

final report

Project code: E.MMS.1412
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Date published: 21 December 2016

PUBLISHED BY
Meat and Livestock Australia Limited
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NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

NSW Making More from Sheep State Coordination

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

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Executive summary

The NSW MMfS program has been successfully completed

Overall the target numbers of participants were exceeded by a large margin and the operational costs for implementation of these activities were well below budget.

	Target no. Participants till Dec 2016	Actual no. Participants	Difference
Cat A	1105	2073	+968
Cat B	390	952	+562
Cat C	197	431	+234

The total number of events delivered was 82 of which 22 were category A events, 55 were category B events and 5 were category C events.

The MMfS National Evaluation report shows an average satisfaction score by participants over all activities of 8.18 and an average value score of 7.8 for NSW.

For category B and C activities where knowledge and skills were measured pre and post delivery of a workshop, the NSW workshops averaged 40% correct answers pre workshop and 68% correct answers post workshop.

The NSW MMfS program successfully organised and part funded the target number of extension activities to reach target participant numbers from 2014 to 2016 and these activities have been shown to have a significant positive affect on the participant's knowledge and skills.

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1 Background

Making More from Sheep was set up deliver awareness, learning and supported adoption opportunities to lamb and wool producers to improve the productivity, profitability and resilience of their business.

It was identified that in NSW following issues currently facing the sheep industry:

1. No significant progress in labour efficiency of wool and lamb flocks, which combined with rising wage costs and scarce labour availability are driving cost of production up.
2. In lamb flocks increased production per hectare achieved is being offset by rising costs associated with achieving that production. Understanding the efficiency of production, such that margins are maintained is a major issue in lamb enterprises.
3. In wool flocks the adoption and implementation of ASBV's in the selection of genetics is slow. Setting breeding objectives is also largely on a desired gains basis rather than with comprehensive and rigorous analysis on the relative economic values of each traits.
4. In both wool and lamb flocks appropriate pasture utilisation and therefore stocking rates continues to be a key differentiator of performance.
5. In both wool and lamb flocks, operational performance continues to be a key differentiator between top 20% and average performance. This covers the above mentioned priorities but also includes animal health and reproduction rates.
6. Risk management (as opposed to risk avoidance) in sheep flocks is not a well understood business skill.

2 Project objectives

The MMfS State Coordinator is responsible for the delivery of an annual business plan to achieve the awareness, engagement and practice change targets. Additionally, the State Coordinator will deliver the defined monitoring and evaluation data specified in the state business plan. The three main areas of delivery fall under the following headings:

1. State Business Plan
2. State Business Plan Implementation
3. Monitoring and Evaluation

The state coordinator is responsible for the engagement and coordination of deliverers.

The target participation number for the program up until Nov 2017 were.

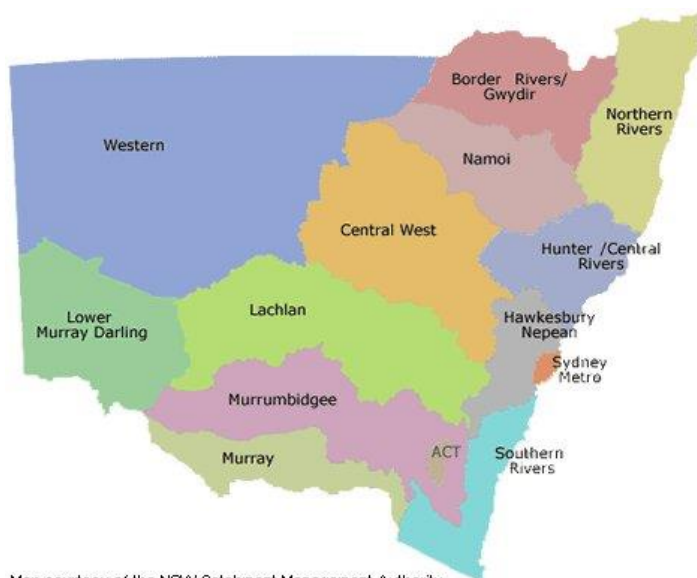
	Target no. Participants	Additional no. Participants
	Original Contract	With Contract Variation
Cat A	885	120
Cat B	313	77
Cat C	157	40

3 Methodology

The state business plan was built on trying to find deliverers within NSW that could run activities aligned to the issues identified and listed in the background above. The plan was to target grower groups, private farm consultancy businesses, agribusiness and use existing networks of producers to generate the interest and get activities off the ground in order to meet the participation targets by category within the agreed budget of \$140,000 of MMfS funds for delivery.

Calls for expressions of interest for delivery were put out to 7 grower groups within NSW, 27 private farm consultancy businesses, 7 agribusinesses servicing sheep producers across NSW, and 3 existing grower networks with the request that they forward the EOI to producer contacts.

It was also identified that using the regions shown below there would be some areas where sheep numbers are low where there might be deliverer gaps. A special effort was made to target these areas in order to get activities up and running. These specific areas included Border Rivers/Gwydir, Hawksbury/Nepean, Hunter/Central Rivers, Lower Murray Darling, Namoi, Northern Rivers, Southern Rivers, and Western.



Map courtesy of the NSW Catchment Management Authority

The calls for expressions of interest for the delivery of activities that would fit within the MMfS national guidelines for funding were taken in April 2014. From that initial call for expressions of interest 6 private consultancy firms responded, 2 agribusiness responded, and 2 of the grower networks responded.

The response to the original call expressions of interest identified activities targeting 495 category A participants, 470 category B participants, and 512 category C participants. This initial EOI therefore generated interest well in excess of the original targets.

The original EOI also left some geographic holes in northern and north western NSW. Holmes Sackett targeted Landmark specifically to help address these gaps.

All potential deliverers were then sent a set of standard operating procedures and an application form. The standard operating procedures covered the budget requirements for each activity in order for it to be approved and the requirements for monitoring and evaluation. This was an invaluable tool for keeping the administration of the program efficiency.

4 Results

4.1 Participation

The total participation number by category for the program up until Nov 2016, inclusive of the increased numbers associated with the contract variation from June 2016 to Dec 2016 are in the table below. NSW MMfS has exceeded its targets.

	Target no. Participants till Dec 2016	Actual no. Participants	Difference
Cat A	1105	2073	+968
Cat B	390	952	+562
Cat C	197	431	+234

The total number of events delivered was 82 of which 22 were category A events, 55 were category B events and 5 were category C events.

64% of businesses that attended activities in NSW has 2000 sheep in the flock or greater with 79% having a property size greater than 500 hectares.

NSW had a 86% evaluation return rate for category A activities, a 94% evaluation return rate for category b activities and a 100% return rate for category C activities.

The MMfS National Evaluation report shows an average satisfaction score by participants over all activities of 8.18 and an average value score of 7.8.

For category B and C activities where knowledge and skills were measured pre and post delivery of a workshop, the NSW workshops averaged 40% correct answers pre workshop and 68% correct answers post workshop.

In NSW the average value score was 7.8 out of 10 with an average score of 7.3 out of 10 for Category A activities and 8.3 out of 10 for Category B and C activities.

The national guidelines for event delivery were set up to encourage producers to contribute to activities. In NSW all event deliverers were asked to encourage producers to pay for all events. In NSW the target was for producer participants to pay 20% of the cost of Category A activities, 40-60% of the cost of Category B activities and 80% of the cost of Category C activities.

With the exception of the webinar series that was run these guidelines were met in all instances. The encouragement of user pays did have the following effects;

- 1) It discouraged deliverers from setting up Category C activities almost completely because it is more difficult to get up an activity where producers pay 80%. The Category C activities run were therefore run by Holmes Sackett.
- 2) It discouraged some deliverers from running Category B activities altogether because it was seen as being harder to get activities up.
- 3) It encouraged deliverers to find other sources of funding so they did not have to ask producers to pay. Sponsorship from private enterprise or other extension services was sought in a number of instances so that the application met the NSW MMfS criteria of funding no more than 80% of a Cat A activity, no more than 60% of a Cat B activity and no more than 20% of a Cat C activity.

Not all planned activities were run. It was made clear to potential deliverers that they had a responsibility to meet their stated participant targets in the applications. Where registrations were low leading up to the event we encouraged deliverers to cancel rather than risk running the event and letting costs increase dramatically per participant. In some instances the deliverers preferred to operate using a cap on MMfS funds per participant based on completed evaluation forms returned.

The webinar series (a Category A event series) was used to encourage producers to nominate Category B workshops that they would like run in their areas. From this the two main suggestions were soil fertility workshops and merino weaner survival workshops.

Based on that feedback 7 soil fertility workshops were attempted in the New England and Riverina, and 2 weaner survival workshops on the central tablelands. Only 1 soil fertility workshop resulted from this effort. It is not clear why, after indicating interest there was little registration support from producers.

Possibilities are that there was insufficient marketing to go with these workshops with the result that the value proposition was not clear enough, that the timing was not good as spring approached.

There were other planned workshops that did not go ahead, however as Holmes Sackett was not responsible for the running of the events we are not clear as to why their were insufficient registrations.

4.2 Financials – CONFIDENTIAL

4.3 Deliverers and delivery locations

4.3.1 Event locations

The 82 NSW MMfS events delivered managed to attract participants from all regions with the exception of the Lower Murray Darling. The map of participant postcodes shows that while all other regions had participation, the concentration of participants was to the eastern end of these regions and that large areas of the western ends of these regions attracted no participation.

Not all of this non-participation can be attributed to locality of the events as the webinar series attracted participants from 102 postcodes outside of NSW. It is possible however that the western sheep producers felt the topics were not relevant to them or that technology was a barrier to participation.

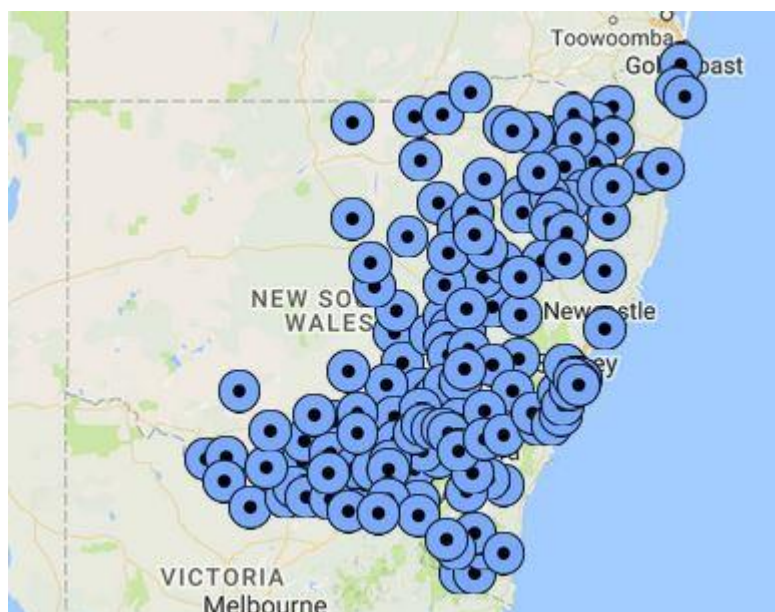


Figure 1: Participant postcodes from within NSW.

The list of event locations and the numbers of participants at those locations is shown in the table below. Note that not all participants come from the event location, but would predominantly have come from the area around that location. The exception to this is the webinar series where the event location is Wagga Wagga but the participants came from all over NSW and other states.

Event Location	Participants	Event Location	Participants
Aberfoyle	11	Junee	24
Adaminaby	14	Junee Reefs	10
Armidale	46	Lockhart	90
Barraba	9	Logie Brae	29
Ben Lomond	17	Mangoplah	26
Binnaway	48	Marrar	10
Blair Hill	17	Mathoura	26
Boree Creek	14	Merrimba	17
Bugaldie	16	Moulamein	50
Bungendore	15	Murrabit	28
Carinda	22	Narrandera	15
Coolac	15	Nimmitabel	60
Cooma	11	Oaklee	23

Event Location	Participants	Event Location	Participants
Cootamundra	123	Talinga	23
Cressbrook	23	Tarcutta	13
Devondale	8	Tooma	10
Dubbo	9	Tooraweenah	14
Dundee	19	Tumbarumba	67
Dunedoo	12	Uralla	86
Finley	36	Wagga Wagga	640
Glenn Innes	13	Wakool	16
Gostwyck	23	Walbundrie	38
Gravesend	10	Walcha	8
Gunning	10	Wantabadgery	3
Gunning2	10	Weona	17
Hollywood	32	Woodside	8
Jerilderie	20	Woodstock	12
		Yalunga	8

4.3.2 Deliverers and delivery organisations

A total of 30 different deliverers from 27 different businesses were used to deliver the 82 events.

After the initial calls for expressions of interest the recruitment of deliverers came either from producer enquiry, or in a few cases deliverers were targeted by Holmes Sackett in order to get specific events up in specific regions in order to meet the geographic spread that was targeted in the original business plan.

A substantial amount of deliverer recruitment was done by other extension service providers such as Glenrac, EH Graham Centre, Merinolink, and Murray LLS

There were no significant quality assurance issues with regard to producer satisfaction, however there were issues raised about quality assurance from non-producers sources that sat in on the webinars.

A goal in the original business plan was to encourage partnerships in events with private extension services in addition to the public sector. A list of the agribusiness organisations that were partnered with for the delivery of events in NSW is shown below.

AgNVet Services
 AIMS
 Aust White Suffolk Assoc
 EH Graham Centre
 Glenrac Inc
 Landmark
 MerinoLink
 Murray LLS
 Myrtle Vale Poll
 NSW DPI
 Pro Way
 Sheep Solutions
 Sheepmatters
 Sthn Riverina Sheep Breeders
 Trigger Vale Genetics
 West Murray land
 improvement

4.4 Event topics

The list of participants by primary event topic is shown below. Sheep nutrition and feed budgeting was the most popular event topic followed by sheep business issues, reproduction, sheep health and labour.

Primary Topic	Participants
Sheep Business Issues	256
Crutching Skills	15
Dog Training	80
New Technology	74
Labour	186
Reproduction	272
Marketing	121
Sheep Health	216
Nutrition and Feed Budgeting	595
Soil Fertility	37

5 Discussion

Overall the NSW MMfS exceeded its target participation rates within budget and with high satisfaction scores by participants in line with other states (see the MMfS National Evaluation report).

The MMfS National Evaluation report shows an average satisfaction score by participants over all 82 activities of 8.18 and an average value score of 7.8.

For the 60 category B and C activities where knowledge and skills were measured pre and post delivery of a workshop, the NSW workshops averaged 40% correct answers pre workshop and 68% correct answers post workshop.

The goals of making sure events covered as wide a geographic area as possible over NSW and included as many deliverers as possible, particularly from private enterprise were also achieved.

The cost of delivery was considerably below budget. This was achieved by ensuring deliverers encouraged participants to contribute to the cost of events, and also by encouraging them to source funding from other places than MMfS for the events.

Private extension services tended to push the cost back to the participants or via sponsorship with other private businesses, whereas the public extension services used funds that they had available for extension services they were going to deliver.

6 Conclusions/recommendations

6.1 User pays

Whilst there was a clear objective in this program to try to transition the industry to user pay by pushing category C events for which the participant is expected to pay 80% of the cost of the event there was little success achieved. The main reason for this is that if funds are available for category A and B events which can be used to pay from 100% to 40% of the cost of the event then there is little incentive for deliverers to apply for a Category C event. For the deliverer it means the event is harder to get up, and they have to fulfil the MMfS requirements as well. There are also issues with the level of branding that is expected from MMfS with these events where the participant has paid 80% of the cost.

6.2 Better guidelines

Most issues in the execution of the MMfS program in NSW stemmed from getting clarity on things like branding, percentage of costs that could be contributed by MMfS etc. None of these issues were large but the program could benefit from an updated document of procedures and guidelines.

6.3 Clarity on stakeholders and roles

Pushing extension to the private sector and to a user pays model by definition gives less control of the content and message to MLA/AWI. Over the course of the program complaints were made to MLA about some of the content of the webinar series being run. These

complaints were not made by stakeholders in the project or in MLA however due to the access to senior MLA staff they caused serious disruption to both MLA staff and Holmes Sackett in their state coordination role. MLA/AWI need to work out how they are going to manage the potential conflicts that will arise if they want to push extension privately thereby relinquishing some control of content.

7 Key messages

7.1 Extension activity

There is a considerable amount of extension activity going on in the sheep industry in NSW both in the private and public sector. NSW MMfS was able to tap into the existing private and public network to ensure that events that aligned to MMfS principals were being run. At the operational level this was very cost effective in terms of required injection of money to make sure events happened.

7.2 Financial efficiency of public based extension

More than half of the required funds to get the extension activities happening were spent in administration (state coordination, national coordination, monitoring and evaluation, and MLA/AWI staff). How financially efficient this model is needs consideration.

Having raised this point however, the program was effective in terms of producer satisfaction and value. There was significant amount of intention to change captured by producers. The next step in evaluating the comparative models would be to see whether this model is more effective in generating activity and generates higher levels of satisfaction and value than the private extension model.