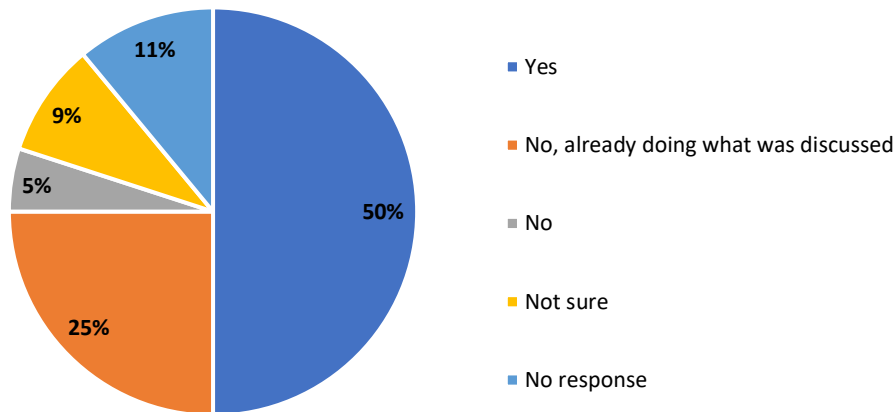


Figure 33: Participant responses to 'Will you be making any changes to your business' as a result of the webinar

Although 50% of respondents reported that they would make a change to their business (Figure 33), many of the comments around this response indicated that specific actions were only identified by a portion of these participants, with many stating they were going to 'look into things', which may or may not result in the producer actually doing anything differently.

***Finding:** Survey feedback collected by MLA from participants indicates that the webinars were well received and useful for the majority of survey respondents, with 73% reporting an overall satisfaction rating of between 80 and 100%.*

Feedback from producers interviewed for the current review indicates that 26% were aware of the B2B webinars and 16% were aware of the podcasts (Figure 34).

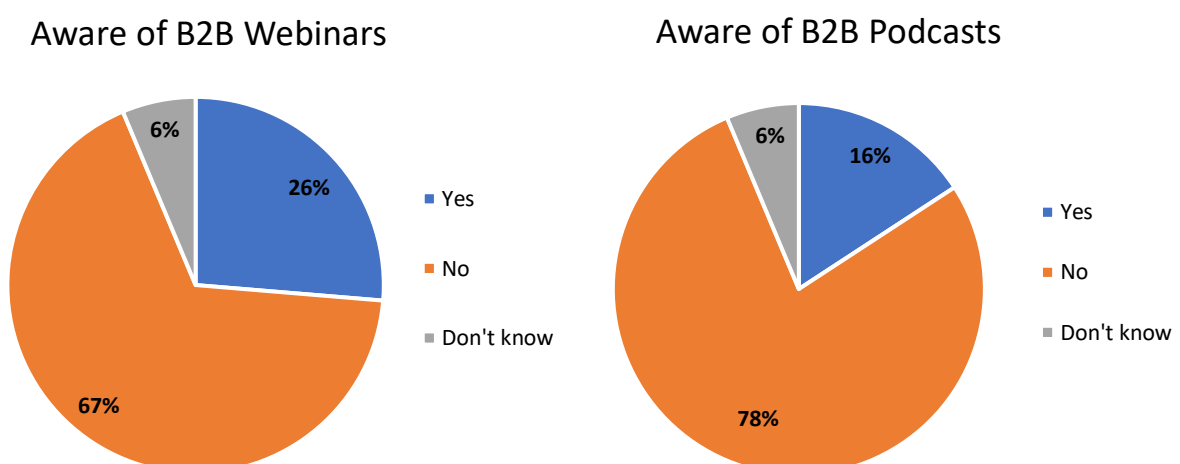


Figure 34: Awareness of B2B webinars and podcasts among producer participants interviewed

Of those producers who were aware of the webinars, 68% had participated in at least one webinar. This represents a participation rate of 18% across all producers surveyed. Of those producers who

were aware of the podcasts, 27% had listened to at least one podcast, representing a participation rate of 4% across all producers surveyed.

Finding: Awareness of the B2B webinars and podcasts among producer participants surveyed for the current review was 26% and 16% respectively. Participation rates in these two activities among producers surveyed was 18% for the webinars and 4% for the podcasts, indicating that the webinars were considerably more popular among these producers than the podcasts.

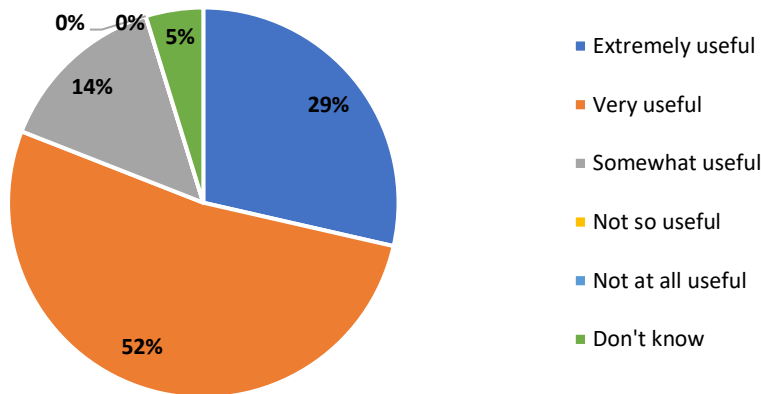


Figure 35: Usefulness of B2B webinars and podcasts among producer participants interviewed (n=19)

Combined feedback on perceived usefulness of both the webinars and the podcasts showed that the vast majority of those producers who did participate in either or both of these activities perceived them to be either 'extremely' or 'very' useful (Figure 35).

Finding: Producer survey feedback from this review indicates that the vast majority of producers who participated in either or both the B2B webinars and podcasts perceived them to be either 'extremely' or 'very' useful in supporting their recovery from the bushfires.

Those producers who were aware of either or both of these activities but did not participate mainly commented that they were too stressed or busy to participate or did not have good internet/phone reception at the time. One producer who was not aware commented: "I wish I had been aware of the podcasts and webinars, I would have liked to have listened to them."

Finding: The main reasons why producers who were aware of the B2B webinars and podcasts but did not participate were that they were too stressed or busy or did not have good internet/phone reception at the time.

The overall conclusion is that the webinars and podcasts were useful for those producers who engaged with them in supporting their recovery from the bushfires. However, many producers were unaware of these two activities, which was likely due in part at least to them not registering having seen promotional material given their high stress levels post fire, particularly among those producers most impacted by the fires.

As noted with previous commentary around marketing and communication to this type of target audience, there are likely to be opportunities for increasing producer awareness by developing a comprehensive marketing and promotion campaign that acknowledges and considers the emotional state that many of the target audience are experiencing after the fires.

***Finding:** There are opportunities to increase producers' awareness and uptake of webinars and podcasts in future through comprehensive marketing and communication activities that acknowledge and consider the emotional trauma that many of the target audience are likely to be experiencing.*

In terms of future activities, the MLA webinar report identified the following feedback from participants:

- Continue to consider future events not only in webinar format but also to reconsider workshops when there is the option to host these as face-to-face events.
- Requests for additional webinars to be held as an extension to the completed 12 webinars. Topics or themes suggested for additional webinars included:
 - Options for transitioning to regenerative livestock production
 - Available grants and subsidies and where to find information
 - Lifetime ewe management
 - Tropical pastures
 - Weed control
 - Pestivirus
 - Quarantine recommendations for introduced sheep
 - Electronic NVDs
 - Financial literacy, spreadsheet templates and other resources
 - Livestock marketing and cattle fertility
 - What makes a 'top 25% producer'
 - Benchmarking methodology and business and farm planning
 - Disaster management plans
 - Managing breeding and lambing ewes under regenerative pasture management
 - How to better manage on farm resources in the long-term: soil, water, vegetation
 - Culling and flock building in pastoral rangelands without the ability to grow or buy in fodder
 - Culling for lack of production and not lack of management, and
 - Animal health, breeding and production and strategies on targeting specific markets.
- Presentations that include practical examples or case studies to accompany technical information
- Provide ready to use templates to accompany presentations where available e.g. spreadsheets for cost of production.
- Continue providing material in different formats. Participants found the downloadable handouts as well as the recordings and podcasts a useful toolkit of materials across the range of subjects.

- Requests for more in-depth seminars on subtopics with more detailed information

Producer feedback from the current review did not provide any suggestions for future webinar topics as producers commented that they could not remember exactly what topics were covered in the B2B webinars. However, based on the feedback provided to other survey questions, key areas of producer concern during fire recovery were:

- Whether to restock quickly via purchasing or more slowly via breeding, or a combination of both.
- Pasture recovery – when to resow and when to wait to assess level of recovery
- Weed management – appearance of new weeds on farm which had not previously been observed pre-fire.
- Livestock nutrition/ration requirements – with limited or no pasture available
- Animal health issues with livestock impacted by fires e.g. burnt teats on breeders
- Controlling erosion
- Revegetation and fencing of waterways

Finding: Key types of information sought by producers interviewed immediately after the fires which could be included in future post disaster recovery workshops, webinars and/or podcasts included restocking strategies (when and how), pasture recovery (resow or wait), management of weeds, impact of fires on soil health, livestock nutrition/ration development and animal health issues.

3.4.5 MLA Website

The MLA website provided various resources for producers recovering from the bushfires. It was the portal for the B2B webinar series and podcasts and also provided access to register for the B2B one-on-one consultant sessions and to apply for the event sponsorship program.

There were resources available for preparing for bushfires in addition to bushfire recovery, including support for mental health. Links were provided to a range of mental health services and resources, including the RFCS, Lifeline, and Beyond Blue. Links were also provided to the various state and territories for more localised resources. Specific information on livestock health and welfare, animal nutrition and livestock transport and agistment was also available.

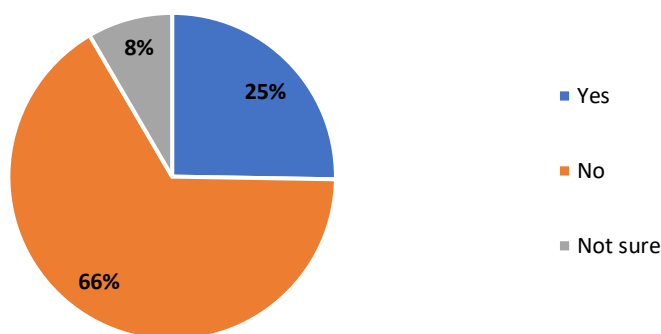


Figure 36: Proportion of producers interviewed who used the MLA website to find information to support their recovery from the bushfires

Figure 36 reveals a quarter of the producers interviewed could recall having used the MLA website for information to support their recovery from the bushfires, while a further 8% were unsure/could not recall. The most commonly reported use of the website was for information around livestock nutrition/ration development.

***Finding:** A quarter of the B2B participants interviewed used the MLA website to find information to support their recovery from the bushfires. The most common use involved information around livestock nutrition/ration development.*

3.5 Impact Assessment

This section reports on the results of a triple bottom line impact assessment of the one-on-one component of the B2B program. Insufficient data was available from the other B2B program offerings i.e. MLA website, event sponsorship program and the webinar/podcast series, for inclusion in the impact assessment.

3.5.1 Overview

The following table provides a summary of the review findings in relation to benefits to producers, consultants and MLA provided by the B2B program.

Table 11: SWOT analysis of B2B program impact assessment

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating producers valued the availability of the program and appreciated the support provided by MLA in making the program available. • The program created goodwill for MLA among industry stakeholders. • Many producers made important practice changes that facilitated a faster recovery from the bushfires and/or supported improvement of long-term business productivity and profitability. • The program played an important role in supporting the mental health of participating producers during their recovery from the fires. • The program provided an opportunity for producers who had not previously engaged with a farm consultant to assess the value of using a consultant without the financial risk in paying for one. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program impact for some individual producers was reduced by choice of consultant, not receiving enough sessions, and/or not using a different consultant for one or more sessions (i.e. technical consultants)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program supported many producers to build stronger networks among service providers to support their recovery from the bushfires but also their longer-term business operations. The program supported producers to increase business resilience and preparedness for future natural disasters. 	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver the B2B program to support red meat producers to recover from future disasters Improve benefits to individual producers by improved facilitation of consultant choice and producer awareness of options available to them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of available funds to support future marketing and delivery of the B2B program

The following table provides a summary of the findings of the triple bottom line impact assessment of the one-on-one consultant sessions.

Table 12: Summary of key findings from the B2B triple bottom line impact assessment

Economic Impacts
<p>The economic benefits to producers involved four outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A reduction in time required to fully recover to pre-fire production levels - An increase in long term business profit above pre-fire levels - A saving in consultant fees where the producer would have engaged with a consultant anyway if B2B had not been available - Grant funding received that would not otherwise have been received without B2B <p>The average net benefit for those producers who received an economic benefit as a result of participating in the B2B one-on-one sessions was estimated at \$6.21 per hectare across 52,284 hectares.</p>
Animal Wellbeing & Environmental/Sustainability Benefits
<p>The review identified various animal wellbeing and environmental/sustainability benefits arising from the B2B program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased preparedness for future natural disasters, including droughts, floods and fires - Improvements in a range of on farm environmental issues including weed control, erosion, ground cover and biodiversity - Increased business resilience - Improved animal wellbeing after the fires

Human Resources: Capability and Capacity Impacts
<p>The human resource/capability and capacity benefits arising from producer participation in the B2B program included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive impact on the mental health of producers during their recovery from the bushfires - Increased support networks for producers for future business operations - Increased use of consultants among producers - Upskilling of producers through involvement in the program in addition to participation in training programs and producer groups facilitated by their B2B consultant - Support provided to transition the business to the next generation through succession planning outcomes
Other Non-Producer Benefits
<p>Other key benefits not directly received by producer participants included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased goodwill toward and reputation of MLA among producers, consultants and other industry stakeholders engaged - Upskilling of consultants in providing services to producers recovering from a bushfire - Increased profile and clientele for participating consultants

3.5.2 Economic Impact

Producer interviews revealed that of those producers who have implemented, or plan to implement their action plan, either in part or in full, 81% reported benefits that could be measured in economic terms. The remaining 19% of producers reported benefits that were either non-economic or could not be measured in economic terms, or reported no expected benefits from implementing their plan due to unsuccessful bushfire recovery loan applications completed by their B2B consultant (Figure 37).

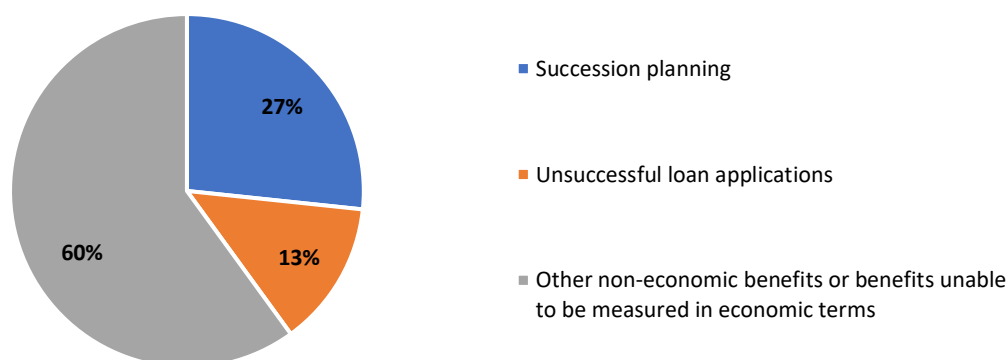


Figure 37: Proportion of producers with no measurable benefits due to implementation of action plan (n=15)

Finding: Eighty-one percent of producers who have implemented, or plan to implement their B2B action plan, either in part or in full, reported actual or expected benefits that could be measured in economic terms.

The types of ‘other’ non-economic benefits or benefits that were unable to be measured in economic terms included:

- Assistance with cattle yard design to improve animal and handler safety
- Completing outstanding tax returns
- Locating a block to share-farm (dairying) and organising the lease contract
- Putting together a proposal to purchase the family farm
- Setting up a farm mapping software system
- Advice on fencing off and revegetating waterways to protect them
- Record keeping systems
- Assistance with logistics to sell a very large volume of cattle quickly (identifying buyers) and identifying feed sources for purchase

There were other producers who also received non-economic benefits as a result of implementing their action plans, but these were in addition to measurable economic benefits. These non-economic benefits will be further identified and discussed in sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.4.

Of those producers who did identify an economic benefit to their business as a result of implementing their action plan, 22% reported a short-term benefit relating to support provided to recover to pre-fire production levels, and 78% reported an actual and/or expected increase in long term profitability of the business. The types of practice changes producers made to increase long term business profit are summarised in Figure 38. The most common changes made related to pasture improvement, grazing management and/or soil health, with 78% of producers making changes in these areas.

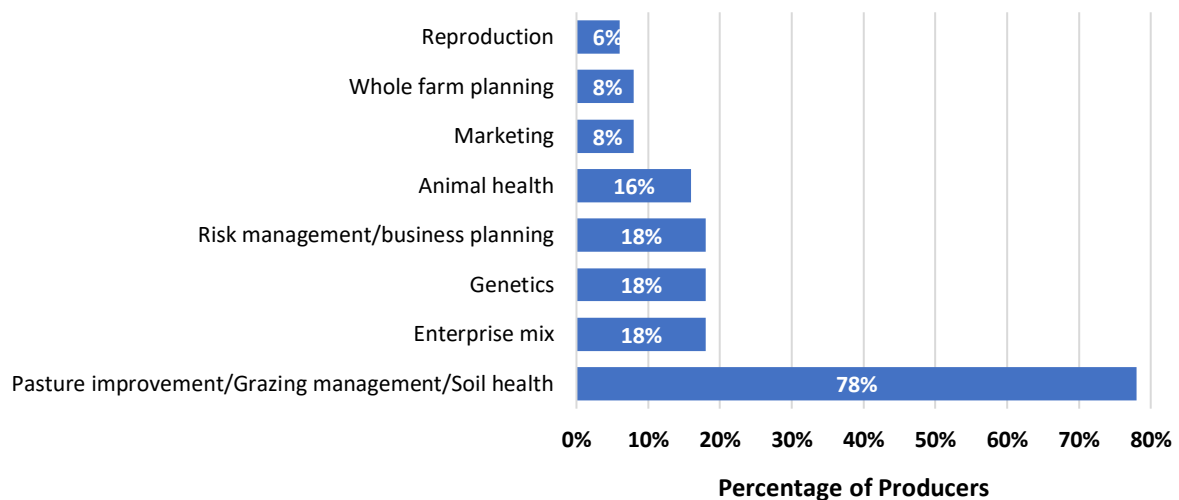


Figure 38: The types of practice changes made by producers to increase long term profitability (Note some producers made multiple changes thus total does not add to 100%)

Finding: Twenty-two percent of producers who identified an actual or expected economic benefit from implementing their action plan reported a short-term benefit relating to support provided to recover to pre-fire production levels, and 78% reported an actual and/or expected increase in long term profitability.

The net benefit of these impacts was calculated as the difference between the annual benefits to each producer due to implementing their action plan and the annual benefits they would still have received without the B2B program (the counterfactual scenario).

The Counterfactual Scenario

The counterfactual scenario was estimated by asking producers if they would still have made the same changes without participating in the B2B program, and if so, would it have been at the same time or later, and did they think the benefits would have been the same.

For the 22% of producers who reported support in terms of short-term fire recovery, 79% reported that the B2B program had reduced the time it would otherwise have taken to get back to pre-fire level production levels. The reduced time estimated by producers ranged from 2 months to 2 years.

For those producers who reported benefits in terms of actual or expected improvements in business profitability over the longer term, Figure 39 illustrates that 60% reported that they 'would have' (27%) or 'probably would have' (33%) made the same changes anyway if they had not participated in the B2B program. Of these producers, 14% reported that they would have made these changes at the same time and received the same benefits without the B2B program, with the other 86% of these producers reporting that they would have made the changes later and/or received less benefits from making those changes without the advice and support of their B2B consultant/s.

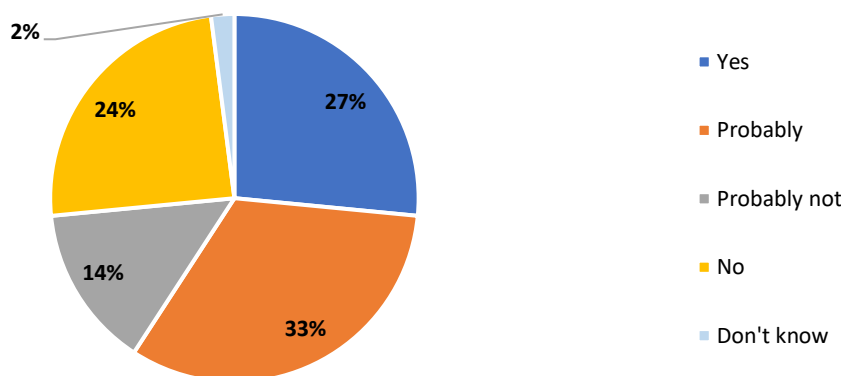


Figure 39: Degree of likelihood that producers would still have made the same changes to improve long term farm profit if they had not participated in the B2B program

The benefits of expected changes made were adjusted accordingly for the counterfactual scenario with the following discounts to benefits applied based on the likelihood of the same changes being made at the same time with the same level of benefits in the counterfactual scenario:

- 'Yes' = 100% discount
- 'Probably' = 75% discount
- 'Don't know' = 50% discount
- 'Probably not' = 25% discount

A summary of these key variables is provided in Figure 40.

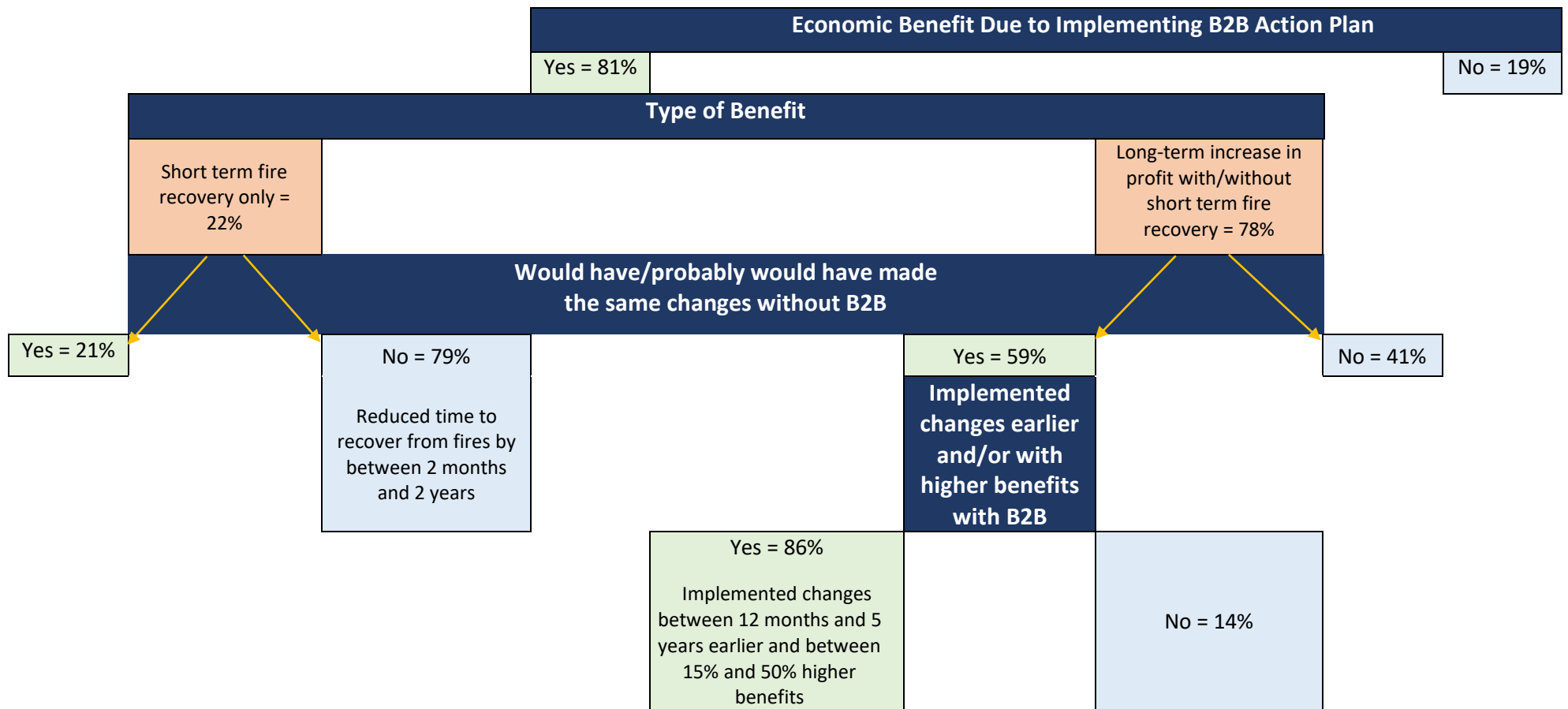


Figure 40: Summary of key impact variables for with and without B2B participation for producers who implemented their action plan

Producers were also asked if they thought they would still have employed a consultant to provide the same kind of services that their B2B consultant/s provided if they had not participated in the program. Figure 41 reveals that 29% of producers reported that they would have (23%) or probably would have (6%) still employed a consultant for the same kind of advice after the fires.

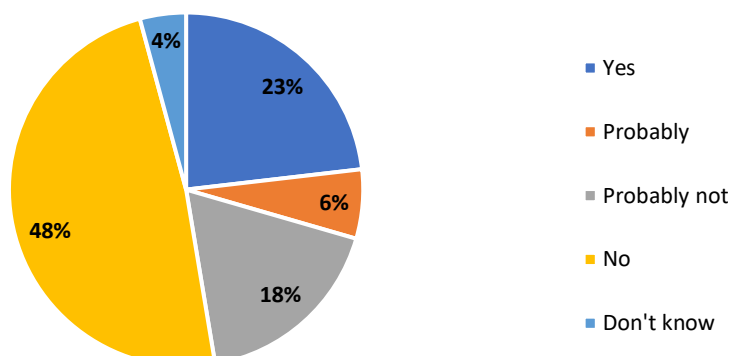


Figure 41: Degree of likelihood that participants surveyed would have employed a consultant to provide the same kind of advice if they had not participated in the B2B program

Finding: Twenty-nine percent of producers interviewed reported that they would have, or probably would have still employed a consultant to provide the same kind of service provided by their B2B consultant/s if they had not participated in the program.

The following benefits were applied for participants who would have or may have still employed a consultant in the counterfactual scenario as a cost saved:

- 'Yes': The full cost of their B2B consultant/s saved
- 'Probably': Seventy-five percent of the cost of their B2B consultant/s saved
- 'Don't know': Fifty percent of the cost of their B2B consultant/s saved
- 'Probably not': Twenty-five percent of the cost of their B2B consultant/s saved

Where the cost of the B2B was available from the information provided to the reviewers, exact costs were used, however this data was not available for all states, thus an average consultant cost of \$1,500 per day was used in these cases.

The difference between the annual net benefit for the 'with B2B' and 'without B2B' scenarios as an annuity per hectare is provided in Table 13 for each state, along with the weighted average net benefit of \$6.21 per hectare after accounting for the proportion of hectares impacted in each state.

Table 13: Average net benefit per state and overall weighted average net benefit

State	Av. Net Benefit (\$/Ha)	% Of total Ha Impacted
NSW	\$8.29	50 %
SA	\$3.71	31 %
VIC	\$8.07	11 %
WA/TAS	\$0.19	8 %
Weighted Average Net Benefit	\$6.21	

Finding: The average net benefit for those producers who received an economic benefit as a result of participating in the B2B one-on-one sessions was \$6.21 per hectare.

Benefits per hectare were highest in NSW, closely followed by Victoria, with average benefits to SA producers much lower. This lower level of benefit for SA is largely due to a higher proportion of producers in that state that only received economic benefits as costs saved on consultant fees, as opposed to benefits associated with fire recovery and/or increased business profit over the long term. This was in turn largely due to a lower proportion of producers in SA who implemented their action plans, as discussed further in the following section.

Sensitivity Analysis

A sensitivity analysis was completed to assess variation in the impact per hectare to changes in the discount rate (DR) used and the estimated level of additional future profit due to increased long-term profit and reduced recovery time. The results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Sensitivity analysis results

Variation	Benefit per Ha
Baseline (5% DR)	\$6.21
7% DR	\$6.79
3% DR	\$5.67
20% increase in future expected profit (5% DR)	\$7.37
20% decrease in future expected profit (5% DR)	\$5.09

Adoption

Figure 42 provides a summary of the proportion of producers interviewed in each state and in total who have either implemented or intend to implement their B2B action plan in full, have implemented or intend to implement their action plan in part only, or have not and do not intend to implement their B2B action plan.

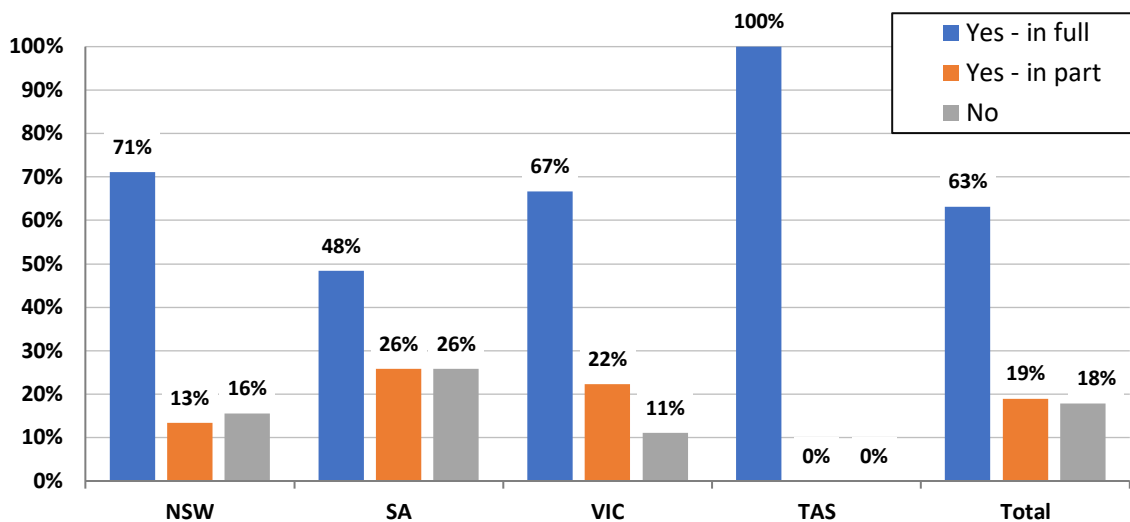


Figure 42: Proportion of producer participants interviewed who have implemented or intend to implement their action in full or in part only, or not at all

The results indicate that overall, 82% of producers have already or intend to implement all or part of their B2B action plan, with 18% not intending to implement the plan. A greater proportion of producers in SA do not intend to implement their action plan (26%) compared to producers in NSW (16%) and Victoria (11%). Survey results indicate that the main reason for this higher rate in SA was that several consultants in that state had quite specific agendas and approaches to farming that did not align well with the needs of some producers.

Finding: Eighty-two percent of producers interviewed have implemented or intend to implement their B2B action plan, either in part or in full, with 18% not intending to implement their plan. A greater proportion of producers in SA do not intend to implement their action plan (26%) compared to producers in NSW (16%) and Victoria (11%). Survey results indicate that the main reason for this higher rate in SA was that several consultants in that state had quite specific agendas and approaches to farming that did not align well with the needs of some producers.

Overall, the key reasons for not implementing action plans included:

- There was nothing new to implement compared to what the producers were already doing
- The advice did not align with what producers needed
- Financial, physical and/or emotional constraints to making changes
- Producers did not agree with the advice
- Producers were satisfied with what they were already doing
- Lack of understanding of the advice
- Considered too risky to implement
- Lack of sufficient follow-up from consultant to enable implementation
- Lack of support from family members to implement changes

Example quotes from producers who do not intend to implement their action plan are provided below:

There was nothing new I wanted to do that was advised, and it confirmed what I was already doing was fine.

I didn't agree with the advice.

Don't intend to implement - it wasn't useful. It didn't make sense to me, it was too risky, and it didn't align with what I needed or what I could physically or financially achieve.

I was relying on my relatives to implement it and that didn't happen.

It was useless. It wasn't what I needed. It may have been better with a different consultant.

We didn't get what we needed and what we were promised. If 'consultant' had provided more we would have had benefits for sure but the consultant just didn't deliver on what they said they would so we weren't able to progress it.

It was too broad brush and we got side-tracked on succession planning, so we decided to just rebuild the farm as best we could.

They came and drove around with me and said there wasn't much more I could be doing.

It wasn't what I wanted to do and I wasn't ready for it emotionally to make those kinds of changes.

Producer Participant Quotes

After accounting for these producers, the proportion of producers interviewed who implemented or plan to implement their action plan either in part or in full who also received or expect to receive benefits that could be measured in economic terms is presented by state in Table 15. Table 15 also presents the average farm size for these producers.

Table 15: Percentage of producers interviewed who implemented or intend to implement their action plan, either in full or in part, who received or expect to receive benefits that can be measured in economic terms

State	% of Producers	Farm Area (Ha)
NSW	71%	530
SA	58%	629
VIC	72%	381
TAS	0%	3,000
Average	66%	531

There was also a small number of producers who did not implement their action plan or did not receive or do not expect to receive benefits that can be measured in economic terms due to implementation of their action plan, but who did receive an economic benefit in saved costs they would otherwise have spent on a consultant if B2B had not been available. These producers have also been included in the adoption units for this impact assessment.

To calculate the adoption units for those producers who were not interviewed, the adoption rates for each state for producers who did benefit were multiplied by the total number of producer participants who were not interviewed, then total hectares was calculated by combining the average farm sizes for both those producers interviewed and for those producers who were not interviewed. An overall summary of the key data inputs for calculating adoption units for the B2B program are provided in Table 16.

Table 16: Key values used for calculating adoption units

Variable	Value
Number of B2B producer participants	132
% Of participants who received an economic benefit	73%
Average number of hectares for farms receiving an economic benefit (Ha)	665
Attribution rate of implementation to B2B	81%
Dis-adoption rate commencing after 10 years	5%

A 5% decline in adoption per year was applied after 10 years to account for producers moving out of the industry or adopting new technology. The attribution rate in Table 17 represents producer estimates of the proportion of information/skills they needed to implement their action plan that came directly from B2B as opposed to support and information provided by other sources.

Table 17: Estimated number of units (ha) adopted per year

Year	# Ha
2019/20	52,284
2020/21	52,284
2021/22	52,284
2022/23	52,284
2023/24	52,284
2024/25	52,284
2025/26	52,284
2026/27	52,284
2027/28	52,284
2028/29	52,284
2029/30	49,670
2030/31	47,186
2031/32	44,827

2032/33	42,586
2033/34	40,456
2034/35	38,433
2035/36	36,512
2036/37	34,686
2037/38	32,952
2038/39	31,304
2039/40	29,739
2040/41	28,252
2041/42	26,839
2042/43	25,498
2043/44	24,223
2044/45	23,012

In addition to expected dollar costs and benefits associated with practice change implementation, producers were also asked to identify any environmental, animal wellbeing and management implications associated with implementing their action plan. These are presented in the following two sections.

3.5.3 Human Resources: Capacity and Capability Impacts

The review found that the B2B program increased the capacity and capability of producers to not only recover from the impacts of the bushfire, but also to manage and improve their businesses into the future. Key areas of benefit were:

- Improved mental health
- Increased skills, knowledge and confidence
- Increased understanding of their situation after the fires
- Increased use of consultants
- Increasing producer networks

The program also had a positive impact on occupational health and safety for 20% of producers who implemented their action plan.

Mental Health

One of the recommended activities for consultants to focus on during sessions was to assist producers to identify and access mental health support services, however producer feedback during the phone interview process indicates that this issue was not specifically raised to any great extent. Over half of producers interviewed reported that the issue of mental health was not raised by their consultant, with a further 21% being unable to recall whether it was raised or not (Figure 43). Twenty-two percent of producers recalled that it was raised and addressed to varying degrees.

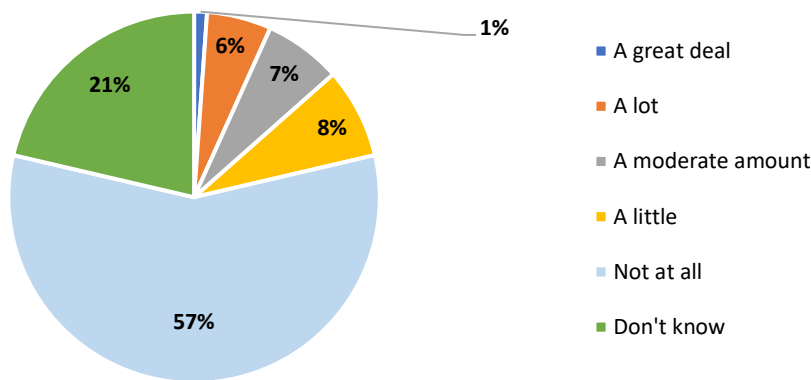


Figure 43: Degree to which producers felt that they were offered or made aware of access to mental health support services through the B2B program

Many producers also commented that they were already aware of what mental health support services were available through other sources, such as the RFCS, local community bushfire recovery centres/hubs, state departments of agriculture/LLS and local shires, and/or that they already had the support they needed. Other producers reported that they did not need mental health support at the time.

While it appears that the issue of mental health was only actively raised by consultants to a limited degree, the B2B program indirectly impacted positively on producer mental health by proving support and reducing producer stress levels.

Across all producers interviewed, two-thirds reported that they felt a 'great deal' (40%) or 'a lot' (27%) more supported in their recovery from the bushfires as a result of participating in the B2B program (Figure 44).

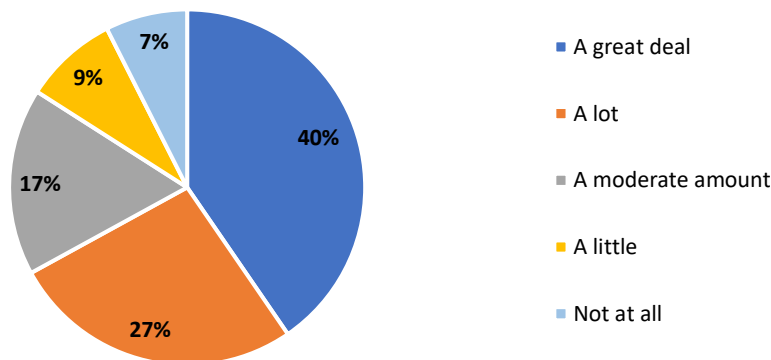


Figure 44: Degree to which producers felt more supported in their recovery from the bushfires as a result of participating in the B2B program

Of the 16% of producers who reported only feeling 'a little' more supported or 'not supported at all' as a result of participating in the B2B program, the reasons provided were either that the services provided through the program did not relate to fire recovery, that they would have still sought the same help and/or implemented the same things anyway, or that the consultant provided no support at all, and in one case actually increased the stress levels of the producer.

Figure 45 illustrates that of the producers who implemented their B2B action plan (either in part or in full), 86% reported that implementing their plan had either a high (47%), medium (23%) or low (16%) positive impact on their stress levels (i.e. reduced their stress levels).

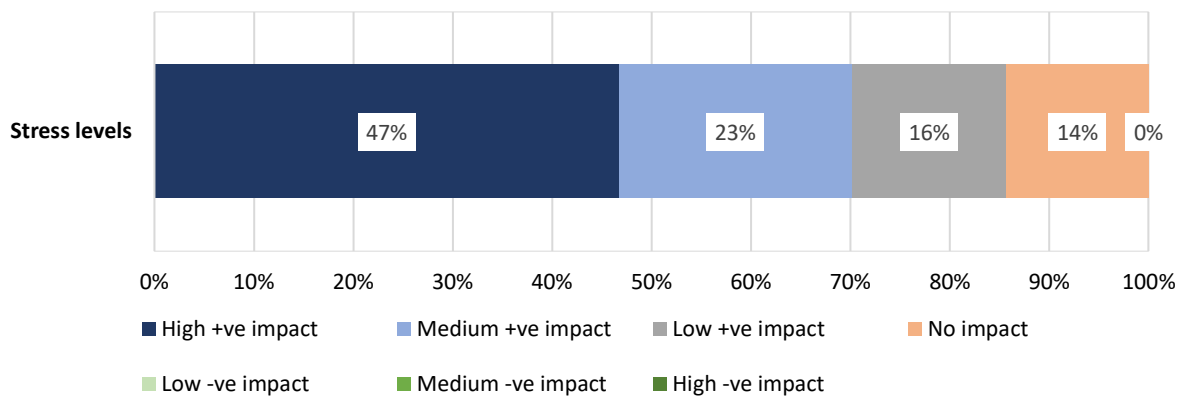


Figure 45: Impact of implementing the B2B action plan on producer stress levels ranging from high positive (+ve) impact through to high negative (-ve) impact (n=78)

In many cases, producers commented that they probably would have done the same things recommended by the consultant anyway, either later on or at the same time, but that the consultant support through making those changes made it much easier for them emotionally to work through their recovery.

Some of the smaller business owners also commented on the emotional stress caused by them not being eligible for the \$75,000 Special Disaster Grant due to their size and relative proportion of income off-farm, and how being able to access help through the B2B program had a positive impact on their mental health.

Example producer quotes around the impact of the program on their mental health are provided below:

It certainly helped my mental health having someone objective in terms of doing the analysis for the mammoth task in front of you. It really helped to reduce my stress levels which improved my mental health.

It helped not only from a financial perspective but mainly from an emotional one. I'm on my own and I was really stressed about what I should do, so just having someone else to talk through the options was a massive relief emotionally.

The grants and help etc was great, but mental health support was a more important need for me. Because we couldn't get any of the grants and I saw everyone else around me getting them while I was battling away with the bum out of my pants and very little help, that's what tipped me over with my mental health. So I appreciate that this program was made available to us even though we are only relatively small producers.

To tell you the truth, I was in a very bad way at the time with my mental health, but I didn't let on to 'consultant', so they probably didn't notice. The help they gave me did help with my mental health though because they helped me see that there was light at the end of the tunnel with my farm.

It was just great to have someone approach me that was willing to walk beside me through that initial recovery period. I didn't do anything differently I don't think, but I talked through what I thought with 'consultant' and just to have someone else with you on the journey was really helpful, I found it to be very valuable.

We were quite isolated socially, so it was actually really good to have someone come for a cuppa to spill my guts and debrief. I realise MLA might say that's not what they want to be paying for, but it was an important part of being in the right head space to be able to make decisions about the future.

Every time 'consultant' left it was a massive weight off our shoulders, we felt more in control. 'Consultant' gave us a new optimism that it was going to be possible to get through this and it was going to be OK so you had hope.

I got some proper sound advice which gave me some hope. It picked me up and gave me hope that there was a brighter future and that I wasn't alone because 'consultant' was the first person I had any help from. It was a very, very difficult time, and 'consultant' provided some light.

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *The B2B program played an important role in supporting the mental health of participating producers during their recovery from the fires.*

Increased Skills, Knowledge and Confidence

Survey feedback indicates that the program assisted producers to increase their skills, knowledge and confidence to make the required decisions to recover from the bushfires and also to improve the long-term profitability of the business.

Figure 46 illustrates that participating in the B2B program and implementing the action plan, either in part or in full, resulted in an increase in skills and knowledge for 93% of those producers surveyed, and an increase in confidence for 92% of those producers. Of particular note is that just under half of these producers reported that implementing their action plan had a high positive impact on their confidence, which is likely also to have contributed to reducing stress levels and improving mental health among these producers.

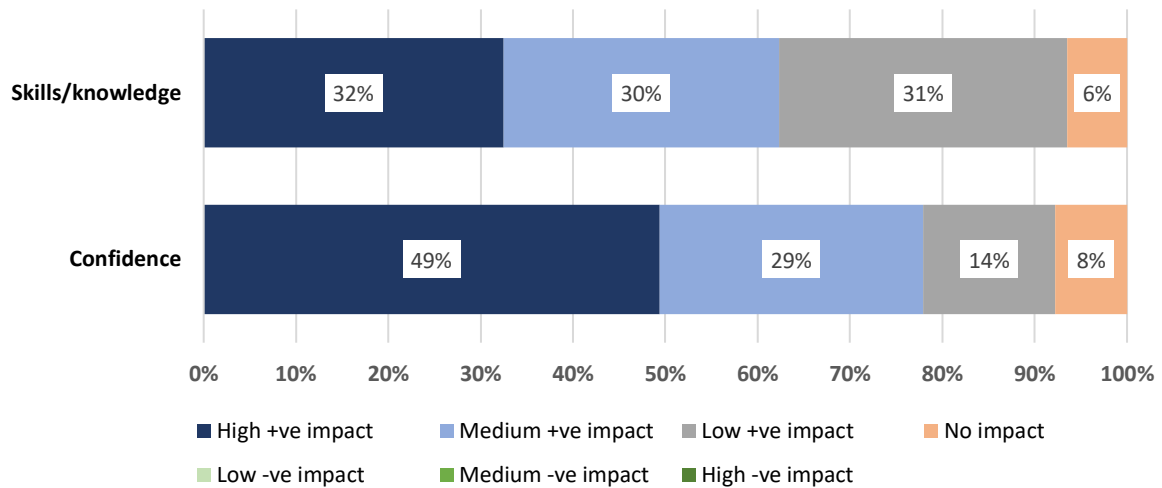


Figure 46: Impact of implementing the B2B action plan on producer skills, knowledge and confidence levels ranging from high positive (+ve) impact through to high negative (-ve) impact (n=78)

Many producers have continued to build their skills, knowledge and confidence over time since participating in the B2B program. Twenty-eight percent of producers have since joined a producer group and/or participated in MLA training programs/information sessions (Figure 47). A further 15% of producers have joined a group and/or participated in training programs/information sessions but were unsure if they were funded by MLA or not. Producers cited difficulties with internet access, poor computer skills, a lack of awareness, already involved in a producer group, a lack of time, no longer farming or a lack of interest as reasons for not joining producer groups or participating in training activities/information sessions.

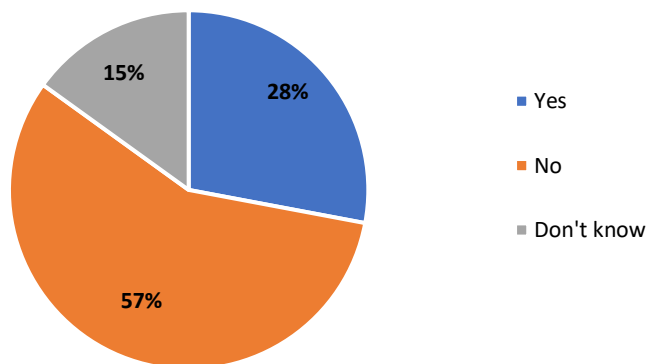


Figure 47: Proportion of producer participants interviewed who have joined a producer group and/or participated in MLA training programs/information sessions since participating in the B2B program

Of the 28% of producers who had joined a group and/or participated in MLA training programs/information sessions, 30% reported that they would not otherwise have participated in these activities if they had not previously participated in the B2B program. The producer groups identified mainly included BetterBeef groups, Landcare groups, and private producer groups run by the B2B consultants. In addition to MLA training programs and courses, some producers also identified other training they had undertaken as a direct result of participating in the B2B program.

Example producer quotes around increased skills, knowledge and confidence as a result of participating in the B2B program are provided below:

We were ahead of the game because a lot of the courses offered since the fires, we had already got involved with or had found that information out earlier through the B2B program, so I feel like our involvement gave us a head start over other farmers in their recovery.

'Consultant' helped by inviting me to a pasture principles workshop that helped with rotational grazing. There was budgeting, including feed budgeting, in that course.

Whether the bushfire had happened or not it helped put the business on a more commercially viable basis, rather than just doing what we've previously always done without thinking, we're now asking ourselves, is this the best thing to do it?

'Consultant' made me aware of how much I don't know which was a really good thing and off the back of that I went and did Prograze and a grazing profit course with RCS and also a marketing course. Having templates and support to do things in a more businesslike manner was really beneficial. They helped us get back in control rather than us being reactive. I just feel the whole thing sharpened me up and gave me direction.

We now have better financial management skills, relevant for recovery, that we can apply in the next natural disaster.

I think that 'consultant' made me realise how much I didn't know, and as a result I went and did quite a lot of training and now I feel so much more in control and confident in decision making, rather than looking over the fence and seeing that my neighbours are doing something so that's what I should do.

It gave us confidence for the planned change of direction – that it was the right thing to do in our circumstances at a time when we were in a bit of emotional turmoil.

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *The program assisted the vast majority of producers surveyed to increase their skills, knowledge and confidence to make the required decisions to recover from the bushfires and also to improve the long-term profitability of the business.*

Increased Understanding of the Situation After the Fires

The review found that the B2B program assisted to increase the capability of 89% of producers surveyed to better understand their situation after the fires. Figure 48 reveals that the program assisted just under half of all producers surveyed to better understand their situation after the fires either 'a great deal' (29%) or 'a lot' (19%). In particular, many producers mentioned the word 'clarity' in terms of how the program had assisted them to move forward after the bushfires.

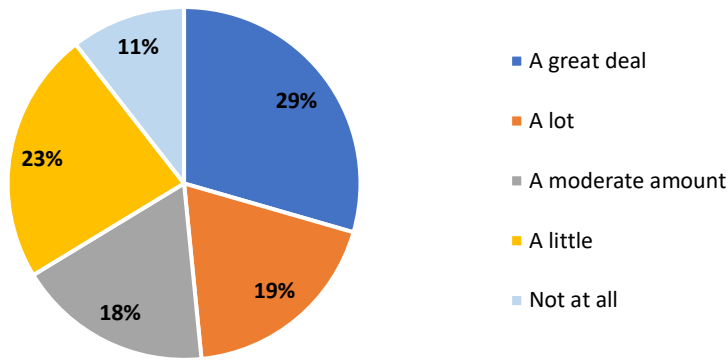


Figure 48: Degree to which participation in the B2B program increased producer capability to understand their situation after the fires

Example quotes are provided below:

It gave us the clarity we needed from someone removed from the situation so we could then just get on with it.

The benefit was really having someone to talk through what I was doing and to walk through the initial recovery process with me - it gave me clarity and confidence as my head was in a spin.

It allowed us to talk things through with 'consultant', and in doing so to take a step back in order to take a step forward toward recovery.

We got clarity on where we were at and what options were available to us, then looked at what we could afford financially and what we could learn.

Producer Participant Quotes

The most common reason provided by those producers who reported that the program had not increased their understanding of their situation after the fires at all was that the services provided did not relate to fire recovery.

Finding: *The B2B program assisted to increase the capability of 89% of producers surveyed to better understand their situation after the fires.*

Increased Use of Consultants

The B2B program has increased the capacity and capability of some producers via their ongoing use of their consultant after the program finished.

Figure 49 illustrates that 44% of the B2B producers interviewed had never used a consultant prior to the B2B program. Of those producers who had, a quarter had previously used (15%) or were already using (10%) the same consultant they used for B2B. The remaining 31% of producers had previously used (25%) or were already using (6%) a different consultant to that used for B2B.

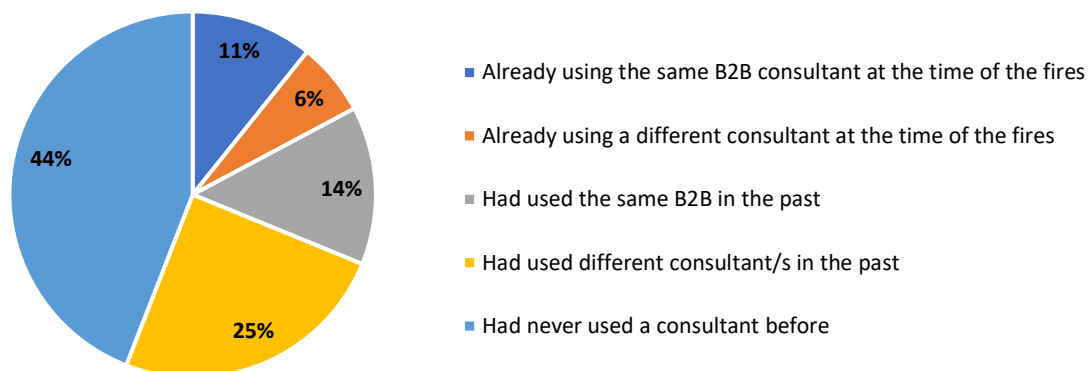


Figure 49: Participant use of consultants prior to participating in B2B

Finding: *The B2B program provided an opportunity for producers who had not previously engaged with a farm consultant to assess the value of using a consultant without the financial risk in paying for one.*

Of those producers who had never used a consultant before, 29% continued to use their B2B consultant after the program ended. Of those 29%, 67% reported that they would not have or would unlikely have still sought advice from a consultant anyway regardless of the B2B program. Thus, overall, 9% of the B2B participants interviewed continued to use their B2B consultant after the program ended when they had never previously used a consultant before and would not have, or would unlikely have, sought advice from a consultant to support their recovery from the bushfires without the B2B program.

Among the 39% of producers who had used a consultant in the past but were not using one at the time of the fires (Figure 49), 53% continued to use their B2B consultant after the program ended while 47% did not. Of the 53% who continued to use their B2B consultant, 74% stated that they would not have, or would unlikely have, still used a consultant to assist with fire recovery without the B2B program. Thus, overall, 15% of the B2B participants interviewed had used a consultant before in the past but were not using one at the time of the fires, and would not have, or were unlikely to have still used a consultant to support their recovery from the bushfires without the B2B program, continued to use their B2B consultant after the program ended.

Example quotes are provided below:

We are now a client of 'consultant' which was actually something we wanted to get out of this program as well, to get on their books because they are in demand. 'Consultant' has a big client run and they are a good operator, so we're very pleased to be a client.

We discovered the value of having a paid agronomist to assist in running our business and now use them regularly. They come out once every three months to assess the farm, and in between I call them to work out what I'm doing with any specific paddock at any given time. It's been a huge bonus to be working with them now as a regular client.

As a result of working with 'consultant' through this program we have found them to be very useful and so worthwhile keeping them on as a paid consultant, so that has been a bonus of being involved in the program, to have that ongoing advice.

We have continued to work with 'consultant' and pay them a couple of thousand dollars a year. This program exposed us to the value of using a consultant and now we include them as a standard part of running our business.

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *As a direct result of having participated in the B2B program, 9% of producers interviewed continued to use their B2B after the program finished when they had previously never used consultants before. A further 15% of producers who had used a consultant in the past but were not using one at the time of the fires, continued to use their B2B consultant after the program ended. These producers would not have, or were unlikely to have, used a consultant to assist with recovery from the bushfires if they had not participated in the B2B program.*

Among the producers who had not previously used a consultant or had used a consultant in the past and did not continue to use their B2B consultant after the program finished, the most common reasons provided were that they did not need further advice, or that they did not value the advice provided by the consultant. In two cases the consultant has been unable to be contacted. Several producers commented that they were open to re-engaging with their B2B consultant in the future should they ever see a need.

Finding: *The most common reasons provided by producers for not continuing to use their B2B consultant after the program ended were that they did not need further advice, or that they did not value the advice provided by the consultant.*

Increasing Producer Support Networks

The capacity and capability of some producers improved as a result of new support networks created through the B2B program. These networks included various service providers, suppliers and other farmers through farm visits undertaken as part of the session activities.

An analysis of the consultant session reports indicates that 47% of producer participants were referred by consultants to a range of suppliers, services and support networks to assist with implementation of their action plan. Figure 50 provides an overview of the types of support networks and the frequency with which producers were referred.

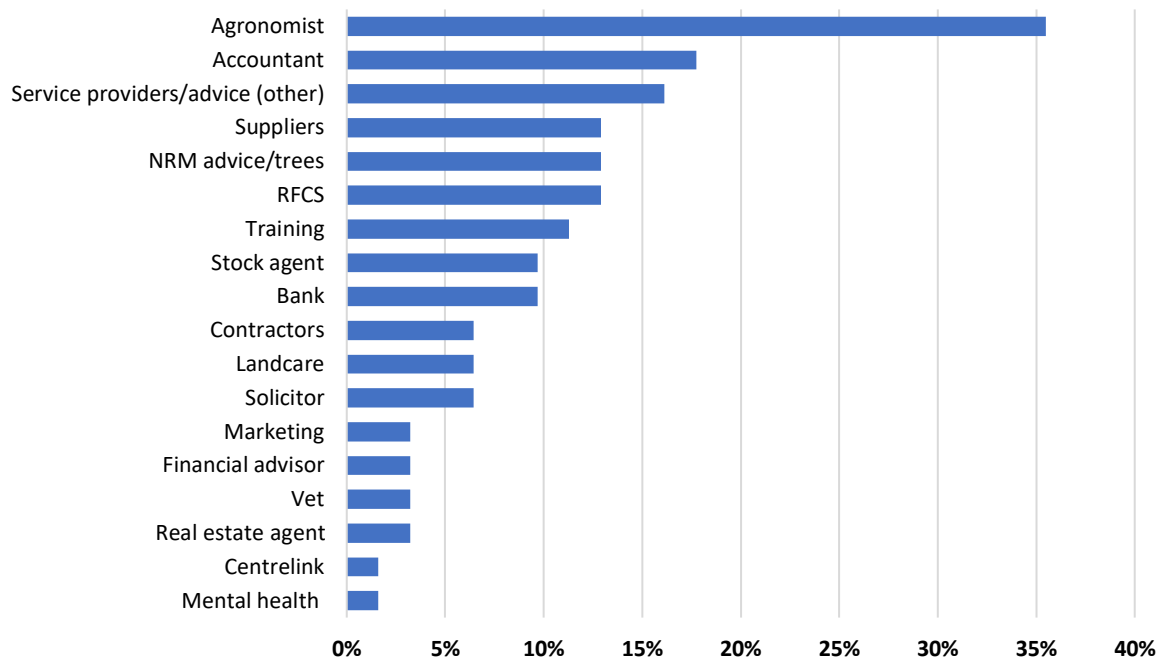


Figure 50: The types of support networks provided by consultants to 47% of producer participants and the frequency with which producers were referred to them

Around 35% of the referrals made were to an agronomist, reflecting the high priority of producers for addressing the issue of pasture recovery after the fires, along with pasture improvement for increased long-term profitability. ‘Other’ service providers and advice included a range of specific advice and services related to individual circumstances e.g. genetics, water infrastructure, dairy equipment, water quality, dung beetles.

Example producer quotes are provided below:

‘Consultant’ provided us with a large network of contacts and resources that will be valuable moving forward as we continue to implement our plan and recovery.

I have such a large resource now of contacts across such a range of topics. I feel well armed to get the information I need if things don't go to plan, I know who to go to to ask for help.

The network of contacts they gave us is part of that option to keep adjusting the plan and have that flexibility as things change.

I didn't really gain much extra knowledge, but they were helpful to give new contacts that I didn't have with suppliers, that kind of thing, networking.

I was focused on the moment and this is what I think I need to do, but ‘consultant’ also gave me that outwards focus on networks and services etc and that was really great.

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: The capacity and capability of some producers improved as a result of new support networks created through the B2B program. Forty-seven percent of producer participants were referred by consultants to a range of suppliers, service providers and support networks to assist with implementation of their action plan, with agronomy being the most commonly referred service.

3.5.4 Animal Wellbeing, Environmental & Sustainability Impacts

The B2B program impacted positively on a range of environmental issues on farms, and also increased the resilience of businesses to deal with future natural disasters, including droughts, floods and fires. Figure 51 provides producer responses to the impact of implementing the B2B action plan on a range of animal wellbeing, environmental and sustainability indicators.

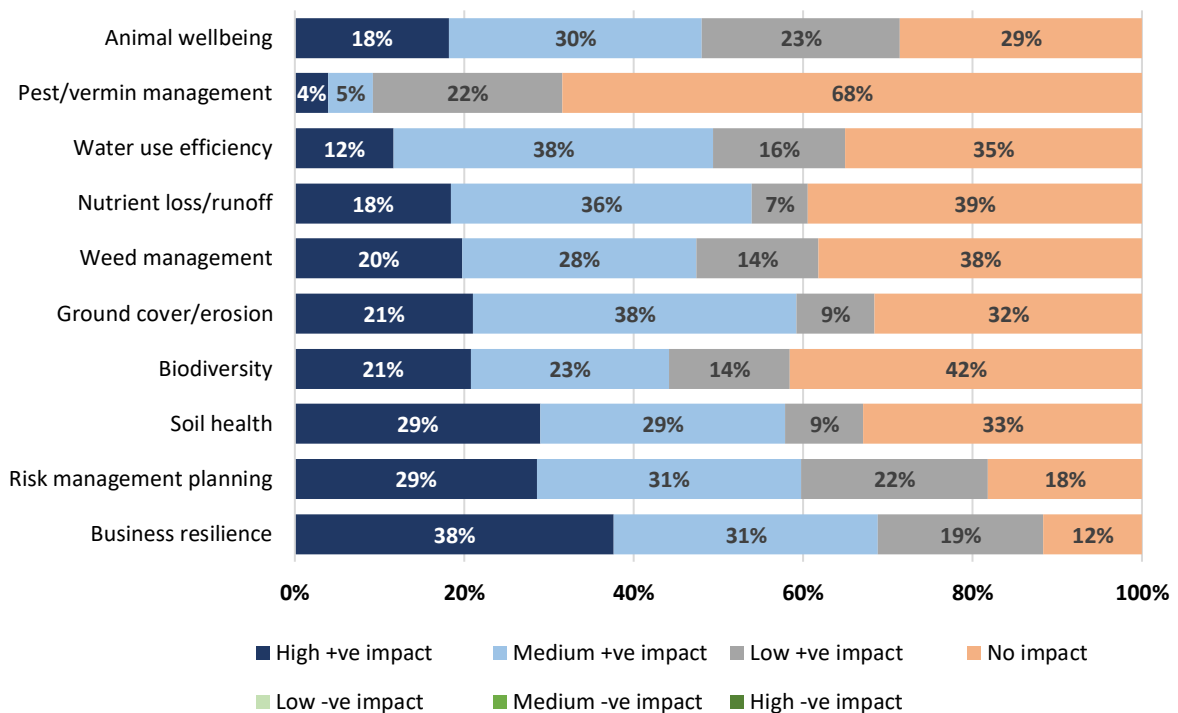


Figure 51: Impact of implementing the B2B action plan on a range of animal wellbeing, environmental and sustainability indicators ranging from high positive (+ve) impact through to high negative (-ve) impact (n=78)

Seventy-two percent of producers who implemented their action plan, either in part or in full, reported some kind of environmental benefit as a result. The areas of highest positive impact reported by producers related to increased business resilience (88% of producers) and improved risk management planning (82% of producers). In terms of specific environmental issues, implementation of action plans had the highest positive impact on soil health, which was a key area of concern for many producers after the fires. Seventy-one percent of producers who implemented their action plan reported a positive impact on animal wellbeing as a result.

Finding: Implementation of the B2B action plan impacted positively on a range of environmental issues on 72% of properties, most notably on soil health. Eighty-two percent of producers who implemented

their action plan reported improved business risk management, and 88% percent reported increased resilience of the business to deal with future natural disasters, including droughts, floods and fires. Seventy-one percent of producers who implemented their action plan reported a positive impact on animal wellbeing.

Many producers commented that by increasing the profitability of their business in good seasons they were improving the overall resilience of the business to managing and coping with natural disasters. In addition, as a result of their participation in the B2B program, 27% of producers surveyed had implemented a range of specific strategies to better plan for future disasters and to reduce the likely impact of future disasters on their business. These included:

- Planting more fire resilient pasture and/or tree species
- Installing a containment area
- Ensuring a green or bared out area to put stock on in case of a fire
- Establishing fire breaks
- Use of fire-resistant fencing materials and water infrastructure i.e. concrete posts
- Diversifying or changing enterprise mix
- Building new dams and adding reticulated water
- Increasing sources of off farm income through new businesses
- Burying water pipes
- Increasing the number of water points
- Reviewing/changing farm insurance
- Improved financial management of the business
- Installing laneways to improve the ability to move livestock quickly if needed
- Improved management of long grass and rubbish around the property
- Improved soil health and ground cover
- Purchasing/upgrading fire-fighting equipment
- Installing sprinkler systems around key assets

Some producers commented that as a result of their experience with the fires they have learned to assume that they will not have any help from authorities to fight any future fires given the limited resources available when such a large event occurs. They have taken the approach of becoming more self-sufficient with their own equipment and planning to increase their own safety and that of their family and property.

Finding: *Twenty-seven percent of producers surveyed had implemented a range of specific strategies to better plan for future disasters and to reduce the likely impact of future disasters on their business as a result of their participation in the B2B program.*

3.5.5 Other Non-Producer Impacts

Goodwill Toward MLA

In addition to the benefits this program generated for producers, there was also a key benefit to MLA as an organisation in regards to how producers feel about the organisation.

The feedback obtained during this review indicates that there is a great deal of goodwill toward MLA across a range of stakeholders for funding the B2B one-on-one consulting service. Smaller scale producers were particularly appreciative of MLA allowing all red meat producers, regardless of number of livestock or farm size, to participate in the program. Example quotes from producers are provided below:

It certainly was worthwhile for me and I'm certain there is a return for MLA and the industry in a faster recovery.

Thank you to MLA. I found it very useful and, to be honest, at the start I thought it would not be the success it turned out to be.

It was a really great program and I hope MLA don't drop it because the uptake wasn't high. There are ways they can improve their comms and marketing to increase that uptake so I really hope they stick with it because it was so valuable.

I commend MLA for running this program, it was a great help to us and will continue to create benefits over the longer term from the changes we've made as a result of this program. It was far and away one of the best things we were involved with after the fires.

It was a good program and I'm pleased to see that MLA is reviewing the program to provide accountability for funds spent.

Could not endorse the program enough, it was so valuable and I really appreciate MLA providing this opportunity.

Producer Participant Quotes

I think just for MLA to be flying the flag was a positive thing, even though there was not big uptake, it was important for them to be seen to be doing something, so I think there was other value in terms of them having a presence in the response and recovery process to support red meat producers and their levy payers.

This is a good space for MLA to invest.

I thank MLA for doing this, for providing assistance to your levy payers. You were out there, offering help in that recovery space and you would be remembered and appreciated for doing that, even for those who didn't take it up. I also appreciate the opportunity of providing feedback on this program as well so thank you for that.

I really enjoyed it and perhaps the best MLA program I have been involved in as we could provide real value.

This was a really good initiative by MLA.

Good on them (MLA) for rolling out a response quickly, it was a good response, and based on hindsight, yes there are some things that could be improved for next time around.

Consultant Quotes

Finding: *There is a great deal of goodwill toward MLA across a range of stakeholders for funding the B2B one-on-one consulting service, and in particular for allowing all businesses regardless of number of head and size to participate.*

Consultant Benefits

The majority of consultants interviewed reported benefits of their participation in the B2B program to either their business (43%) and/or to themselves personally (83%). The business rewards came in the form of increased exposure and profile, increased client base, and professional development through experiential learning. Consultant comments included:

I gained clients and work, and experience with dealing with financial and mental side of natural disasters.

It improved my profile in the district and expanded what people thought I could offer as a service. It broadened their view on my skills set and broadened local acceptance of my skills.

We got great exposure out of it, and whilst none of the producers are regular one-on-one clients, they hopefully have told others what we do and there has been some positive networking and flow on outcomes from that that we may not be aware of.

You always learn something about what pastures did well after a fire and what regenerated well and that helps next time around.

I learnt a lot about what trauma does to people and that it is not just fixed overnight and that you can't assume that they have done what is logical. That you have to be patient, listen and be aware. It reinforced and fine-tuned the principles of dealing with people in those situations - some stories were pretty horrible.

Consultant Quotes

Finding: *Forty-three percent of consultants interviewed reported business benefits to them as a result of participating in the B2B program. These included increased exposure and profile, increased client base, and professional development through experiential learning.*

Personal benefits of program involvement related to positive feeling associated with helping people in need. Consultant comments included:

I felt good from helping people. I was very happy to be involved.

It was a personally satisfying consultancy job. It genuinely helped the client. It's very humbling working with people in personal trauma, you get a level of personal growth and development from going through that with them. I got to work with people who were under incredible stress and to meet them where they're at and to be able to help them also helps to round your skills. It's not so much about the technical stuff or the nitty gritty of the detail, it was about the broader actions and steps needed.

Consultant Quotes

Finding: Eighty-three percent of consultants interviewed reported personal benefits from participating in the B2B program in terms of positive feelings associated with helping others in need.

3.5.6 Unexpected Impacts

Producers

Producers were asked if there were any unexpected impacts from their participation in the B2B program, either negative or positive. Twenty-eight percent of producers identified unexpected impacts, 74% of which were positive and 26% of which were negative. The positive responses included:

- Being able to help friends and neighbours by sharing what they had learned through this program
- The consultant providing ongoing support and advice at no charge
- Resources provided by the consultant for ongoing use e.g. spreadsheets
- The ability to increase profit with less risk than expected
- Realisation that it is okay to ask for help when you need it, and increased willingness to give help to others in need
- Producer realisation that they are a better farmer than they thought they were
- Learning how to use AuctionsPlus
- Being able to choose a consultant that they wanted to work with anyway
- Reinvigorated and motivated the producer to make more changes to the business
- Realisation that the business was not as robust as thought, thus increased awareness of planning for future natural disasters
- Discovered the value of having a paid agronomist to assist in running the business
- Realisation of how much the producer did not know, and being able to address that knowledge gap with subsequent training
- Being able to organise a field day for the business
- Provided an opportunity for the son to be more involved in the management side of the business

- Unexpected breadth of experience, new ideas and networks provided by the consultants

Example producer quotes are provided below:

We became a bit of a resource for neighbours in that we were often asked, where do I go for that information, or who do I speak to for this. Because of the contacts our consultant had shared and because we had got a head start on recovery compared to other farmers in our area due to the B2B program, we were able to share our experiences with neighbours in terms of, I tried that and it was hopeless, don't bother, or this worked really well etc and that made us feel good about ourselves too because we were helping others in the community.

Interestingly, I'm now getting neighbours asking me questions about this and that because they can see I'm improving the business and they're interested in how I'm doing it, so that's great and I'm happy to share what I know.

Before the fires we were probably like a lot of other farmers, we didn't like asking for help. We now understand that it's OK to ask for help and it really does make such a difference so we now have a new way of thinking about asking for advice and support when we don't have all the answers, or just want another opinion if we're not sure. On the flip side, we are also now much more aware of ensuring we give back when we can to help others who may need it.

Producer Participant Quotes

Unexpected negative impacts reported by producers mainly related to the perceived value and behaviour of their consultant. Example quotes are provided below:

It had a negative effect on my stress levels because I needed help when I registered and it took a long time before the consultant actually came, and then the advice they gave wasn't at all helpful for what I needed so I felt let down and stressed and I lost my confidence, and to be honest, this experience, along with not being able to get other services that had been promised, I've lost a lot of trust in people.

I didn't expect the consultant not to listen to what we needed and rather just to tell us what they wanted us to do, which didn't match up at all with our objectives.

It was surprisingly disappointing - unfortunately a waste of time because I had the wrong consultant.

Producer Participant Quotes

Finding: *Unexpected positive impacts of the B2B program were reported by 21% of producers surveyed and unexpected negative impact were reported by 7% of producers surveyed. Unexpected negative impacts mainly related to the perceived value and behaviour of consultants, while a range of positive impacts were reported, including sharing information and knowledge gained through the program with friends and neighbours, ongoing free support provided by the consultant, resources provided by*

the consultant for ongoing use, gaining new and unexpected skills and knowledge, and a realisation that it's okay to ask for help when you need it along with an increased willingness to help others where possible.

Consultants

Consultants were also asked if there were any unexpected impacts from their participation in the B2B program, either negative or positive. Thirty percent of consultants interviewed reported unexpected positive impacts from their participation in the program. These included:

- Surprise at the strength of positive emotion from helping those in need
- Unexpected long term practice changes made by producers
- The development of new knowledge/networks
- Assisting a family to improve the ability of a family member with a disability to be more actively involved in the business

Finding: *Thirty percent of consultants interviewed reported unexpected positive impacts from their participation in the B2B program, the most frequent of which involved surprise at the strength of positive emotion from helping those in need.*

3.6 Future Support for Disaster Planning and Recovery

3.6.1 Supporting Producers to be More Prepared for Natural Disasters in General

Some stakeholders reported that supporting producers to better prepare for natural disasters is not an area where MLA should be involved, and that it was better left to the state departments and/or other organisations. Other stakeholders felt that MLA should just keep doing what they are already doing in terms of supporting producers to increase productivity and profitability as that assists to build the resilience of businesses to be able to recover and continue to operate after a natural disaster. Of those who did see a role for MLA in disaster planning, the following key suggestions were provided on how MLA could better support producers to be more prepared for natural disasters in general:

- Collate the learnings from producers impacted by the Black Saturday fires and use that information to inform other producers and consultants on how to be better prepared next time. For example, having a plan for how to manage livestock when a fire is imminent and having appropriate insurance were two key learnings that many producers mentioned in their interviews that should be communicated to other producers. One producer mentioned how a group of local farmers had started a WhatsApp group to keep in touch and help each other out with equipment and support during the fires. This information could be used as part of training workshops/information sessions and also as case studies of producer stories and experiences.
- Keep relevant information out in front of people all the time to remind them of disaster planning and the information and tools available to assist with that.
- Highlight specific information as needed e.g. put out brochures/run webinars in fire season pre-emptively about what to do in the event of a fire threat.
- Improve collaboration with other organisations offering support to producers around disaster planning to work together to minimise duplication and generate better outcomes for industry.

- Investigate the opportunity of working with corporate businesses who are wanting to contribute to building community resilience to disaster and supporting disaster recovery efforts. An example is an organisation called corporate2community.
- A specific offer for MLA to engage with Regenerative Agriculture Alliance and Southern Cross University, to potentially work together on disaster planning issues.
- Development of a training course specifically focused on risk management, including preparing for natural disasters.
- Reinforcing the importance and advantage of having a fire plan. One producer commented that: *“Because we had a plan that we reviewed annually, it was the reason we were actually able to save stock and our house, because of that plan. The CFA provides checklists etc for fire plans and I think a lot of people just throw them out but they are so important to have and we are an example of how they can work. If you can save your stock and key infrastructure you have a better basis for rebuilding.”*
- Provide producers with disaster planning proformas and checklists on the MLA website.
- Reengaging with B2B producers to assist them with future risk management planning

Specific suggestions provided by other fire recovery service providers included:

- **Deliver preparedness programs** now 2 years after the fires while it is still fresh in everyone's minds in conjunction with state departments of agriculture/Catchment Management Authorities/fire authorities. These programs could cover:
 - The need for insurance
 - Benefits of business diversification to reduce risk
 - Business planning for the future
 - Development of a disaster plan that includes fire/flood/other weather events.
 - Restocking/resowing plans
- **Have personnel in standing positions of 'preparedness and recovery'** so that they are already trained ready to go and can swing from preparedness to recovery when a disaster occurs, rather than having to recruit or reassign staff to these roles. One service provider suggested there needs to be a 'war chest' with the funding for this type of response ready to go.
- **Build capacity into recovery networks** to be able to promote MLA services and to be involved in the recovery network at a local level before disasters occur. MLAs presence in these networks is important outside of disaster response so that everybody knows them and what they have to offer e.g. become involved in local/state/federal standing disaster committees and services such as Bushfire Recovery Victoria, National Recovery and Resilience Agency, State Departments of Agriculture/Catchment Management Authorities.

***Finding:** In terms of helping producers be better prepared for future disasters, other fire recovery service providers suggested that MLA could deliver preparedness programs in conjunction with State Departments of Agriculture/Catchment Management Authorities/Fire authorities; have personnel in standing positions of 'preparedness and recovery' ready to help with recovery when needed and build capacity into recovery networks so that they are embedded in recovery activities.*

3.6.2 Disaster Recovery Support for Producers over the Medium to Longer Term

Where Are Producers at Now with their Fire Recovery?

The vast majority of producers interviewed have either fully recovered from the physical impacts of the fires, or are confident that they have their recovery under control, with many producers commenting that it will take up to 5 years to fully recover back to pre-fire status. Most of these producers reported that the key actions remaining in order to completely recover involved fencing and removal of fallen trees and other debris from the farm. A small number of producers still appear to be struggling with on farm recovery, with the main challenges identified as being limited financial and labour resources, and access to required materials and service providers. Among these producers, one of the major difficulties is that they are understocked, but given the high costs of replacement animals, are very limited in their ability to increase stock numbers in the short term.

The major current issue identified by producers in terms of recovery from the fires is mental health. Many producers reported that mental health among impacted producers is still a big issue, and certainly the interviewers for this review noted that producers are still deeply traumatised by the bushfire events, with many becoming emotional during interviews.

It was noted by many producers that it was not until quite a bit later after the fires that their mental health deteriorated. They reported that in the immediate aftermath of the fires they were so busy trying to recover that they were unaware of what impact the event had had on their emotional wellbeing until later on. Observations by producers also suggest that current access to mental health support for those producers who need it is an issue, mainly in terms of linking producers in with available services when they may not actively seek out those services themselves.

The other issue affecting people's current mental health as reported by producers, is the cumulative impacts of other issues that are combining to cause high levels of emotional stress on top of recovering physically and emotionally from the fires. For example: the impacts of COVID-19, including social isolation; deaths of family members/personal illness; recent floods/mice plague in NSW; delays associated with rebuilding, including access to materials and service providers; high livestock prices inhibiting rebuilding stock numbers; stress that is triggered by other events, such as smoke from burn-offs triggering panic attacks and vision of traumatic events on television triggering remembered emotions from the fires; and ongoing disputes with external organisations related to bushfire recovery.

Some example producer quotes are provided below:

I would count myself as a very resilient type of person and I didn't feel like I needed mental health support in those early months, but it wasn't until 12 months later when I realised just how tired and stressed I was. I was OK, but it hits you later on as you're so busy before then just getting things done, it's when it slows down that the emotional strain and stress catches up with you, so there are people now that need mental health support that aren't getting it.

I think there's still some mental health issues that are community wide. I think for many people it's the mental health stuff that is still lingering and more of a problem than physical recovery of the farm. It will take years to recover physically but the mental health struggle is ongoing for many.

I think mental health is still a really big issue. I got help by accident almost but there are plenty of others who didn't. Some committed suicide, others have turned to substance abuse or are just getting angry.

I think mental health is the big thing now, but I don't know how you go about helping people that need it. I have a few friends who haven't been the same since the fires, I feel they're struggling with mental health, but it's hard to know how to help them.

We crashed later on after the fires, and the services available was not as obvious then and COVID made it very difficult to get the help we needed. I'm worried that some people who are just starting to unravel now will not seek help. How do you secretly introduce care givers to them without offending them? Not everyone will go to seek help, so it's tricky.

Getting people the help they need isn't easy, but I think mental health is something people need to do one-on-one, not going to a community event which is why producers aren't doing it. So, I think there needs to be a way of identifying need and then somehow getting those people that support in a way that won't offend them or that their neighbours would be aware of because they don't want others to know.

MLA could help with identifying people who are still traumatized and help them get help - such as sessions, conferences, to help men who are still suffering. Suicide is still a risk.

Producer Participant Quotes

Consultants were asked during stakeholder interviews if they had assisted any of their producer clients to access mental health support, with 28% reporting that they had (Figure 52).

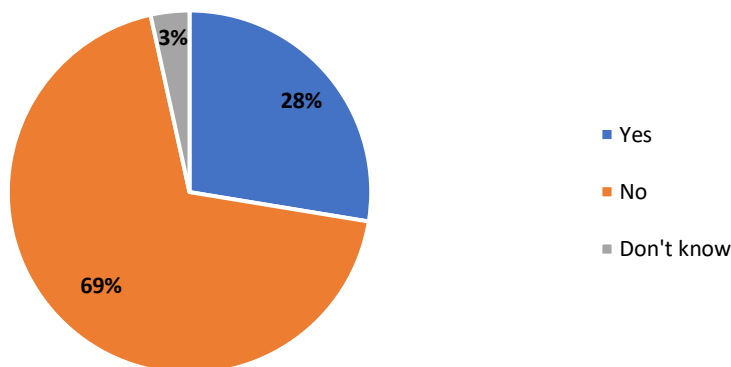


Figure 52: Proportion of consultants interviewed who assisted producer clients to access mental health support

The support provided in these cases was to either recommend to the producer directly that they seek mental health support, or to alert mental health service providers that specific producers may need help. In most cases, it appears that consultants were unaware of whether or not these producers had received mental health support.

The negative impact on consultant mental health during delivery of the B2B program was raised by a producer and a consultant during the stakeholder engagement process. The consultant commented that it was likely that some of the B2B consultants would have benefitted from some post session counselling to support their mental health.

***Finding:** Stakeholder feedback suggests that some consultants may have benefitted from post session counselling to support their mental health.*

How can MLA support producers in providing general disaster recovery assistance in the medium to longer term?

In response to the question of how MLA could support producers in providing general disaster recovery assistance in the medium and longer term, the overwhelming response from producers was to provide ongoing support over an extended period of time through the B2B program. It was suggested that this could be achieved via provision of ongoing phone support from B2B consultants (e.g. regular check in calls, availability for producers to call for advice and assistance over an agreed period time) and/or as an additional review session to assess producer progress and needs. These kinds of follow-up support measures were also identified by producers as a suggested improvement to program structure. One consultant suggested that a follow-up review session could also be used to reflect with producers on their experience during the fires and through the recovery process, and to capture these 'stories' and key learnings to assist other producers and consultants in future.

Other suggestions provided by stakeholders during this review included:

- Ensure that producers involved in the B2B program are provided with strong support networks and key contacts during program delivery that they can access for additional support as needed over their period of recovery.
- Work closely with the RFCS to 'handover' clients identified as needing ongoing support for recovery beyond that provided through the B2B program.
- Provide a learning pathway for producers after B2B to business by identifying key programs, courses, workshops etc that their B2B consultant recommends they engage with.

The key area of support needed for disaster recovery over the medium to longer term was reported to be moral/emotional support to improve the mental health of producers during the long recovery process. A regular phone call to check in on progress and answer any immediate questions was considered to provide a positive impact on producer motivation and accountability in implementing their B2B action plan, and beyond that, to provide much needed moral support for many.

***Finding:** The key area of support needed for disaster recovery over the medium to longer term was reported to be moral/emotional support to improve the mental health of producers during the long recovery process.*

4.0 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the assumption that MLA intends to deploy the B2B program again in the future. The recommendations in section 4.1 for program planning are considered to be the highest priority, and can be actioned immediately in preparation for a future disaster event.

4.1 Planning

Recommendation 1: MLA to review, clarify and clearly state the intended purposes of the B2B program.

Recommendation 2: MLA, with input from relevant stakeholders/future delivery partners, to review and clarify project objectives and intended outcomes to ensure that they accurately reflect the intended purposes of the program, and that they are SMART⁴ in order to enable measurement of success against intended outcomes.

Recommendation 3: MLA to review and clarify the intended target audiences of the B2B program and ensure that producer eligibility criteria align with those targets. In particular:

- Identify and clarify any requirements for prioritising level of need based on degree of impact or scale of impact based on property size
- Clarify eligibility of dairy enterprises/farms
- Clarify eligibility of properties indirectly rather than directly impacted by a disaster
- Clarify eligibility of producers who purchase an impacted property after the disaster event

Recommendation 4: MLA to establish a business continuity plan for natural disasters impacting the industry, that includes core disaster response roles and responsibilities for selected MLA staff, along with deployment processes that enable staff to immediately slip into these emergency roles without the additional burden of pre-existing work on top of these roles. There may also be a training requirement for specific staff members identified to take on these roles in the event of an emergency.

Recommendation 5: MLA to establish a pre-approved list of B2B state-coordinators across all states and territories of Australia that is reviewed and updated annually.

Recommendation 6: MLA to establish a pre-approved list of B2B registered consultants across all states and territories of Australia that is reviewed and updated annually.

This would involve undertaking a review of the current list of B2B consultants and contacting past consultants considered to be suitable for future program delivery to ascertain their willingness to be on the list for delivery of the next B2B program. If additional consultants in particular states, such as SA, or consultants with specific skills are required, MLA should consider calling for expressions of interest through the Livestock Advisor Updates program.

⁴ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound (SMART)

Recommendation 7: MLA and state coordinators to have state coordinator and consultant program contracts pre-agreed in principle and reviewed and updated annually as required.

Recommendation 8: Aim to offer the B2B program within 2 weeks of a natural disaster, depending on the disaster situation and pending advice from first responders on the ground. This timeline would be facilitated by having:

- MLA project staff on standby ready to be deployed to the B2B program at short notice (Recommendation 4)
- State coordinators for the B2B program pre-arranged annually and ready to be deployed at short notice (Recommendation 5)
- A list of pre-approved consultants (revised annually) for emergency recovery ready to deploy at short notice (Recommendation 6)
- State coordinator and consultant B2B contracts revised and agreed to annually in the event that they need to be signed quickly (Recommendation 7)
- Pre-approved funding available to deliver the B2B program in the event of a significant natural disaster
- Program communication and marketing assets and plans ready to be implemented at short notice (Recommendation 13)
- Predefined criteria to determine under what circumstances the B2B program will be offered following future natural disasters

Recommendation 9: MLA to investigate opportunities to seek project funding partners, such as drought hubs, state governments, other RDCs and philanthropic businesses (e.g. corporate2community, banks, insurance companies).

Recommendation 10: MLA to review the length of time for producer registration and the length of time allowed for registered producers to complete their three (or less) sessions, giving consideration to the intended purpose of the B2B program, available resources for program delivery and the following review findings:

- Length of time for producer registration:
 - o A higher proportion of producers who received their first session within the first six months post fire compared to the following six months, sought advice on fire recovery as opposed to seeking other types of advice because their fire recovery was in hand by the time they had engaged with the program (Figure 19).
 - o Feedback that more producers may have engaged with the program if it had been available for a longer period of time.
- Length of time allowed to complete sessions:
 - o Stakeholder feedback that while offering the program as early as possible was advantageous to those producers ready and able to engage with it, allowing an extended period of time, greater than six months, for completion of subsequent sessions would allow producers the option of having more time to decompress and think after the initial session before following up with a second and/or third session.

Recommendation 11: MLA to explore and seek out opportunities to engage with national and state disaster recovery organisations. This could include:

- Seeking representation on relevant disaster recovery committees/groups
- Promoting the B2B program to these organisations and, ideally face-to-face, through these committees.
- Seeking input on the B2B program offering and advice on how the program could better engage with other disaster recovery support services/organisations
- Identifying co-funding opportunities for delivery of B2B activities (Recommendation 9)

Recommendation 12: MLA considers changing the program name to remove the word ‘Business’. A suggested alternative title for the program is ‘Back on Track’.

Recommendation 13: MLA to develop a project Communication and Marketing Plan that:

- Is ready to implement in the event of a future disaster where the B2B program is offered
- Aligns with MLA targets for the number of producer participants to be engaged in the program
- Accounts for the emotional trauma and mental health of the target audience and their subsequent reduced capacity to absorb and act on information provided to them
- Provides sufficient detail to producers regarding the value proposition for participating
- Provides sufficient detail to producers of what the program is about and how it works in practice
- Pre-emptively considers and addresses producer concerns/questions regarding participating in the program in promotional material and activities, such as via the use of FAQs
- Involves direct and early engagement with other key disaster recovery service providers and community groups to promote the program
- Uses a range of promotional materials and mediums to reach the target audience including local fire recovery support networks.
- Actively supports state coordinators to effectively promote the program within their state by providing promotional assets and recommended communication and marketing strategies and processes
- Creates awareness of B2B when there are no natural disaster events, to build knowledge and trust in the ‘brand’

Recommendation 14: MLA to develop a project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan that supports measurement of success against the intended project outcomes, and aligns with the MLA Triple Bottom Line Evaluation Framework and the Adoption Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

4.2 Structure/Support Offered

Recommendation 15: Retain the four key elements of the B2B project to support producers recovering from a natural disaster:

- MLA Website to provide recovery information, tools, links to other relevant sources of information
- Event sponsorship program
- Webinars and podcasts
- One-on-one consultant sessions

Recommendation 16: MLA to investigate and consider the option of offering a review session to some or all B2B producers, suggested to occur 12-24 months after the fires, to:

- Check in on producer recovery and provide additional advice/support as required.
- Check in on the mental health of producers and their families and take appropriate actions to assist producers to access/seek any required support.
- Reflect with producers on their experience during the fires and through the recovery process and capture these 'stories' and learnings for use by MLA to assist other producers and consultants in the future.

Recommendation 17: MLA to investigate and consider the option of offering phone support to some or all B2B producers, suggested for up to 24 months after the fires. This could involve:

- The opportunity for consultants to conduct regular 'check-ins' with their producers as needed over the phone, perhaps every month or two to begin with, and extended out over six months to 12 months over a two-year period as needed.

The purpose of the phone calls would be:

- To check on producer progress with implementing their actions plan.
 - Assess outcomes to date of actions taken and advise on additional actions required based on those outcomes and any new developments.
 - To provide moral support and motivation to producers during their recovery.
 - To check on producer mental health and take any required actions where further support is needed.
 - Inform producers of any relevant learning opportunities (e.g. courses, groups, workshops, webinars etc) on offer through MLA and other providers.
- The opportunity for producers to call consultants to ask questions regarding implementation of their action plan.

Recommendation 18: MLA to investigate and consider options to better support the mental health of producers impacted by natural disasters through the B2B program. Suggested options to explore could include:

- Training provided to B2B consultants to improve their awareness of the signs indicating that a producer may require professional mental health support (e.g. mental health first aid course), along with advice and processes for making referrals
- Ensure that any B2B information pack provided to producers and consultants includes details of available mental health services
- Identify relevant mental health support services in impacted regions and engage with them to provide referrals for B2B participants as needed.
- Offer producers the option of having a mental health support person attend part of a session as part of the program to assist as needed.
- Include a mental health component to disaster recovery workshops/webinars run through the program
- Provision for consultants to make phone calls at agreed intervals with their B2B producer clients to check in on their progress and assist with any questions or referrals they may need.

Recommendation 19: MLA to explore the option of providing producer participants and B2B consultants with a summary resource in hard copy form that provides key steps and advice for immediate actions required post event for recovery, along with a list of key service providers and resources available to support recovery (including grants/financial support).

This resource could be based on the Agriculture Victoria 'Recovery After Fire' document, but updated to a national document incorporating learnings from this review and covering disaster recovery in general. In consultation with agronomy experts, the resource could also potentially include a summary of learnings from the Black Saturday fires in relation to the impact of the fires on soils and specific pasture species and their recovery to assist future decision making. Appended information tailored for each region/state immediately after a significant natural disaster, listing key local service providers and contact details for recovery support, and a list of available grants/financial support and how to access those grants, could also be provided.

Recommendation 20: MLA to explore the option of engaging and working closely with the RFCS as part of the B2B delivery model to provide an opportunity for interested producers to receive ongoing support through the service after the final B2B session. This could involve the offer of an RFC attending a session/s and then the option of a handover to the RFC after the final session.

4.3 Program Delivery

Recommendation 21: MLA to develop a process for increased scrutiny of consultants in relation to meeting the eligibility criteria, particularly in relation to claimed skills in financial analysis and business management and alignment of consultant skills with those considered to be required for assisting producers with disaster recovery.

Recommendation 22: State coordinators to ensure that approved consultants are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities as either a farm management consultant or a technical specialist consultant. In particular, ensure that consultants understand:

- Requirements for the type of advice to be provided versus type of advice that is out of scope
- To provide bespoke advice to individual producers that aligns with producer needs and their capacity and capability to implement changes, rather than providing a standard set of advice based on consultant areas of interest/philosophies
- Their obligation to put the needs of the producers first by discussing with them the option to use a different consultant with specialist technical skills for one or two sessions, and to ensure that producers understand they have the opportunity for up to three sessions.
- If the consultant determines that less than three sessions are needed for a producer to support their recovery, ensure that this is discussed openly with the producer so that they are not left 'hanging', waiting for follow-up contact from the consultant for further sessions.

Recommendation 23: MLA to investigate opportunities for increasing the required skill set among B2B consultants and to provide pathways for younger/less experienced consultants to come into the program. For example:

- Provide an opportunity for B2B consultants to come together to share their experiences and learnings from participating in the program.

- Provide training on financial and budgeting aspects of consulting
- Provide training around dealing with people who have experienced significant trauma
- Provide an opportunity for younger/less experienced consultants to shadow some of the more experienced consultants, preferably ones who already have a relationship with the producer to minimise stress on producers

Recommendation 24: MLA to consider and clarify the following potential conflicts of interest for consultants:

- Consultants providing services to relatives
- Consultants also participating as producer recipients of consultant advice

Recommendation 25: MLA to consider options for supporting the mental health of B2B consultants. Suggestions options could include:

- Host a debrief session, or sessions, with consultants to talk about their experiences and emotions. This could be one-on-one with a counsellor and/or in a group of consultants with a counsellor
- Provide consultants access to a counsellor phone number to call if they need support in between scheduled catch-ups
- Regular check-in phone calls from the state coordinators to assess consultant wellbeing

Recommendation 26: MLA to review and revise the role of state coordinators to increase consultant wellbeing, to maximise benefits for individual producers, to increase participation rate and to increase return on investment for MLA. This should involve:

- Increased support provided to consultants during program delivery.
- Increased communication and monitoring around consultant delivery activities to reduce issues and inconsistencies around delivery.
- Increased monitoring of consultant billing to ensure compliance with MLA requirements.
- Clarify the role of state coordinators to actively promote the B2B program in their state, and for development and provision of a state Communication and Marketing Plan that aligns with the broader MLA B2B Communication and Marketing Plan.

Recommendation 27: MLA to provide greater clarity to state coordinators around the following administration issues:

- Maximum number of sessions per farm allowed or recommended per day
- Any limits on the maximum number of producers able to be serviced by one consultant
- Allowances for invoicing of other non-consulting costs e.g. soil tests/farm mapping
- Billing requirements where more than one producer is visited at the same time e.g. succession planning involving multiple producer participants.
- Provision for billing above the maximum stated travel allowance where additional travel is required.
- The type of advice that consultants are able to provide. In particular:
 - o If producers do not need or do not want advice specifically related to disaster recovery, are consultants able to provide other types of advice/support such as succession planning, increasing long term productivity/profitability

- Clarification of what types of advice are out of scope e.g. writing loan applications, investigation of land purchase options, succession planning not related to disaster recovery, development of new business opportunities (farm related or not farm related)
- Requirements for mode of session delivery. For example:
 - All sessions ideally to be delivered face-to-face
 - Pre-planned use of one session for desktop data analysis/report writing
 - Use of zoom/phone for session delivery
 - Off site visits to other farms to view infrastructure setups and/or discuss management practices focused on improving long term productivity.

Recommendation 28: MLA to investigate and consider the option of using a triage system to assist with increasing benefits of participating in the program for individual producers. The purpose of this system would be to ensure that producers are aware of what is available to them through the program, including the number of sessions and the option to use different consultants, and to facilitate the process of changing consultants for one or two sessions to maximise producer benefits.

Suggested opportunities include:

- The state coordinator (or MLA staff member where the state coordinator is the consultant) makes phone contact with each producer after the first and second sessions to:
 - Ask for and record general feedback on the session
 - Ask if the producer would like another session, either with the same consultant or with a different consultant
 - If the same consultant is not preferred, assist the producer to select a different consultant to best meet their needs (also seeking input from the consultant)
- Either MLA (where the state coordinator is the consultant) or the state coordinator call or email the consultant after the first and second sessions to ask how it went and if they think the producer needs any further sessions with them, or if they recommend a different consultant based on specific technical needs of the producer.

Recommendation 29: MLA to investigate ways of better supporting producers to make a more informed decision as to which consultant/s to select. Suggested opportunities could include:

- Facilitate a brief introductory conversation between producers and the state coordinator to determine the producer needs, and which consultants might align with those needs (Recommendation 28).
- More detailed information provided to producers on each consultant, their areas of expertise and their specific areas of interest e.g. regenerative agriculture, succession planning, financial management, animal health plans, designing containment yards etc.
- Provide video links where consultants have recorded a brief summary of their experiences, their background, their interests etc and then provide email/phone contact details for producers to contact consultants and ask any questions as part of their decision-making process.

- Invite consultants to speak at or be presented as B2B consultants at disaster recovery workshops/events, promotional events (e.g. tailgate/shed meetings) and webinars.

4.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

Recommendation 30: MLA to ensure that state coordinators collect and log registration details to MLA for all producer participants into a central database.

Recommendation 31: Amend the B2B producer registration form to enable producers to provide single figure estimates of farm size and pre-fire livestock numbers rather than selecting from a list of ranges.

Recommendation 32: MLA to review the B2B consultant session report and producer action plan templates and revise as required with a view to:

- Determining exactly what reporting best meets the needs of MLA and producer participants.
- Minimising duplication in required reporting.
- Increasing capture of specific data to assist with program impact assessment as identified in a B2B M&E Plan (Recommendation 14).

For example:

- Information regarding scale of changes made (i.e. no. livestock and/or hectares impacted)
 - Expected productivity outcome (e.g. increase in stocking rate measured as dse/ha),
 - Current productivity performance level (e.g. 5 dse/ha)
 - Target productivity performance level given recommended changes (e.g. 8 dse/ha)
 - Expected time to reach productivity/recovery target (e.g. 2 years)
 - Estimated costs associated with changes made (e.g. costs associated with pasture recovery)
 - Estimated economic impact of changes made (e.g. \$25/dse gross margin) and
 - Non-economic impacts of changes made (e.g. reduced run-off/erosion, increased biodiversity).
- Seek input and feedback from B2B consultants on any revised reporting requirements.
 - Ensure that B2B consultants are all fully aware of their obligations for reporting, why reporting is required, and how the data collected is used.
 - Provide examples of completed reports to demonstrate requirements for completion of templates.

Recommendation 33: State coordinators to submit all consultant session reports and producer action plans to MLA.

Recommendation 34: MLA to review, clarify and communicate expectations, process and responsibilities for completion of producer feedback surveys. This could involve:

- Producers asked to complete the survey on location at the end of the final session (potentially biased result with consultant present)
- Producers provided with a hard copy of the survey or a link to an online survey with reminders provided by the consultant and/or state coordinator to complete the survey
- Producers engaged via a phone call from a third party to complete the survey
- Producers provided with an incentive to complete the survey e.g. follow up review session with consultant/ongoing consultant phone support

5.0 Conclusion

B2B was widely acknowledged by stakeholders as a worthwhile program that delivered triple bottom line benefits to industry. While the program was developed at very short notice in response to the impact of the Black Summer bushfires on red meat producers across Australia, the concept of B2B was soundly based and fit for purpose. Producers and other stakeholders were very appreciative of MLA making the program available.

Benefits included many participating producers recovering more quickly than without the program and increased long term productivity through on-farm practice changes. B2B participants also reported improved mental health, increased skills, knowledge and confidence and improved business resilience. Many producer participants also reported development of stronger networks and an increased likelihood of using farm management consultants in the future. Consultants engaged in B2B also reported benefits of program participation, including higher profiles and new clients.

The estimated average net benefit for participating producers who received a measurable economic impact was \$6.21 per hectare across 52,284 hectares.

Unfortunately, B2B was substantially undersubscribed following the Black Summer fires relative to potential audience and funding available. A key challenge is therefore to increase producer uptake if the program is delivered again in future. The opportunity now, without the urgency that MLA staff experienced following the bushfires, is to address the recommendations made in this report, in particular:

- Reviewing the purpose, objectives, outcomes and target audiences for the next version of B2B
- Developing and implementing a B2B communication and marketing plan to address a key gap in the current program
- Investigating opportunities for project funding partners, including other RDCs, state governments and federal programs
- Exploring opportunities to engage with relevant state and national disaster recovery organisations to identify potential partnerships, collaborations and promotional opportunities
- Implementing a range of actions to enable the next version of B2B to be rolled out at short notice, including budget, staffing, state coordinators and consultants
- Reviewing monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure they are aligned to the purpose, objectives and targets for delivery to enable continuous improvement and reporting to be on-going as the program is delivered.

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Appendix A: Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Key Findings

Program Planning and Design

- Key success factors around initial project planning included a combination of clear direction and support (including financial support) from the MLA board to roll the project out as quickly as possible, a dedicated and enthusiastic team who got the project up and running in a very short amount of time, equity across all states impacted in being able to access available support, and development of guidelines to support delivery of the one-on-one sessions.
- Key challenges associated with initial B2B project planning were largely related to the time of year (early January) when many people were on holidays, the short timeframe to plan and make the program available to producers, and challenges with engaging project stakeholders, including consultants and other fire recovery service providers.
- The general consensus from stakeholders engaged for this review was that offering the four types of support (website, event sponsorship, webinars/podcasts and one-on-one consultant sessions) through the B2B program was an effective means of supporting producers impacted by the fires.
- The vast majority of state coordinators and consultants interviewed (91%) felt that the requirements for producer eligibility were appropriate, with the caveat that many were unclear of the program's purpose and target audience.
- There were mixed views among stakeholders as to whether MLA should have targeted larger producers to a greater degree to generate a higher return on program investment, and prioritised providing support to those producers most impacted by the fires.
- There was broad consensus among stakeholders interviewed that eligibility criteria were required for B2B consultants. A view among some consultants in SA that the eligibility criteria were too strict resulted in fewer than expected consultant registrations in that state.

Program Delivery: One-on-One Consultant Sessions

- Stakeholder feedback suggests that uptake of the B2B program would have been higher with improved promotion and marketing of the program to producers, other fire recovery support services and producer service providers.
- Producer feedback suggests that the main reasons for the relatively low participation rate among eligible producers were that they were too stressed/traumatised to engage with the program, lack of awareness of the program and/or lack of understanding of what the program offered/value of potential benefits or that they did not need or want outside help.
- Forty-one percent of non-participating producers interviewed were unaware of the B2B program at the time it was available. Among these producers, 56% reported that they would have, or would likely have, participated in the program had they been aware of it. A focus on increasing program awareness is therefore likely to drive increased participation rates.

- A major limitation to producers being able to absorb any promotional material that they may have been exposed to was their impaired cognitive capacity at the time due to the emotional trauma they were experiencing. Thus, an important feature of any future successful marketing program for B2B will need to consider the emotional state of the target audience and the subsequent need for direct, personalised marketing, preferably via a known source.
- Other fire recovery service providers interviewed also suggested that COVID-19 impacted on the willingness of some producers to participate in the program, and that it was too early for many producers and ideally would have been offered over a longer period of time.
- Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for increasing future participation in the B2B program. These largely involved increasing awareness and understanding of the program via a more personal approach from a trusted source, increasing engagement with other disaster recovery service providers, offering the program over a longer period of time, and increasing the number of consultants available and producer familiarity with those consultants.
- Consultant feedback suggests that the process of matching consultants to producers could be improved by providing producers with more information on consultants, providing opportunities for producers to meet consultants and/or hear them speak, and for state coordinators to play more of a role in assisting producers to identify the consultant that best aligns with their needs.
- The intention of the program was for the first session to be delivered by a farm management consultant (FMC), with subsequent sessions to be delivered either by the FMC or by a specialist technical consultant (STC) based on specific technical needs identified by either the producer or the FMC, however this did not occur in practice.
- Some producers were unaware of the option of having up to three sessions, and there was a lack of awareness among some producers of the option to use a different consultant for some sessions, and/or how to go about arranging for a different consultant.
- The majority of producers interviewed (89%) were satisfied that their consultant/s had the required range of skills and knowledge to meet their needs.
- Among those producers who were not satisfied with their consultant/s skills and knowledge (11%), reasons included: a perceived mismatch between what the consultant promoted their skills to be relative to what the producer perceived them to be; consultants not delivering on their promises; consultants perceived to be 'pushing their own barrow' rather than providing bespoke advice; advice provided was not useful or able to be implemented; no new ideas were generated; producer was unable to access the range of skills required from the one consultant and was not offered access to other consultants.
- A third of consultants interviewed reported having worked directly with another service provider/s during session delivery, most often the Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS), which was engaged by 20% of consultants interviewed.
- The peak months for delivery of the first one-on-one consultant sessions were May (21%) and June (20%) 2020, with numbers dropping off in July (8%) before small surges in August (11%) and October (10%), then tapering off into November and December.
- Almost three-quarters of producers interviewed felt that the timing of delivery of the B2B program was ideal for assisting with their recovery. The date of first sessions held among these

producers represented a similar spread of times to the average across all producers, indicating that the 'right' time was different for different producers.

- Producer feedback indicates that while the ideal timing for seeking advice was influenced by the degree of physical impact of the fires and the degree to which producers were emotionally traumatised, making key decisions around pastures and breeding early enabled producers to get ahead of others who had not made those key decisions early enough, and that getting advice early provided an opportunity to put fencing and key infrastructure back better than what it was before the fires.
- Among the 25% of producers interviewed who disagreed with the timing, or who 'neither agreed nor disagreed', 89% reported that it would have been better if the program was made available to producers earlier than it was, while 11% reported that it was too early and would have suited them better a bit later on.
- The most common feedback from consultants and other service providers around program timing and duration was that the program should be made available to producers sooner than what it was and should run for a longer period of time to allow more producers to engage with the program later on and/or to allow more flexibility for time between sessions.
- The majority of producers interviewed (89%) agreed that the format of the one-on-one consultant sessions was what they needed to support their recovery from the fires. The most commonly mentioned positive aspects of the format were that it was one-on-one and face-to-face.
- There were missed opportunities to increase the value of the program for producers and the return on investment to MLA by providing some producers with additional sessions with a different consultant where they received less than three sessions, providing some producers with less sessions where not all sessions were needed, or using a different consultant for one or more sessions.
- Many consultants were unclear as to what type of advice they were not able to provide during the B2B sessions, with some completely unaware that there were guidelines regarding what type of advice was in and out of scope. Other consultants were aware of the guidelines and followed them as best they could, while others appeared to do what they thought was best for the producer or what the producer wanted regardless of the guidelines.
- Specific advice relating to fire recovery was not provided to 27% of producer participants. These participants instead received advice relating to increasing long term farm productivity and profitability, succession planning and/or other types of advice that may or may not have related directly to the farm business. The timing of the first session influenced the ability and/or need for the consultants to provide advice on fire recovery for at least some producers.
- The most frequently mentioned producer suggestions for increasing the value of the B2B program for other producers in the future included:
 - Make the program available earlier
 - Include provision for ongoing consultant follow-up phone support and/or an additional follow-up session 6-24 months later
 - Increase awareness of the program among eligible producers
 - Provide more information and support for producers when selecting their B2B consultant

- Ensure that producers understand that they have up to three sessions available
 - Ensure that producers understand that they are able to use different consultants across the three sessions and provide a process to facilitate this in practice
 - Provide producers with additional resources to support fire recovery e.g. list of local service providers, sources of key types of information, available grants/financial support
 - Increase the focus on providing mental health support to producers through the program
- COVID-19 impacted on the ability of some producer sessions to be held on farm, particularly in Victoria, where 34% of all sessions were delivered remotely. Twelve percent of producers interviewed reported a decrease in session value for remotely delivered sessions. Producers commented that remote session delivery was less of an issue if they already knew the consultant prior to B2B, and/or if they had already had at least one session on farm beforehand. It was also reported by non-producer stakeholders that COVID-19 was likely to have reduced the willingness of at least some producers to participate in the program.
 - Consultant feedback suggested that other service providers assisting producers with fire recovery were either unaware of B2B, or that the program did not actively seek to engage with other relevant services, other than what individual consultants did at their own discretion.
 - Forty one percent of fire recovery service providers interviewed were unaware of the B2B program. The majority of these representatives were from agencies or organisations that did not necessarily have a direct linkage with state departments of agriculture/catchment management fire recovery staff, who in general had heard of B2B.
 - Among those service providers interviewed who were aware of B2B, 38% actively promoted it. Of the service providers who were unaware of the program, 89% reported that it would have supported the work they were doing, and 80% reported that had they been aware of the B2B program, their organisation would have potentially engaged with it.
 - Three consultants engaged directly with the RFCS during session delivery, mainly with producers who were already being supported by the service, and a further four consultants referred producers to the RFCS. These actions involved 8% of all producer participants. Many stakeholders made specific mention of the opportunity for MLA to engage and work more closely with the RFCS to provide producers with the opportunity for ongoing support after the final consultant session.
 - In general, state coordinators felt well supported by MLA in undertaking their role, and most consultants felt well supported by their state coordinator (69%). Among the 25% of consultants who only felt somewhat well supported or not well supported by the state coordinator, the key areas identified as lacking included provision of feedback on consultant reports and action plans, clarity around the purpose of the program and what was required of consultants, lack of advice and support on how to engage with traumatised producers, a lack of resources to assist with producer referrals to other support services/training activities, and a lack of contact from coordinators to assess consultant progress and to support wellbeing.
 - A range of administrative issues and inconsistencies around delivery were identified during the review which require clarification and management for future delivery. These included: the maximum number of sessions to be delivered per business per day; invoicing requirements where multiple businesses are attending a session simultaneously; allowances for invoicing of other services to producers (e.g. soil tests/farm mapping); and lack of effective communication

with producers about the number of sessions delivered to them and the consultants used to support maximum value from program participation.

- Stakeholder feedback regarding suitability of consultants engaged in the B2B program indicated that most consultants were well placed to deliver the program. Some specific feedback around consultant suitability included perceptions that: there are very few consultants with high level farm business management skills and practical skills in farm production; some consultants who claimed to have skills in business management were relatively unskilled in this area; the skill set of some consultants did not align well with that required for the task of fire recovery; and some consultants were overly focused on pushing their own agenda rather than assisting producers to recover from the fires.
- There were scenarios where the producer eligibility criteria as described in the program guidelines did not provide sufficient clarity to determine whether or not producers qualified. These included properties that were not physically impacted by the fires but were still impacted in other indirect ways, inclusion of dairy enterprises/farms as being eligible, and eligibility of producers who purchased fire impacted properties after the fires.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Although it was a requirement of state coordinators to ensure that all producers completed a registration form, producer registration details were missing for two states, with registration details recorded for only 81% of all producer participants.
- The vast majority of producers interviewed (86%) were satisfied with the level of detail provided in their action plan. Only a small number of producers were dissatisfied, however this response related more to their disagreement with the content of the plan.
- A range of suggestions were provided by stakeholders for improving the templates for consultant session reports and producer action plans, with most relating to simplifying the reporting, reducing duplication and increasing flexibility.
- According to the B2B program guidelines: *“Following the delivery of the three sessions, producers will be required to complete a feedback survey”*. An overall producer feedback response rate of 45% was achieved.
- The B2B guidelines and consultant/state coordinator contracts did not provide clear, consistent direction as to who was responsible for ensuring that producers completed a feedback form after their final session. As a result, there was confusion among state coordinators and consultants as to whether or not it was their role to ensure this occurred.
- Consultants and state coordinators provided various suggestions for how to increase producer feedback response rates in future. These included linking consultant payment to survey completion, providing an incentive for producers to complete the form, providing the survey to producers at the end of the final session for completion on the spot, collecting producer feedback via a phone call with an independent third party, and clarifying the role of consultants and state coordinators in requesting and following up on survey completion.

Program Delivery: Other B2B Offerings

- The event sponsorship program was viewed positively by stakeholders, however delivery of events was severely hampered by COVID-19, especially in Victoria.
- Survey feedback collected by MLA from participants indicates that the webinars were well received and useful for the majority of survey respondents, with 73% reporting an overall satisfaction rating of between 80 and 100%.
- Awareness of the B2B webinars and podcasts among producer participants interviewed for the current review was 26% and 16% respectively. Participation rates in these two activities among producers surveyed was 18% for the webinars and 4% for the podcasts, indicating that the webinars were considerably more popular among these producers than the podcasts.
- Producer survey feedback from this review indicates that the vast majority of producers who participated in either or both the B2B webinars and podcasts perceived them to be either 'extremely' or 'very' useful in supporting their recovery from the bushfires.
- The main reasons why producers who were aware of the B2B webinars and podcasts but did not participate were that they were too stressed or busy or did not have good internet/phone reception at the time.
- There are opportunities to increase producers' awareness and uptake of webinars and podcasts in future through comprehensive marketing and communication activities that acknowledge and consider the emotional trauma that many of the target audience are likely to be experiencing.
- Key types of information sought by producers interviewed immediately after the fires which could be included in future post disaster recovery workshops, webinars and/or podcasts included re-stocking strategies (when and how), pasture recovery (resow or wait), management of weeds, impact of fires on soil health, livestock nutrition/ration development and animal health issues.
- A quarter of the B2B participants interviewed used the MLA website to find information to support their recovery from the bushfires. The most common use involved information around livestock nutrition/ration development.

Impact Assessment

- Eighty-two percent of producers interviewed have implemented or intend to implement their B2B action plan, either in part or in full, with 18% not intending to implement their plan.
- The key reasons for not implementing action plans included: Nothing new to implement compared to what producers were already doing; advice did not align with producer needs; financial, physical and/or emotional constraints to making changes; producers did not agree with the advice; producer satisfaction with what they were already doing; lack of understanding of the advice; considered too risky to implement; lack of sufficient follow-up from consultant to enable implementation; and lack of support from family members to implement changes.

- Eighty-one percent of producers interviewed who have implemented, or plan to implement their B2B action plan, either in part or in full, reported actual or expected benefits that could be measured in economic terms. The economic benefits to producers involved four outcomes:
 - A reduction in time required to fully recover to pre-fire production levels
 - An increase in long term business profit above pre-fire levels
 - A saving in consultant fees where the producer would have engaged with a consultant anyway if B2B had not been available.
 - Grant funding received that would not otherwise have been received without B2B
- Twenty-two percent of producers interviewed who identified an actual or expected economic benefit from implementing their action plan reported benefits relating to short term fire recovery to pre-fire production levels. Seventy-nine percent of these producers reported that the B2B program had reduced the time it would otherwise have taken them to get back to pre-fire level production levels. The reduced time estimated by producers ranged from 2 months to 2 years.
- Seventy-eight percent of producers interviewed who identified an actual or expected economic benefit from implementing their action plan reported a benefit of increased long-term profitability, which may or may not have also involved a reduced time for fire recovery. Sixty percent of these producers reported that they 'would have' or 'probably would have' made the same changes anyway if they had not participated in the B2B program. Of these producers, 14% reported that they would have made these changes at the same time and received the same benefits without the B2B program, with the other 86% reporting that they would have made the changes later and/or received less benefits from making those changes without the advice and support of their B2B consultant/s.
- The average net benefit for those producers who received an economic benefit as a result of participating in the B2B one-on-one sessions was \$6.21 per hectare across 52,284 hectares.
- The review identified various animal wellbeing and environmental/sustainability benefits arising from the B2B program:
 - Increased producer preparedness for future natural disasters, including droughts, floods and fires
 - Improvements in a range of on farm environmental issues including weed control, erosion, ground cover and biodiversity
 - Increased business resilience
 - Improved animal wellbeing after the fires
- The B2B program assisted the vast majority of producers surveyed to increase their skills, knowledge and confidence to make the required decisions to recover from the bushfires and also to improve the long-term profitability of the business.
- The program assisted 89% of producers surveyed to better understand their situation after the fires.

- The B2B program provided an opportunity for producers who had not previously engaged with a farm consultant to assess the value of using a consultant without the financial risk in paying for one.
- As a direct result of having participated in the B2B program, 9% of producers interviewed continued to use their B2B consultant after the program finished when they had previously never used consultants before. A further 15% of producers who had used a consultant in the past but were not using one at the time of the fires, continued to use their B2B consultant after the program ended. These producers would not have, or were unlikely to have, used a consultant to assist with recovery from the bushfires if they had not participated in the B2B program.
- The capacity and capability of some producers improved as a result of new support networks created through the B2B program. Forty-seven percent of producer participants were referred by consultants to a range of suppliers, service providers and support networks to assist with implementation of their action plan, with agronomy being the most commonly referred service.
- Twenty-seven percent of producers surveyed had implemented a range of specific strategies to better plan for future disasters and to reduce the likely impact of future disasters on their business as a result of their participation in the B2B program.
- The B2B program played an important role in supporting the mental health of participating producers during their recovery from the fires. While it appears that the issue of mental health was only actively raised by consultants to a limited degree, the program indirectly impacted positively on producer mental health by providing support and reducing producer stress levels.
- The program had a positive impact on occupational health and safety for 20% of producers interviewed who implemented their action plan.
- Other key benefits not directly received by producer participants included the following:
 - Increased goodwill toward and reputation of MLA among producers, consultants and other industry stakeholders engaged
 - Upskilling of consultants in providing services to producers recovering from a bushfire
 - Increased profile and clientele for participating consultants
- Unexpected positive impacts of the B2B program were reported by 21% of producers surveyed and unexpected negative impact were reported by 7% of producers surveyed. Unexpected negative impacts mainly related to the perceived value and behaviour of consultants, while a range of positive impacts were reported, including sharing information and knowledge gained through the program with friends and neighbours, ongoing free support provided by the consultant, resources provided by the consultant for ongoing use, gaining new and unexpected skills and knowledge, and a realisation that it is okay to ask for help when you need it along with an increased willingness to help others where possible.
- Thirty percent of consultants interviewed reported unexpected positive impacts from their participation in the B2B program, the most frequent of which involved surprise at the strength of positive emotion from helping those in need.

Future Support for Disaster Planning and Recovery

- In terms of assisting producers to be better prepared for future disasters, other fire recovery service providers suggested that MLA could deliver preparedness programs in conjunction with state departments of agriculture/catchment management authorities/fire authorities, have personnel in standing positions of 'preparedness and recovery' ready to help with recovery when needed, and build capacity into recovery networks so that they are embedded in recovery activities.
- The key area of support needed for disaster recovery over the medium to longer term was reported to be moral/emotional support to improve the mental health of producers during the long recovery process.
- Stakeholder feedback suggests that some consultants may have benefitted from post session counselling to support their mental health.

Recommendations

A total of 34 recommendations have been made based on the assumption that MLA intends to deploy the B2B program again in the future. These recommendations are summarised in four categories below. The recommendations for program planning are considered to be the highest priority, and can be actioned immediately in preparation for a future disaster event. Further detail on individual recommendations is provided in Section 4.0 of this report.

Planning

Recommendation 1: MLA to review, clarify and clearly state the intended purposes of the B2B program.

Recommendation 2: MLA, with input from relevant stakeholders/future delivery partners, to review and clarify project objectives and intended outcomes to ensure that they accurately reflect the intended purposes of the program, and that they are SMART⁵ in order to enable measurement of success against intended outcomes.

Recommendation 3: MLA to review and clarify the intended target audience of the B2B program and ensure that producer eligibility criteria align with those targets.

Recommendation 4: MLA to establish a business continuity plan for natural disasters impacting the industry, that includes core disaster response roles and responsibilities for selected MLA staff, along with deployment processes that enable staff to immediately slip into these emergency roles without the additional burden of pre-existing work on top of these roles.

Recommendation 5: MLA to establish a pre-approved list of B2B state-coordinators across all states and territories of Australia that is reviewed and updated annually.

Recommendation 6: MLA to establish a pre-approved list of B2B registered consultants across all states and territories of Australia that is reviewed and updated annually.

⁵ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Bound (SMART)

Recommendation 7: MLA and state coordinators to have state coordinator and consultant program contracts pre-agreed in principle and reviewed and updated annually as required.

Recommendation 8: MLA aim to offer the B2B program within 2 weeks of a natural disaster, depending on the disaster situation and pending advice from first responders on the ground.

Recommendation 9: MLA to investigate opportunities to seek project funding partners, such as drought hubs, state governments, other RDCs and philanthropic businesses (e.g. corporate2community, banks, insurance companies).

Recommendation 10: MLA to review the length of time for producer registration and the length of time allowed for registered producers to complete their three (or less) sessions, giving consideration to the intended purpose of the B2B program, available resources for program delivery and the review findings (as described in section 4.0).

Recommendation 11: MLA to explore and seek out opportunities to engage with national and state disaster recovery organisations.

Recommendation 12: MLA considers changing the program name to remove the word 'Business'. A suggested alternative title for the program is 'Back on Track'.

Recommendation 13: MLA to develop a project Communication and Marketing Plan.

Recommendation 14: MLA to develop a project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan that supports measurement of success against the intended project outcomes, and aligns with the MLA Triple Bottom Line Evaluation Framework and the Adoption Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

Structure/Support Offered

Recommendation 15: Retain the four key elements of the B2B project to support producers recovering from a natural disaster.

Recommendation 16: MLA to investigate and consider the option of offering a review session to some or all B2B producers, suggested to occur 12-24 months after the fires.

Recommendation 17: MLA to investigate and consider the option of offering phone support to some or all B2B producers, suggested for up to 24 months after the fires.

Recommendation 18: MLA to investigate and consider options to better support the mental health of producers impacted by natural disasters through the B2B program.

Recommendation 19: MLA to explore the option of providing producer participants and B2B consultants with a summary resource in hard copy form that provides key steps and advice for immediate actions required post event for recovery, along with a list of key service providers and resources available to support recovery (including grants/financial support).

Recommendation 20: MLA to explore the option of engaging and working closely with the RFCS as part of the B2B delivery model to provide an opportunity for interested producers to receive ongoing support through the service after the final B2B session.

Program Delivery

Recommendation 21: MLA to develop a process for increased scrutiny of consultants in relation to meeting the eligibility criteria, particularly in relation to claimed skills in financial analysis and business management and alignment of consultant skills with those considered to be required for assisting producers with disaster recovery.

Recommendation 22: State coordinators to ensure that approved consultants are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities as either a farm management consultant or a technical specialist consultant.

Recommendation 23: MLA to investigate opportunities for increasing the required skill set among B2B consultants and to provide pathways for younger/less experienced consultants to come into the program.

Recommendation 24: MLA to consider and clarify potential conflicts of interest for consultants.

Recommendation 25: MLA to consider options for supporting the mental health of B2B consultants.

Recommendation 26: MLA to review and revise the role of state coordinators to increase consultant wellbeing, to maximise benefits for individual producers, to increase participation rate and to increase return on investment for MLA.

Recommendation 27: MLA to provide greater clarity to state coordinators around a range of administration issues identified during the review.

Recommendation 28: MLA to investigate and consider the option of using a triage system to assist with increasing benefits of participating in the program for individual producers.

Recommendation 29: MLA to investigate ways of better supporting producers to make a more informed decision as to which consultant/s to select.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Recommendation 30: MLA to ensure that state coordinators collect and log registration details to MLA for all producer participants into a central database.

Recommendation 31: Amend the B2B producer registration form to enable producers to provide single figure estimates of farm size and pre-fire livestock numbers rather than selecting from a list of ranges.

Recommendation 32: MLA to review the B2B consultant session report and producer action plan templates and revise as required.

Recommendation 33: State coordinators to submit all consultant session reports and producer action plans to MLA.

Recommendation 34: MLA to review, clarify and communicate expectations, process and responsibilities for completion of producer feedback surveys.

Appendix B: Case Studies

NSW - Southern

Context

From 1 July 2019 to the end of the bushfire season on 31 March 2020, there were more than 11,400 bush and grass fires across NSW. The fires burnt 6.2 per cent of the state – the largest burnt area recorded in a single fire season in eastern Australia⁶ (Figure B1).

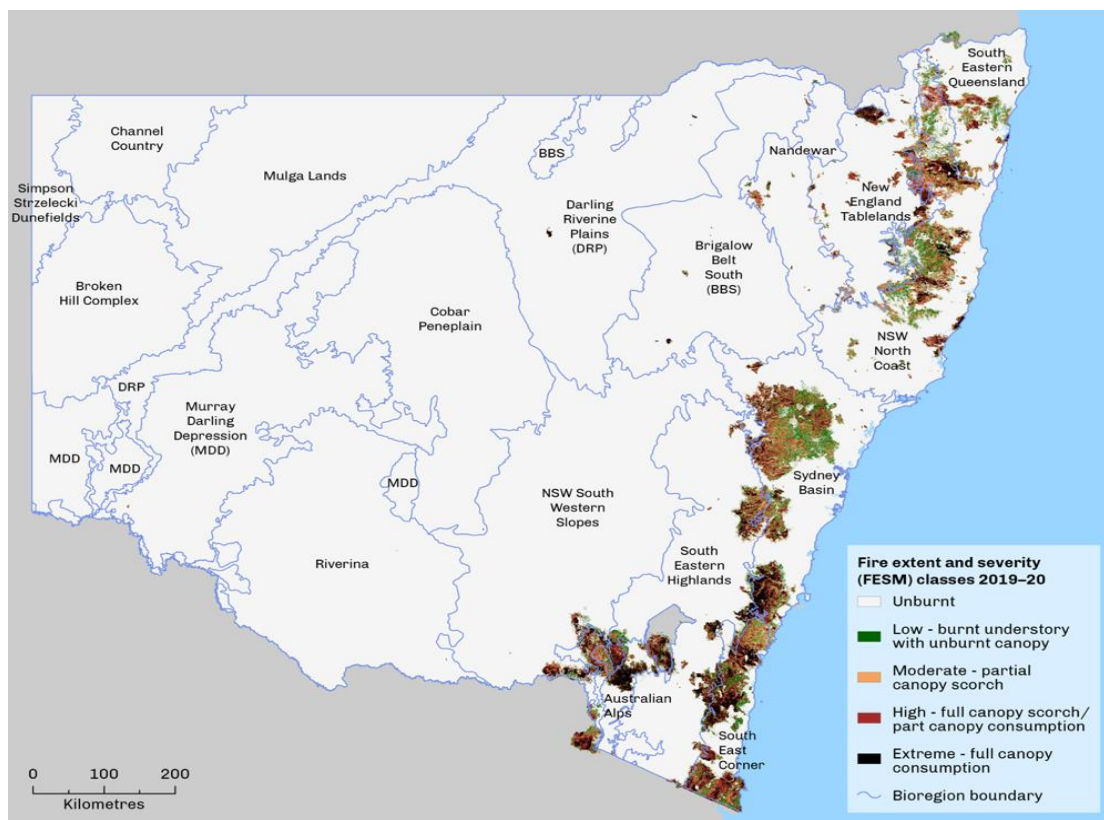


Figure B1: Fire extent and severity mapping, 2019-20 NSW Black Summer bushfires⁷

Losses experienced by the agricultural community were also grave, with thousands of farms affected by significant losses of livestock, placing further strain on a sector already suffering wide-spread effects of drought.

The fire complexes that impacted on Southern NSW included:

- Badja Forest Road fire
- Currowan fire
- Dunns Road fire in Snowy Valley
- Good fire in the Snowy Monaro region

⁶Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/black-summer-bushfires-vic-2019-20/>

⁷ <https://www.soe.epa.nsw.gov.au/all-themes/land/fire>

- Green Valley Talmalmo fire
- Werri Berri fire in the Bega Valley
- Border fire in the far south
- Clyde Mountain Upper Turon fire

Combined, these fires burned 1,506,193 hectares (27.3 per cent of NSW’s total area burned) and 1,523 homes (58 per cent of the total)⁸.

In the Greater Hume and Snowy Valleys, 94 properties surveyed⁹ by NSW DPI had 53,926 hectares burnt from 74,297 hectares (average 78% of property area burnt) and the loss of approximately 9,006 head of livestock. The average cost per hectare burnt was estimated at \$1,200, with a total estimated cost for recovery of \$687,600 per business over 4 years for recovery¹⁰.

Non-Participating Producers

Eight interviews were conducted with producers who had not enrolled in the B2B program to discover why they had not engaged in the program. The producers’ properties were all affected by fires, ranging from 90% burnt to burnt up to the boundary but not into their property with no impact on fences. Property size ranged from 40 ha to 900 hectares. Three producers lost livestock as well as fences and infrastructure. One had multiple properties burnt by the various fire fronts and one had their property burnt twice, 5 days apart.

The producers interviewed had properties at Tumbarumba, Wondalga, Ellerslie, Lower Bago, Oberon Creek and other areas within the Snowy Council area. One came from the northern fire range on the Queensland border (Figure B2).



Figure B2: Location of producers interviewed relative to the fire footprint in NSW

⁸ As above

⁹ NSW DPI (2020) Bushfire Impact on Red Meat Industry (sheep and cattle) in the Greater Hume and Snowy Valleys Local Government Areas Report.

¹⁰ As above

Recovery Activities and Assistance

The actions undertaken by the producers following the fires are shown in Figure B3, with the key activity being replacing fencing and feeding livestock.

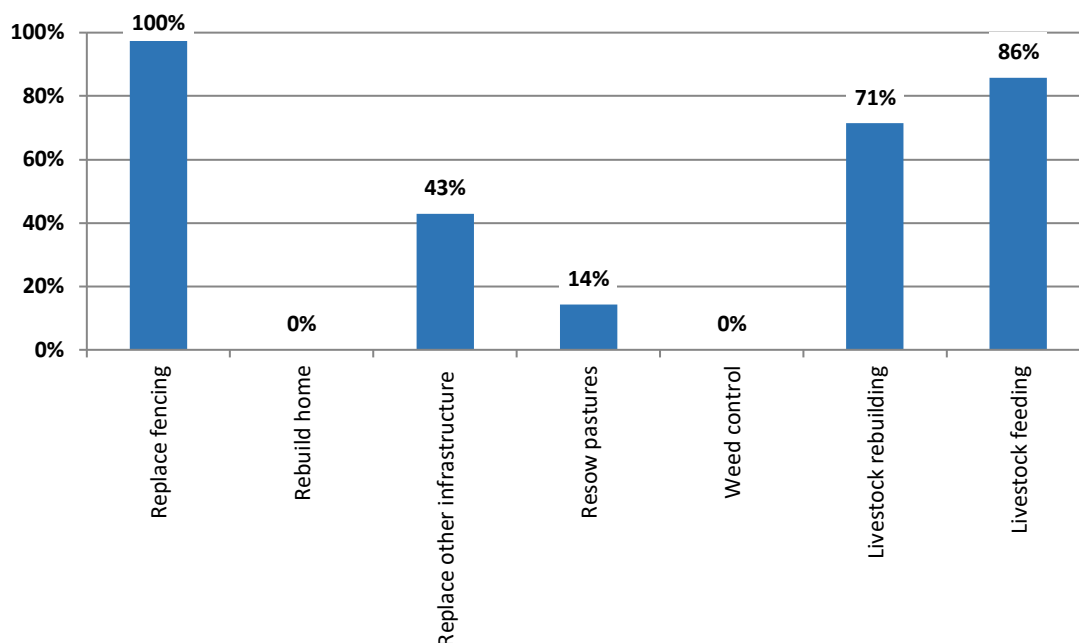


Figure B3: Actions undertaken by respondents to recover from fire

The producers used a variety of different service providers to undertake their recovery activities, which included (but were not limited to):

- Rural Financial Counselling Services
- NSW DPI/LLS (including LLS vets)
- Supply company advisor
- Accountant
- Banker
- Insurance agent
- Blaze Aid and other fencing groups e.g. Uniting Church
- Army and other organisations for removing fences and buildings

The main activities service providers assisted with were fencing and clean up, accessing insurance, applying for grants and stock disposal. Only one producer sought one to one advice, but was vague in the details of what that was. The others gave reasons such as:

Too busy

Didn't think we needed it.

My husband is very stoic and thought he could do it himself.

I am very organised and didn't need it.

Only one producer recalled using the MLA website to find information but did not think it was specifically aimed at recovering from bushfires, but more general on pastures and livestock feeding. They also listened to the MLA webinars but thought they were the general webinars on production rather than recovery from bushfire.

None of the producers interviewed normally use consultants, with one commenting that he was ‘too old for it and a bit set in my ways’.

Finding: The producers interviewed from NSW used many different services to assist them with bushfire recovery to assist with replacing fences, accessing grants, insurance and other services, information, and fodder for feeding livestock, advice for resowing and herd/flock rebuilding. The majority of these services were face-to-face and/or one-on-one. They were less likely to use websites and other forms of virtual assistance as some had limited access to internet after the fires or didn't have the time.

B2B Program

Awareness of B2B

Five producers (62%) had heard of the Back to Business program (Figure B4). Of those, two offered reasons why they didn't take it up:

*Heard about it from a neighbour but was too busy at the time to consider taking it up.
I was vaguely aware of it from newsletters but I didn't think I needed it.*

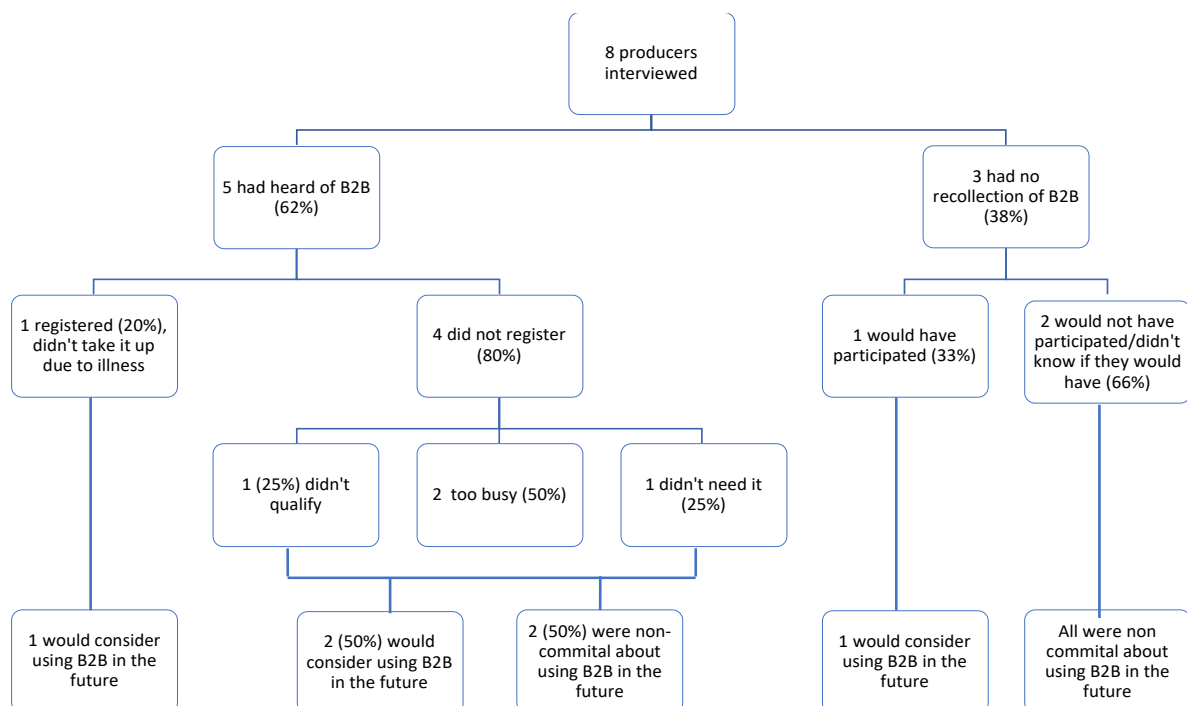


Figure B4: Producers responses to questions about awareness of B2B

Of the three remaining producers who hadn't heard of it (33%), one thought they would have participated. One producer registered for the program but then her husband had a health problem and they ran out of time to access B2B before it finished. Of the remaining four producers who had heard of the program but didn't register, two were too busy, one didn't qualify and one didn't think they needed it (Figure B4).

Four of the producers (50%) thought they would have been likely or very likely to use B2B in the future if need arose with the others being non-committal about likelihood of future use.

***Finding:** Just over half (62%) of the producers interviewed had heard of B2B and one had registered but needed to withdraw for health reasons, the others thinking they didn't need it or were 'too busy' or didn't qualify. Of the remaining who hadn't heard of B2B, only one would have used B2B. Half of the producers interviewed thought they may use B2B in the future if the need arose, the others were non-committal.*

Barriers to participating in B2B

When asked why they thought more producers hadn't taken up B2B, the responses were that:

- It was too early for a lot of producers, many of whom were '*too busy fencing and feeding livestock*'. Also, there was a lot on offer early and this was confusing.
- Lack of awareness of the program in general. It seems that unless the program was getting a lot of word of mouth from other service providers or through the media/social media, many were too inundated with other offers and activities to take notice of electronic communications. Landline, phone tower and internet outages also restricted who got to see the communications they were sent.
- Lack of understanding of what it really was about. The word 'business' was thought to be off-putting to some.
- Too busy fencing and feeding livestock to pay attention to extra support on offer and/or missed the deadlines.
- Already had the support they needed from other services e.g. RFCS and Business Enterprise Centres who were offering a similar service.
- Producers were too stressed, overwhelmed and traumatised to pay attention to the many offers of help. One producer commented '*(there was) A lot of trauma, few with plans. Many with not great management skills too and reluctant to proactively chase professional help. Including some big operators in this area.*'
- Some producers don't want outside help with the refrain 'other people need it more than me' a common one. Also, some are proud of their ability to be stoic and sort it out themselves, others are isolated in valleys and are an older demographic unused to accepting help from strangers.

My wife monitors the email and she didn't tell me about it and didn't hear about it at any of the recovery meetings I went to.

Too much on offer early on - too traumatised and wanting to get on with it to seek help

Finding: The main reasons cited for more producers not knowing about B2B were lack of awareness of the program or understanding of what it was about and producers being too stressed to take in the information on offer or be able to process the information they were given. There was acknowledgement that there was a lot on offer and some similar services being offered from other service providers.

Improving future participation in B2B

When asked how B2B could be changed to make it more appealing or more useful, one producer commented the following:

One of the biggest issues we have is replacing stock because the prices are through the roof. Help with purchasing genetics would be good i.e. loans or rent a bull or something like that.

This comment was backed by service providers saying that the Dairy Industry support package funded by NSW DPI¹¹ allowed for the purchase of replacement stock (up to \$200,000) but that nothing was on offer for beef producers. Beef was not one of the industries supported by this initiative.

Cash is king in this instance. I needed cash to get things rolling so \$75K grant useful. The fire has had a 5 year impact on cashflow. If MLA wanted to really help, sourcing replacement cattle, not charging us levies for a period of time, helping with costs of cattle burial etc is what we needed. Not sure if it is their (MLA's) job to help here but that's what I needed NSW have given us rate relief for 12 months, all adds up.

Other needs that producers expressed for help in addition to fodder and fencing was herd rebuilding, managing pastures and weeds and nursing fire affected stock. Two mentioned help with fire plans and said:

People had to be loud about what happened to get help, and people don't like to be loud. Sometimes the undeserving got what others should have gotten. Perhaps MLA could help with organising and networking with people to make the connections to the people that needed help the most but weren't asking for it.

Suggestions from the non-participating producers interviewed to improve the uptake of B2B included:

- Having B2B offered for a longer time period
- Promoting B2B face-to-face to create a human connection and trust with producers in trauma.

¹¹ Bushfire Industry Recovery Package – Supply chain support grants- Dairy. NSW Government. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/DPC%20A3609849%20%20FACT%20SHEET%20-%20DAIRY%20-%20Supply%20Chain%20Support%20Grants%20copy.pdf>

- Promoting more stories of recovery in the feedback magazine/online to give examples of how it can help with reference to B2B.

Finding: Improving participation in B2B in the future is thought to need longer time frames, more face-to-face promotion and promoting stories of recovery to explain how it can help with herd rebuilding and other practical issues.

Preparing for future disasters

Two of the producers interviewed suggested that MLA could help them prepare fire plans and how to look after animals after the fires. One producer commented:

It's hard to get people to prepare - they don't like to plan. MLA should keep offering lots of basic stuff to upskill producers, and encourage more use of consultants.

Finding: Two non-participant producers suggested MLA could help them prepare fires plans and how to manage livestock after a fire including sick/burnt animals.

Need for on-going support

There is a spectrum of recovery for producers in the NSW. Two are still building fences and would like assistance with labour, one thinks her husband needs assistance with mental health as he is now ready to talk about his traumatic experiences and another would like help with rebuilding the genetic base of their sheep flock and cattle herd. At the other end of the spectrum, two producers have recovered well, with two good seasons and exceptional cattle prices. One commented 'we are fine' while the other said fire recovery cost them around \$850,000. The following quotes show where people are at now:

I'm in my 70's trying to get succession happening on farm. Also, every situation is different, what I need is different from my neighbours.

There is fatigue following the fires but most farmers in our area have got on with it and the good seasons/prices have made it easier to get back to business again.

Run more of this type of program - it's needed. And run it every time there is a natural disaster so beef guys get used to it and recognise it. Then the uptake will increase, and the benefits.

I have had PTSD - finally got some treatment last year and am recovering from it. Also struggled to get some of the financial assistance as I left it too late but did fight to get what we needed when initially told no, because annoyed that greedy people were jumping in early.

***Finding:** Half of the producers interviewed are still in the recovery phase who need help with fencing, herd/flock rebuilding and mental health. The remainder consider they have recovered, aided by the two good seasons.*

Conclusions

In NSW, 63% of the interviewed non-participating producers were aware of B2B but only one registered (and was unable to take it up) while the others did not consider they needed it or were too busy rebuilding to access it. The remaining producers had no recollection of the program.

Of the producers who were not aware of B2B, 33% said they were likely to have used it and the rest said they didn't know if they would have. Of the all the producers interviewed, 50% said they were likely to access B2B in the future and the other producers were ambivalent about whether they would or not.

The main reasons reported by non-participating producers as to why B2B was not more widely known:

- Lack of awareness of the program which was generally thought to be a lack of face-to-face communications with producers (or the service providers that were working with them) to explain the program and the benefits. There was also the perception that other services were on offer that were similar to B2B provided by the RFCS and Business Enterprise Centre.
- Producers were in general overwhelmed by the trauma, recovery process and the many offers of support and needed one to one help to sort it out and repeated messaging to have B2B front of mind.
- Producer tendency to be 'stoic' and not seek help, even if they could have benefited from it. Sometimes this was thought to be age related and some thought it was a 'trust' issue. One producer mentioned about being conscious that 'others needed it more'.

If B2B was to be offered again in the NSW, non-participant producer feedback suggests that they responded best to face-to-face information sharing rather than from electronic communications and also from one-to-one offers of assistance rather than having to sort through what was useful and what wasn't. It would also be useful if B2B could have been offered over a longer time period for those producers who were initially too traumatised/overwhelmed to see the benefit, but who over time, came to the realisation they needed help.

South Australia

Context

In the summer of 2019-2020, fires raged across three different zones in South Australia in 2,286 individual blazes. These fires resulted in more than 1,180 homes, non-residential buildings, and facilities being destroyed or damaged. Sadly, three people died¹².

These large-scale bushfires burnt 278,603 hectares of land (Figure B5), severely impacting Yorketown, the Adelaide Hills and Kangaroo Island and key industries including tourism, primary producers,

¹² <https://www.recovery.sa.gov.au/Past-Events/what-happened/2019-20-SA-Bushfire-Recovery-Interim-Report-Web.pdf>

viticulture and forestry. It is estimated that 67,928 livestock worth \$16.99 million were lost or destroyed, with 1,200 primary production businesses impacted¹³.

The Kangaroo Island fires burned 211,500 hectares including one of SA's most important ecological sites, Flinders Chase National Park, home to the endangered and endemic Kangaroo Island dunnart and the glossy black cockatoo. An estimated 25,000 koalas were killed, with the habitats of numerous other animals destroyed¹⁴.

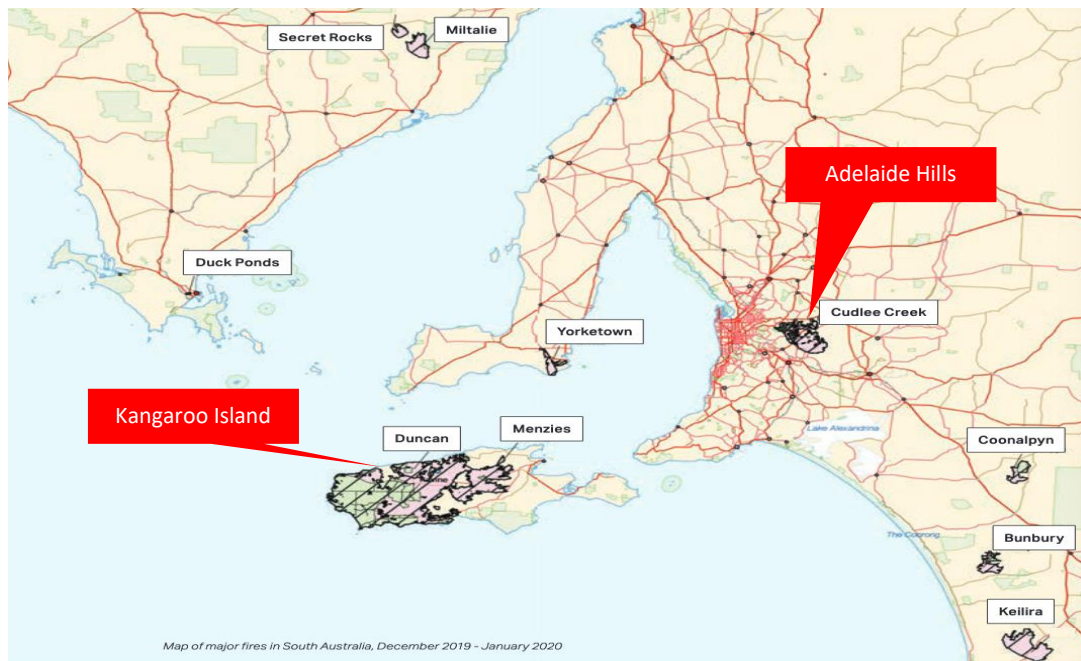


Figure B5: Map of Major Fires in South Australia December 2019 – January 2020¹⁵

Non-participating producers

Seven interviews were conducted with SA producers who had not enrolled in the B2B program to explore why they had not engaged in the program.

These producers were all affected by the fires, with most having 75% or more of their farm area impacted. Property size ranged from 43 to 1,335 hectares. Four producers lost livestock and all lost fences and infrastructure. Three had multiple properties burnt by the various fire fronts and one was burnt twice as new fire fronts came through.

The producers had properties in post codes: 5220 – Kangaroo Island (2 properties), 5223 – Kangaroo Island (3 properties) and 5244 – Adelaide Hills (3 properties) (Figure B5).

¹³ As above
¹⁴ As above
¹⁵ As above

Recovery activities and assistance

The actions undertaken by the producers following the fires are shown in Figure B6, with the key activity being replacing fencing. Other help was also received with replanting trees and constructing new creek crossings and new dwellings.

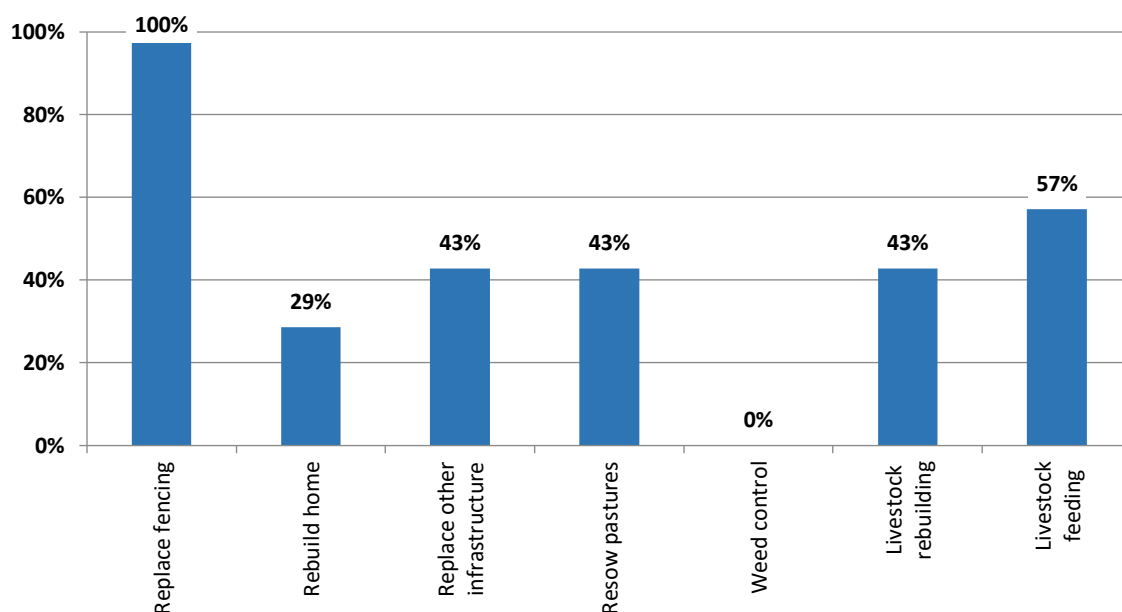


Figure B6: Actions undertaken by respondents to recover from fire

The producers interviewed used a variety of different service providers to undertake their recovery activities. These included (but were not limited to):

- State Department of Agriculture (PIRSA)
- Stock agent
- Accountant
- Blaze Aid

The main activities these service providers assisted with were fencing and clean up, applying for grants and insurance claims.

One producer had no help from anyone and said:

Nothing, not even help with fencing. I bought droppers and propped up fences in the short term, then permanently fixed them where needed. Having saved my stock meant the focus was on feeding them and this effectively preserved my source of income.

Only one producer recalled getting specific advice from someone he described as a consultant, 'maybe someone from PIRSA and Dairy SA'. The other six producers gave various reasons for not using 1 to 1 consultant advice such as:

*Too busy
(I) knew what I wanted to do
(I) was overwhelmed and too busy to think about that sort of thing
(I) didn't need it
(I) had the relevant skills set plus my main job was off-farm.*

Two producers had previously used consultants, one for pastures and nutrition advice and the other for financial advice. Another said they attended seminars and used specialist people, but not agricultural consultants.

Only one producer of the seven producers could recall using the MLA website for information but not specifically for bushfires recovery, and another said he used it for information on soils and pastures.

***Finding:** The producers interviewed from SA used services during the bushfire recovery phase to assist with fencing and other infrastructure rebuilding (including houses) as well as for advice and help with pasture resowing, feeding livestock and herd/flock rebuilding. In general producers did not use consultants for advice and only two could recall using the MLA website for information.*

Feedback on B2B program

In SA 40 red meat producers participated in the B2B program from 1,200 impacted primary production businesses.

Awareness of B2B

Five of the producers (71%) were aware of the B2B program (Figure B7). The reasons they gave for not using B2B included 'timing wasn't right', 'too busy and too emotionally affected', 'wasn't for me' and 'didn't think I needed it'. One said:

'There is a lot you can read. I didn't feel I needed a consultant at the time.'

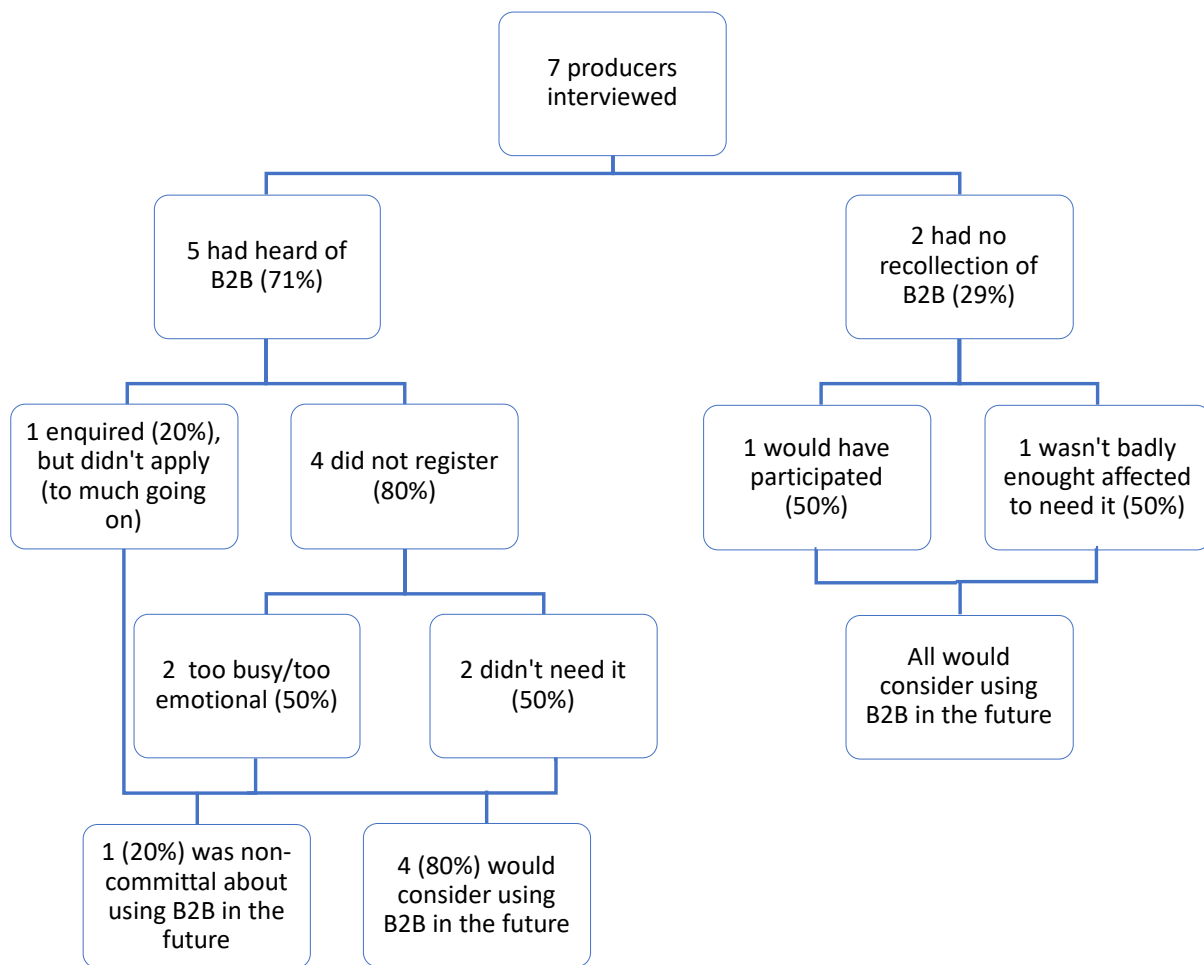


Figure B7: Producers responses to questions about awareness of B2B

One producer enquired but didn't register because:

We had enough going on doing what I know we needed to do. We were in survival mode at the time. I had no time to take on anything new and take on more by working with a consultant.

In other words, at least in part, they saw B2B as needing extra work (they didn't have time) and headspace (they were in survival mode).

For the two producers who were not aware of the program, only one thought they would have used it if they knew about it, and one said they were not badly enough affected as it mainly burnt the hills and some fencing. Both were from the Adelaide Hills.

Only one producer thought, in hindsight, that B2B would have helped them with recovery, and four said maybe. Four (57%) thought they might be likely or very likely to use B2B in the future if faced with another disaster, depending on the circumstances.

Finding: Most (71%) of the producers interviewed could recall hearing about B2B and one made an enquiry but did not apply as had too much going on. The others didn't register as they were either 'too

busy and/or emotionally' affected or thought they had the resources to do it themselves. Of the 29% who had not heard of B2B, one (50%) would have participated and the other was not badly enough affected. Most of the producers interviewed (86%) would consider using B2B in the future if they were faced with similar magnitude fires.

Concerns about B2B

One producer expressed concerns that consultants can rort programs such as this (where someone else is paying):

Through excessive charging, especially, where another party is picking up the bill...Consultants can be like fencing contractors. Everyone thinks they are good at it, but few are, so the quality of the consultants on the list for MLA's program needs to be good.

Another said '*not all consultants push the right messages'* and one was concerned about MLA (or PIRSA) running a program like this, noting that they '*might be pushing their own agendas'*.

Finding: *Some of the producers interviewed had concerns about B2B either being rorted by consultants and/or being used to push service provider agendas.*

Barriers to participating in B2B

When asked why they thought more producers hadn't taken up B2B, the responses were that:

- It was too early for a lot of producers, many of whom were busy building fences and infrastructure.
- Lack of awareness of the program in general. It seems that unless the program was getting a lot of word of mouth from other service providers or through the media/social media, many felt too inundated with other offers and activities to take notice of emails. There seemed to be more knowledge of the program amongst producers interviewed from Kangaroo Island compared to the producers interviewed from the Adelaide Hills.
- Lack of understanding of what it really was about. Some thought it involved 'work' around their financial records they didn't want to do. Some had trust issues with MLA/PIRSA, '*if there was no local representative, there is less trust'*. This included too much time and effort to apply.
- Too busy fencing and feeding livestock
- Producers were too stressed, overwhelmed and traumatised to pay attention to the many offers of help. One producer commented '*People were mentally and physically wrecked. The fires were so massive and went for so long'*
- Some producers didn't want outside help with one producer commenting that '*Older full and part time farmers in his area often don't welcome new ideas'*.
- Many producers in the Adelaide Hills rely on off-farm income so didn't have the time or need to get involved. Also, older full and part-time farmers in this area perceived to not be welcome to new ideas.

Dairy SA were very active with dairy producers. I was not aware of what MLA were offering.

If no local representative there is less trust.

Finding: *The main reasons cited for why more producers did not get involved in B2B related to lack of awareness of the program and understanding of what it was about; stress and trauma impacting on producers' ability to process what offers were available and a small level of distrust in MLA/service providers involved in the program. Many producers also felt that people were too busy rebuilding infrastructure as the first step before they looked for other forms of help.*

Improving future participation in B2B

B2B was a new initiative developed specifically for the Black Summer fires so had no brand recognition or track history with previous events. As a result, awareness needed to be built amongst fire recovery agencies and service providers. While five producers (71%) identified there was a need for B2B, it was evident from the interviews that word of mouth from trusted local people was the way most producers found out what was available to help them. If the local service providers didn't know what B2B was, then it was unlikely to have been taken up producers. Suggestions from the producers interviewed to improve the uptake of B2B included:

- Channel information through regional recovery centres including handouts and personally brief the recovery centre staff as to what B2B was/how to access it.
- Phone/visit affected landholders to see how they are going and make the offer of B2B if relevant. This is something Dairy SA did for dairy producers.
- Use trusted locals i.e. livestock agents to pass on the information.
- Piggyback on field days to ensure the information is available to those attending.

Great that MLA is helping us, we just need to accept that help when we hear about it. Next time MLA needs to make sure people know it's available.

Help from MLA is great where it hits the mark - just need to connect locally first and ensure it's timely.

Finding: *Improving participation in B2B in the future is thought need a more personal approach from MLA as although more producers knew about it than in other areas, there was a reluctance to engage with MLA by some. There was also the suggestion that MLA needs to reach out one to one to producers like Dairy SA did and to piggy back on recovery field days more.*

Preparing for future disasters

Producers were asked how MLA could better prepare people for future disasters. Their responses indicated that they want MLA to facilitate sessions where they could:

- Hear others stories of survival and recovery from disasters
- Analyse their personal risks
- Make personal plans and prepare for disaster

- Learn about how to use tools like insurance effectively

Maybe MLA hosts facilitated sessions where producers and key speakers who have lived through disasters tell their stories and how to plan/prepare.

The most important thing is to forearm people and help them plan and know how to act before the next disaster.

Finding: Producers thought that MLA could help prepare others for future disasters by facilitating sessions to help people prepare plans for future disasters, analyse risk and hear stories of survival and recovery from disaster.

Need for on-going support

Only one of the producers interviewed was still rebuilding and said it would just take time.

These final comments from producers highlight the needs of producers going forward:

You never really know how you will cope until you're in it. You learn a lot from surviving a fire. Some still can't even talk about it - mental health is a big one.

My situation was unique because I have a trucking business too, and was pretty well insured. I really feel for my full-time farming friends who were so affected by the fire. I have been frantically busy since the fires with both of my businesses. I did lots to help fire affected people through my trucking business but could not meet the demand. I am still working to get the farm back to where it was before the fires hit.

MLA should do something like this again because it was a good idea. Younger people in particular - especially if in debt and wanting to learn new things - would benefit most as long as you get compatible consultants where you agree with what they recommend.

Finding: Only one of the producers interviewed was still in the recovery phase, the rest had moved forward and were no longer in need of support.

Conclusions

In SA, 71% of the on-participating producers interviewed were aware of B2B but didn't think they needed it or were too busy or emotional to register. The remaining 29% had no recollection of the program and were from the Adelaide Hills.

Of the producers who were not aware of B2B, one (50%) said they were likely to have used it if they had known and the other said they weren't badly affected enough. Half of the interviewed producers thought they may use B2B in the future if faced with another disaster of this magnitude.

The main reasons non-participating producers thought that B2B was not taken up by more producers were:

- Lack of awareness and understanding of what B2B was and how it could help. This indicates a need for more face-to-face and one to one communication with producers.
- Producers' levels of stress, trauma and overwhelm following the fires and their desire to get actively involved in fencing, feeding livestock and other infrastructure rebuilding to be bothered looking through all the offers of help or take in what was on offer.
- A degree of distrust of MLA and/or service providers delivering the program and perceptions of self-interest.
- Producers' tendency to be 'stoic' and not need help or not seek help, even if they could have benefited from it.

If B2B was to be offered again in SA, there was a small proportion of non-participant feedback suggesting MLA needs a look at who was delivering the program in SA and an emphasis on building trust with MLA through use of face-to-face promotion using trusted locals. There is also merit in offering the program over a longer time frame to allow producers who were initially too busy/traumatised to be aware of the program an opportunity to engage when they were ready and realised they could benefit from the program.

Victoria – Upper Murray

Context

The North East (Talmalmo) fires started on 29 December 2019 in NSW as a result of lightning strikes and spread on 30 December south into North East Victoria. Additional fire activity commenced in Abbeyard on 31 December 2019 and near Wodonga on 10 January 2020. As of 17 February 2020, around 394,000 hectares in Towong (205,000 ha) and Alpine (187,000 ha) LGAs were burnt. The fires affected 63,836 hectares of total agricultural land in Towong (59,849 ha) and Alpine (4,000 ha) LGAs affecting 365 agricultural properties in the North East of Victoria (Figure B8)¹⁶.

Most of the impacted properties are beef cattle and sheep enterprises, with a few dairy producers. Approximately 3,385 beef cattle died and 1,887 went missing; and 2,053 sheep died while 814 went missing (total 8,580 livestock dead or missing). The majority of the Upper Murray is considered to be cattle country with some pockets of dairy and sheep.¹⁷

Overall, 303 structures were destroyed including 22 primary residences, 35 secondary residences, 23 wool sheds, 2 dairy sheds, 129 hay sheds, 92 machinery sheds. In addition, 16 irrigation pumps were also destroyed.¹⁸ About 3,472 kilometres of fencing was damaged – external fences (2,123 kilometres) and internal fences (1,349 kilometres).¹⁹

¹⁶ Unpublished data from Agriculture Victoria (pers. comm. Kylie Macreadie)

¹⁷ As above

¹⁸ As above

¹⁹ As above

Of the estimated households affected by fires, over 300 are still being case managed²⁰ by the North East’s community health care network, Gateway Health, in 2022. A proportion of those are farmers who are rebuilding their businesses and lives post bushfires.

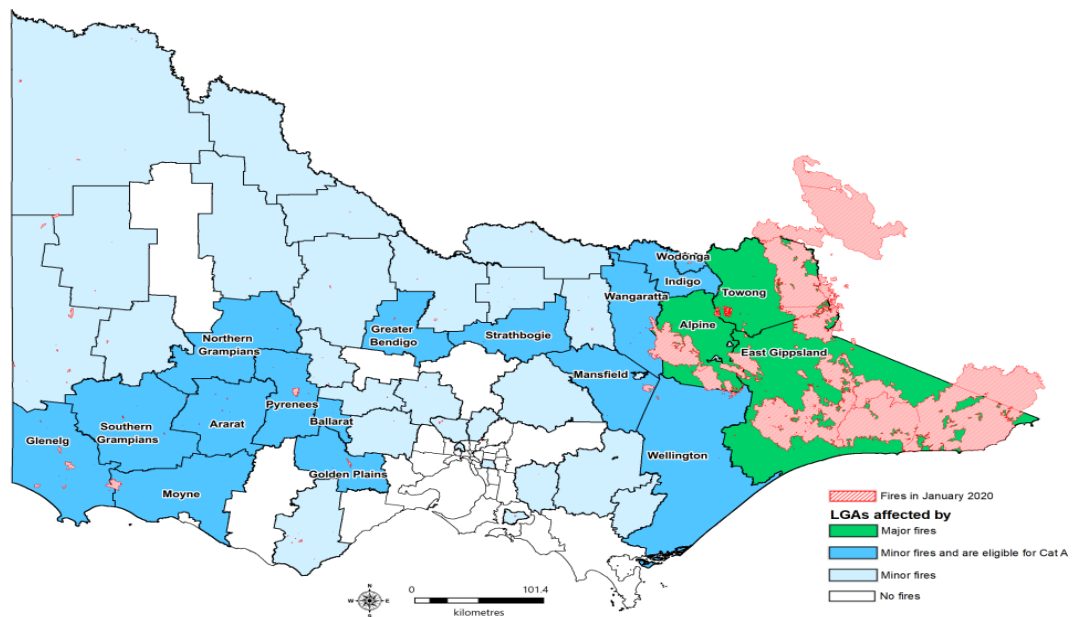


Figure B8: Location of 2019-2020 summer fires that impacted on Victoria²¹

Non-participating producers

Seven interviews were conducted with producers from this region who had not enrolled in the B2B program to discover why they had not engaged in the program.

Producers’ properties were all affected by fires, ranging from completely burnt to less than 10% burnt. Property size ranged from 40 to 400 hectares. Four producers lost livestock as well as fences and infrastructure. One had multiple properties burnt by the various fire fronts.

Three producers were from Cudgewa, one also had property at Tintaldra, one was from Lucyvale, one from Burrowye, one from Mt Alfred and one from Walwa (Figure B9).

²⁰ Case management is a process to help connect fire affected landholders with the services and advice they need to recovery from fire. It encompasses emergency support for housing, food etc to infrastructure rebuilding, mental health support, and other forms of business and personal support.

²¹ Unpublished data from Agriculture Victoria (pers comms Kylie Macreadie)

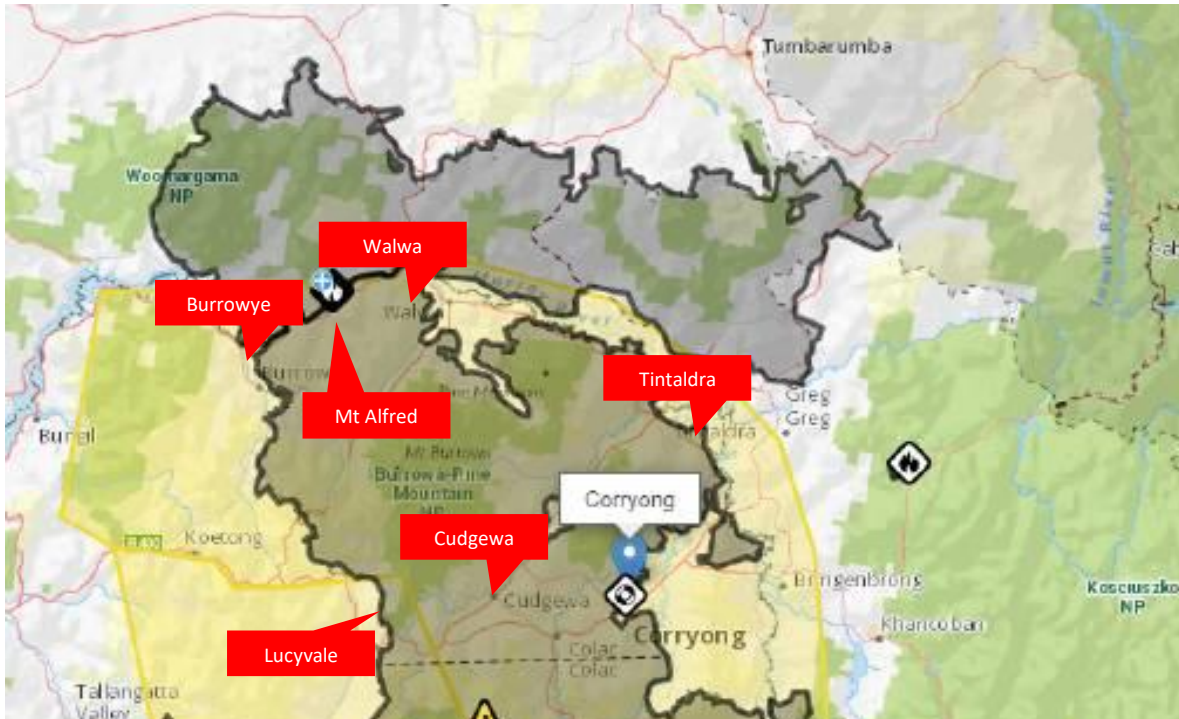


Figure B9: Location of producers interviewed relative to the fire footprint

Recovery Activities and Assistance

The actions undertaken by the producers following the fires are shown in Figure B10, with the key activity being replacing fencing, followed by pasture resowing, feeding livestock and herd/flock rebuilding. One producer reported that they spent time dealing with dams that silted up after the rains came.

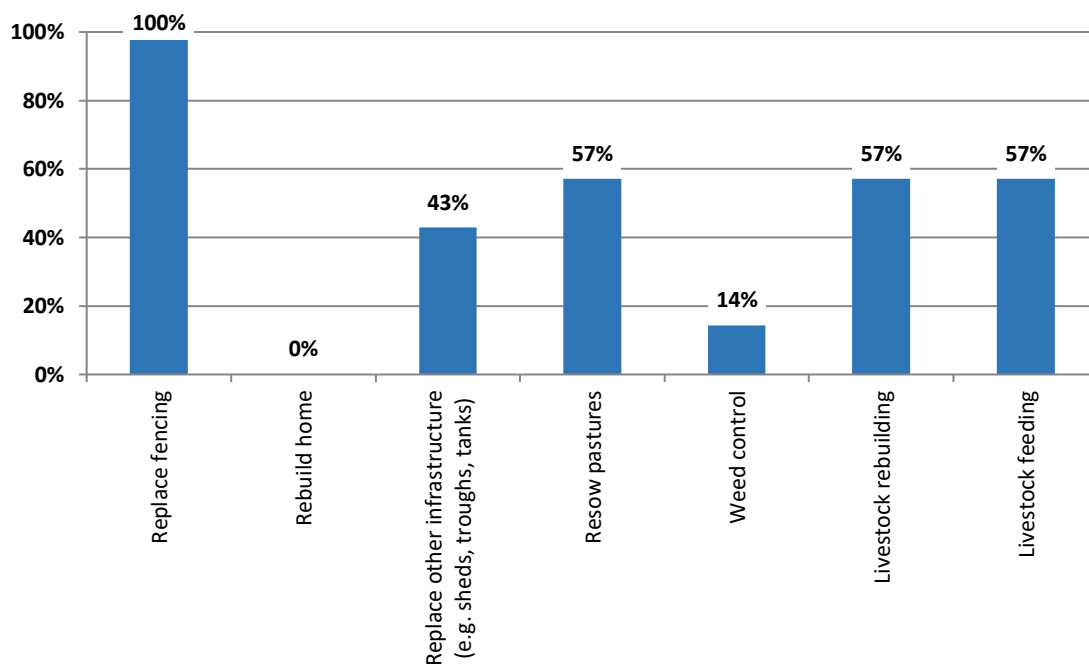


Figure B10: Actions undertaken by respondents to recover from fire

The producers used a variety of different service providers to undertake their recovery activities. They included (but not limited to):

- Rural Financial Counselling Services
- Agriculture Victoria
- Supply company advisor
- Blaze Aid and other fencing groups e.g. Uniting Church
- Army and other organisations for removing fences and buildings

The main activities service providers assisted with were help with fencing and clean up, applying for grants and stock disposal.

Only one producer recalled receiving specific advice from a consultant in the form of free agronomy advice that came with free seed supplied by Blaze Aid. They went on to develop a professional relationship with the agronomist. Others provided reasons such as:

*Didn't think it was necessary at the time.
We were not badly affected and could do it ourselves.*

One producer cited difficulties with outside communications as their landline was burnt and they are in an area with very little mobile phone coverage so found it hard to work out what they needed or how to get help. As a result, they heard about many things too late to access the help, as is evident by this comment:

Didn't know what I needed. Had no landline (it was burnt) and very little mobile coverage so found it hard to get any help at all. Just spent my time trying to work out what to do.

The producers interviewed either reported that they did not use MLA's website or could not recall if they did for finding information to support their recovery from bushfires. The common refrain was that there was a lot on offer initially to the point of overwhelm and all they really wanted to do was rebuild fences and look after their stock. One producer noted that they did use MLA's website, but for other things, not specifically bushfire recovery information.

Finding: *The producers interviewed from the Upper Murray used face-to-face services during the bushfire recovery phase to assist with fencing and other infrastructure rebuilding as well as for advice and help with pasture resowing, feeding livestock and herd/flock rebuilding. They also used these services to help access funding and direct forms of help. They were less likely to use virtual forms of assistance, websites and e-communications as most had limited phone coverage and access to electricity for many weeks/months after the fire.*

Feedback on the B2B Program

There were 27 red meat producers from Victoria who participated in the B2B program from an estimated 1,344 agricultural properties affected by the fires across the whole of Victoria, the majority of which had cattle and/or sheep enterprises.

Awareness of B2B

Of the producers interviewed, 43% could recall that they had heard of the Back to Business program while 57 % could not (Figure B11).

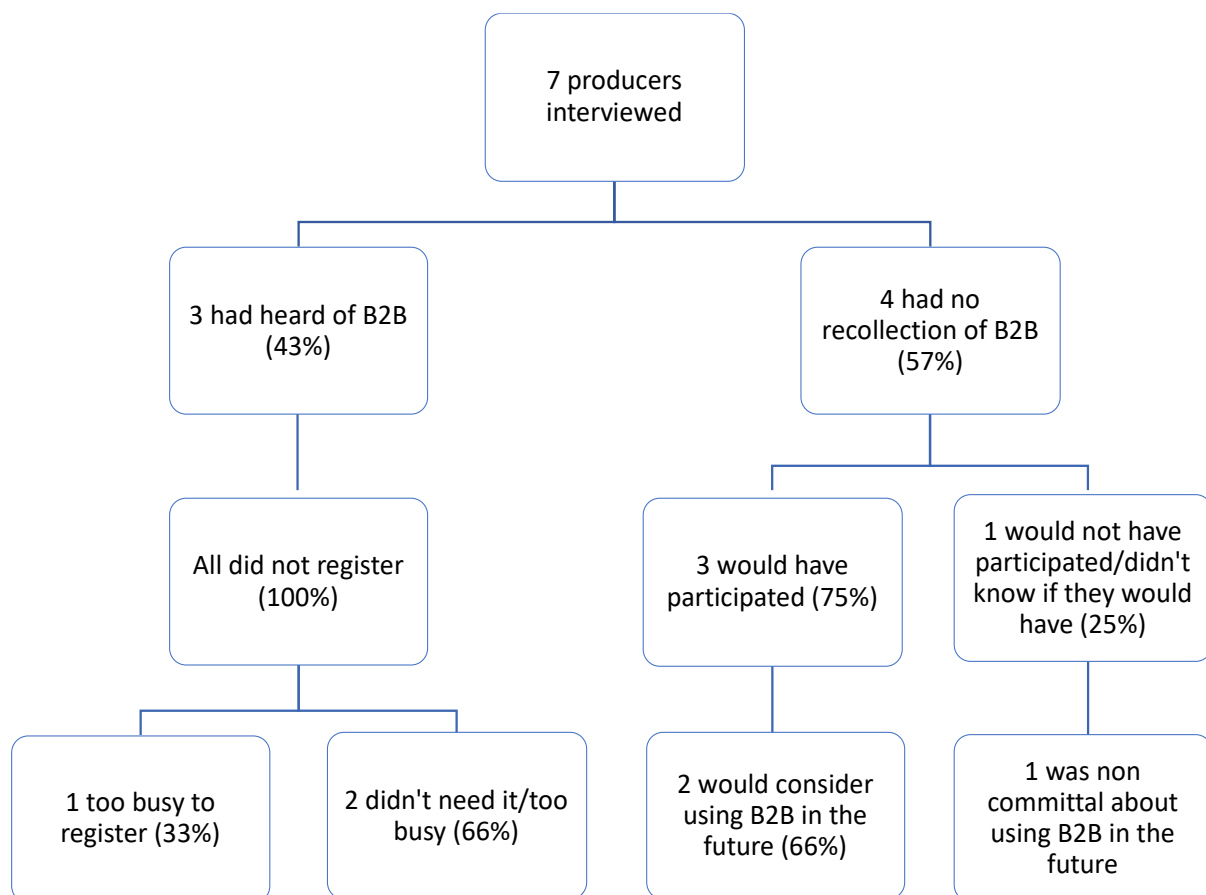


Figure B11: Producers responses to questions about awareness of B2B

Of the ones that could not recall B2B, it is known that at least two of them had this information provided to them (the interviewer had sent it to them personally after the fires). This is an indication of the amount of stress and overwhelm producers were experiencing at the time as they both could not remember receiving this information. Some of the comments received showed the issues these producers faced:

Didn't know about B2B as electronic communications is not my thing.

We have 3 farms and two off-farm jobs. It was really hard for us as we were working in our communities (stock transport/district nursing) but felt no one was coming to us to help us when we needed it. Also because we lost power and electronic communications, we missed all the emails/Facebook etc comms and when we got the services back, we didn't have time to sift through everything to work out what would suit us.

Biggest issue was lack of a landline and a mobile with a failing battery that I didn't have time to replace. If I was to be in this situation again, I would have pushed harder for assistance but at the time I was aware of what others were saying about people that were getting assistance that perhaps they didn't need/deserve. Realise now I could have done with more assistance with fencing and clean up. It's hard doing it on your own as motivation is up and down, other farm jobs take precedence but when Blaze Aid was here, we got a lot done and I had someone to talk to about it and to provide the motivation to get things done.

Non-Participating Producers

When asked if they would have used the program if aware of it at the time, 3 out of 4 (75%) who couldn't recall B2B said they would have been very likely or likely to use it and only one said unlikely.

Of the producers who had heard of the program, one said they were 'too busy rebuilding fences and managing stock', one thought they could do it themselves and the last said there was too much else to apply for and do and they didn't think they needed the program and didn't really remember much about it.

Of the 4 producers who hadn't heard of B2B, only one thought it may have helped them, the others didn't know or were ambivalent about its potential benefits. This group of respondents had mixed responses about whether they would use such a program in the future if faced with fires. One was very likely, one likely and another said 'don't know' (Figure B11). One commented:

'(B2B) Probably would have helped me be more organised and access the services I needed.'

Finding: *Less than half (43%) of the producers interviewed could recall hearing about B2B and none of them registered as they were either 'too busy' or thought they had the resources to do it themselves. Of the 57% who had not heard of B2B, three would have participated and the other was non-committal in their response.*

Barriers to participation in B2B

When asked why they thought more producers hadn't taken up B2B, the responses were that:

- It was too early for a lot of producers, many of whom wanted to 'get on with replacing fences first and deal with livestock'
- Lack of awareness of the program in general. It seems that unless the program was getting a lot of word of mouth from other service providers or through the media/social media, many were too inundated with other offers and activities to take notice of electronic

communications. Landline, phone tower and internet outages also restricted who got to see the communications they were sent.

- Lack of understanding of what B2B was about and how it could have helped them. The word 'business' in B2B was something that didn't resonate with producers who were busy rebuilding infrastructure and thought this was the next step after the fences were up again.
- Producers were too stressed, overwhelmed and traumatised to pay attention to the many offers of help
- Too much time/effort to reply. This relates back to not understanding what B2B was and how to access the support.
- Some producers don't want outside help with the refrain 'other people need it more than me' a common one. Also some are proud of their ability to be stoic and sort it out themselves, others are isolated in valleys and are an older demographic unused to accepting help from strangers. Some also have the skills and resources to do it themselves and did.

Most people wanted the practical help i.e. fodder for their stock, fences put back up again.

People are more concerned about getting down to rebuilding after the fires. We were 'under siege' for 3 weeks and it was more of a mental strain with no power or fuel that was the issue for lots of people. Infrastructure rebuilding was the main effort needed.

Older farmers who are isolated up the valleys don't tend to seek help and who only engage with MLA for NLIS tags and declarations.

Upper Murray farmers are pretty resilient and stubborn. Also they are a much older demographic ... most would have never thought to seek assistance. Another reason is there was so much help - people got overwhelmed with it all and just went outside to get on with rebuilding fences etc.

Non-Participating Producers

Finding: *The main reasons cited for not knowing about B2B related to lack of promotion face-to-face, the producers' feelings of overwhelm/trauma that impacted on their ability to process information and offers, too much on offer creating too much 'noise' around B2B and feelings of stoicism/others needing it more or simply being too busy surviving (rebuilding fences, feeding/watering livestock etc).*

Improving future participation in B2B

When asked how MLA could improve the uptake or make it more useful, some said it would be good if it was available now as they are ready to think more strategically about recovery. Others said that MLA needs to have a presence face-to-face to communicate these types of offers. There was a general misconception about the name thinking the program involved 'figures' and 'work' they didn't have time or the headspace for.

Some producers shared that as they were busy working in their off-farm jobs as well as trying to rebuild, they didn't have time to go searching for help, even though they needed it, and one said succession planning was clouding their recovery and they would like help with that. Another producer said access to fencing contractors and feed was their biggest issue, and MLA could have helped them with that or worked with the Victorian Farmers Federation on the coordination of fodder drops.

Succession is a big issue for us - the whole farm was burnt but we farm it as two separate entities as Dad hasn't been able to work with us on a viable succession plan. Think there are others like us out there with these issues that are holding back our recovery.

Suggestions from producers interviewed to improve uptake of B2B included:

- Making it available now as they were ready to use it.
- One to one visits to tell people what it was about as they were too busy to refencing/feeding livestock/carting water to leave the farm to seek additional help
- Better promotion as they did not remember hearing about it at all. This includes using non-electronic communication as initially they had no access to the internet as the towers had all been burnt.

Finding: *Improving participation in B2B in the future is thought to need longer time frames for delivery, better promotion using face-to-face and one to one visits and less reliance on electronic communications.*

Preparing for future disasters

Two producers made suggestions as to how MLA could help them prepare for future disasters. Both suggested MLA needs to have a local presence to let them know what was available.

Another commented that their community has been spending a lot of time planning how to better support itself for future disasters:

Since the fires there has been lots of focus on what to do next time as a community and lots of infrastructure has been put in place i.e. water and communications at the hall, widespread adoption of UHF for communications as little mobile coverage, more fire pumps on the water resources, satellite internet at the hall etc. This has been the focus in our area.

Finding: *While there were no specific recommendations for preparing for future disasters, two producers suggested MLA needs to have a local presence to know what was happening rather than relying on electronic information.*

Need for on-going support

There is a spectrum of recovery for producers in the Upper Murray. Four of the producers surveyed said they had fully recovered or were close to it. Three are still working on recovery activities. One is still building fences and would like assistance with that in rough country, one would like help with soil tests and advice as their soils have been 'cooked' and another would like help with rebuilding the genetic base of their flocks and herds:

Would be good to do B2B now 2 years after the fire as we have finally put up all our fences but still need to rebuild our genetic base. However, we are a bit embarrassed that ours is more of a hobby farm as succession hasn't happened and we are only farming a part of the farm (dad still has the rest and is not open to this) so is not a viable business. We still want to do a good job though.

At the other end of the spectrum one producer has recovered well with 2 good seasons and exceptional cattle prices and said they have 'well and truly moved on' as these comments show:

I have resown a lot of pasture and we are ok because the seasons have been good. We got annoyed at the way money was wasted after the fires yet you couldn't get what you needed such as clean up crews, fencing and there was a lot of people taking stuff they weren't entitled to such as hay and generators just because they were available so freely. Lots of waste. Maybe we had heard about B2B but after the fires we were too concerned about feeding cattle, building fences and looking after our remaining stock. I was too busy for a while to realise how hard the fires had hit us until afterwards.

Think that at times there is too much assistance for people who would otherwise have exited the industry. Drought is actually more stressful long term than fires. I think many of my neighbours have moved on from the fires and we are sick of it - so much talk still about recovery. We have been part of the community recovery committees and a bit over it all now. Understand that mental health with some people is still not good - perhaps it wasn't before the fires either.

Interesting the three producers still undertaking recovery activities had significant amounts of their properties burnt and lost livestock, whereas the others lost fences but not many animals.

Finding: *There is still a proportion of producers in the recovery phase (43%) who lost significant proportions of their properties and livestock who need support with fences, herd/flock rebuilding, succession planning and soil testing. The remainder consider they have recovered and most have 'moved on' from fires.*

Conclusions

In the Upper Murray, 43% of the interviewed non-participating producers were aware of B2B but did not consider they needed it or were too busy rebuilding to access it. The remaining 57% had no recollection of the program, even though some of them had been directly sent information about it.

Of the producers who were not aware of B2B, 75% said they were likely to have used it and the rest said they didn't know if they would have. Of the 75% who were likely to have used B2B if they had known about it, 66% said they were likely to access something similar in the future and the other producers were ambivalent about whether they would or not.

There were 4 main reasons reported by non-participating producers as to why B2B was taken up by more producers:

- Lack of face-to-face communications with producers (or the service providers that were working with them) to explain the program and the benefits. Producers were in general overwhelmed by the trauma, recovery process and the many offers of support and needed one to one help to sort it out and repeated messaging to have B2B front of mind.
- Over reliance on electronic communications to promote the program in an area that had weeks if not months of no internet or power.
- Program ended before people were ready to use it.
- Producers tendency to be 'stoic' and not seek help, even if they could have benefited from it. Sometimes this was thought to be age related and some thought it was a 'trust' issue. One producer mentioned about being conscious that 'others needed it more'.

If B2B was to be offered again in the Upper Murray, non-participant producer feedback suggests that there needs to be a process for identifying who could potentially benefit from the program and then to take a personal approach to offering the service. The preference is for face-to-face contact and even a one-to-one visit to the farm in lieu of electronic communications which were patchy for weeks/months after the fires. While there may still be many who opt not to use it, at least producers would have been more aware of the program and the potential benefits. It would also be useful if B2B could have been offered over a longer time period for those producers who were initially too traumatised/overwhelmed to see the benefit, but who over time, came to the realisation they needed help.

Appendix C: Working with People Experiencing Grief and Trauma

Background

Supporting producers who have been through a catastrophic event such as the black summer bushfires is very different from the extension generally undertaken by MLA and their partners. These catastrophic events can trigger trauma and grief responses that have an impact not only on their physical environment but on their emotions, cognition, physical being, behaviour, and their interactions with everyone around them (Table C1). People who may normally be stoic, resilient, and able to manage their daily lives can find they are unable to do the simplest of tasks or make simple decisions. Their emotions and psyche are up and down, their behavioural responses all over the place. While this is very normal and many people can navigate the trauma and grief with time, some are severely affected and require support and understanding to get through the recovery phase.

Table C1: Typical reactions that people exposed to a traumatic event may experience²²

Response	Characteristics of Response
Emotional responses	<p>Shock (disbelief at what has happened; numbness—the event may seem unreal or like a dream; no understanding of what has happened).</p> <p>Fear (of harm/injury or death to self and close others; of a similar event happening again; awareness of personal vulnerability; panicky feelings; other apparently unrelated fears).</p> <p>Anger (at ‘who caused it’ or ‘allowed it to happen’; outrage at what has happened; at the injustice and senselessness of it all; generalised anger and irritability; ‘why me?’).</p> <p>Helplessness (crises show us how powerless we are at times, as well as how strong).</p> <p>Irritability (frequent swings in mood).</p> <p>Depression (about the event, past events or loss of personal effects; guilt about how you behaved).</p> <p>Sadness (about human destruction and losses of every kind; for loss of the belief that our world is safe and predictable).</p> <p>Shame (for having been exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others; for not having reacted as one would have wished).</p> <p>Guilt (that some have not lost as much as others; about behaviour required for survival). People may also have difficulty feeling happy, lose pleasure derived from familiar activities and have difficulty experiencing loving feelings.</p> <p>Other possible responses include frustration, playing it down, terror, grief/sense of loss, confusion, bewilderment, insecurity, crying, anxiety, disempowerment, feeling inadequate, dependence, withdrawal, apathy, lethargy, compassion, uncertainty, humility, euphoria, detachment, empathy, avoidance, panic, odd humour, uncertainty, hypersensitivity, disbelief/denial, self-blame, blaming others, embarrassment, highly charged, feeling isolated/abandoned, hope.</p>
Cognitive responses	<p>Tension (more easily startled; general nervousness—physical or mental).</p> <p>Sleep disturbances (unable to sleep; thoughts that keep the person awake; reliving the event).</p> <p>Dreams and nightmares (of the event or other frightening events).</p> <p>Memories and feelings (interfere with concentration, daily life; flashbacks; attempts to shut them out which lead to deadening of feelings and thoughts).</p> <p>Other possible responses include difficulty concentrating, memory impairment, disorientation, confusion, preoccupation/worry, indecisiveness, intrusive or irrational thoughts, absentmindedness, unwanted memories, poor problem-solving ability, reality</p>

²² Handbook 2: Community Recovery. Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection. <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5634/community-recovery-handbook.pdf>

Response	Characteristics of Response
	distortion, revert to 'native' language, slow reactions, impaired decision-making ability, poor attention span.
Physical responses	Tiredness, palpitations (racing heartbeat), tremors, breathing difficulties, headaches, tense muscles, aches and pains, loss of sexual interest, nausea, diarrhoea or constipation, changes in sleep patterns (insomnia, nightmares), impaired immune response (colds, flu), fatigue/exhaustion, shortness of breath/hyperventilation, gastrointestinal problems, chest pain, numbness, tingling, changes in appetite, anxiety attack, startle response (jumpy), agitation, dizziness, sudden onset of the female cycle, lethargy, vulnerability to illness.
Behavioural responses	Social withdrawal (a need/wish to be alone). Other possible responses include avoidance, loss of interest in usual activities, increased smoking, alcohol and other drug use.
Delayed effects	Any of these may occur after months or years of adjustment.

The impact of grief and trauma on the people affected by fires is something that all recovery efforts need to consider. Many of the service providers interviewed during this review were very cognisant of the grief and trauma many producers had been through and how it had impacted on the way these producers were able to respond to the many, many offers of help. Some service providers were able to articulate in brain science terms what people were experiencing and used that to help shape their recovery efforts while others, from years of experience, took a more empathetic approach to working with fire affected producers. Other service providers realised their lack of experience and knowledge of trauma and made efforts to educate themselves and their co-workers.

The interviews undertaken with service providers as part of the review of B2B highlighted the following observations about the producers they worked with:

- Many people were unable to take in all the information on offer as too much and overwhelming to their stressed brains. Written information and electronic information was hard to digest and messages had to be repeated over time to sink in. There were a lot of offers of help that were not applicable or suitable and this had to be sorted from what was useful.
- Some people had difficulty making even simple decisions as their cognitive abilities were impaired by the grief and trauma they were experiencing.
- Some people turned away from strangers and were more reliant on local, trusted people to help them or shut down and allowed no one in at all. As a result, it took time for some recovery/support workers to get the trust of producers before they could start to help them. Others were very open and actively sought help.
- Most producers just wanted to be 'active' and rebuild fences/feed livestock etc. following the fires as that seemed to help with processing the grief and trauma as well as being practical. Sitting down planning or trolling through electronic information was difficult and frustrating, especially as electricity was limited to generators and internet to satellite services or non-existent.
- Some producers were not coping before the fires due to other factors such as the impact of the drought and/or family situations. The fire became another traumatic event in a series of events. These producers were particularly affected and if open to help, required more than most.
- Face-to-face information sharing and one-on-one approaches appeared to 'cut through' all the noise of offers and assistance and helped producers understand what was available and useful and enabled them to take more notice of written information (hard copy and electronic).

- Some producers needed ‘hand holding’ to step through the process of recovery as had little idea or resources to do this themselves. Others were very capable of managing their own recovery and required minimal/no assistance.

The spectrum of support producers required following the black summer fires related to how traumatised they were from the event. In general, people are resilient to traumatic events and given time, generally recover. Eyre 2006²³ notes that:

‘... the psychological and social impacts on those affected by major emergencies are many and varied. As well as including grief, trauma, stress and other forms of loss-related reactions, the evidence suggests that people are generally resilient and demonstrate the ability to adapt, adjust and recover after such events. The ability to cope is related to a range of pre-disaster, within-disaster, and post-disaster risk factors.’

There are a proportion of people who experience mental health problems after a disaster such as²⁴:

- **Depression:** Characterised by a sad or depressed mood, a loss of interest in normal activities, poor motivation and lack of energy: it is usually accompanied by disturbed sleep and poor appetite; in more severe cases, suicidal thoughts may be present
- **Anxiety:** Characterised by fear that something bad will happen, and often by worry about areas such as safety, health and money: these disorders are usually accompanied by physical symptoms (being tense, on edge, heart racing etc.) and the person will often avoid activities that they find upsetting
- **Substance use disorders:** Characterised by excessive use of alcohol or other drugs, which interferes with the person’s social relationships and ability to carry out normal roles
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder:** One of the anxiety disorders, it is often mentioned in the context of trauma and disaster, but is probably no more common than depression: it is characterised by memories (often in the form of images, smells or other sensations) that haunt the person (and are associated with high arousal, being jumpy, on edge, disturbed sleep, being irritable) and efforts to avoid reminders, and a general numbing of emotional responsiveness.

A study undertaken 3-4 years following the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires²⁵ showed that the majority of people demonstrated resilience without indications of psychological distress. However, there were still a proportion of people suffering chronic PTSD (1%-15.6%)²⁶, depression (6.3-12.9%), severe psychological distress (4.9-9.8%) or elevated heavy drinking (19.6-24.7%) 3-4 years post bushfires. To assess this in context, acute levels of these disorders would have been higher directly following the fires and would have abated over time. But for some of the people who were experiencing any of these disorders at the time, their ability to accept help or ask for help would have been impaired and would have limited their access to services to assist them with long term recovery. As a result, services

²³ Eyre A 2006, Literature and Best Practice Review and Assessment: Identifying people’s needs in major emergencies and best practice in humanitarian response. United Kingdom: Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

²⁴ Handbook 2: Community Recovery. Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection. <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5634/community-recovery-handbook.pdf>

²⁵ Richard A Bryant, Elizabeth Waters, Lisa Gibbs, H Colin Gallagher, Philippa Pattison, Dean Lusher, Colin MacDougall, Louise Harms, Karen Block, Elyse Snowdon, Vikki Sinnott, Greg Ireton, John Richardson, David Forbes (2014). Psychological outcomes following the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires <https://doi.org/10.1177/000486741453447>

²⁶ The range represents proportion of respondents from low-affected communities to high affected fire communities.

that were only available for a limited time after the fires, would not have been accessed by those that needed more time to process their trauma and be able to realise they needed or reach out for help.

Impact of Grief and Trauma on Delivery of B2B

The outcome of understanding how grief and trauma impact on people’s ability to recover from bushfire is the recognition that people’s responses vary and thus the type and timing of support services needs to match this variation.

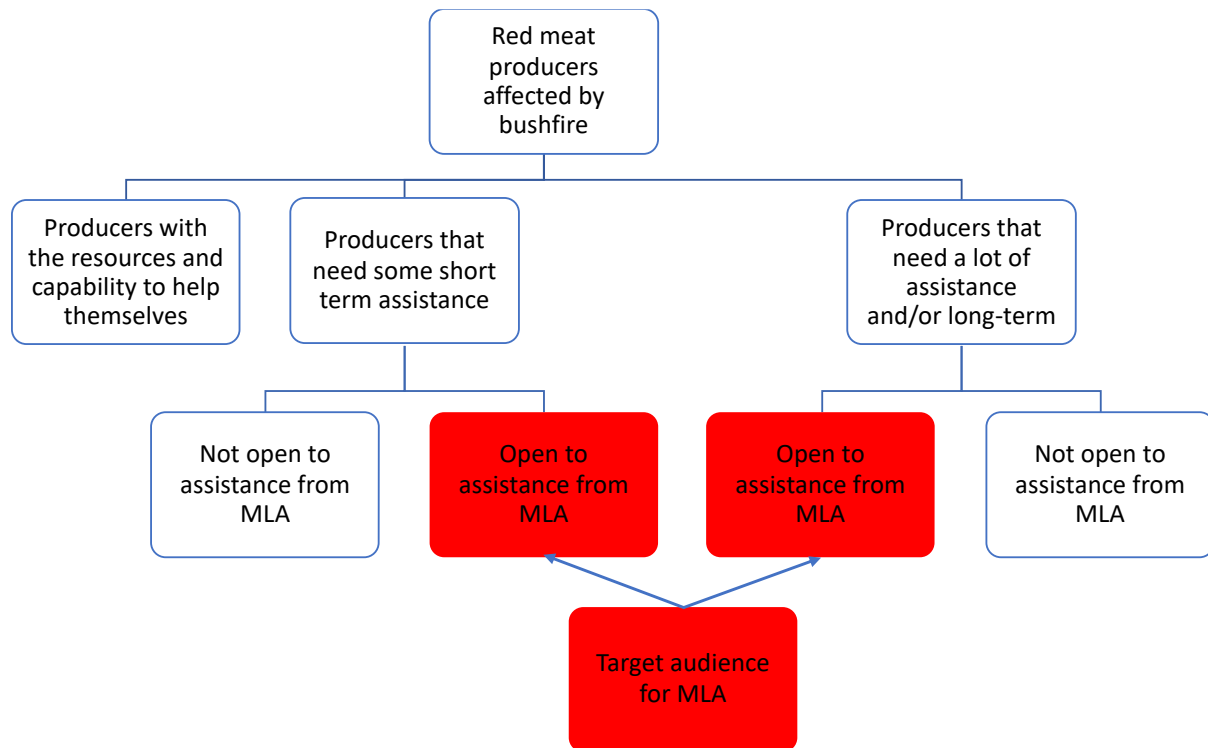


Figure C1: Target audience for MLA assistance as defined by need and willingness to receive assistance

In the case of B2B, the target audience was ‘all fire affected red-meat producers’ and a one size fits all approach was taken with program design and promotion. While it is acknowledged that this approach was appropriate given the circumstances at the time, a better response in the future needs to consider that there are different degrees of assistance required and it is appropriate to offer it at different times. One way to consider who the ‘target’ audience is for B2B is to consider who needs help versus who is seeking it as well as the amount of assistance they need. Figure C1 outlines a diagram of how the target audiences can be visualised and Table C2 defines some characteristics of each segment.

Table C2: Target audience segment characteristics

Audience Segment	Characteristics
Producers with the resources and capability to help themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not have been as severely affected by the fires as others i.e. may have lost minimal livestock/infrastructure and not require much rebuilding. • If severely affected, have resources/plans to rebuild i.e. adequate insurance, access to cash reserves/loans, agistment, labour etc. • Have skills and capability to seek assistance unaided • Have access to own trusted advisors for advice and assistance. • Able to access electronic forms of assistance. • Did not experience extreme trauma or near death experiences.
Producers that need some short term assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lost mainly infrastructure rather than livestock. • Have some resources to rebuild but maybe not enough so need help seeking assistance for advice/materials/cash. • Some trusted advisors and links with community • Need some help with electronic forms of assistance and making sense of the support on offer. • May have had a 'close encounter' with the fire but able to process this and/or recognise they need help and seek it.
Producers that need a lot of assistance and/or long-term assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lost significant infrastructure (including home) and/or livestock. • Livestock may have needed putting down or forced sales due to injury. • Near-death experience with the fire or lost someone in the fire. • Low connection with or disconnection from community and support • Reluctance to seek help or recognise need for help (or too traumatised to understand/seek help) • Low use of digital communications/access to digital communications. • Less likely to have a network of trusted advisors • Little or no planning for disaster • Struggling before the fires

While it is impossible to know exactly who fits in each of the categories in Figure C1 and Table C2, triaging producers into these categories enables an understanding of who needs help and then how to help them can be identified including the best ways to engage with them.

It is evident from who did participate and who didn't in B2B that the communication channels used were inadequate for the circumstances. To engage with people experiencing grief and trauma needs MLA to consider the following approaches:

- Use face-to-face communications where possible directly with producers or at least with service provider that are making referrals with producers to services.
- Use people in the field who are 'trusted' and known to the community to promote the service. This includes working side by side with other service providers such as RFCS, vets, agronomists, stock agents, local group reps (Landcare, production groups), BlazeAid, fodder drops etc.
- Communicate in waves according to the levels of trauma in the community i.e. make B2B available as soon as possible to get to the people able to hear the message early but repeat the messaging at intervals after the fire as others become able to discern their needs after trauma recedes. Based on the findings from this review, this can be up to 2 years post event and beyond.
- Ensure the message is promoted using local communication channels such as drop-in centres, community meetings and field days, local radio, local community Facebook pages, local papers and newsletters, not just MLA national communication channels.

- Consider one to one communication either via phone (if telecommunications restored) or in person in areas that have been hardest hit or very isolated. MLA has a database of members, this could be accessed to assess who is likely to have been affected and as a means for contacting people to assess their need for help.
- Work with organisations that have been put in place to 'case manage' the most severely affected people. Note these organisations maybe run by community health organisations with little ties to agriculture and business so will not necessarily know to look to MLA for advice/services.

Planning for Future Disasters

To be better prepared for future disasters, the following is suggested:

- 1. MLA to become a 'known' service provider in the disaster management landscape.**
This requires MLA to develop an understanding and presence in each state jurisdiction as all have different structures for response/recovery as well as at a national level so they become 'embedded' in recovery. Note Dairy Australia has done this, as have other industry organisations such as the VFF who coordinate the fodder drop in Victorian emergencies.
- 2. MLA to refine/develop service offerings based on different target audience's needs.**
This means seeking input from producers and other service providers on what they perceived they needed and matching it with what MLA has the means to provide. This report contains some suggestions to refine B2B but should not be limited to B2B. As was the case of one state where industry advocacy was perceived to have been needed from MLA to support producer recovery via grant eligibility.
- 3. MLA to engage a 'standing' team of service providers ready for the next disaster.**
This could include MLA staff, consultants, state Department of Agriculture staff etc who have been trained to provide the recovery services, including promotion as well as delivery. This list of providers would be updated annually for their availability. This may also include a list of partners such as the RFCS that are engaged with during disasters according to some standing arrangements.

Conclusion

Ultimately, producers affected by catastrophic disasters like the Black Summer fires need foremostly to be supported as humans with human needs and emotions and secondly as business owners.

For many, there is an imperative need to be 'actively' recovering after fires and moving their bodies rather than actively engaging their minds (because they often cannot engage their minds). Being able to meet them where they are (in the paddock/on farm) is critical to connecting with them to demonstrate understanding and empathy before offers of support can be given. Most producers know what needs to be done but the enormity of the task can overwhelm them, and the best support is sometimes simply to listen to them, break it down, and prioritise and help with the analysis/brainstorming/problem solving. Put simply, a program like B2B has the flexibility to provide this support if it can connect with producers when they are ready, in person, and is able to be flexible in the timeframe for its delivery.

Appendix D: Summary of Webinar/Podcast Series

Table D1: Summary of B2B 12 Part Webinar Series

Date	Title	Presenter	Registrations
24-Mar-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Cashflow is king things to consider now and options available - feedbase and livestock	Alistair Rayner - RaynerAg	231
2-Apr-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Accessing support that's available - financial, personal and business	Ted O'Kane - NSW DPI	100
9-Apr-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - What's possible now? - personal and business direction	Alistair Rayner - RaynerAg	121
14-Apr-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Prioritising farm infrastructure for rebuild - sheds, water, fences, and shelter	Hilary Beech - Holmes Sackett	92
21-Apr-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Livestock health, welfare and biosecurity during rebuild	Jillian Kelly - NSW LLS	90
28-Apr-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Livestock nutrition and feeding options during rebuild	Alistair Rayner - RaynerAg	91
5-May-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Grow more feed - pasture recovery, redevelopment, forage crops and purchasing fodder	Nathan Ferguson - Graminus	132
12-May-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Opportunities to drive livestock operations - enterprise options, genetics	Luke Stephens - NSW DPI/MLA	99
19-May-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Making use of short-term business resilience opportunities - cashflow, feed/sell/agist, markets and season	Hamish Dickson - AgriPartner	92
26-May-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Building long-term business resilience - budgets,	Simon Vogt - Rural Directions	107

Date	Title	Presenter	Registrations
	business structure, farm management and succession		
2-Jun-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Rebuilding your herd or flock - using management and genetics to achieve the best production results	Nathan Scott - AchieveAg	110
9-Jun-20	BACK TO BUSINESS - Maintaining the integrity of Australia's red meat and wool industries	Kathleen Allan - ISC	69
Total Registrations			1,334

Table D2: Summary of B2B 12 Part Podcast Series

Title	Podcast Link	Listens
What to expect from the Back to Business podcast.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=600146	20
Alastair Rayner discusses things to consider and options for feedbase and livestock.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=604130	18
Accessing support that's available, financial, personal and business.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=604106	9
What's possible now - personal and business direction with Alastair Rayner.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=624566	26
Farm infrastructure – rebuilding sheds, water, fences and shelter.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=629998	29
Livestock health, welfare and biosecurity during a rebuild with Dr Jillian Kelly.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=632020	30
Livestock nutrition and feeding options during rebuild with Alastair Rayner.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=642070	35

Title	Podcast Link	Listens
Grow more feed – pasture recovery, redevelopment, forage crops and purchasing fodder.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=647025	41
Opportunities to drive livestock operations – enterprise options and genetics with Luke Stephen.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=652758	42
Making use of short term business resilience opportunities cashflow, feed sell agist, markets and season with Hamish Dickson.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=657896	43
Building long-term business resilience – budgets, business structure, farm management and succession planning with Simon Vogt.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=661668	39
Rebuilding your herd or flock – using management and genetics to achieve the best reproduction results with Nathan Scott.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=666592	33
Maintaining the integrity of our red meat and livestock industries with Kathleen Allan and Emily King.	https://player.whooshkaa.com/episode?id=672312	22
Total Listens (as of June 15, 2020)		387