

final report

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Making More From Sheep National Coordinator 2014 - 2016

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Executive summary

The Making More From Sheep (MMFS) National Coordinator 2014 - 2016 project followed on from the MMFS Phase 2 National Coordination project which began in 2011. Phase 1 of MMFS National Coordination began in 2007. This 3 year project has been the final stage in a National Coordination program lasting nearly 10 years.

MLA and AWI jointly initiated MMFS to address an identified need for the delivery of a timely and relevant package of best practice management tools for sheep producers. The overarching objective in the appointment of a National Coordinator was to ensure that the approved MMFS key performance indicators (KPIs) were achieved, activities were aligned and integrated, and all monitoring and evaluation was carried out as outlined in the MMfS strategy.

Actions to address the project objectives were incorporated into a workplan under seven activities. Each activity contained a series of achievement criteria that were approved by the joint MLA & AWI program managers. Progress against the achievement criteria was provided in the six monthly milestone reports.

Results of the project were achievement of all the MMFS program KPIs and expenditure of the National Coordination funds in line with the program budget.

The overall MMFS program has run largely without issues despite the complexity of operating with numerous sub-contractors across many locations and involving risk associated with planning, delivery, communications and the provision of a website. This success reinforces the value of having an overall coordination role in project management.

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1 Background

The Making More From Sheep (MMFS) National Coordinator 2014 - 2016 project followed on from the MMFS Phase 2 National Coordination project which began in 2011. Phase 1 of MMFS National Coordination began in 2007. This 3 year project has been the final stage in a National Coordination program lasting nearly 10 years.

MLA and AWI jointly initiated MMFS to address an identified need for the delivery of a timely and relevant package of best practice management tools for sheep producers.

The key program principles have been:

1. to be the market majority program for delivery of sheep D&E activities, taking the leadership to align sheep extension and communication activities
2. foster and strengthen both private and public extension and communication delivery mechanisms for the sheep industry
3. deploy limited industry resources effectively and efficiently, seeking opportunities for leveraging resources where possible, both private and public sector
4. recognise the engagement behaviour and different learning needs of producers, provide multiple entry points and a spectrum of aligned and coordinated activities that enable producers to engage in a complete learning pathway that seeks to improve skills, knowledge and confidence leading to practice change.
5. implement learning pathways to provide a three-tier – but not necessarily sequential - approach to learning, and include:
 - a. broad scale communications activities (passive participation) to increase industry-wide awareness (Category A);
 - b. targeted participatory learning activities to enhance producer knowledge, attitude, skills and/or aspirations (KASA) (Category B); and
 - c. targeted participatory learning activities to elicit, attribute and measure the impact of changes in key practices and procedures promoted in MMfS (Category C).

The role of the MMFS National Coordinator 2014-2016 has been to professionally and efficiently manage the MMFS program to achieve the awareness targets and KPIs for building knowledge, skills and confidence and supporting practice change outlined in the Phase 2 Business Case.

2 Project objectives

Project objectives were based on achievement of MMFS KPI targets for building awareness, knowledge, skills and confidence and supporting practice change, as outlined in the business case through implementation of the following activities.

1. Professionally and efficiently co-ordinate the MMfS program to ensure the approved KPIs are achieved, activities are aligned and integrated, and all monitoring and evaluation is carried out as outlined in the MMfS strategy.
2. Assist in the development of State Business Plans in conjunction with the respective State Co-ordinator. This will also include the review and assessment of milestone reports before consideration by the MLA Manger and MMfS Executive.
3. Arrange and co-ordinate training of State Co-ordinators (SC) and their respective teams on the appropriate program products and tools, as required; as well as ensuring all teams are appropriately skilled and able to implement monitoring and evaluation processes.

4. Set up systems to maintain regular communication with the SC network to track progress against milestones and identify potential issues that may hinder achievement of stated milestones in individual contracts.
5. Provide and/or co-ordinate prompt operational support to SCs on an as needed basis. Arrange face to face meetings with the SC from the respective programs as required, which will be part of the continuous improvement process of the program.
6. Collate state M&E reports and provide monthly engagement figures and six monthly activity reports against the respective program KPIs.
7. Develop and manage the critical relationships (sheep producers, Agencies, Agribusiness and MLA and AWI), within and around MMfS.
8. Work with MLA/AWI RD&E managers to integrate the MMfS package within existing MLA/AWI programs and collaborating activities.
9. Provide Executive support and respond effectively to the requirements of the MMfS Project Executive and Project Advisory Panel.
10. Engage and lead a team of MMfS advocates and intermediaries; and develop and manage relationships with training and extension providers.
11. Ongoing review and maintenance of currency of the MMfS website.
12. Oversight of technical upgrades / updates to the MMfS curriculum and resources as required.
13. Initiate opportunities to raise sheep producers' interest and awareness of MMfS, and encourage them to participate in project activities by:
 - 13.1. Coordinating a range of communication methods to support sheep producers, the media, intermediaries and deliverers in their efforts to raise the awareness and uptake of MMfS with the nominated communications support.
 - 13.2. Coordinating and tailoring MMfS promotion and media activity with the nominated communications support
 - 13.3. Supporting MMfS producer advocates, when appropriate, intermediaries and deliverers.
 - 13.4. Assisting in the preparation of case studies in conjunction with the nominated communications support.
 - 13.5. Identifying linkages with other MLA and AWI products and producer learning activities.
 - 13.6. Driving beyond just awareness-building activities to achieve industry change.

All Key Activities are to meet the requirements of MLA and AWI, to be agreed and regularly reviewed by the MMfS Project Executive.

3 Methodology

The objectives outlined above were incorporated into a workplan under seven activities. Each activity contained a series of achievement criteria that were approved by the joint MLA & AWI program managers. Progress against the achievement criteria was provided in the six monthly milestone reports. A summary of these activities is provided as follows.

3.1 Work with state coordinators towards fulfilment of their contracts.

Advice was given to state coordinators in the development of their business plans to ensure that delivery would suit MLA and AWI objectives as well as the criteria of topic relevance, variety of topics, geographic spread and suitability of delivery partners. State milestone reports were assessed, with particular attention given to the development of planned event

tables. Most communication with state coordinators was direct using email or phone; however each state coordinator was visited at their office at the start of the project for induction and once again as the project progressed. Three state coordinator meetings were held in Sydney during the project for reporting, planning and team building along with four tele-meetings. The team building and knowledge sharing benefits of these meetings were supported by state coordinators in the survey of coordinators done by Kristy Howard towards the end of the project (see appendix 1, section 13).

State Coordinator training was limited to a session on the business edge program, a tele-meeting on the new MLA Profitable Grazing Systems program and ad hoc training on M & E data submission.

3.2 Program technical content and resources

- The development and publication of the new “Efficient Pastoral Production” module was finalised and launched in May 2016. The launch of this module took significantly longer than expected, mostly due to the module lead writer having to be replaced several times for a variety of reasons.
- New resources containing standardised technical information on a range of diseases were produced by a contractor and made available for deliverers via the MMFS website.
- A tool for conducting and interpreting lamb post mortems (“Lambs Alive”) was produced for use by vets at MMFS events and made available through each state coordinator.
- New or alternative resources were added to the signposts section of each MMFS module.
- Other sheep industry programs such as Paraboss and Sheep CRC had their resource material made available via the MMFS website and email update.

3.3 External stakeholder relationships

- Through the State Coordinator business plan development and contract variation process comments and suggestions were made on proposed event diversity in location, deliverer and topic.
- Input through attendance was provided to the MLA Extension and Adoption workshop.
- Productive relationships were developed with industry organisations including the Sheep CRC, RIST, state government DPIs, TIAR and GRDC. Most of these related to accessing resource material for the MMFS website.
- Quite a bit of time was spent clarifying cost sharing guidelines with external stakeholders, both directly and through providing advice to state coordinators.
- Networking via attendance at industry events such as LambEx, Sheep CRC conference, BWBL Conference and Sheepvention took place on an ad hoc basis since building the MMFS profile at industry events had been a focus in previous phases of MMFS.

3.4 Internal stakeholder relationships

- Ongoing issues of lack of consistency between our cost sharing guidelines and those of other programs required some flexibility. The benefits gained in leverage for the program were seen to outweigh a hard line in sticking to cost sharing arrangements

outlined in the Standard Operating Procedures. Much of this flexibility was provided through altering the event category to suit the funding guidelines rather than event content.

- Joint activities were conducted with MBFP in all states except Qld and were encouraged through the proposed event planning process.
- Producer advocates as presenters were not a feature of this phase of MMFS, however producer case studies were used in both Beyond the Bale and Feedback Magazines and ongoing contact was maintained with Richard Smith (AWI Comms) and Kayla Ludman (MLA Comms).

3.5 Website

- Newsletters were put on the website and event information was added as received. While 356 events were delivered over the 3 years of the project, not all were added to the events page.
- Routine checking of URL hotlinks was carried out twice per year.
- Ten email updates were sent to over 3,000 subscribers. The subscribers list was updated after each round of evaluation data was received.
- The member area of the website was updated with the addition of the Lambs Alive publication, a deliverer resources section was added including animal health presentations and Module 12, Efficient Pastoral Production was added,
- Ongoing liaison with L cubed for assistance with newsletter formatting and ad hoc website maintenance was carried out.
- Website usage and download statistics were compiled.

3.6 Liason, reporting and support to the Executive Committee

- Monthly activity sheets were provided with monthly invoices
- Milestone reports 1,2,3,4,5,6 & Final report were provided as per the initial contract and subsequent contract variations.
- Recommendations were made to the EC relating to the project outputs and budget including the post mortem tool, animal health resources, M & E contracting, development of the pastoral module, end of project communication resources and legacy activities.
- The Executive committee had 3 meetings in Sydney and 3 tele-meetings.

3.7 Monitoring and evaluation

- Monitoring of the budget in relation to state coordination and delivery contract variations was discussed.
- Overseeing and proofing the quarterly M & E report.
- Text and photos for a comprehensive whole of program management report were collated and prepared along with a supporting infographic.

4 Results

4.1 Whole of MMFS Project KPIs

One of the main objectives of the National Coordination project was to ensure that KPIs in relation to event participation, evaluation return rate and flock size were met.

Table 1 KPIs v's actuals achieved

	KPI	Actual
Number of Participants		
Category A	2604	7562
Category B	921	3993
Category C	462	2004
Evaluation Return Rate (average of states)		
Category A	65%	69%
Category B	80%	83%
Category C	80%	80%
Flock Size		
Greater than 2,000 head	15%	60%

Each state exceeded their participation targets for all event categories.

4.2 National coordination financial report

The National Coordination project was made up of professional fees and reimburseable expenses as follows:

Project Expenditure Jan 2014 to Feb 2017 [Confidential]

Professional fees for 246 days over 3 years 1 month

5 Discussion

This national Coordination contract was the final 3 year contract covering the 9.5 years of National Coordination for MMFS. By the time this contract started in January 2014, MMFS was a well known program having delivered events since February 2008. This phase of the program has run fairly smoothly through a combination of being an established brand with experienced personnel overseeing the project, supported by a capable group of state coordinators along with a supportive group of event deliverers and other stakeholders. A detailed report of the project management aspects of the entire MMFS program was developed and is available on the MMFS website. The Executive Summary is included as Appendix 1. Design and formatting was not included as a part of this National Coordination project.

6 Conclusions/recommendations

The MMFS National Coordination project 2014 – 2016 has achieved the objectives as set out in the contract on time and within budget. All milestone reports have been accepted as meeting the required standard.

The overall program has run largely without issues despite the complexity of operating with numerous sub-contractors across many locations and involving risk associated with planning, delivery, communications and the provision of a website. This success reinforces the value of having an overall coordination role in project management.

7 Appendix

7.1 Appendix 1

Making More from Sheep

Report

Development, Implementation and Evaluation of the project 2005-2016

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Executive summary

This report contains a consolidated description of the development, implementation and closing of the *Making More from Sheep (MMFS)* project from 2005 – 2016, along with a review of project management.

It aims to provide:

- a resource for future program managers based on the experience and lessons learnt by project personnel, and
- observations and recommendations from independent project evaluators.

MMFS was instigated and funded by Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) with the overall goal of:

Providing Australian lamb and wool producers with a best practice package of information and management tools to assist them achieve profitable and sustainable sheep production.

Specific objectives of *MMFS* were to:

- raise sheep producer awareness of the *MMFS* Manual and website;
- motivate sheep producers to engage with the program by using the manual/website and/or participating in a related learning activity;
- achieve sheep producer adoption of the key management principles and practices outlined in the manual/website to increase profitability and sustainability.

The project addressed this objective by developing initial supporting strategies and a plan for *Communication, Delivery and Extension for 2006-09*. In 2010, a second phase (Phase 2 and its extension) of *MMFS* was developed based on a business case that set targets and incorporated recommendations from the Phase 1 evaluation, with the budget established by the executive committee using Phase 1 expenditure as a guide.

The project's primary audience was:

- the top 30% of sheep producers (a combination of information seekers and large flocks) who produce 70% of Australia's wool;
- innovative sheep meat producers;

and secondary audiences including:

- farm employees;
- new industry entrants;
- industry partners (who can influence producer adoption decisions);
- other stakeholders.

Following an initial investment over four years starting in 2005 (Phase 1) the project was extended, after which a second phase began (Phase 2:2011-13) and was also subsequently extended (Phase 2 extension:2014-16) ending in December 2016.

Over the total life of the project, 20,361 participants were engaged in 1035 activities.

MMFS was jointly managed and funded by AWI and MLA. In Phase 1 *MMFS* was led by AWI as managing agency with MLA as co-funder, with the situation reversed for Phase 2 and the Phase 2 extension (i.e. MLA Managing Agency and AWI co-funder).

MMFS was guided by an Executive Committee comprising two AWI staff, two MLA staff and the National Coordinator and supported by a Project Advisory Committee, to act as a conduit for industry feedback, provide advice and review progress.

The National Coordinator organised supporting functions, developed *MMFS* resources and oversaw implementation by the State Coordinators of the project. The State Coordinators managed event delivery by private and public service providers.

A Communications Consultant was engaged to manage the launch of the manual and related communications. Producer Advocates provided case studies for videos and publications.

MMFS used a delivery model of engaging experienced event deliverers, sourced by word of mouth or expression of interest. This saved money on training and reduced risk of poor delivery. However, it did not significantly grow the delivery network or the skill/capability of deliverers.

The launch of the program was delayed due to time over-runs with the development of the manual. Ultimately this did not affect meeting awareness and participation targets for Phase 1, as the delivery organisations stepped up the roll-out of events. Phase 2 delivery timelines were met and, again, participation targets were generally over-achieved.

Gaps in delivery occurred when one phase finished and the next started. This stop/start nature of the project caused significant extra administrative work and needs better management for future projects.

From 2005–2016 \$5,468,597 was allocated to the project on a roughly equal shares basis by AWI and MLA with \$5,418,225 being spent – an underspend of \$50,372 (0.9%).

Project costs were scoped initially in the *Delivery and Marketing Strategy (2006)* and further refined in the *Communication, Delivery and Extension Plan 2006–09*. The system of breaking the project down into components, each with its own contract and budget line, meant that a lot of the risk associated with cost management was passed on to contractors.

The Phase 1 budget was adequate for achieving most project objectives with a couple of exceptions; hard copy manual sales only met half the target and the budget for Producer Advocates was insufficient to allow them to attend a large number of events.

The Phase 2 budget was developed from the executive committee's assessment of the Phase 2 business case, and their experience from Phase 1.

Complexities in the new "user pays" model of funding activities using Category A, B and C events saw budget management become more complex for State Coordinators.

There were three extensions to Phase 2, all based on a pro-rata extension of the targets from the Phase 2 business case.

MMFS was generally considered a good investment for MLA/AWI, as most targets were over-achieved and the benefit cost analysis (BCA) (calculated twice during the program); showed a BCA = 3.9:1 at the end of Phase 1 (GHD Hassall, 2009) and a BCA = 5.6:1 at the end of Phase 2 (Beattie and Howard, 2013) and a net present value of \$13.98 million

Evaluation of the *MMFS* manual showed that 62% of participants rated the manual as either "very useful" or "useful".

The website was well supported and 1,300 copies of the full manual were downloaded in Phase 1, compared to sales of the hard copy manual of approximately 1,400. There were around 60,000 visits to the website in the 18 months of Phase 1 at an average 3,000/month, rising to around 16,000/month by the end of the project.

MMFS event quality, based on producer feedback in Phase 1, showed events were generally considered outstanding, with 97% of participants rating events as either *useful* or *very useful*.

Evaluation of practice change and adoption from Phase 2 found 76% of producers interviewed had made on-farm change after attending a *MMFS* event (extrapolated to 56% of all producers attending *MMFS* events).

During Phase 2, a more structured approach was developed to create a learning pathway.

Events were categorised as:

- Category A (awareness) - subsidised up to 100% by *MMFS* and were generally free or cost up to \$30 each for participants,
- Category B (knowledge and skills) - funded up to 50% (cost for participants around \$50)
- Category C (adoption) - subsidised up to 20% with participants paying up to \$1,850 for a series of activities.

If there was a difference between *MMFS* funding, participant fees and event costs, the remainder of the cost was funded by sponsorship or co-funding.

This approach was met with a degree of concern resulting in discussions between State Coordinators and MLA/AWI to iron out inconsistencies (some similar events attracted different costs depending on where they were held and who sponsored them) and ensure that all states implemented a uniform approach to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).

MMFS communications were managed at two levels, promotional communication to producers and internal communications to project personnel.

Promotional communication was guided initially by the *Communication, Delivery and Extension Plan* and included the appointment of a Communications Consultant to manage the launch of the *MMFS* manual and subsequent event promotion (pre and post). After the contract expired in Phase 1, this type of communication was managed by MLA/AWI and the National Coordinator in an *ad hoc* way.

Evaluation found high producer awareness of *MMFS* and good support for events, so a more active communications program was of limited value. A quarterly newsletter (email

update) started in 2008 with 30 editions distributed in to around 3,000 subscribers, with an average opening rate of 32%.

Internal communications were mostly overseen by the National Coordinator using regular telephone and email communications with State Coordinators and (mostly) twice yearly face-to-face meetings. Producer Advocates were brought together three times and the Executive Committee met 12 times.

Risk was managed using plans and contracts that spelt out the requirements for development and delivery. Standard operating procedures (SOP) were developed by each state to streamline event approval and funding, which managed consistency and reduced risk for event delivery. A national M&E SOP ensured consistency in the collection of information and data. Overall, there were few risks that could not be managed with contracts, the SOP and clear key performance indicators.

Final evaluation of *MMFS* included interviews with the State Coordinators and selected event deliverers to gain insights on internal running and project highs and lows. The ability to customise events in the context of local issues, while still linking to the manual content, was seen a strength of the project by these stakeholders.

Many State Coordinators and deliverers found the program to be very worthwhile and provided a raft of suggestions for future extension programs, incorporating the strengths of *MMFS* and negating the weaknesses.

The five key recommendations of this report are:

1. Share: Publicise this report amongst all the industry Research and Development Corporation's to create awareness of its existence as background reference material for future projects. The report is also applicable to other extension agencies, such as government departments, natural resource management and catchment management authorities.

2. Length: Large flagship programs should run for a minimum of five years, with built-in review and continuous improvement processes and stop/go points to ensure adherence to needs or discontinuation.

3. Measure: Build measurement and evaluation (M&E) into the planning phase to ensure that M&E evolves with the needs of the project and contributes to continuous improvement from the beginning.

4. Investment: While the *MMFS* funding model worked overall, future projects will need to review what constitutes delivery costs to streamline costs without compromising quality.

5. Revisit: Consider commissioning a final evaluation of practice change for *MMFS* in 2017 to demonstrate post-program impact.

Each chapter of this report includes an "at a glance" section providing lessons learnt which may be relevant to other projects.

In conclusion, this report provides a detailed history of the *MMFS* project and its achievements and is recommended as a resource for any extension professional engaging in new project development.