

# finalreport

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

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**Date published:** July 2005  
**ISBN:** 1 74191 011 0

**PUBLISHED BY**  
Meat & Livestock Australia Limited  
Locked Bag 991  
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

## Meat & Livestock Australia Edge and MBfP Mini Survey

### Executive Summary

During the undertaking of the 2005 LPI Awareness & Adoption survey MLA also undertook a specific program evaluation aimed at gaining further insight into the impact of an MLA program on course participants.

The EDGE and More Beef from Pastures (MBfP) programs were chosen as the subject of this 'mini survey'. These two programs were chosen on the basis of their widespread popularity and also because during the process of conducting them a database of participants was collected by the various facilitators. These courses also cater to the main target producer segments of Southern & Northern Beef producers and Southern Sheep or Lamb producers.

The objective of the EDGE & MBfP survey is to determine if participating producers have changed management practices as a result of attending one of the EDGE courses or participating in a program such as MBfP. Determining the extent of change and the desire to participate in other MLA programs will assist MLA in understanding the impact these particular programs are having on the key producer segments.

A total sample of **n=300** was obtained, **n=220** EDGE course participants and **n=80** MBfP manual recipients.

The mini survey concentrated on evaluating the effectiveness of the EDGE and MBfP programs in creating change on these actual course participants.

- ❑ Overall **78%** of participants in **EDGE** courses indicated they changed management practices as a result of attending. However, **46%** also indicated they sought other information before changing. Whilst the EDGE program has a strong influence producers still appear to seek second opinions, these are from Dept of Ag personnel.
- ❑ Of the EDGE program participants to make changes to management practices, **45%** changed **Grazing** management practices, **33%** **Supplementary feeding & Nutrition** practices, **30%** **Pasture** management and **24%** **Reproductive** management practices. All these management practices are production focussed with producers indicating they had a **direct impact** on **productivity**, **natural resource management** as well as **profitability**.
- ❑ **75%** of **MBfP** manual recipients read at least one of the modules, of these **77%** read the module on Pasture utilisation and **69%** read the module on Pasture growth, both production oriented.
- ❑ As a result **37%** of participants in the MBfP program changed management procedures or used the practices & tools, as few as **19%** sought additional information before making changes. Non-usage of the practices & tools in the MBfP manual, is mainly due to the **drought** or **no feed**.

Both these programs have instigated a significant level of change and adoption of practices and procedures amongst participants. Continuing to measure the level of change using this survey technique is unlikely to identify additional increases in change or adoption, most producers are already likely to have taken at least one step in improving their management practices. However, one success will lead to more, further change is likely amongst this available population.

If **further change** is to be achieved amongst known course participants, it is clear from the mini survey that MLA must introduce a number of communication channels and strategies to reach producers. Improving and multiplying the messages will give each desired management change a greater chance of adoption, this could include:

- ❑ **Improving course content** to embrace best practice coaching techniques. Courses and programs must have messages and content that is designed to have a stronger impact on the producer audience and maximise the opportunity to effect change.
- ❑ Recognising **alternative communication** vehicles to facilitate the further education of producers. These same messages also need to be directed at the producer audience via alternative mediums such as Dept of Ag personnel. Respondents indicated they provided a reliable and credible source of information outside of the highly regraded MLA programs.
- ❑ Capitalise on **previous participation**. Almost **40%** of participants in both programs surveyed indicated that they are likely to attend other EDGE courses or MLA programs, this is indicative of the impact of the courses they have already participated in.

In conducting this mini survey we have identified as a significant **shortcoming** the usefulness of **MLA's own database** resource. The EDGE course participants in particular were compiled from no fewer than 41 separate source files. The collection of the information they contained at a franchisee level is essential however a central database facility is a must for the strategic management of future communication.

- ❑ It is apparent from the survey that **once involved** in the MLA programs producers are **likely to implement change** and they are **more likely to attend** other courses.
- ❑ **Tracking** their **participation** and areas of interest is critical to the future communication strategies of MLA.

The level of support for the survey and the quality of the data collected across such a wide range of topics suggests that MLA has a solid platform of support within the livestock producing community.

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### 1. Background

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) is responsible for the implementation and training associated with the dissemination of innovation and best practice throughout the Australian red meat industry.

Two of these key training initiatives are the **EDGE Network** (EDGE) and **More Beef from Pastures** (MBfP) programs. The effectiveness of these MLA programs amongst that population of producers who have participated at various levels in the courses is critical to the ongoing management of the programs being offered by MLA.

This evaluation concentrated on measuring the level of **adoption** or change in management practices discussed in **each** of the programs as well as collecting producer assessments of the **benefit** or **value** (to them) that resulted from adopting these practices.

The survey's respondent base or sample has been made up entirely of previous course participants from each program, these contacts were provided by MLA from a number of sources and compiled into one database for interviewing. The EDGE & MBfP elements of the survey were managed separately.

MLA has specified that the study's aim is to reflect the variation in adoption levels and management changes between the **EDGE** and **MBfP** program participants. A stratified sample structure was applied to each of the segments with the objective of providing statistically representative information for both producer groups. On this basis Axiom believes the samples are of sufficient size to satisfy a 90% confidence interval irrespective of segment population size.

### 2. Project Objectives

This 'mini' survey was undertaken to explore at a micro level the impact of specific MLA programs and courses, EDGE and MBfP are regarded as well known by producers and both are widely attended. As such a reasonable sized database of participants exists from which valuable research can be gleaned regarding producers experiences of each of the courses and the subsequent impact they have had on management practices.

The project specifically aimed to:

- ☐ Determine the level of satisfaction with the each of the programs and measure the subsequent uptake and implementation of the program initiatives (practices & tools) as a ratio of the level of participation in % terms;
- ☐ Evaluate producer's satisfaction with the changed management practices (where they involve change) that were the direct result of adoption following participation in either the EDGE or MBfP programs.

A number of key information objectives were deliberately omitted from the LPI Awareness & Adoption survey on the understanding they were suitable for inclusion within the scope of this user based survey, these include:

- ❑ Understanding the variation in management practice adoption rates across each of the programs or modules, identify which producer segments are more open to change;
- ❑ Determine what information or advice producers seek before adoption of new management practices;
- ❑ Determining which other programs or initiatives producers are aware of that MLA provide within the EDGE courses & MBfP manual;
- ❑ Evaluate how producers felt they benefited as a result of management change;
- ❑ Address general perceptions of MLA, establish an understanding of the degree of credibility producers associate with information and services provided by MLA, would producers attend other EDGE or MBfP courses?

The underlying objective is to evaluate the impact the courses have on management change and the effectiveness of the communication processes employed by MLA to achieve this change.

### 3. Methodology and Sample

Axiom Research addressed the information objectives by undertaking a **telephone survey** amongst a random selection of producer participants from each program amounting to ***n=300*** (*n=220* EDGE & *n=80* MBfP) program participants. This sample size reflects the significance of each segment and is also sufficient to evaluate the changes in management strategies resulting from each of the MLA programs.

The survey instrument was designed using a master questionnaire and code-frame response mechanism that directed specific questions at each of the target segments. The actual survey was managed using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) methodology, telephone interviewing (field-work) was undertaken by Interviewing Australia. Axiom's DP partner D & M Research undertook all data processing.

- ❑ Screeners were also employed to ensure respondents were only included if they recalled the course(s) or program(s) they attended or participated in. Where respondents had less than 100 hectares we terminated the interview.
- ❑ Respondents identified as EDGE or MBfP contacts completed only those sections of the survey applicable to them.

Segmentation of the sample and the resulting data has been a key driver in the design of the survey, aspects of the industry that influenced the sample included:

- ❑ Producer segments - Beef or Sheep/Lambs
- ❑ Producer locations - Southern rainfall zones (NRZ, Wheat/Sheep & Pastoral)
- ❑ Cattle/Sheep production
- ❑ Property size in terms of grazeable area and livestock numbers
- ❑ MLA membership

The detailed data tables generated have been collated to represent the findings by producer segment, the two key program groups and where possible by region, zone or other segmentation opportunities such as age, farm size or herd & flock size.

### 3.1 Sample Overview

#### 3.1.1 *EDGE Respondent Profile and Demographics*

**220** livestock producers participated in the **EDGE** component of the 2005 EDGE & MBfP Survey. These respondents were randomly chosen from an MLA database of known EDGE program participants and provide a significant base from which to evaluate producer perceptions of the effectiveness of the EDGE component of the MLA course offering.

Of the  $n=220$  EDGE producers surveyed:

- ❑ **68%** indicated they are **Beef Producers** ( $n=149$ )  
Commercial breeders 74%, mixed stud 7%  
21% have >200 breeding cows, 39% have 50-200 breeders and 39% <50 breeders  
Average no. of beef cattle: 353  
Average no. of breeding cows: 151  
Average property size: 2,868 Hectares
- ❑ **67%** also indicated they are **Sheep/Lamb Producers** ( $n=148$ )  
Wool producers 56%, lambs 52% & mutton 45%  
56% have >2,000 sheep  
Average no. of sheep: 2,506  
Average no. of lambs for slaughter: 853  
Average property size: 2,700 Hectares  
**26%** of EDGE producers surveyed have property sizes of up to 400 Hectares, 44% have properties between 400 and 1,000 Hectares and **31%** have over 1,000 Hectares. The mean property size is 2,470 Hectares.
- ❑ **68%** of EDGE producers surveyed indicated they were current **members** of the MLA, **20%** are **non-members** and 12% don't know their membership status.  
*\*(EDGE sample appears skewed to represent sheep producers with smaller beef enterprises)*

#### 3.1.2 *MBfP Respondent Profile and Demographics*

**80** livestock producers participated in the **MBfP** component of the 2005 EDGE & MBfP Survey. These respondents were randomly chosen from an MLA database of known MBfP manual recipients, the total number of known MBfP program participants is significantly fewer than the EDGE course. The responses from this sample were more focussed around the management practices contained in the MBfP manual than other course activity.

Of the  $n=80$  MBfP producers surveyed:

- ❑ **98%** are classified as **Beef Producers** ( $n=78$ )  
Commercial breeders 82%, mixed stud 6%  
41% have >200 breeding cows, 37% have 50-200 breeders and 23% <50 breeders  
Average no. of beef cattle: 608

Average no. of breeding cows: 261

Average property size: 1,247 Hectares

- **31%** are also **Sheep/Lamb Producers** ( $n=25$ )

Wool producers 26%, lambs 25% & mutton 19%

68% had >2,000 sheep

Average no. of sheep: 2,952

Average no. of lambs for slaughter: 1,319 Average property size: 2,191 Hectares

**46%** of MBfP producers surveyed have property sizes of up to 400 Hectares, **25%** have properties between 400 and 1,000 Hectares and **30%** have over 1,000 Hectares. The mean property size is 1,229 Hectares.

- **87%** of MBfP producers surveyed indicated they were current **members** of the MLA, **10%** are **non-members** and 3% don't know their membership status.

*\*(MBfP sample appears to include beef producers who have significant sheep enterprises)*



## 4. EDGE Survey Results and Discussion

### 4.1 EDGE Program Awareness & Participation

The mini EDGE survey looked closely at the awareness and attendance of programs amongst known course participants. A number of the courses are clearly the 'value drivers' in MLA's training programs.

These overall awareness and attendance of EDGE courses has been aggregated under the EDGE Network classifications. Percentages are of all respondents ( $n=220$ ) or known course participants chosen at random from a base of 4,069<sup>1</sup> producers who have attended an EDGE course.

Edge Network program classifications:	Overall Course Participation	Other Course Awareness
People	4%	35%
Business	3%	48%
Natural Resource Management	6%	48%
Feedbase & Pastures	<b>65%</b>	49%
Livestock	<b>52%</b>	57%
Quality Assurance	-	66%
Marketing	4%	60%
Other	9%	2%

Awareness of programs other than those attended is relatively high, albeit a prompted or aided response.

#### 4.1.1 Participation in MLA Programs by EDGE participants

Of those producers contacted in the survey, all (100%) of them had participated in the EDGE program through one or more of the courses being offered.

- ❑ **65%** of the EDGE participants attended courses under the **Feedbase & Pastures** program, **52%** attended courses under the **Livestock** program
- ❑ The remaining programs (Marketing, People, Business and Natural Resources Management) had a low attendance of between 3 to 6% of the EDGE participants overall

<sup>1</sup> The result of Axiom databases list merge of 41 separate attendance lists

- ❑ Within the Feedbase & Pastures programs, **34%** of all EDGE participants attended a **Prograze** course and **21%** attended a **Beef Cheque** course **Lamb Cheque** and **Prograze Update** attracted between 4 to 5% of participants.
- ❑ Within the Livestock programs, overall **17%** of participants attended a **Wean more lambs** course and **15%** attended an **Effective breeding** (Lambs) course **Nutrition Edge** attracted **11%** of participants, **Money Making Mums** **8%** and **Effective breeding** (beef) **3%**
- ❑ **4%** of participants attended the **Marketing** course, **9%** indicated they had attended other MLA courses not mentioned.

### 4.1.2 Awareness of Other MLA Programs by EDGE participants

Overall awareness, amongst producers participating in EDGE courses, of **other** MLA programs or courses respondents had not already participated in was significant, however much of this awareness was prompted or aided.

- ❑ The highest level of awareness of other MLA programs amongst EDGE participants was 66% for **Quality Assurance**, next highest was 60% awareness for **Marketing** course
- ❑ Other programs with satisfactory awareness levels included **Livestock** courses with **57%** awareness, Business 48%, Feedbase & Pastures 49% and Natural Resources Management courses 48%, while the **People** programs had the lowest overall awareness level of 35%
- ❑ Unprompted awareness was evident only amongst the **Feedbase & Pastures** program participants, 10% of them were aware of **Beef Cheque** and 6% of **Prograze**. These were the most well known unprompted courses identified.

## 4.2 EDGE Program Effect on Management Practice Change

The key objective of each of the MLA programs is to disseminate the production efficiencies identified through the R&D programs back to producers. The influence of this communication and dissemination of information on management practice is the measure of the effectiveness of MLA's role as an industry steward.

Management change is clearly being achieved through some of the key programs being undertaken. Overall, **78%** of producers who participated in the EDGE program indicated they were motivated to change their management practices following on from attending at least one of the EDGE courses.

- ❑ The highest proportion of subsequent management practice change or activity was **90%** of **Lamb Cheque** course participants (lowest sample base  $n=10$ ), **89%** of participants in the **Beef Cheque** course also changed management practices as a direct result of attending the course.
- ❑ **86%** of **Prograze** participants and **84%** of **Wean More Lambs** participants also changed practices.

- ❑ The lowest level of subsequent management practice change activity was evident for the **Prime Time** or **Making More from Merinos** course at **63%**, **Effective Breeding** (lambs) **66%**, and **Money Making Mums** (sheep) **67%**, still a significant influence on management change.
- ❑ Further analysis reveals a **higher overall incidence** of **management practice changes** amongst **MLA members** at **80%** than non-members at 65%.

Of the courses offered in the EDGE program, seven of them were well attended by the sample, as a result of attending these specific EDGE courses a proportion of course participants **changed management practices**.

	<b>Pro graze</b>	<b>Beef Cheque</b>	<b>Effective breeding - Lambs</b>	<b>Wean More Lambs</b>	<b>Nutrition Edge</b>	<b>Money Making Mums</b>	<b>Prime Time</b>	<b>Total</b>
Grazing Management	61%	60%	39%	25%	-	50%	42%	<b>45%</b>
Reproductive Management	31%	26%	44%	38%	6%	36%	42%	<b>24%</b>
Supplementary feeding and Nutrition	30%	19%	39%	41%	81%	36%	42%	<b>33%</b>
Calving, lambing or weaning times	16%	19%	13%	34%	13%	7%	33%	<b>17%</b>
Management or preparation of sires	8%	10%	22%	16%	-	29%	17%	<b>8%</b>
Genetic Selection	9%	17%	26%	19%	-	43%	42%	<b>13%</b>
Natural Resource Management	11%	7%	-	6%	6%	-	8%	<b>7%</b>
Animal Health Practices	13%	17%	17%	9%	-	21%	25%	<b>12%</b>
Pasture Management	42%	43%	17%	19%	19%	14%	42%	<b>30%</b>
Marketing & Finance	5%	6%	4%	-	-	-	-	<b>2%</b>

Across all MLA programs attended, Grazing management, Supplementary feeding & Nutrition practices, Pasture management and Reproductive management were the main management practices where producers have made changes. This trend varied by course attended, of those producers who attended the:

- ❑ **Prograze** course, **61%** made changes to **Grazing management** practices and **42%** to **Pasture management** practices
- ❑ **Beef Cheque** course, **60%** made changes to **Grazing management** and **43%** made changes to **Pasture management**
- ❑ **Nutrition Edge** course, **81%** made changes to their Supplementary feeding & Nutrition practices after attending
- ❑ **Money Making Mums** (sheep) course, **29%** of participants were influenced to change the Management or preparation of sires, the highest for this practice across all courses.

### 4.2.1 Other Information Influences on Management Practice Change

A critical issue for MLA is **who or what actually influenced change?** The survey sought to understand what proportion of producers sought other advice or information (outside of the MLA courses) before deciding to change management practices. Overall, **46%** of EDGE course

participants **sought further information** or advice, after attending an MLA course, prior to initiating a change in their management practices.

- ❑ **38% of Prime Time or Making More from Merinos** course participants and **34% of Effective Breeding** (lambs) course participants indicated they subsequently sought further **information or advice** prior to implementing management practice changes
- ❑ In contrast, **59%** of participants of the **Nutrition Edge** course and **56%** of the **Money Making Mums** course had a much **higher proportion** of course participants seeking further information or advice after participating in the course and prior to implementing a change in management practices.

Where management change was undertaken and also influenced by 'influential sources' respondents were asked what or who those influences to change were.

- ❑ The main influence that convinced producers to make management practice changes was identified as **MLA programs** with **59%** of producers indicating that MLA programs influenced management change. Other less significant influences included, 'Edge Network' **Co-ordinators** and the **Department of Agriculture**.
- ❑ This trend was mainly evident across all changed management practices, other influencers included **Producer forums** and the **Media**.
- ❑ Known **influential producers** are also seen to have played a part for those implementing **Genetic Selection** and **Animal Health Practice** changes.

### ***4.2.2 Management Practice Change and the Benefits***

Overall, as a result of participants attending any of the EDGE programs:

- ❑ **46%** made **changes** to **grazing management** practices
- ❑ **33%** to **supplementary feeding & nutrition** practices
- ❑ **30%** to **pasture management**
- ❑ **24%** to **reproductive management**
- ❑ **17%** also made changes to **calving, lambing and weaning times**.

The practices changed varied by the courses attended, with regard to the attendance at the (most popular) Prograze and Beef Cheque courses, **Grazing management** and **Pasture management** were the most common practices changed. If producers chose to attend the Nutrition Edge course, changes to Supplementary feeding & Nutrition practices was most common, if Money Making Mums (sheep) was the chosen course then changes to the Management or preparation of sires was most likely.

- ❑ Specifically producers indicated that the changes made to **grazing management** and **pasture management** also had the **biggest impact** or **benefit** for grazing enterprises.

As a result of these changes **Productivity increases** and **better natural resource management** are mentioned as being the main benefits to grazing enterprises.

- ❑ The impact varied by type of practice change, with **Productivity increases** and **better natural resource management** the most evident impact following on from changes to

Grazing Management, Supplementary Feeding & Nutrition and Pasture Management. **Profit** was the most common impact after participants' implemented changes to Animal Health practices and Calving, Lambing or Weaning Times.

### 4.2.3 Future Course or Program Attendance Intention

36% of EDGE course participants indicated they would attend another EDGE course or program.

- ❑ 14% were undecided and 50% of all EDGE course participants surveyed said they would **not attend** any other EDGE programs.
- ❑ However, 31% of EDGE participants did indicate they would attend other MLA courses not connected with the EDGE program.

## MBfP Survey Results and Discussion

The overall awareness and adoption of MBfP tools and practices is based on the MBfP manual and level of readership. All respondents interviewed ( $n=80$ ) from the original 1,272 manual recipients provided by MLA, were confirmed as having received a manual.

### 5.1 MBfP Manual Readership

The mini MBfP survey looked closely at the proportion of manual recipients who actually read each of the specific modules.

- ❑ 100% of manual recipients indicated they had read the manual, however 25% of these readers had read the **introduction only**, leaving 75% who have read one or more modules. Readership and the subsequent adoption of procedures and practices is the key objective of the program, the proportion of producers who adopted or used tools is represented as a percentage of all those who have read each of the MBfP manual modules.

MBfP Manual Modules:	Overall Module Readership % of readers	Adopted Procedures % module readers	Used Tools % module readers
Setting Directions	47%	42%	42%
Tactical Stock Control	47%	55%	42%
Pasture Growth	69%	44%	44%
Pasture Utilisation	77%	50%	41%
Genetics	43%	23%	47%
Weaner Throughput	47%	33%	46%
Herd Health & Welfare	50%	43%	43%
Meeting Market Specifications	48%	33%	42%

#### 5.1.1 Overall Adoption of Module Procedures by MBfP manual recipients

Of the 75% of manual recipients who read at least one module, 42% have carried out one or more management **procedures** in the modules as a direct result of reading them.

- ❑ Procedure adoption was highest amongst manual recipients who read the **Tactical Stock Control** module, **55%** of the readers of this module subsequently adopted one or more of its procedures.
- ❑ This was followed by readers of the **Pasture Utilisation** module, where **50%** of readers adopted a procedure from this module.
- ❑ The lowest level of subsequent procedure adoption was evident amongst readers of the **Genetics** module, **23%**. This is not unexpected due to the lower level of readership for this module.

### ***5.1.2 Overall Use of Manual Tools by MBfP manual recipients***

Overall, **37%** of MBfP manual readers indicated they had also used one of the **tools** or **practices** contained in the manual.

- ❑ When analysed by module read the tool or practice usage varied within a narrow band of 41% to 47% (this anomaly is due to a number of respondents who had read the introduction only or could not recall the modules they had read).
- ❑ Further analysis revealed a marginally higher incidence of tool or practice usage amongst MLA members.

## **5.2 Adoption or Use of Specific Practices or Tools from MBfP Manual**

The adoption of procedures has been discussed, 42% of manual recipients indicating they carried out one or more of the procedures contained in the manual. However, critical to the success of the courses offered by MLA is the adoption and use of the recommended management changes, in the MBfP manual these changes are called **Practices or Tools**.

### ***5.2.1 Specific Practices or Tools Used by MBfP Manual Recipients***

The survey established that **28%** of MBfP manual recipients were able to nominate which practice or tool they had used, slightly fewer than those who indicated they had used a practice or tool (37%). Of these pasture management and measurement is of most interest:

- ❑ **68%** of MBfP manual recipients using tools (28%) indicated they had used **Pasture rulers, sticks & meters**.
- ❑ **Methodology for field-based pasture measurements** was also mentioned as a practice widely used by **27%** of tool users.

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	<b>MBfP Tools &amp; Practices Used by tool users (28%)</b>
Pasture rulers sticks & meters	68%
Methodology for field based pasture measurement	27%
Information sources on pasture utilisation	14%
Beef Cattle market specifications	14%
Others (Single mentions)	41%

A considerable number of other practices and tools were represented in the manual and included in the survey response mechanism. With many producers mentioning the pasture management tools the other practices and tools were not as widely used, however other single mentioned practices or tools used by the 28% of tool users include:

- ☐ Template of partial budget calculations for comparing change scenarios (5%)
- ☐ Guide to mapping pasture zones and developing the capacity for differential land management (5%)
- ☐ A guide to measuring water use efficiency (WUE) and setting targets for all pasture zones (5%)
- ☐ Grazing management options to convert pastures into beef production (5%)
- ☐ Sources of information for breed and crossbred averages for important traits (5%)
- ☐ Guidelines when considering using different breed types (5%)
- ☐ Calving histogram calculator (5%)
- ☐ Diagnostic tool to detect presence of diseases (5%)
- ☐ Vaccination strategies (5%)
- ☐ Beef Cattle market specifications (5%)

This evaluation of tools use is based on 28% of manual recipients recalling which practices or tools they had changed or adopted, this was an unprompted question and such the insights should be regarded as top of mind recall only.

### **5.2.2 Level of Information sought prior to change**

A critical issue for MLA is to determine **what influence** on **change** the MBfP program and manual has had? The MBfP survey sought to understand what proportion of producers sought other advice or information (outside of the MBfP Manual) before deciding to adopt or change management practices.

Overall, **19%** of MBfP manual recipients **sought further information** or advice, after receiving the manual and prior to using any of the procedures, practices or tools in the manual.

- ☐ The need to seek further information varied by module read, within a narrow band of 21-24% for most modules, however it was slightly higher at 27-33% for readers of the Setting Directions, Herd Health & Welfare and Genetics modules. MLA programs are identified as the main influencers convincing producers to use the procedures & tools contained in the MBfP manual.

## **5.3 Impact of MBfP on Grazing Enterprises**

Understanding how changes to management practice impacts on grazing enterprises is an essential aspect of ensuring the programs and their content are not only addressing producer needs but are actually helping improve grazing productivity and enterprise viability.

### **5.3.1 Impact of Management Practice Changes on Grazing Enterprises**

Of those producers who received an MBfP manual, **37%** have **changed their management** practices as a result of trying out tools or procedures contained in the MBfP manual.

Of those respondents who changed management practices by carrying out the MBfP procedures or tools & practices, the impact of this change in practice is mostly on two main aspects of grazing enterprises, with:

- ☐ **59%** of producers indicating **Productivity** increases
- ☐ **36%** indicating an impact on **Profit**

Also mentioned as being significant were:

- ☐ **14%** better natural resource management
- ☐ **14%** lower cost of production
- ☐ **9%** turnover
- ☐ **9%** time savings

The other areas of impact were single response comments, such as:

- ☐ "More efficient for pasture so able to increase stocking rate."
- ☐ "Lowers debt."



- ☐ "Breeding herd intact."
- ☐ "Increased condition of animals." "Cattle are well finished/better cattle/ better kill sheet/better returns."
- ☐ "Useful reference."
- ☐ "Match beef production with pasture growth /calving in spring so optimising spring flush grass with extra calves."
- ☐ "Made management easier."

The focus of these responses on production or productivity aspects of grazing enterprises is a positive statement about the impact of the MBfP manual and the procedures & tools it promotes.

### **5.3.2 Why Practices & Tools were not used**

Manual recipients' non-usage of the tools or practices contained in the MBfP manual, is mainly due to the **drought situations** and lack of available feed.

More specifically:

- ☐ **26%** of recipients not using the manuals tools indicating the **drought prevented** them
- ☐ **18%** indicated they had **No time to read it**
- ☐ **18%** also stated they were **already implementing** or had Implemented the tools or practices (management changes)
- ☐ **8%** Will implement them in the future
- ☐ **8%** did not understand them

The Other reasons were single responses, as follows:

- ☐ "We already have a pretty specific management program which is pretty high technology and which probably incorporates what is being espoused by MLA especially in pasture utilisation. We haven't gone down that path to incorporate. Given the type of enterprise we have not able to incorporate the Weaner recommendation, the cattle genetics and herd health recommendations. I do want to try to explore the marketing aspects of the manual."
- ☐ "A lot that I have read doesn't sit well with me. I don't necessarily agree with it."
- ☐ "Already have that information, we get from other angles."
- ☐ "I prefer judgement."
- ☐ "Going to read it but haven't got around to it / glanced but I am reading from front to back",
- ☐ "Waiting on the facilitator to come and adapt a programme to suit this property."
- ☐ "Don't need to I am satisfied with the pasture management at the moment / I have been doing it for 50 years and I have been making living at it."

- ❑ "There was not enough detail for what I wanted." **Other Course Attendance or MBfP Forum Participation**

Understanding if course attendance has motivated producers to get more involved in other courses or MLA activities is useful information for the development of an ongoing communications program.

- ❑ **67%** or two-thirds of producers have not undertaken any further action since receiving the MBfP manual.

In contrast:

- ❑ **9%** attended a 'More Beef from Pastures' **Forum**, **9%** attended an MLA Course of some kind to learn more about the manual, **8%** have since joined a producer group or network and **2%** employed a farm management consultant. **28%** of program participants said they had **no time** to participate in extra courses and **20%** said the drought was preventing them. **15%** said they did not need to do extra courses and **12%** felt that the **manual** contained **sufficient** information. **49%** of MBfP manual recipients indicated they are a member of a producer group or network that discusses farm management practices, membership of these groups includes **Beef Cheque** (14%) and **Best Wool** (11%), VFF and NSWFA were also mentioned by 8% of recipients respectively as being 'producer groups'.

Interestingly almost any producer group qualified as a discussion forum for management practices, general farm management issues are obviously being discussed in forums other than those established by MLA. **Conclusions and Recommendations**

## 6.1 Conclusions

The objective of the EDGE & MBfP programs and courses is to facilitate the dissemination of R&D information to producers so that they can benefit from the innovations developed through the R&D process. Within these two courses specific management procedures, tools and practices have been packaged to assist graziers in improving productivity through the process of trialing and adopting change within their enterprise.

**EDGE** courses appear to be very well branded with participants able to recall the courses they participated in as well as others on offer.

- ❑ **65%** of EDGE program participants attended the **Feedbase & Pastures** course and **52%** attended the **Livestock** course, these courses were the highest attended by far.
- ❑ Attendance at an EDGE program motivated **78%** of participants to **change** or **adopt** the specific **management practices** being discussed within the course. **Lamb Cheque** and **Beef Cheque** have the **highest** influence on **change**.
- ❑ Awareness of other MLA programs is high amongst EDGE participants, **66%** being aware of the **Quality Assurance** courses and **60%** the **Marketing** courses. **36%** of EDGE course participants indicated they would attend another EDGE course or programs and **31%** of indicated they would attend other MLA courses not connected with the EDGE program.
- ❑ **46%** of EDGE program attendees seek **further information** or advice prior to changing management practices learned in the courses they attended. This poses a problem to the instigation of change.

Much of the content of the EDGE program and courses concentrates on husbandry and pasture management, as a result the survey established that:

- ❑ **45%** of EDGE program participants made changes to **Grazing** management practices, **33%** to **Supplementary feeding & Nutrition** practices, **30%** to **Pasture** management and **24%** to **Reproductive** management.
- ❑ Specifically producers indicated that the changes made to **grazing management** and **pasture management** also had the **biggest impact** or **benefit** for grazing enterprises.
- ❑ **Profit** was the most common benefit mentioned after participants' implemented changes to Animal Health practices and Calving, Lambing or Weaning Times.
- ❑ MLA programs, 'EDGE Network' Co-ordinators and the Department of Agriculture were identified as the main **influencers** convincing producers to make management practice changes. The inclusion of alternative communication channels such as Dept of Ag personnel would give MLA 'control' over the consistency of the messages producers will receive.
- ❑ **22%** of course participants have not changed any management practices as a result of attending an EDGE program, **Lack of interest** was nominated by over a quarter of these as the reason, a further **12%** said the **drought** was hampering change.
- ❑ **52%** of EDGE participants are members of a producer group or network that discusses farm management practices.

The **MBfP** manual was made available to Beef Procedures primarily from NSW & Victoria, clearly the modules in the manual that related to production issues were widely read. **75%** of recipients reading at least one of the core modules with many producers implementing the procedures discussed as a result.

- ❑ The **Pasture Utilisation** and **Pasture Growth** modules within the MBfP manual had the **highest readership** levels of **77%** and **69%** of recipients who read the manual.

Manual recipients' adoption of the tools and practices contained in the manual is significant once producers read the manuals relevant modules.

- ❑ Overall, **37%** of readers have (**permanently**) changed their management practices as a result of carrying out any of the **procedures** or **tools** contained in the MBfP manual. Much of this change has impacted significantly on the production capacity of participating graziers.
- ❑ **42%** of readers were motivated to carry out one or more **procedures** from the modules read in the manual, and **31%** of readers indicated they have used the **tools** or **practices** contained in the manual. The most **commonly** used tool or practice is the **Pasture rulers, sticks & meters**, used by **68%** of tool users and **27%** used the manuals **Methodology for field-based pasture measurements**.
- ❑ **19%** of readers sought further information following the MBfP program before they used any of the procedures or tools they read or learnt about.
- ❑ Non-usage of the practices & tools in the MBfP manual, is mainly due to the **drought** or **no feed**.
- ❑ Of interest to the management of MBfP is the influence the manual had on forum attendance, **67%** or two-thirds of producers have **not yet** undertaken to attend a forum,

MLA course, join a producer group or employ a farm management consultant since receiving the MBfP manual.

However, **9% did attend** a 'More Beef from Pastures' **Forum**, 9% attended an MLA Course of some kind to learn more about the manual, 8% did join a producer group and **2% did employ** a farm management **consultant**.

While general curiosity was the attraction for forum attendees, **lack of time** and the drought are key reasons for non-attendance of forums/courses, joining networks or employing farm management consultant.

- ❑ **40%** of MBfP manual recipients indicated that they are likely to attend other EDGE workshops in the next 12 months, and **29%** indicating this likelihood for other MLA courses.
- ❑ **49%** of MBfP manual recipients are members of a producer group or network that discusses farm management practices.

MLA Membership also influences course participation and subsequent change, most likely this is simply a function of the communication and course promotion process with members.

- ❑ **87%** of MBfP participants were MLA members whereas **68%** of EDGE participants were members.

## 6.2 Recommendations

This summary report has focussed on the MLA objective of instigating change at a producer level, as a result of this closer look at EDGE & MBfP it is evident that a number of factors will contribute to a rise in a change of management practices impacting on production.

The clear message is to firstly **continue to encourage producers** to participate in the education and training offered through MLA programs such as EDGE & MBfP. Secondly the message of change must be **reinforced through other communication channels** and credible references. As a result change and adoption of innovative practices will occur.

To achieve management change amongst course attendees MLA must:

- ❑ Concentrate on improving the **impact of the messages** contained in the courses being offered and highlight the dangers of complacency. A significant proportion of participants indicated they had made changes but few appeared to do anything further. Whilst mitigating circumstances were prevalent these will always hamper progress, producers must be encouraged to implement new ideas despite the seasonal issues they may face.

The significant proportion of course participants who have not made changes, reflects the level of resistance to change, as well as the degree of apathy that exists amongst the rural community. MLA must accept that not all producers are a prospect for change.

- ❑ Improve the **credibility of the messages** and course content. A significant proportion of course attendees and manual recipients indicated they **sought further information** before

making a change to their management practices, even though MLA courses included here are being nominated as reliable sources of information by participants.

This interruption to the process of change needs to be explored to further enhance the impact of specific programs on management change.

If producers do cross reference information then perhaps the MLA communications strategy should also include stronger liaison with departmental extension personnel who are mentioned as being 'as influential' as MLA programs.

The intention amongst producers to **attend other MLA courses** is significant, 36% of EDGE and 41% of MBfP participants are responsive to further education and training opportunities, MLA must keep track of who these producers are.

Course **promotion to non-members** is also likely to attract reasonable levels of support as is evident by the higher level of non-member participation in the EDGE program.

As a result of undertaking the mini survey using **MLA databases** as the contact source, we have identified the need to further develop the centralisation of program and course participant records. Addressing this issue alone will help to facilitate the targeted promotion of other courses to producer segments that have indicated they are keen to participate and improve productivity.

The mini survey also highlighted the 'make change then sit back and see what happens' approach to innovation, this mentality won't prevent change but it will retard the speed of change. If MLA can also **identify producers who have already embarked on change** through course participation then further change appears to be a stronger probability.

## **7. Appendices**

The following appendices are attached in *Axiom\_EDGE&MBfP\_2005\_Report&DataTables.zip*

### **7.1 Appendix 1 Main data file(s)**

Pdf files containing SurveyCraft tables of survey dataset. Various analysis perspectives have been required and due to the volume and complexity of the data several different data processing initiatives have been undertaken.

These include:

- ❑ *Edge - Main Data Tables (Final).pdf*
- ❑ *More Beef - Main Data Tables (FinalV2).pdf*

### **7.2 Appendix 2 PowerPoint file**

Detailed PowerPoint report containing the main findings from the survey.  
This is listed as:

- ❑ *MLA Edge-MBfP Producers Report 02-08-2005.ppt*