

Final report

NFAS Communication & Adoption Strategy Development and Implementation

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Abstract

The National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) is an independently audited quality assurance scheme owned and administered by AUS-MEAT and managed by the Feedlot Industry Accreditation Committee (FLIAC). The objective of NFAS is to provide a trusted quality assurance scheme for beef cattle feedlots that impacts positively on product integrity and production standards whereby lot feeders maintain responsibility.

This project developed a three-year Communication and Adoption Strategy (in collaboration with AUS-MEAT, FLIAC, the Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) and Integrity Systems Company (ISC) that engages and drives NFAS Accredited lot feeders' ongoing awareness and understanding of NFAS Standards and requirements.

Implementation of on-ground project activities commenced in November 2021 with an Annual Plan that provided a clear framework and timeline for communication activities, goals, and outcomes. The resourcing capacity provided by the project has enabled different approaches to communication and extension to be trialled and implemented. It has also aided a specific focus on developing content and managing and organising NFAS events such as Open Forums and providing communications and adoption specialist support.

The benefits to industry from the project included simplified messaging and extension resources to support NFAS conformance and help feedlots understand 'what has to change' and creation of responsive and tailored communication activities and extension resources based on direct and immediate feedback from the field.

Executive summary

Background

A review of the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) in 2014 recommended improvements in program communication were required. Limited available resources previously had meant that there was not as much awareness of the program and its objectives as there should be, and communication and extension approaches were less strategic and more reactive.

The Integrity Systems Company (ISC) in collaboration with AUS-MEAT, the Feedlot Industry Accreditation Committee (FLIAC), and the Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA), resourced this project to engage and drive NFAS Accredited lot feeders' ongoing awareness, understanding, and practice change in relation to NFAS Standards and requirements.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to understand the specific requirements of the target audiences via a situational analysis, develop an overarching three-year communications and adoption strategy for NFAS, develop and deliver annual communications plans, and provide on-going communication expertise and resourcing to support NFAS.

All objectives related to this project were delivered on.

Methodology

The three-year Communications and Adoption Strategy and annual plans focused on:

- Audit readiness: creating awareness of changes in NFAS standards and audit requirements and development of new technical content to assist with conformance to these changes.
- Routine communications: a dedicated NFAS database and email newsletter to drive attendance at Open Forums and provide a timely source of information to tackle issues that were cropping up.
- Extension and training: activities and resources to quality assurance including leveraging off existing training opportunities.
- Open Forums: a regular way to get messaging across, create relevant resources on priority topics if needed, and offer a direct communication vehicle, particularly for small to medium-sized feedlots
- Stakeholder relationships and collaboration: regular engagement, communication, and presentations to key industry stakeholders.

Results/key findings

The Communication and Adoption Strategy and Annual Plans provided clear frameworks and timelines for communication activities, goals, and outcomes that enabled improved planning and coordination of industry activities. NFAS communication and adoption activities moved from being largely 'ad hoc' and focused on formal communication (e.g., Advice Notices) to more regular and better developed activities.

The additional resourcing capacity provided by the project enabled different approaches to communication and extension to be trialled and implemented. It also aided a specific focus on developing content and managing and organising NFAS events such as the Open Forums and providing communications and adoption specialist support.

Benefits to industry

Benefits to the Australian feedlot industry from the project and its outcomes included activities and approaches that helped protect the brand integrity of NFAS. A more cohesive and collegiate approach to communication and extension activities embedded across industry participants (AUS-MEAT, ALFA and FLIAC) enabled clear, consistent messaging and extension resources to support NFAS conformance and help feedlots understand 'what has to change'.

Future research and recommendations

Future investment in this area is critical to ensuring engagement, awareness and understanding of NFAS Standards and requirements by Australian lotfeeders.

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1. Background

The National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) is an independently audited quality assurance scheme owned and administered by AUS-MEAT and managed by the Feedlot Industry Accreditation Committee (FLIAC). The objective of NFAS is to provide a trusted quality assurance scheme for beef cattle feedlots that impacts positively on product integrity and production standards whereby lot feeders maintain responsibility. The Scheme facilitates industry producing certified grain-fed beef for export and is recognised in Australian export legislation. NFAS has been in operation since 1994 and was the first agricultural industry quality assurance program in Australia. A review of the program in 2014 recommended improvements in program communication were required. Limited available resources have meant the approach since then has continued to be less strategic and more reactive.

A previous lack of investment into NFAS communications had consequently meant there was not as much awareness of the program and its objectives as there should be. Awareness of NFAS Standards amongst feedlot operational staff and the importance of compliance, methodologies and practices that are required also needed improving. Ensuring that compliance within NFAS is continually improved is fundamental to the feedlot sector being able to demonstrate to stakeholders that the sector's quality assurance programs deliver suitable outcomes for livestock and employees within individual sites. Therefore, it is vital that communication efforts deliver assurance to stakeholders that industry is capable of self-regulating, is proactive in educating lot feeders about program improvements and compliance and is consistent in its approach to communicating the standards through AUS-MEAT and its team of auditors.

The project developed a three-year Communication and Adoption Strategy, in collaboration with AUS-MEAT, FLIAC, the Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) and the Integrity Systems Company (ISC), that:

- Engages and drives NFAS Accredited lot feeders' ongoing awareness and understanding of NFAS Standards and requirements.
- Provides a clear timeline of communication activities, goals, and outcomes.
- Outlines seasonal conditions of lot feeding to form annual content themes, that addresses preparedness as it relates to NFAS Standards.
- Outlines content requirements that cover all key aspects of the Scheme considered important by Scheme Management, including, but not limited to, contingency planning and crisis management as it relates to the Standards.
- Uses NFAS auditing results to identify deficiencies in NFAS compliance to inform, develop and target communication efforts to achieve measurable practice change and improvements in compliance.
- Assists AUS-MEAT's internal communication and cross pollination of information amongst NFAS auditors to foster improved auditor understanding of the evolving Rules and Standards, consistency, and communication of NFAS to lot feeders.
- Includes clear milestones for review of the Communication and Adoption Strategy using Key Performance Indicators to measure the success, relevancy, and efficiency of communication plans to inform plans.
- Assists the industry Technical Services Officer in enhancing the skills and knowledge of lot feeders in relation to the Scheme.
- Provides dedicated resourcing to execute the agreed annual implementation plans in line with the three-year Communication Strategy, including but not limited to managing development

and deployment of all communication collateral to Scheme participants and assisting Scheme management in communication to auditors.

2. Objectives

The original objectives of the project were to:

1. Facilitate an inception meeting with the Steering Group.
2. Perform a situational analysis to understand the specific requirements of the target audience to inform the development of a NFAS communications and adoption strategy.
3. Develop an overarching three-year communications and adoption strategy for NFAS that defines:
 - Goals
 - Target Audience(s)
 - Communication Channels
 - Communication Themes
 - Communication Timings
 - Communication Frequency
 - Content Types
 - Measurement, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) framework for the strategy
 - Issues management
4. Develop an annual communications plan for Steering Group sign-off that includes:
 - Regular communication activities
 - Content development requirements, timelines, responsibilities
 - Content publishing times, platforms, audiences
 - NFAS webpage content
 - Performance reporting against MERI framework
 - Drive the evolution of the content plan based on the performance of communication activities
 - Annual Report to stakeholders
5. Update the Style Guide for NFAS:
 - Logo
 - Colours
 - Tone of Voice
 - Communication/Content Templates
6. Provide on-going communication expertise and resourcing to execute the agreed annual communications plan in line with the three-year Communication and Adoption Strategy, including but not limited to:
 - Managing development and deployment of all communication collateral to Scheme participants
 - Assisting Scheme Management in communication to auditors

A revised Statement of Work for the project was negotiated in May 2022 and all milestones and deliverables related to the objectives have been approved:

- Milestone 1: Inception meeting planned.

- Milestone 2: Acceptance of the final Situational Analysis Report.
- Milestone 3: Delivery of three-year NFAS Communication and Adoption Strategy.
- Milestone 4: NFAS Program Management Review Point (Go/No-Go Decision based on ISC assessment of next phases of work proceeding based on NFAS Program future management considerations).
- Milestone 5: Acceptance of the NFAS Style Guide.
- Milestone 6: Delivery of '2021/22 Communications & Adoption Implementation Plan'.
- Milestone 7: Mid-year milestone report acceptance.
- Milestone 8: Delivery of '2022/23 Communication & Adoption Implementation Plan'. And Acceptance of the '2022/23 Communication & Adoption Implementation Plan' by the Reference Group within two weeks of its delivery.

3. Methodology

3.1 Project inception

An inception meeting was held via videoconference with the NFAS Communications Steering Group on 19th February 2021. This meeting confirmed the background, approach, issues and finalised the parameters of all facets of the project. A key outcome from this meeting was to agree and endorse the tasks and methodology to be used in the project and clearly define the project outcomes.

3.2 Situational analysis

This phase focused on understanding the operating environment and specific requirements of the target audiences. A key aspect of this phase was to understand the current levels of awareness and understanding of NFAS Standards and requirements, deficiencies in NFAS compliance, current barriers to adoption of NFAS Standards, communication preferences, and the demographics of the target audiences.

The key barriers to compliance for NFAS Standards and requirements and why previous efforts have not achieved higher levels of uptake were investigated. NFAS auditing results were used as well as other information from industry stakeholders to supplement a small number of interviews with key lot feeding industry stakeholders, including NFAS Communications Steering Group members, AUS-MEAT, FLIAC and ALFA, seeking their views and opinions. 19 semi-structured qualitative interviews of feedlot operators were conducted. These were representative and in-depth, but not suitable for statistical analysis.

At the conclusion of this phase, a final Situational Analysis report was provided containing key findings.

3.3 Strategy development

This phase focused on developing an overarching three-year Communications and Adoption Strategy. The aim of this Strategy was to define the NFAS's communication and adoption goals, objectives, outcomes, and activities in an effective, consistent, and coordinated manner. It provided a framework to manage and coordinate the variety of communications and adoption approaches that the project used to share key messages and reach target audiences.

The emphasis of the Strategy was on facilitating the uptake and application of the NFAS Standards, methodologies, and practices to management decisions and providing information to the varied and numerous stakeholders.

At the conclusion of this phase, a final Communications and Adoption Strategy document was provided to the Steering Group and formed the foundation for the annual 'Communications and Adoption Plans'.

3.4 Planning and content development

This phase focused on creating the annual 'Communications and Adoption Plan'. A Plan was developed in each year of the project that specified monthly activities, content development requirements (including timelines, responsibilities, key considerations, etc.), content publishing requirements (including times, platforms, audiences, etc.) and NFAS webpage content requirements. The formats for the types for communication and adoption materials were defined in the annual plan against the objectives, outcomes, and audiences.

Each Annual Implementation Plan sought to deliver on the opportunities identified in the three-year NFAS Communication & Adoption Strategy and to make a transformative 'step change' in NFAS communications.

A summary of Annual Plan content is provided below:

3.4.1 Audit readiness

Development of new technical content, e.g., Fact Sheets, focused on the highest information needs (e.g., the most common causes of Corrective Action Requests (CARs)) in conjunction with ALFA and AUS-MEAT.

Contribution to advanced awareness of any upcoming changes in audit requirements each year.

Mailouts of technical resources (e.g., livestock incident reporting triggers poster) on request.

Regular NFAS 'Open Forums', featuring different lot feeders and industry experts in tackling an 'issue of focus' from the NFAS Standards, including:

- Direct design, management, and organisation of the Open Forums.
- Social media management.
- Regular evaluation of the Open Forums incorporating participant feedback.

3.4.2 Routine communications

A dedicated NFAS email newsletter to drive attendance at the Open Forums and provide a timely source of information that tackles issues that were cropping up.

Assess feedback on preferred frequency of newsletter publication and monitor open rates and click rates of circulated newsletters.

Maintenance of NFAS systems and processes, including ensuring database currency to optimise customer relationship management (CRM) and manage the NFAS email marketing platform.

Timely and appropriate responses to all inquiries to the info@nfas.org.au email. These were primarily comments, feedback, and questions that arose from subscribers reading newsletters and responding

to issues raised in them.

Monitoring and ensuring consistency and guidance in the use of the NFAS logo and branded templates.

Assisting in resolution of a preferred website approach to ensure NFAS web resources are easily accessible. The provision of resources on the AUS-MEAT website was a significant barrier to implementation of the communication and adoption plan.

3.4.3 Extension and training

Case studies of lot feeders that have participated in Open Forums or that illustrate focused campaign requirements (through partnership with Free Range Ag).

Auditor virtual workshops to get feedback from the field in trends in CARs and auditor and feedlot communication and support needs; and establish a culture of regular interaction with the audit team. Use auditor feedback to ensure specific, relevant information and support is provided.

Leverage opportunities to use existing training platforms (AUS-MEAT or ALFA) to support NFAS.

3.4.4 Open Forums

Open Forums were developed in conjunction with ALFA and AUS-MEAT based on seasonal conditions, highest information needs, and topics of most risk to the industry. The Open Forums were a regular way to get messaging across, create relevant resources on priority topics if needed, and offer a direct communication vehicle, particularly for small to medium-sized feedlots and those that were not engaged with beef industry networks and media.

3.4.5 Stakeholder relationships and collaboration

Regular communications and adoption presentation and updates at FLIAC meetings.

Support to ALFA's and FLIAC's internal communications (e.g., review of media releases, review, and input into FLIAC letter to feedlots, articles for NFAS-branded page in every issue of ALFA Lot feeders Journal, etc.).

Regular Working Group meetings (ALFA, AUS-MEAT & CMA) which was a critical component in building understanding and collaboration between the organisations.

Preparing materials and presentation for industry forums or conferences as required.

Updates for other industry stakeholders on request.

3.5 Deployment and reporting

This phase provided communications and adoption specialist support to AUS-MEAT (and FLIAC) to execute the agreed annual Communications and Adoption Plans in line with the three-year Communication and Adoption Strategy. The types of support activities provided are detailed in the Plan above.

This phase also involved monitoring and overseeing the development and execution of the Communications and Adoption strategy (in conjunction with AUS-MEAT and FLIAC) to meet ISC and FLIAC reporting requirements (e.g., regular milestone reports, quarterly reports to FLIAC on delivery (occurred and planned) and reach of communication and adoption activities, etc.). This phase has an evaluation and reporting component, reviewing the performance of previous communication

activities against KPIs, reviewing effectiveness of content, and other agreed metrics.

4. Results

4.1 Audit readiness

Communication and adoption resources regarding NFAS Rules and Standards were created and made available to lot feeders and their services providers. These resources included:

- ELEMENT LM5 - Animal Health Factsheet and associated resources:
 - NFAS Register of Veterinary Medicines Form
 - NFAS Treatment Protocol Form
 - NFAS Biosecurity Risk Assessment for Visitors and Staff
 - NFAS Visitor Log
 - Emergency Animal Disease (EAD) Action Plan
 - Vet assistance in feedlots checklist
- ELEMENT LM8 - Livestock incident Reporting Factsheet and associated resources:
 - Critical Incident Response Plan and Activity Form
- ELEMENT QM7 - Product Recall/ Non-Conforming Product Factsheet and associated resources:
 - NFAS Product Recall Activity Form
- ELEMENT QM9 - Critical Incident Response Plan Factsheet
- ELEMENT FS4 – Additive, premix, and liquid supplement Manufacturer Accreditation Factsheet

Additionally, other industry resources were made accessible to lot feeders and their services providers to support the NFAS documents:

- MLA Antimicrobial stewardship guidelines
- MLA factsheet Antimicrobials and growth promotion
- MLA factsheet High importance antimicrobials
- MLA factsheet Interpreting prescription and restraint on labels
- MLA factsheet Key points on antimicrobial stewardship
- Importance Rating and Summary of Antibiotic Uses

The NFAS Communication & Adoption Strategy assisted NFAS to deliver its mission and objectives by increasing the annual rate of conformance. A key aim of the project was that every NFAS-accredited feedlot could report having the information, reference materials, tools, and training and extension opportunities to conform with NFAS requirements.

Analysis conducted in January 2023 showed that Open Forum attendees (the primary NFAS communication and extension activity) were receiving fewer Corrective Action Requests (CARs). All 136 feedlots that had participated in forums had 149 CARs in total (an average of 1.1 CARs per feedlot), compared to 151 non-forum feedlots that received 249 CARs (an average of 1.6 CARs per feedlot). Arguably, those lot feeders that attend forums may have systems and processes in place that makes them less likely to get CARs anyway, however, it should be noted that the 59 feedlots that had participated in three or more forums had 47 CARs in total (an average of 0.8 CARs per feedlot) or half the number of CARs on average than non-forum feedlots.

4.2 Routine communications

4.2.1 NFAS branding guidelines

A consistent NFAS Style Guide was developed and implemented via document templates and other NFAS collateral. These branding guidelines covered:

- The NFAS Logo
- Colours – primary colour, secondary colours, accent colour, colour balance
- Typography – Font for headings, body text, etc.
- Graphics
- Usage – how the guidelines should be implemented in document templates and other resources.

This provided more uniformity and guidance in the use of the NFAS logo and a set of branded templates for all NFAS documentation, resources, information materials, and routine communications.

4.2.2 Email newsletters

A key communication channel was the NFAS newsletter which was used to drive attendance at the Open Forums and provide a timely source of information to tackle current issues. The open rates and click rates of circulated newsletters were monitored for each edition, and the average metrics were higher than industry averages.

Email newsletters containing recordings and resources from Open Forums had a 57% Open Rate and a 19% Click Rate.

The customer relationship management (CRM) and NFAS email marketing platform were managed to support distribution of the newsletter and other communication activities. The number of subscribers grew organically during the life of the project and there were 599 subscribed members on the NFAS mailing list (as at 28th April 2023), comprising lot feeders, service providers, and other stakeholders.

4.2.3 NFAS website

Easy access to NFAS information resources was enabled by having a single NFAS page created on the AUS-MEAT website and the NFAS Reference Material and resources migrated from the ALFA website. These, and other resources, will be made available via the purpose-built NFAS website once it is deployed in the second half of 2023. The aim is for the NFAS website to be the 'one stop shop' for feedlot owners, managers, and staff for practical information to assist feedlots in being compliant with the quality assurance program. The objective is that the website contains every conceivable piece of documentation in an easy-to-find system. The measure of success will be that every NFAS-accredited feedlot can report having the information, reference materials, tools, and resources to conform with NFAS requirements. Communication and extension activities will drive participants to the website to access information.

To further reinforce the NFAS entity, NFAS had a dedicated Zoom Account, YouTube account, and Mailchimp Account established.

4.2.4 Media

Industry media was used to support communication around changes to the NFAS Rules and Standards and to promote NFAS Open Forums, case studies, and resources.

The audience for NFAS communications is well-defined (NFAS-accredited feedlots and service providers) which enabled the use of a small number of highly targeted print, digital and social media channels (e.g., ALFA Lotfeeders Journal, ALFA newsletters, AUS-MEAT communications). Key outcomes included:

- Coverage in the ALFA Lotfeeding Journal and securing an ongoing NFAS-branded page in every issue.
- Strong support from both ALFA and AUS-MEAT's e-newsletters
- Building an NFAS-specific customer relationship management (CRM) database and templates for direct communication via e-newsletters (utilising Mailchimp marketing automation platform and email marketing service).

Case studies prepared included:

- Greg Clark (Royal Oak Beef Feedlot) on product recalls.
- Jeremy and Angela Cummins (Angora Feedlot) on quality audits.
- Dr. Kev Sullivan (Bell Veterinary Services) on livestock incident reporting.
- John and Alison Bell (Inavale Brangus Stud) and Jackie and Darren Rethus (West Wimmera Beef) on CARs.
- Sarah Hamilton (Tallawanta Feedlot) on biosecurity.
- Todd Fotheringham (KM & JK Fotheringham) and Andrew Winks (Woolerina Grazing Family Trust) on feed additives.
- Tess and Caitlin Herbert (Gundamain Feedlot) on internal audits.
- Lucy Morris (TW Pearson) and Enoch Bergman (Swans Veterinary Servicers) on making the most of vet visits.

4.3 Extension and training

4.3.1 Open Forums

Two NFAS Open Forums were piloted in late 2021, focusing on meeting the new NFAS Standards and Guidelines. With the introduction of several significant practice change requirements to the NFAS guidelines, it was crucial to identify additional mechanisms to engage feedlots in the communication effort.

The Open Forums were a virtual one-hour lunch time discussion between feedlots and industry experts, examining the practical challenges of implementing feedlot quality assurance (QA).

The purpose initially was to 'un-freeze' small to medium feedlots who may have been overwhelmed by the 'how' of the changes, especially the requirement to undertake a simulation (a new requirement in QM7). In subsequent meetings, the aim was to provide a forum for developing a greater appreciation for the nuances of QA in the feedlot, drawing on a discussion group format and peer-to-peer learning principles.

The target audience was small to medium feedlots (1,000-5,000 head capacity) with a format that was intended to:

- Provide information that was consistent with latest NFAS Fact Sheets but delivered in a way that extended on the basics and brought to life the “how” of NFAS in a practical sense.
- Promote direct and live interaction between feedlot operators and the presenters – the appeal being that this was a conversational format rather than a lecture as a strategy to inform.
- Enable topics of discussion to be timely and related to issues on feedlot that correlated with areas of current concern (e.g., topics linked to a prevalence of CARs).
- Plays to human nature and the fact people like the opportunity to see colleagues *in situ* (providing they have cameras on).

Not only have did the Forums achieve what was intended, they had numerous spin-off benefits including:

- Building a collaborative relationship between NFAS and ALFA personnel.
- Opportunities to develop and publish web-based resources.
- Development for case studies which were published in industry media.
- A regular NFAS-branded page in ALFA’s Lotfeeding Journal.
- The trigger to develop a customer relationship management (CRM) database, e-news templates, etc.

During 2021, two NFAS Open Forums were piloted:

No.	Date	Topics	Guest Speakers ¹	No. registrations	No. recordings watched
1	9 th November	Conducting a simulated product recall activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greg Clark (Royal Oak Beef Feedlot) 	53	-
2	15 th December	Changes to animal health requirements and antimicrobial stewardship plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riley Sturrock (Launcell's Feedlot) • Lachy Strohfeltdt (Protein Production Vets) 	76	-

During 2022, seven NFAS Open Forums were delivered:

No.	Date	Topics	Guest Speakers	No. registrations	No. recordings watched
3	15 th February	Developing a Critical Incident Response Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeremy and Angela Cummins (Angora Feedlot) 	81	50
4	16 th March	Livestock Incident Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lachy Brown (Pakaderinga Feedlot) • Dr Kev Sullivan (Bell Veterinary Services) 	71	42

¹ Open Forums were also supported by “internal” industry expertise from Jeff House (ALFA/MLA Technical Services Officer), Verity Price (ALFA Policy Manager), Jim Cudmore (FLIAC Chair), and Patricia Ryder (AUS-MEAT Livestock Program Manager)

5	20 th April	All the business of Corrective Actions Confirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Darryn and Jackie Rethus (West Wimmera Beef) John and Alison Bell (Inavale Brangus Stud) 	64	37
6	8 th June	Biosecurity elements of your NFAS audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sarah Hamilton (Tallawanta Feedlot) Paul Cusack (Central Veterinary Services Cowra) Samantha Allan (Animal Health Australia) 	72	57
7	28 th July	Feed additives and the changes in relation to this element in your NFAS audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rob Lawrence (Consulting nutritionist) Todd Fotheringhame (KM & JK Fotheringhame) Andrew Winks (Woolerina Grazing Family Trust) 	64	52
8	26 th August	Internal and animal welfare audits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caitlin & Tess Herbert (Gundamain Feedlot) 	64	83
9	13 th December	Heatload and the latest advice on NFAS audits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Andrew Talbot (Killara Feedlot) Dr Tony Batterham (Quirindi Veterinary Clinic) 	58	103

During 2023 (January to April), two NFAS Open Forums were delivered:

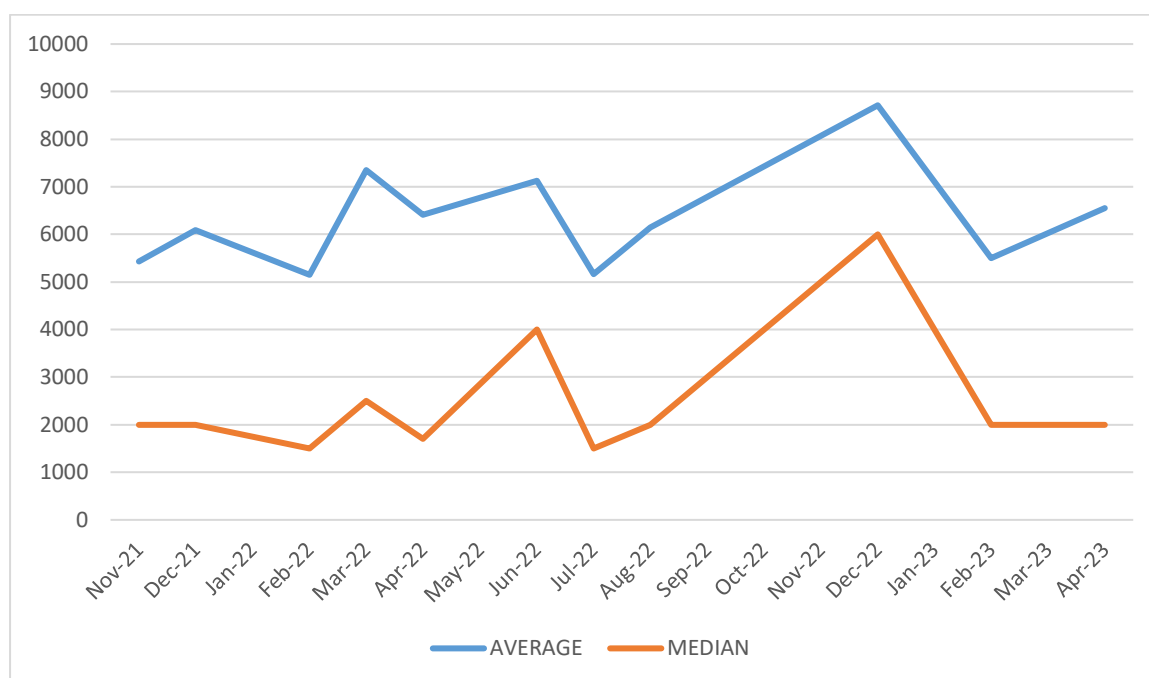
No.	Date	Topics	Guest Speakers	No. registrations	No. recordings watched
10	28 th February	How to get the most of your vet visit and make sure you are audit ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lucy Morris (TW Pearson Feedlot) Dr Enoch Bergman (Swan's Vet Clinic) 	55	68
11	27 th April	Ensuring PIC recons are the easy part of the NFAS audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Janeta Banks (Paringa Feedlot) Fiona MacDiarmid (Terence Vale Feedlot) 	83	-

167 feedlots registered for one or more Forums during the project, which represented 44.5% of active NFAS-accredited feedlots. Distribution by state is presented in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Open Forum registrations by state

The average size of feedlots participating in the Forums was 5,672 head, with a median size of 2,000 head, indicating that the content and format of the Forums was resonating with the target audience of small to medium feedlots.

Figure 2: Open Forum registrations by feedlot size

Figure 3: Average and median participant feedlot size (no. head)

There were high levels of “repeat visits” with 57% of feedlots participating in two or more Forums. This figure increased from 43% in the twelve months from April 2022.

Many feedlots watched the recordings of the Open Forums in their own time, which extended the reach of these activities, and the longevity of the messaging and content as an extension tool.

4.4 Stakeholder relationships and collaboration

During the period February to December 2021, the project Steering Group met six times to provide feedback and guidance on project deliverables and activities. The Steering Group comprised representatives from AUS-MEAT, FLIAC, ALFA and ISC.

In August 2021, a Working Group was convened with representation from Chris Murphy Advisory, AUS-MEAT and ALFA.

In December 2021, the Steering Group disbanded as its functions had largely been assumed by the Working Group with direct involvement in implementation of the Annual Plan and the operational decisions around communication and adoption activities. The Working Group met, on average, fortnightly to provide feedback and guidance on project deliverables and activities. The regular Working Group meetings were a critical component in building communications understanding and collaboration between ALFA, AUS-MEAT and FLIAC.

CMA provided a regular NFAS communication strategy presentation and update to FLIAC at each of their meetings.

The project team provided support to AUS-MEAT’s internal communications (e.g., review and input into circulars to feedlots, articles for NFAS-branded page in every issue of ALFA Lot feeders Journal, etc.).

A key achievement was NFAS’s presence at ALFA’s 2022 BeefEx Conference. Two CMA project team members attended the event, and AUS-MEAT was represented by their Livestock Program Manager and an auditor. This was an important opportunity to engage directly with lot feeders and service

providers. NFAS sponsored a trade booth to display materials and encourage downloads of NFAS resources via a quick response (QR) code. There was 151 downloads of the resources and positive feedback on NFAS interactions.

5 Conclusion

Providing adequate resourcing and communication and adoption expertise enabled AUS-MEAT and FLIAC to lift awareness of NFAS Standards and the importance of compliance, methodologies, and practices amongst feedlot operational staff. The project helped overcome a level of complacency that had evolved on some feedlots and encouraged quality systems to become embedded in the culture of feedlot businesses. At the same time, NFAS moved towards a more demanding and precise outcomes-focused approach and shifted from a culture of 'extension' to one of compliance. The communication and adoption project provided information, reference materials, tools, and training and extension opportunities to support feedlots to conform with NFAS requirements.

5.1 Key findings

- The Communication and Adoption Strategy and Annual Plans have provided clear frameworks and timelines for communication activities, goals, and outcomes. This has provided an “over the horizon” view of upcoming activities to enable improved planning and coordination of industry activities, e.g., reducing date clashes of AUS-MEAT and ALFA events.
- AUS-MEAT’s communication and adoption activities in relation to NFAS moved from being largely ‘ad hoc’ and focused on formal communication (e.g., Advice Notices) to more regular and better planned activities.
- The additional resourcing capacity provided by the project enabled different approaches to communication and extension to be trialled and implemented. It also aided a specific focus on developing content and managing and organising NFAS events such as the Open Forums and providing communications and adoption specialist support. This expertise and capability assisted the broader industry in unplanned ways such as providing support to ALFA’s and FLIAC’s internal communications (e.g., review of media releases, review and input into FLIAC letter to feedlots, etc.).
- Deployment of the NFAS Communication and Adoption Strategy provided a solid foundation for engagement with lot feeders (particularly for small to medium feedlots (1,000-5,000 head capacity)) to build ongoing awareness, understanding, and action regarding the NFAS Standards and requirements.
- The frequency and reach of NFAS engagement with feedlot operators lifted through the regular Open Forums and an increased media presence, with 45% of NFAS-accredited feedlots having participated in an Open Forum.
- NFAS continued to build its own identity and “personality” through direct engagement with feedlot operators, service providers, and other stakeholders, through events such as BeefEx.

5.2 Benefits to industry

Benefits to the Australian feedlot industry from the project and its outcomes include:

- Embedded messaging on the value of NFAS and quality assurance more generally.
- Activities and approaches that have helped protect the brand integrity of NFAS.

- A more cohesive and collegiate approach to communication and extension activities across industry participants (AUS-MEAT, ALFA and FLIAC).
- Additional internal capacity to respond to strategic communication and adoption needs or implement additional activities as needed.
- Clear, consistent messaging and extension resources to support NFAS conformance and help feedlots understand 'what has to change'.
- Creation of responsive and tailored communication activities and extension resources based on direct and immediate feedback from the field.

6 Future research and recommendations

Future investment in this area is critical to ensuring engagement, awareness and understanding of NFAS Standards and requirements by Australian lotfeeders. A further contract for communications and adoption support will be between CMA and AUS-MEAT, effective 1st May 2023.