Final report

MLA's Livestock Advisor Essentials program

Abstract

MLA's Livestock Advisor Essentials program (formerly known as Red-meat Industry Professionals Program (RIPP)) was a national pilot program designed to better connect MLA-funded R&D outputs with people in industry who can use the outputs to improve the profitability and sustainability of red meat businesses. This investment was designed to fast track the adoption of MLA outputs by developing regional 'champions' to demonstrate and promote the benefits of adopting MLA RDE&A outputs within red meat industry businesses.

The purpose of the Livestock Advisor Essentials project was to pilot a professional development program. This was designed to bridge the gap between MLA and less experienced livestock industry professionals by building the capacity and awareness of new industry professionals who are passionate about the Australian red meat industry.

The project has been successfully completed. Despite a very challenging environment for delivering events due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the objectives of the pilot were achieved on-time and in-budget.

The first phase of this project was market research to better understand the target market for LAE, including advisors needs and how these intersect with services and support that MLA could offer. A survey was distributed electronically via industry networks, with responses from 233 livestock industry advisors received. Different sectors and levels of career experience were analysed separately, and different needs and preferences were able to be identified. There were areas of commonality across respondents including:

- Preference for activities and support specifically designed for advisors
- Strong reliance on internet for accessing information and preference for face-to-face activities
- Strong demand for opportunities for networking amongst peers

The results from the survey provided a basis for MLA to improve engagement with livestock industry advisors and through this advisor network, improve services and support to livestock producers, increasing the dissemination of R&D outcomes. Findings from phase one were used to inform the design of the program delivered during phase two.

In phase two, a training program for early career livestock advisors from southern Australia was designed and delivered. Four technical experts were recruited to deliver training in business, feedbase, value chain and people. All four workshops were successfully delivered, with business and feedbase able to be delivered face-to-face and value chain and people needing to be delivered online due to state border closures. Seventeen early-career participants registered for the full program, and an additional three participants registered for one module.

Monitoring and evaluation data provides evidence of a significant increase in KASA from pre to post workshop periods, and extremely positive general feedback has been received in terms of the value and satisfaction of the workshops and program as a whole.

Six participants expressed interest in being a part of the mentoring program. Six mentors were engaged to match the goals and areas of skill development of the mentees. Online introductory sessions were set up for each mentoring partnership. A formal mentoring workshop to facilitate training and learning about goal setting and getting value out of mentoring was delivered, and mentoring partnerships continued post the workshop.

Feedback from LAE participants has been extremely positive, and there is a strong case to develop this pilot project into an ongoing project, delivered throughout Australia.

Executive summary

Background

The purpose of the Livestock Advisor Essentials project was to pilot a professional development program. This was intended to bridge the gap between MLA and less experienced livestock industry professionals by building the capacity and awareness of new industry professionals who are passionate about the Australian red meat industry.

Objectives

The primary objective of Livestock Advisor Essentials (LAE) was to build an on-ground advisor network capable of disseminating high quality information and linking producers to MLA programs and resources. Underlying this was an objective to conduct market research to determine the needs and preferences of livestock advisors to inform the design and delivery of a targeted professional development course.

Methodology

In phase one of the project, social research methods were employed to better understand the target market for LAE, including livestock advisors needs and how this intersects with services and support that MLA could offer. A short survey, using survey monkey with links and information was circulated electronically (via email and social media).

In phase two a twelve-month program was designed and delivered to early career livestock advisors, to upskill them and improve their industry networks.

Case studies have been produced showcasing the stories of three participants.

Results/key findings

In phase one, 233 survey respondents participated in the survey, sharing their views. Valuable insights were gained about the age/experience/role of livestock advisors as well as their preferences for training and education and linking with MLA products and resources.

In phase two seventeen early-career participants registered for the full program, an additional three participants registered for one module. Six participants also participated in a formal mentoring program.

Monitoring and evaluation data provides evidence of a significant increase in KASA as a result of the workshops, and extremely positive general feedback has been received in terms of the value and satisfaction of the workshops. Participants showed increased confidence for supporting producer clients and improved skills and knowledge and awareness of tools and resources.

Benefits to industry

A network of livestock advisors motivated to support producer clients with skills, experiences and tools in business, feedbase, value chain and people management is now established in southern Australia. Building collaborative networks will enable advisors to know how to connect with others or reach out for support. The project has significantly lifted the technical capability of the professional network, building the profitability of the livestock industry.

Future research and recommendations

It is recommended that this LAE pilot project be extended and expanded to a permanent program. Based on participant feedback, some elements of delivery could be improved, further consolidating the benefits of delivering a program to participants across Australia. Some elements of what was developed during the pilot can be rolled out nationally (e.g., people) while other will require modifying to meet regional needs (e.g., feedbase). Continuing the program will leverage the original investment in the pilot project.

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1. Background

MLA's Livestock Advisor Essentials project (formerly known as Red-meat Industry Professionals Program (RIPP)) was a national program designed to better connect MLA funded R&D outputs with people in industry who can use the outputs to improve the profitability and sustainability of red meat businesses. This investment was hoped to fast track the adoption of MLA outputs by developing regional 'champions' to demonstrate and promote the benefits of adopting MLA RDE&A outputs within red-meat industry businesses.

The purpose of the Livestock Advisor Essentials project was to pilot a professional development program. The project was intended to bridge the gap between MLA and less experienced livestock industry professionals by building the capacity and awareness of new industry professionals who are passionate about the Australian red meat industry. These Livestock Advisor Essentials advisors would then act as a conduit for MLA information and resources within their own organisations and to the producers they interact with. This would build the link between MLA RDE&A and the opportunity for producers to engage with the professional extension and consultancy MLA has on offer, significantly increasing the reach of MLA RDE&A nationally. The project was also intended to lift the technical capability of the professional network, building the profitability of the livestock industry.

2. Objectives

The objectives of Livestock Advisor Essentials (LAE) were to:

- Build an on-ground advisor network capable of disseminating high quality information and linking producers to MLA programs and resources.
- Increase the awareness of less experienced livestock industry professionals about MLA and MLA's R&D outputs, tools and resources to enable them to share this information with colleagues and red meat producers they interact with.
- Increase knowledge of less experienced livestock industry professionals about best practice management within feedbase, business, and reproduction/genetics.
- Increase awareness across industry through LAE participants of the training opportunities available to improve livestock business profitability and management
- Increase the capacity of information providers to motivate producers to increase their knowledge and skills through MLA's tools, resources and adoption programs.
- Encourage motivated but inexperienced livestock industry professionals to increase their own knowledge and/or skills in whole of business livestock management.
- Work in collaboration with existing projects targeting livestock industry professionals to continue to grow the professional network capability and build MLA's reach through industry.

All of these objectives were achieved.

3. Methodology

3.1 Phase one

Phase one was designed to achieve the deliverable:

- Design and deliver a national survey of 250 livestock industry service providers to determine training needs/gaps.

An online survey was deemed to be the most cost-effective method of conducting market research. The survey was designed to identify:

1. Who red meat industry professionals are (i.e., their roles, the types of businesses they work for and the services they offer).
2. What their needs are.
3. How best to connect with them/what services and support they would most value.

The LAE survey questions were initially drawn from a selected range of questions used in the National Adviser Survey on Extension undertaken as part of the Federal Government funded project 'Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns for R&D' (referred to in this report as the R&D 2015-2017 survey), and then customised to serve the specific aims of LAE. The survey questions were uploaded to online platform Survey Monkey and then piloted with six individuals from the target audience to ensure that the questions were unambiguous. Following the piloting process, the survey was revised before being opened. A copy of the final survey is provided in Appendix one.

The survey was promoted using a communications plan. The communications plan identified key messages and channels of communication and was developed in conjunction with MLA's Communications Manager. The survey was distributed widely through MLA and industry networks. It should be noted that because the survey was distributed electronically it attracted responses from self-selected respondents who voluntarily completed it, rather than randomly selected respondents. This means that there may be potential bias in the sample (i.e., it may not be truly representative of the livestock advisor sector).

The methodology for data analysis is reported in Appendix two.

3.2 Phase two

The agreed deliverables for phase two were:

- Design and pilot a 12-18 month program for less experienced livestock industry professionals to assist them in developing their technical skills and knowledge. This will assist them with career development and increase the value of the services provided to clients by them. The program will offer a suite of training workshops aligned with current adoption programs and including relevant MLA RDE&A tools and resources.
- The course will consist of three two or three-day workshops. Each workshop may cover one or two topics, depending on the time required for training in a topic. Participants may choose to enrol for the entire course or to attend particular sessions.

- Participants who enrol for the entire course will be eligible to apply to participate in a post-program project which will enable the continuation of their learning journey, with practical one-on-one support (mentoring) from a leading livestock industry technical expert (10 places available).
- 30 participants, with five livestock advisors and 10 producers going on to participate in Involve and Partner program (PDS, PGS, EDGE programs, or MLA Livestock Advisor Updates).
- Training package to meet target audience needs developed and available for ongoing delivery, following the pilot project. Material for delivery will be extracted from existing MLA resources (e.g., off-the-shelf PGS supported learning projects) developed on behalf of MLA. Project landing page via MLA website and plan for effective communications with the target audience. To be determined based on social research survey.
- Access to the Project Manager and relevant MLA staff during the program for advice and coaching about how to use or promote MLA tools, resources and programs relevant to their customers and clients.

3.2.1   Program development

To meet these deliverables, a twelve-month program was designed and delivered to engage early career livestock advisors and upskill them and improve their industry networks. Livestock advisors were considered professionals who provide advice or guidance to livestock producers, one-on-one or in groups. Roles include but are not limited to consultants, veterinarians, livestock agents, and extension officers.

Four technical experts were recruited to deliver sessions covering business, feedbase, value chain and people. An open call for expressions of interest was publicised by MLA, and a selection panel assessed applications against the selection criteria. The four successful deliverers worked with the project managers and MLA to design the whole program and acted as a sounding board at critical decision-making stages of the pilot. Basil Doonan from Pinion Advisory was the deliverer for the feedbase module, which was titled *Optimising pasture production* and opened the series. John Francis from Agrista was the deliverer for the business module which was titled *Building blocks for business* and delivered second. Elke Hocking from Elke Hocking Consulting delivered the value chain module, titled *Meating the market*, which was delivered third. Jill Rigney from The Right Mind delivered the final module focussing on people which was titled *Influence and impact*.

At each session deliverers shared with participants their own career journey, key career learnings and turning points. This assisted participants to identify opportunities and considerations for their own career journeys.

Delivery schedule for workshops:

Workshop	Date	Location
Optimising pasture production	13 & 14 April 2021	Melbourne
Building blocks of business	8 & 9 June 2021	Sydney
Meating the market	16 February 2022	Online
Influence and impact	17 February 2022	Online

All four workshops were successfully delivered, with business and feedbase able to be delivered face-to-face and value chain and people needing to be delivered online due to on-going state border restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Meating the Market and Influence and Impact workshops were originally planned for August 2021, postponed until December 2021 and then finally had to go online in February 2022.

There were two online tutorials in between sessions to allow for extra material to be delivered and a Q&A session.

Seventeen early-career participants registered for the full program, an additional three participants registered for the business module.

The course was charged at a subsidised rate of $1750 and travel and accommodation expenses were the responsibility of the attendee.

Monitoring and evaluation surveys were designed to capture the knowledge and skills of the participants prior to commencing each module and at the completion of the module. An overall survey also captured the feedback and change in confidence of the participants over the twelve-month period. As this was a pilot project, coordinators also asked for feedback on the delivery, content, structure, price, appropriateness of resources, following each session as well as end of project feedback.

Six participants expressed interest in being a part of the mentoring program. Some mentees requested a particular mentor, and these were approached, and all agreed to be a part of the mentoring program. For those participants who did not identify a preferred mentor, potential mentors were approached based on matching personality and skills in the areas of desired growth identified by the mentee. Online introductory sessions were set up for each mentoring partnership. A formal mentoring workshop to facilitate formal training and learning about goal setting and getting value out of mentoring was delivered by Jill Rigney from The Right Mind, and mentoring partnerships continued post the workshop.

Case studies have been produced to share the stories of three of the participants. These are available for publishing through MLA channels and on social media.

3.2.2 Branding and resources

Branding was designed for the project to allow for promotion and advertising of the program. The brand was designed to align the project with the existing Livestock Advisor Updates project.

Collateral included a logo, powerpoint template for deliverers, template for resources for participants, social media templates and letter head.

🔆 **Learn**   🧠 **Develop**   🔗 **Connect**   Funded by MLA and
                                            delivered by Pinion Advisory   **pinion** ADVISORY

4. Results

4.1 Phase one

The purpose of questions 1-6 was to identify key characteristics of the survey respondents including their:

- Sector / roles
- Region/s in which they operate
- Years' experience in providing advice
- Age
- Type of service provided to livestock producers
- Number of producers that advisors typically work with

This baseline data was used to identify how needs differ between roles and age/experience cohorts to enable MLA to provide targeted support and professional development opportunities.

Public extension agents were the largest group of respondents. These included advisors working in technical and natural resource management roles. Private livestock consultants, agronomists, technical specialists and vets comprised 30% of respondents. 10% of all respondents provide Landcare, NRM or other environmental services (47% of 'other') in their working roles with livestock producers. This is the 5th equal (with vet) highest category of total survey respondents.

The role-based data provides a 2019 benchmark for potential longitudinal comparison. An important target audience for the LAE survey was the private commercial sector because of their intermediary role working with livestock producers. The relatively low response rate from this cluster highlights how difficult it is to access and engage those working in this sector. Conversely, the high level of response from the public sector reflects their willingness to engage and be part of processes that sustain and build livestock advisory services.

Respondents were asked to identify all regions where they work providing support, advice and information for livestock producers. NSW was the region most nominated by respondents at 33% followed by northern Queensland at 28%, southern Queensland at 28%, Victoria at 18.5%, South Australia at 18% , a combined pastoral zone (SA, NSW,WA) at 14%, Tasmania at 13%, southern WA at 12%, Northern Territory at 9%, northern WA at 8% and ACT at 3%.

Based on data from respondents, all sectors were equally represented across the eastern region consisting of NSW, southern Queensland and ACT. In the northern region (northern Queensland, northern WA and NT) the public sector and private commercial sectors were strongly represented, however the private consulting and private industry/research sector were only moderately

represented. In Victoria the private commercial sector was strongly represented, the private consulting and private industry/research sectors moderately represented, and the public sector poorly represented.

In Tasmania and South Australia, the private sector (commercial, consulting and industry/research) was moderately represented but the public sector had low involvement.

In the pastoral zone (SA, NSW, WA) and Western Australia the private consulting and private industry/research sectors were moderately represented, however both the private commercial and public sectors had low involvement.

Respondents were asked to identify how many years' experience they had in providing information, advice and support to livestock producers according to four age clusters (0-5, 6-10, 11-20 and over 21 years) (Fig 1).
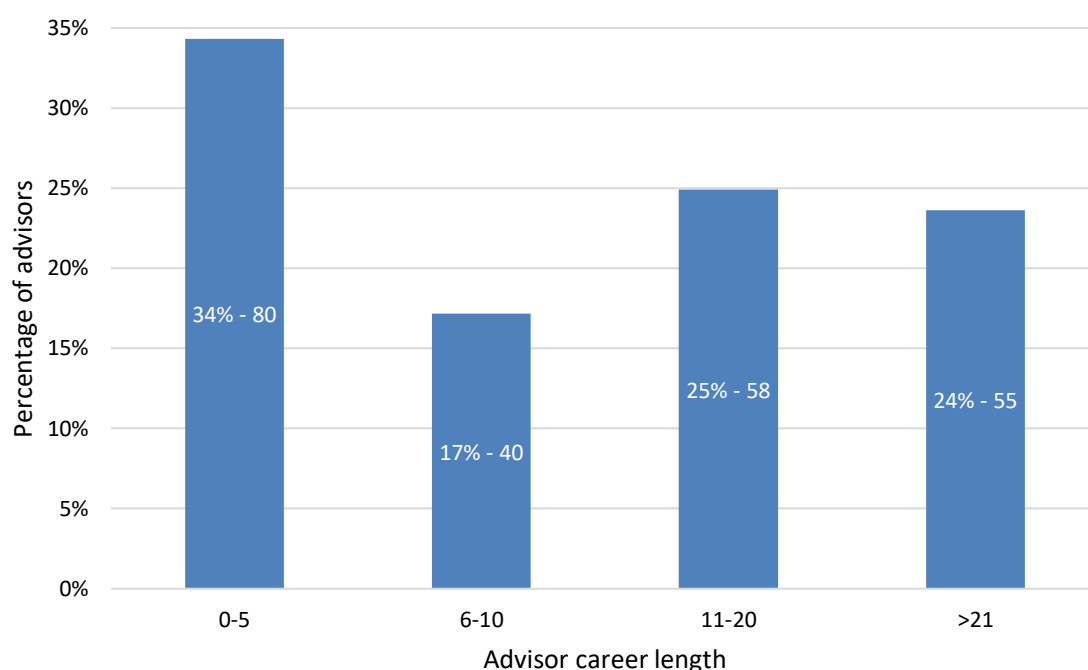
How many years' experience do you have in providing information, advice and support to livestock producers? (n=233)

The highest response rate (34%) to the LAE survey was from the cohort with the shortest advisory career experience (0-5 years). The response rate in the cohort with 6-10 years' career experience was lowest at 17%. There may be a range of explanations including that this cohort has less interest in engaging with MLA, are time poor due to work/family demands or that there are relatively fewer advisors in this experience range. If the latter, this may be related to the withdrawal of public extension services, particularly in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania over the past 10-20 years. The RAD Meat Professional Project (Thompson and Mohr-Bell, 2017) also conducted a survey of red meat professionals, and while this survey extended to students, one of the findings may be relevant to interpreting the years' career experience. 75% of those surveyed in the RAD Meat Professional Project expected to remain in their current role for less than 5 years, and of these, 50% did not expect to remain in the red meat industry.

Other data was collected including age, client profiles, and experience with different agricultural sectors. The full set of results are presented in Appendix 2.

4.2 Phase two

4.2.1   Participant demographics

Demographic data was collected for participants. Participant demographics were consistent with the trends identified in phase 1 of the project. Fifty percent of participants were from the private sector and fifty percent from the public sector. Participants filled a variety of roles including consultants to one-on-one clients, extension officers, advisors providing training to groups of producers as well as advisors with very specialist roles such as veterinarians.
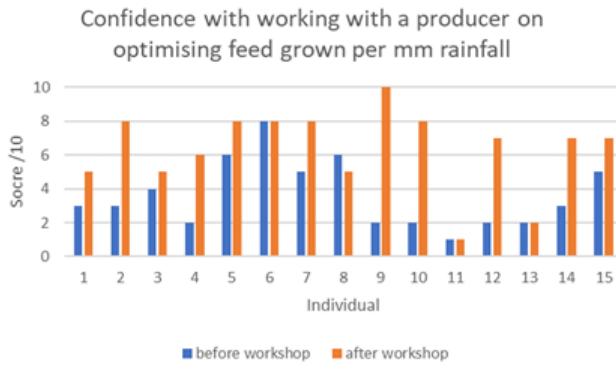

Despite the program being marketed at early career livestock advisors, advisors with more than ten years' experience wished to be involved and were accepted into the program.

Knowledge, skills and confidence data collected through pre and post workshop surveys is presented for each of the four modules as well as for the whole of program and the mentoring program.
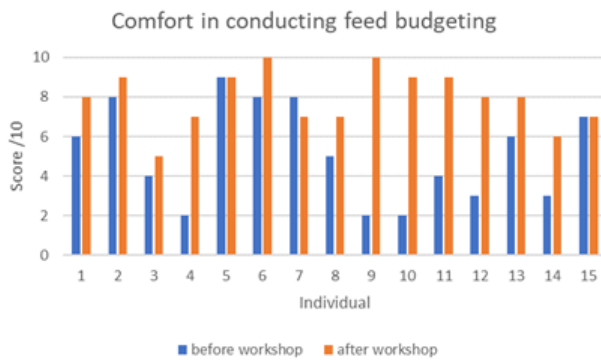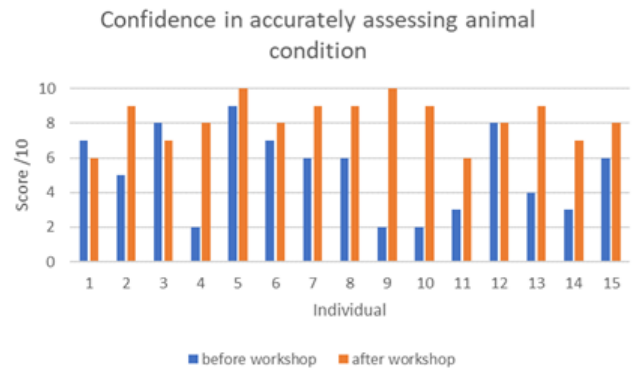
4.2.2   Optimising feedbase

The full data set is presented in Appendix 3. The data comparing responses from pre- and post-workshop surveys showed a significant increase in confidence in working with producers on feedbase related topics.

Confidence in working with a producer on optimising stocking rate

Mean confidence before 4.4 after 7.9

Confidence with working with a producer on optimising feed grown per mm rainfall

Mean confidence before 3.5 after 6.3

Confidence in accurately assessing animal condition

Mean confidence before 5.2 after 8.2

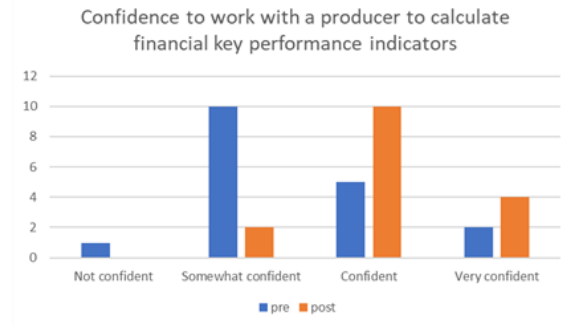
Comfort in conducting feed budgeting

Mean confidence before 5.1 after 7.9
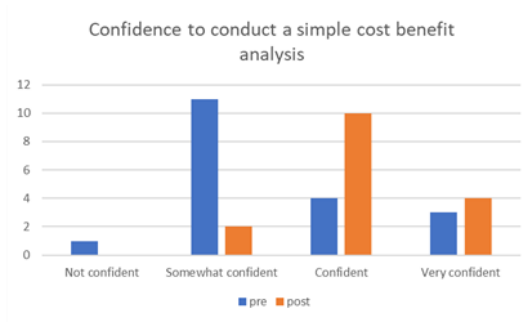
4.2.4 Building blocks of business

The full data set is presented in Appendix 4. The data comparing responses from pre- and post-workshop surveys showed a significant increase in confidence in working with producers on business related topics. The data presented here groups the responses rather than showing individual responses pre- and post- workshop results as in the feedbase data.
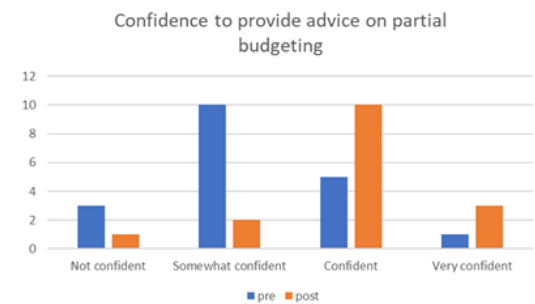

Rating of financial literacy for supporting clients with business related decision making
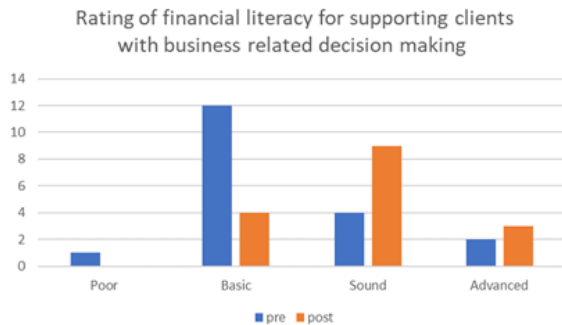
Mean score before: basic (3)
Mean score after: sound (7)

Confidence to work with a producer to calculate financial key performance indicators

Mean score before: somewhat confident (4)
Mean score after: confident (7.5)

Confidence to conduct a simple cost benefit analysis

Mean score before: somewhat confident (4)
Mean score after: confident (7.5)

Confidence to provide advice on partial budgeting

Mean score before: somewhat confident (3.8)
Mean score after: confident (7.8)

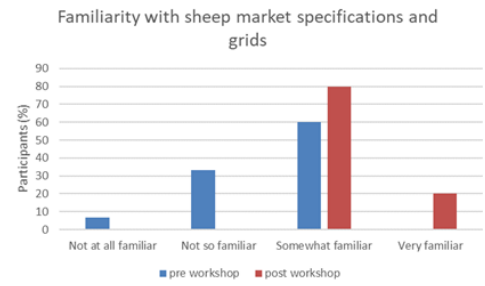Confidence to analyse and interpret financial data and deliver the messages from this data

Mean score before: somewhat confident (4)
Mean score after: very confident (8)
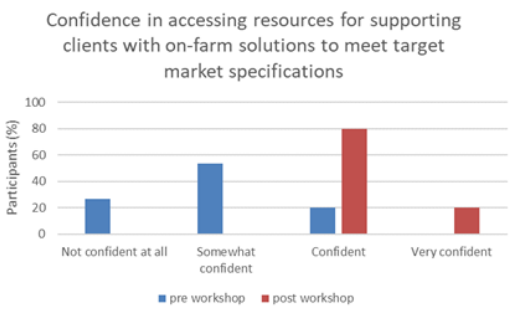
4.2.5   Meating the market

The full data set is presented in Appendix 5. The data comparing responses from pr-e and post-workshop surveys showed a significant increase in confidence in working with producers on value chain related topics.
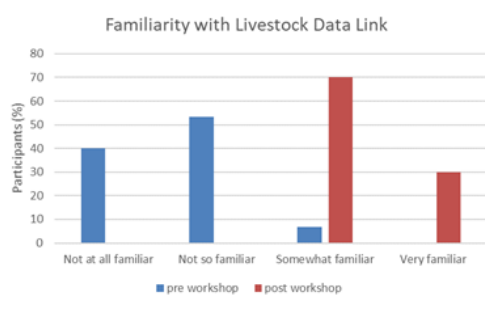

Familiarity with beef market specifications and grids
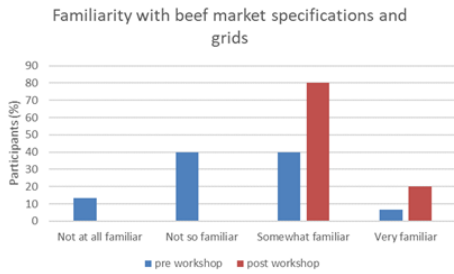
Mean score before: not so familiar (4.5)
Mean score after: somewhat familiar (8)

Familiarity with sheep market specifications and grids

Mean score before: somewhat familiar (5)
Mean score after: somewhat familiar (7.9)

Confidence in accessing resources for supporting clients with on-farm solutions to meet target market specifications

Mean score before: somewhat confident (5.6)
Mean score after: confident (8.2)

Familiarity with Livestock Data Link

Mean score before: not so familiar (3.8)
Mean score after: somewhat familiar (8.2)

Familiarity with RamSelect
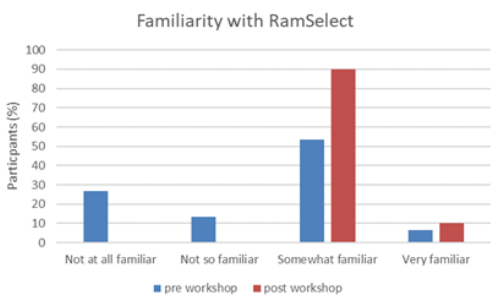
Mean score before: somewhat familiar (5.5)
Mean score after: somewhat familiar (8.2)

Familiarity with objective carcase technologies currently being developed to measure lean meat yield and eating quality
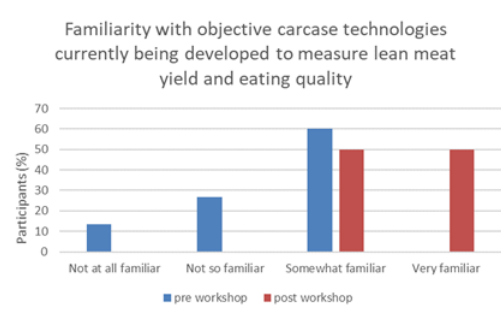
Mean score before: somewhat familiar (5.2)
Mean score after: very familiar (9)

Confidence in providing advice on meeting MSA requirments for beef
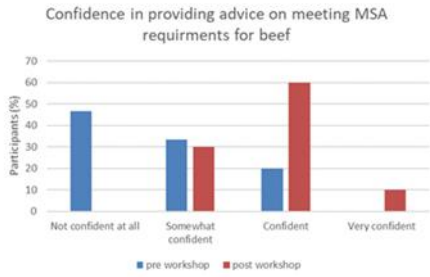
Mean score before: somewhat confident (3.3)
Mean score after: confident (7.2)

Confidence in providing advice on meeting MSA requirements for lamb
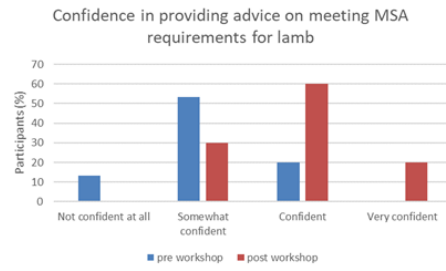
Mean score before: somewhat confident (3.5)
Mean score after: confident (7.4)

Confidence in providing advice to clients about how they can improve compliance to current and future market specifications for lamb and beef
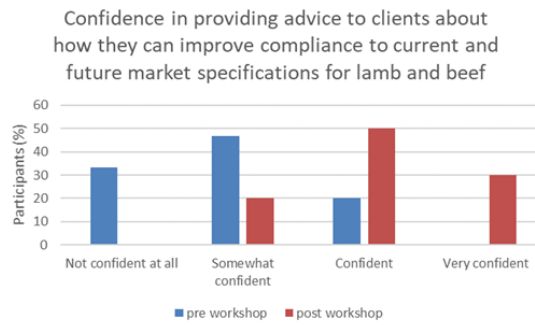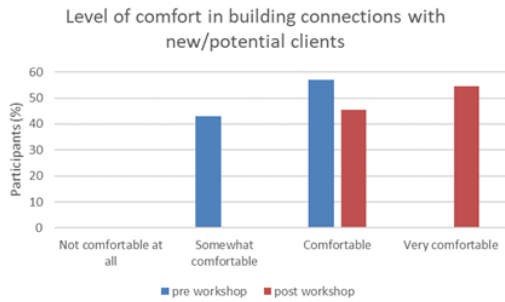
Mean score before: somewhat confident (4.6)
Mean score after: confident (7.8)

The online delivery had an impact on the ability to deliver highly technical information in a meaningful way. The tour of the processor facility also had to be converted to a virtual tour which had an impact on the participants ability to see firsthand how decisions made on-farm carry through to meat quality assessments. If the final two workshops were able to be delivered face-to-face as intended, it is felt deeper learning and engagement would have resulted.

4.2.6 Influence and Impact

The full data set is presented in Appendix 6. The data comparing responses from pre- and post-workshop surveys showed a significant increase in confidence in working with producers on people related topics.
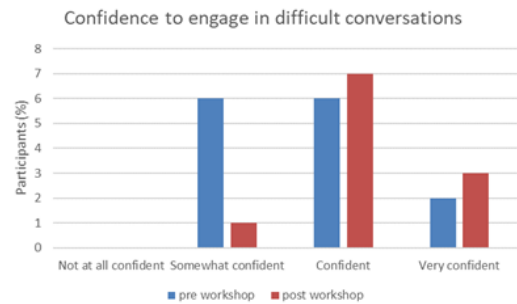

Level of comfort in building connections with new/potential clients

Mean score before: comfortable (6.1)
Mean score after: very comfortable (8.2)

Self assessed rating of listening skills

Mean score before: good (6.5)
Mean score after: very good (8.8)

Ability to work with different personaility/behavioural styles to yourself

Mean score before: good (6.5)
Mean score after: very good (8.2)

Confidence to engage in difficult conversations

Mean score before: somewhat confident (5.5)
Mean score after: confident (7.9)

Familiarity with identifying barriers to change

Confidence in knowledge required to build and maintain own brand
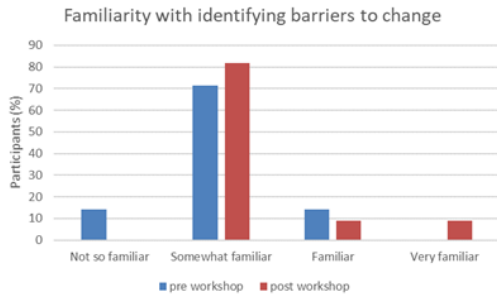
Mean score before: somewhat familiar (4.8)
Mean score after: somewhat familiar (5.8)

Mean score before: confident (7.2)
Mean score after: confident (8.2)

4.2.7   Whole of program

The data captured in a detailed survey of participants following the final workshop showed significant and consistent increases in confidence, awareness, skills and knowledge as a result of participating in the program.

Ninety-one percent of participants showed an increase in confidence to engage with clients about livestock management.

Change in confidence to engage with clients about whole of business livetsock management

9%

36%

55%

■ Significant increase ■ Increase ■ No change ■ Slight decrease ■ Signifcant decrease
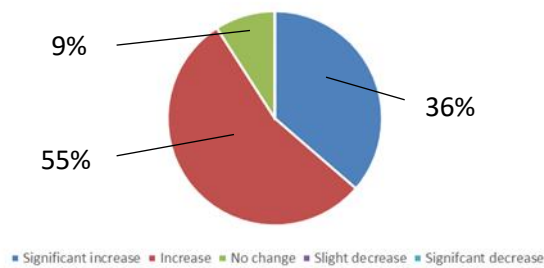
All participants showed an increase in confidence that they had grown their advisor network.
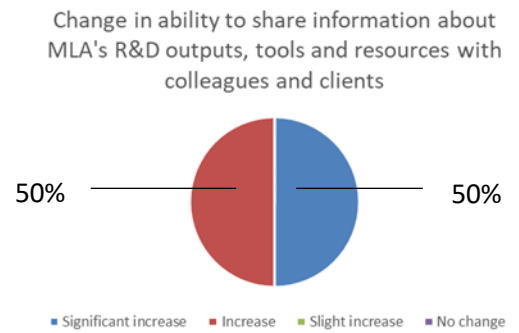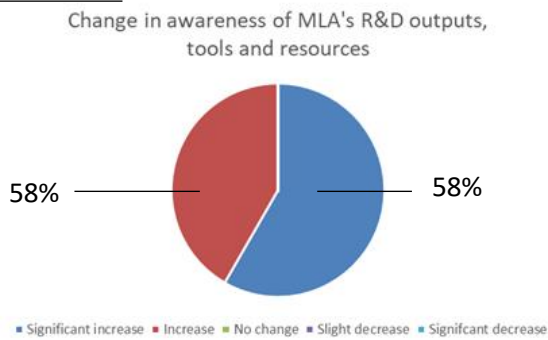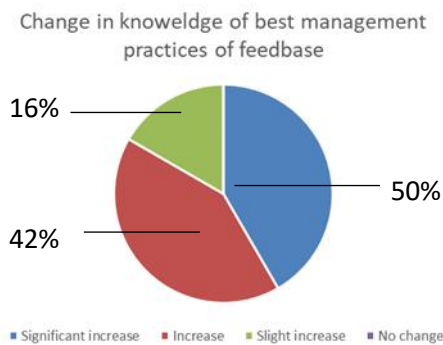
Confidence that there has been growth in their industry advisor network

42%   58%

▪ Very confident ▪ Confident ▪ No change ▪ Less confident ▪ Not confident at all
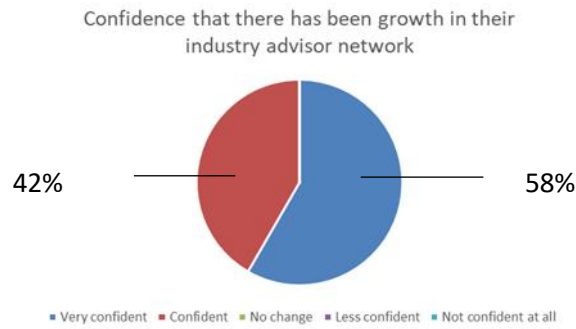
All participants showed an increase in awareness of MLA tools and resources as well as in their ability to share this awareness with colleagues.

Change in awareness of MLA's R&D outputs, tools and resources

58%   58%

▪ Significant increase ▪ Increase ▪ No change ▪ Slight decrease ▪ Signifcant decrease

Change in ability to share information about MLA's R&D outputs, tools and resources with colleagues and clients

50%   50%

▪ Significant increase ▪ Increase ▪ Slight increase ▪ No change

All participants showed an increase in knowledge in all four learning areas of feedbase, business, value-chain and people and culture.

Change in knoweldge of best management practices of feedbase

16%
42%   50%

▪ Significant increase ▪ Increase ▪ Slight increase ▪ No change

Change in knowledge of best practice management in a business sense

27%   73%

▪ Significant increase ▪ Increase ▪ Slight increase ▪ No change

Change in knowledge of bst practice management in a value-chain sense

36% 64%

■ Significant increase ■ Increase ■ Slight increase ■ No change

Change in knowledge of best practice management in a people sense

27% 73%

■ Significant increase ■ Increase ■ Slight increase ■ No change
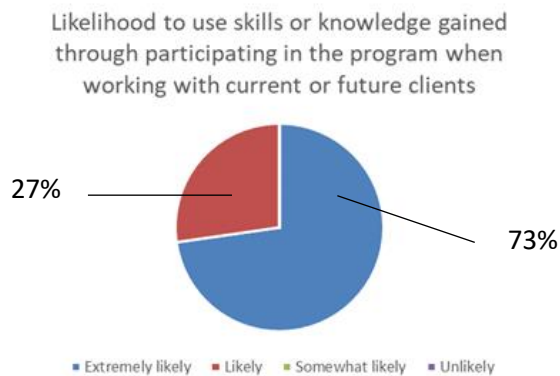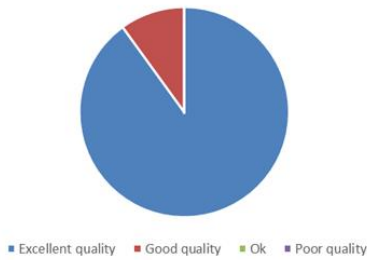
Not all participants showed an increase in awareness of training opportunities for livestock producers, more explicit sign posting of relevant PDS/PGS/EDGE programs could have occurred.

Change in awareness of training opportunities for livestock producers

9%
9%
36% 45%

■ Significant increase ■ Increase ■ Slight increase ■ No change
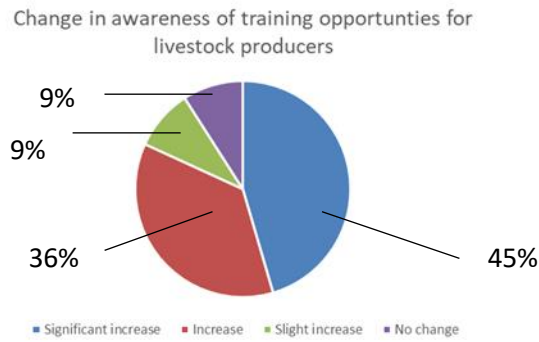
All participants were likely or extremely likely to use the skills and knowledge gained through the program when working with current or future clients and all deliverers were rated highly by all participants.
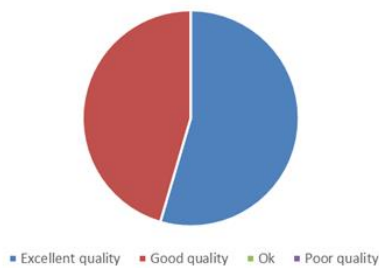
Likelihood to use skills or knowledge gained through participating in the program when working with current or future clients

27% 73%

■ Extremely likely ■ Likely ■ Somewhat likely ■ Unlikely

Quality rating for deliverer of the Feedbase workshop - Basil Doonan

Excellent quality ■ Good quality ■ Ok ■ Poor quality

Quality rating for deliverer of the Business workshop - John Francis

Excellent quality ■ Good quality ■ Ok ■ Poor quality

Quality rating for the deliverer of the Value Chain workshop - Elke Hocking

Excellent quality ■ Good quality ■ Ok ■ Poor quality

Quality rating for the deliverer of the People and Culture workshop - Jill Rigney

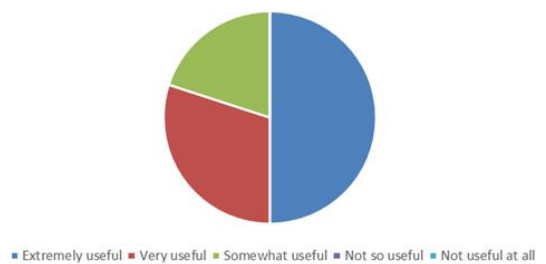Excellent quality ■ Good quality ■ Ok ■ Poor quality
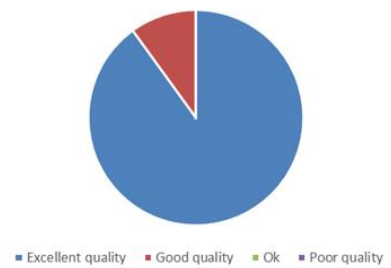
Quality of all deliverers was highly rated by participants. Participants did not see a need for any changes to timing, content, resources or the amount of peer-to-peer learning. One participant suggested an electronic repository for resources, for example the use of drop box for accessing documents, this would be very easy to implement in future programs.

Perception of balance between technical skill development and soft skills for the program

■ Exactly right ■ Close enough
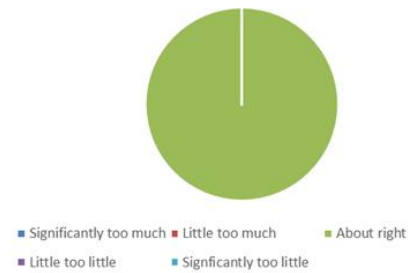■ Too much emphasis on technical skills ■ Too much emphasis on soft skills
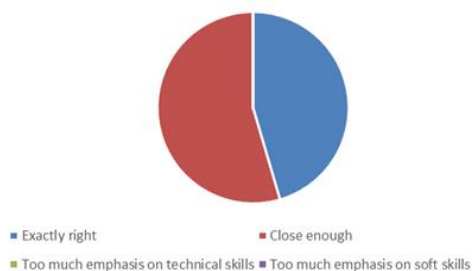
Usefulness of resources provided (manual, electronic tools and resources)

■ Extremely useful ■ Very useful ■ Somewhat useful ■ Not so useful ■ Not useful at all

Rating of amount of peer-to-peer learning in the program

Perfect amount ■ Almost enough ■ Significantly too little
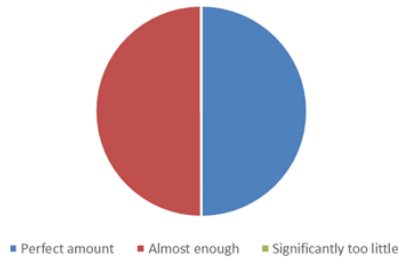
Rating of time commitment for being involved in the program

Significantly too much ■ Little too much ■ About right
Little too little ■ Signficantly too little

Quality rating of the coordination of the program (communication, attential to detail, organisation of workshops)

Excellent ■ Good ■ OK ■ Poor

Future delivery could benefit from increasing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning as part of the program design. The overall satisfaction with the program was 9.5 out of 10 and the overall value of attending these workshops was 8.6 out of 10.

4.2.8   Mentoring program

Forty percent of mentees were somewhat confident or not confident at all at the beginning of the program in asking for guidance and support from their mentor, compared to eighty percent being extremely confident at the conclusion of the program.

All participants said there was sufficient time with their mentor/mentee. This was highlighted as an extremely important factor that contributed to a positive impact on each participant's experience of the program. However, a number of participants suggested more time to spend with mentors/mentees for future programs.

Mentees reported that the mentoring program most definitely assisted in achieving their professional goals. Most of the participant thought that their mentor/mentee partnership was very effective.

All participants were extremely satisfied with the mentoring workshop delivered by Jill Rigney. All participants rated the workshop as valuable to extremely valuable. The content was rated as excellent by 100 percent of participants.

Remuneration of mentors was not an important consideration for their involvement in the program, however, professional development, reimbursement of travel expenses and coordination support were significant incentives to participation, along with a desire to give back to industry and support the development of a young person.

Rating of the importance of various factors relating to mentors' willingness to participate in the program

Factor	Mentor rating
Remuneration for time	Not important at all
Giving back to the industry	Extremely important
Reward from helping to grow and support someone to fulfil their potential	Extremely important
Professional development opportunities for myself	Extremely important
Opportunity to learn from my mentee and exposure to new ways of thinking	Extremely important
Reimbursement of travel and accommodation expenses	Extremely important
Formal coordination support	Extremely important

4.2.9 Engagement with other MLA programs

The participants engaged in the LAE program showed progression in confidence and ability by engaging in Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) programs, Producer Demonstration Sites (PDS) projects, EDGE and the MLA Livestock Consulting Internship (LCI) program. These programs were promoted throughout the LAE project and the final participation figures are three participants completing PGS train the trainer components, six are now PGS deliverers, two have applied for PDS projects, one is a PDS facilitator, two are EDGE deliverers and one is in the current LCI cohort.

5. Conclusion

The Livestock Advisor Essentials pilot program successfully achieved the project objectives. Social research provided insight into the needs of livestock advisors and informed the design of a professional development program to build foundational skills and knowledge. Experts in their field were engaged as deliverers of the four workshops of feedbase, business, value chain and people.

The target number of thirty participants was not reached, with seventeen participants registering for the complete program. Covid-19 related border restrictions may have impacted registrations, with expressions of interest received from far more than the seventeen participants. With the state of Victoria in lock down, and people from other southern states still nervous about travelling, the impact on registrations was not surprising.

Monitoring and evaluation results demonstrate that participants grew in confidence, skills and knowledge in all areas, and expanded their network. Participants became more aware of MLA tools,

resources and training opportunities, and intend using these for supporting their clients in the future.

Participants indicated a greater amount of face-to-face content would be beneficial, and some felt some online coaching or support between workshops would be valuable. There was also an opportunity to increase the amount of peer-to-peer learning in the program.

5.1 Key findings

Despite the lower-than-expected enrolments (explained by covid), the program was well received and met a need in the industry. Enquiries were received about future LAE from north, west and south during the rollout as word about the program spread. There is a demand for programs specifically targeting advisors

The program was incredibly effective and achieved the following:

- An on-ground advisor network capable of disseminating high quality information and linking producers to MLA programs and resources was built.
- The awareness of less experienced livestock industry professionals about MLA and MLA's R&D outputs, tools and resources has increased and enabling them to share this information with colleagues and red meat producers they interact with.
- The knowledge of less experienced livestock industry professionals about best practice management within feedbase, business, value chain and people was increased.
- The capacity of information providers to motivate producers to increase their knowledge and skills through MLA's tools, resources and adoption programs was improved.
- Inexperienced livestock industry professionals were encouraged to increase their own knowledge and/or skills in whole of business livestock management.
- Participants were introduced to opportunities to work in collaboration with existing projects targeting livestock industry professionals (e.g. LAU). This will continue to grow the professional network capability and build MLA's reach through industry.

5.1.1 Benefits to industry

The direct benefits to industry will be in the form of bridging the gap between MLA and less experienced livestock industry professionals by building the capacity and awareness of new industry professionals who are passionate about the Australian red meat industry. An on-ground advisor network has been established, capable of disseminating high quality information and linking producers to MLA programs and resources. Red meat producers will benefit through having access to livestock advisors who have a whole of business perspective and are well connected, trained and resourced to be able to support them. Depending on their area of work, one advisor has the potential to reach 20-50 producers. Hence the investment in training and supporting advisors has the potential to leverage increased adoption uptake and result in improved industry performance.

6. Future research and recommendations

The key recommendations resulting from the pilot project are:
- There is sufficient evidence to support the expansion of the pilot to a permanent offering from MLA. The project should be formalised and rolled out ready for 2023 intake so as not to lose momentum gained from the brand awareness generated during the pilot.
- Expand the program from a primary target audience of early career professionals to those with more years' experience but looking to build their foundational skills and knowledge.
- Participants must be currently employed in the industry and have the support of their employer.
- Based on feedback from the pilot, the proposed structure for the Livestock Advisor Essentials program is:
  - 12-month program, running for the calendar year.
  - Introductory webinar to introduce participants and all deliverers, establish expectations and share preliminary reading materials.
  - Expand to five topics delivered as face-to-face workshops (the same topics as the pilot with the addition of reproduction and genetics).
  - Formal online tutorials 4-8 weeks after each workshop.
  - Designated time in the delivery schedule for group sharing/discussion (i.e., opportunity to learn from peers, and share experiences and learnings).
- Tailor the program to ensure relevance to groups in the southern, northern/rangelands and western livestock production regions of Australia.
- A group run every three years in each region, cycling between regions each year (i.e., one active group per year).
- Increase the cost of the program to be more reflective of the value, and travel and accommodation expenses to remain the responsibility of the participant.
- A minimum of 15 and a maximum of 25 participants per region.

7. Acknowledgements

8. Appendix

Appendix 1 – Phase 1 breakdown of survey respondents by sector

Appendix 2 – Phase 1 report

Appendix 3 – Monitoring and evaluation report for feedbase module

Appendix 4 – Monitoring and evaluation report for business module

Appendix 5 – Monitoring and evaluation report for value chain module

Appendix 6 - Monitoring and evaluation report for people module