

# final report

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## **Professional Development to Build the Capacity of Agricultural Consultants for the Livestock Sector**

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## **Abstract**

The professional development project was established in 2010 to support 20 young and emerging advisors and consultants to develop their business skills and capacity to provide services to the livestock industries. The project was designed to provide additional support and professional development for students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Agriculture (Agricultural Consulting) and other personnel in consultancy firms, agribusiness and agency organisations.

Over the 3 years, the professional development project engaged 49 livestock industry advisors and consultants in 12 activities designed to develop their professional, technical and personal skills.

Of the 49 participants, 22 were private sector consultants, 12 were enrolled in the Sheep CRC Graduate Certificate in Agriculture (Agricultural Consulting) and 4 were undertaking other post graduate studies. During the period of the project, 7 of the participants started businesses providing livestock industry advisory services.

Evaluation of all the activities demonstrated their value to the group. The group's post project reflections indicate strong support for professional development activities of this kind. The group particularly valued the opportunity to network with like minded professionals and learn from each other.

This project has provided some important insights for planning future investments to secure a vibrant and competent advisory sector (both public and private) to support the sheep and cattle industries in the future.

## **Executive Summary**

The professional development project was established in 2010 to support 20 young and emerging advisors and consultants to develop their business skills and capacity to provide services to the livestock industries. The project was designed to provide additional support and professional development for students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Agriculture (Agricultural Consulting) and other personnel in consultancy firms, agribusiness and agency organisations.

The project aimed to provide participants with;

- access and exposure to experienced consultants
- development of skills in understanding and managing people and the social aspects/demographics of rural communities
- development of skills in critical thinking and strategic planning
- increased understanding of issues associated with running your own business
- increased technical skills.

Over the 3 years, the professional development project engaged 49 livestock industry advisors and consultants in 12 activities designed to develop their professional, technical and personal skills.

Of the 49 participants, 22 were private sector consultants, 12 were enrolled in the Sheep CRC Graduate Certificate in Agriculture (Agricultural Consulting) and 4 were undertaking other post graduate studies. During the period of the project, 7 of the participants started businesses providing livestock industry advisory services.

A range of experienced and highly regarded consultants, trainers and researchers delivered workshops to the group, including;

- Engaging producer groups
- Establishing your own consultancy business
- Principles for high quality extension
- Evaluation techniques
- Benchmarking the farm business
- Understanding personality types and working with people
- Presentation and facilitation skills
- Attending the Lambex Conference 2012 and Lean Meat Yield and Eating Quality Field Day 2013
- Genetics Service Provider Training

Evaluation of all the activities demonstrated their value to the group. The group's post project reflections indicate strong support for professional development activities of this kind. The group particularly valued the opportunity to network with like minded professionals and learn from each other.

The project was flexible in structure and responsive to participant needs which contributed to its success. Individuals invested significantly in the project by covering their own travel costs and in many cases forgoing earnings to attend the workshops.

The concept of building a network and providing professional development for livestock advisors and consultants is currently being discussed in a number of forums;

- Sheep Genetics and the Sheep CRC are considering the needs of Genetics Service Providers and the value of a professional network, regular training and accreditation of skills
- The Agriculture Institute of Australia has recognised the growing expectations placed on the private sector, as state agencies reduce their investment in extension. The Institute recognises the need for industry to consider how training, accreditation and succession planning will be resourced in the future.
- MLA, AWI and the Red Meat Co-investment Committee are currently developing a framework for future investment in extension capacity and services in both the public and private sectors.
- The Sheep CRC has invested heavily in building capacity in advisory services. A successful Extension Bid would provide a platform for continued development of a professional network with appropriate training, accreditation and personal development activities.

This project has provided some important insights for planning future investments to secure a vibrant and competent advisory sector (both public and private) to support the sheep and cattle industries in the future.

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## 1. Background

In 2009, the Sheep CRC, in collaboration with the University of New England (UNE), developed a course aimed at building capacity in the agricultural consulting sector. The Graduate Certificate in Agriculture (Agricultural Consulting), the first course of its kind in Australia, is aimed at practising and intending consultants and advisors.

The Sheep CRC invested in the development of this course in response to market research that identified;

- relatively low levels of productivity growth within the sheep sector
- increasing business and technical complexity in sheep enterprises
- declining extension services within the public sector agencies
- low level usage of specialist consultants by sheep producers; and
- a growing shortfall in suitably qualified consultants to service industry.

Whilst the Sheep CRC market research focussed on the sheep industry, many of the issues are considered common to other agricultural industries, including beef. For this reason the post graduate course was specifically designed to be attractive to all the agricultural sectors. The course material has been developed with input from many of the consultancy firms that are participants in the CRC.

The course is based around four units that can be studied full time for one semester or part time over two years, in a distance education mode. The two compulsory units provide students with skills in;

- running your own business – strategic and business planning, legal considerations, business structure and managing media relations
- providing client services – benchmarking, business and whole farm planning, facilitation and negotiation.

The two elective units allow consultants from any agricultural or natural resource management sector to develop new technical skills that are relevant to their industry and can be chosen from a wide variety of options at UNE or another university.

There is no residential school associated with the graduate certificate course. All learning and study is undertaken remotely.

Since 2009, a total of 210 students have enrolled in the graduate certificate course with 168 completions to date. Students have been a mixture of undergraduate students, recent graduates and experienced industry personnel. They have come from a range of disciplines including, private and public veterinarians, extension officers, agronomists, stud breeders, commercial producers, natural resource management officers and agribusiness personnel.

The Sheep CRC has invested significantly in the development of the course material for the graduate certificate. Early on, it was identified that significant value would be added to the course through the provision of supporting professional development activities that could be undertaken on an optional basis. This would provide;

- access and exposure to experienced consultants who are prepared to provide mentoring and encouragement to establishing consultants
- development of skills in understanding and managing people and the social aspects/demographics of rural communities
- development of skills in critical thinking and strategic planning
- increased understanding of issues associated with running your own business
- increased technical skills.

In planning this project it was also recognised that many small to medium sized consultancy firms have younger or less experienced staff, not enrolled in the graduate certificate, who would also benefit from the professional development activities in this project.

Capacity building within private sector consultancies has been recognised as a major impost for small to medium size businesses. These consultancies are increasingly expected to fill the gap in advisory services as state departments reduce investment in extension services. This project was seen as an opportunity to also build skills and capacity in consultancy and advisory services generally.

Providing adequate support and professional development opportunities to advisory personnel in the public and private sectors has been identified as a major issue by a review project currently being undertaken by MLA and AWI to develop a framework for future investment in livestock extension. The Agriculture Institute of Australia has also identified capacity building within private sector advisory services as an important focus for their future activities.

## **2. Project Objectives**

The objective of the project was to;

Provide a professional development program to support 20 young and emerging consultants, to develop their business skills and capacity to provide services to livestock producers.

The expected outcomes of the project were;

- Increased supply of consultants providing high quality advisory services to the livestock sector
- Increased use of consultancy services by the livestock sector
- Increased productivity growth in the sheep and beef sectors through the provision of high quality consulting services.

## **3. Methodology**

Invitations to participate in the professional development project were sent to the following groups of people within the agricultural advisory sector;

- Students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Rural Science (Agricultural Consulting) in 2009
- Cadets and younger staff within the state agencies with a focus on extension/advisory services
- New recruits to private agricultural consulting firms
- Senior experienced consultants to act as mentors to project participants

Appendix 6.1 provides a copy of the letter of invitation that was distributed.

The topics covered in the project were determined by consultation and negotiation with the participants to ensure that the project met their needs, but focussed on the key topics in the graduate certificate course and other related skills. Key areas of focus included;

- Strategic and business planning
- Critical thinking skills
- Running your own business
- Understanding personality types and the implications for working with people
- Presentation, facilitation and negotiation skills
- Media training
- Social aspects and demographics of rural communities and the implications for consultants

- Best practice in developing and delivering extension and training to industry

The project used a number of techniques for communicating with the group and undertaking activities.

- i. Electronic (email) communications support for the project group to keep in touch and discuss issues of importance to the group
- ii. Recorded podcasts available through the Sheep CRC website
- iii. A webinar series to enable project participants to participate in specific professional development activities without having to travel
- iv. A range of face to face activities over the period of the project.

#### 4. Results

The activities undertaken throughout the project and evaluation results are detailed below;

1. Audio podcasts with David Sackett, Mike Stephens and Bob Hall on the importance of the consulting sector and personal experiences as a consultant were made available to the project through the Sheep CRC website.
2. Wednesday February 9<sup>th</sup> 2011 – Introductory webinar
  - Overview of the project and its objectives
  - Each participant provided a PowerPoint slide and introduced themselves to the group
  - Discussion and determination of priority activities for the group
3. Monday April 4<sup>th</sup> – Robbie Sefton (Sefton and Associates) Webinar  
Establishing producer groups
  - Developing key messages for producers
  - Maintaining the group
  - Evaluation of activities and outcomes
  - Web Link to the recording  
<https://sheepcrc.webex.com/sheepcrc/ldr.php?AT=pb&SP=MC&rID=42382757&rKey=03e30bc346396f1f>
  - Webinar was difficult to hear, due to a lot of interference on the line and it proved difficult for Robbie to engage the audience. The follow up resources provided by Robbie were highly valued by participants.
4. Friday April 29<sup>th</sup> – David Sacket (Growth Farms) Webinar  
Establishing your own consultancy business
  - Do's and don'ts
  - How do you know when you are ready?
  - Web Link to the recording  
<https://sheepcrc.webex.com/sheepcrc/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=MC&rID=42647117&rKey=c984c8318a3d39c5>
  - Webinar was highly valued by the participants. Several group members that listened to the webinar later contacted me to say how much they valued the recording.
5. Wednesday June 4<sup>th</sup> David Heinjus (Rural Directions) Webinar  
Achieving excellence in agricultural consulting



- Providing value to your business, your clients and the industry
  - Web Link to the recording  
<https://sheepcrc.webex.com/sheepcrc/lsr.php?AT=pb&SP=MC&rID=42919107&rKey=9bbba0ee1aecfc0a>
  - Webinar was highly valued by the participants. Several group members that listened to the webinar later contacted me to say how much they valued the recording.
6. May 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 – Melbourne Workshop
- Understanding personality types, dealing with conflict and difficult people (Day 1 delivered by Ben Reeve from Mike Stephens and Associates)
  - Using Persuasion Skills to design adoption programs that will result in increased adoption rates within the industry (Day 2 delivered by Bruce Howie c-Qual)
  - Mentoring dinner with senior consultants – Peter Hanrahan, Russell Pattinson, Mike Stephens, Robert Patterson. Presentations on the Australian Association of Agricultural Consultants and the Agriculture Institute of Australia
  - Overall the two day workshop was rated very highly by the participants, the average evaluation rating was 4.5/5.0 for Day 1 and 4.2/5.0 for Day 2
7. February 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 2012 – Adelaide Workshop
- Tour of Michell's Wool and presentation on the wool supply chain (Michael Blake)
  - Financial benchmarking for farming businesses (David Heinjus)
  - The post farm supply chain for wool (Michael Blake)
  - Evaluation principles and techniques (Peter Hanrahan)
  - Evaluation sheets from the Financial Benchmarking session indicated that all participants were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" and all indicated that they had "learnt a lot"
  - The session on evaluation principles was quite challenging for many, but everyone acknowledged the importance of evaluation and building their skills in this area
  - A smaller group attended the Michell's Wool tour, but provided very positive feedback
8. June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> 2012 – Bendigo Lambex Conference
- All participants rated this event very highly and were very appreciative of the opportunity to hear such high quality speakers and interact with the trade displays
  - The opportunity to network with others in industry was also considered very important
9. May 20<sup>th</sup> 2013– Hamilton Field Day
- Lean Meat Yield and Eating Quality Demonstration Site Field Day
  - Feedback on the field day was variable. It was disappointing that more trial results were not available on the day
10. May 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013 – Melbourne Workshop
- Genetics Service Provider Training Workshop
  - Evaluation data showed that 84% of participants ranked the workshop session as either "very useful" or "quite useful"

- Other qualitative feedback indicated that the group valued the training and networking opportunity very highly

11. June 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> – Adelaide Workshop

- Presentation and Facilitation Workshop presented by Ann Burbrook and Ben Reeve (Mike Stephens and Associates)
- The average score for usefulness of the workshop was 8.8/10.
- All participants indicated they had improved their skills and confidence in presentation and facilitation

12. July 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> - Orange

- Presentation and Facilitation Workshop presented by Ann Burbrook and Ben Reeve (Mike Stephens and Associates)
- This workshop had not been completed at the time of writing the report

The list of 49 participants, their place of work and the activities are provided in Appendix 6.2 and 6.3.

The group changed over the 3 year period as;

- Individuals changed employment or roles within their organisation
- Personal situations changed
- Priorities within organisations changed
- New members joined as they heard about the project and expressed interest

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

Over a period of 3 years, the professional development project engaged 49 livestock industry advisors and consultants in a dozen activities designed to develop their professional, technical and personal skills.

Of the 49 participants, 22 were private sector consultants, 12 were enrolled in the Sheep CRC Graduate Certificate in Rural Science (Agricultural Consulting) and 4 were undertaking other post graduate studies. During the period of the project, 7 of the participants started businesses providing livestock industry advice and services.

The membership of the group evolved over the period as;

- Additional people learnt of the project and asked to join
- Others changed jobs or roles within their organisation
- Budgets and operating conditions within organisations changed

The changing group membership did not negatively impact on the project or the activities undertaken; rather it enriched the group through the injection of new people and new ideas.

The project was specifically designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the group. Decisions on activities and locations were made based on group feedback. In reality individuals have different interests and participate in the activities that will most benefit or interest them. Location was also important in determining attendance. Activities were rotated around different locations to give everyone the opportunity to participate. Participants paid their own travel costs and therefore had to weigh up the costs and time involved to attend an event. It was difficult for participants from WA to attend due to the additional costs and travel time involved for them.

The networking aspects of the project were particularly valued by the participants, many of whom are self employed or working in small businesses, with limited opportunities for professional interaction with like minded people.

As part of wrapping up the project, the group was invited to send an email with their reflections on the project and thoughts for future activities. Appendix 6.4 provides copies of all the reflections received. In summary, the reflections indicate;

- There is strong recognition of the need and value of professional development opportunities for advisors in the livestock industry
- There is enthusiasm for the types of activities undertaken and great ideas for future activities
- A strong appreciation of MLA providing funding for the activity
- Opportunities to build on this initial project and build a network of livestock advisors and support them with ongoing professional development.

The concept of building a network and providing professional development for livestock advisors and consultants is currently being discussed in a number of forums;

- Sheep Genetics and the Sheep CRC are considering the needs of Genetics Service Providers and the value of a professional network, regular training and accreditation of skills
- The Agriculture Institute of Australia has recognised the growing expectations placed on the private sector, as state agencies reduce their investment in extension. The Institute recognises the need for industry to consider how training, accreditation and succession planning will be resourced in the future.
- MLA, AWI and the Red Meat Co-investment Committee are currently developing a framework for future investment in extension capacity and services in both the public and private sectors.
- The Sheep CRC has invested heavily in building capacity in advisory services. A successful Extension Bid would provide a platform for continued development of a professional network with appropriate training, accreditation and personal development activities.

This project has provided some important insights for planning future investments to secure a vibrant and competent advisory sector (both public and private) to support the sheep and cattle industries in the future.

## 6. Appendices

### Appendix 6.1: Letter of Invitation sent to Graduate Certificate Students, Consultancies and State Agencies



23<sup>rd</sup> November 2010

Dear [Name],

#### **Building Capacity and Skills in the Livestock Advisory Sector**

*The Sheep CRC is committed to building capacity and skills in individuals who are working, or plan to work, as specialist advisors in the sheep industry. As part of this commitment we are pleased to offer two separate opportunities for professional development of staff in your organisation.*

##### **1. Graduate Certificate in Rural Science (Agricultural Consulting)**

*The Graduate Certificate in Rural Science (Agricultural Consulting), developed by the Sheep CRC, is being successfully delivered through the University of New England. Enrolments in the course have exceeded expectations, with 57 enrolments in the first three semesters and the majority of students successfully completing their units.*

*The course is specifically designed to meet the needs of people who are in full time work and requires the completion of 4 units over a 1-2 year time period. The two compulsory units focus on skills for running a business and providing advice to clients, while the two elective subjects can be drawn from the full suite of technical subjects available through UNE and other universities. The selection of two electives makes the course suitable for professionals working in agriculture and natural resource management generally. Applications to enrol for Semester 1 next year close on January 31<sup>st</sup> 2011. Further information on the course is available on the Sheep CRC website <http://www.sheepcrc.org.au/education/graduate-cert-in-rural-science.php>.*

##### **2. Professional development for young and emerging consultants**

*In addition to the Graduate Certificate course, MLA have provided the Sheep CRC with funding for a professional development project, to cater for young and emerging consultants in the sheep and beef livestock sectors. The project will draw together a group nominated by consultancy firms, state agencies and the Graduate Certificate student intake. This group will then undertake a program of on-line, teleconference and face to face development activities to build personal skills that will assist their future careers.*

*The project aims to build capacity in the advisory sector by providing mentoring and encouragement to establishing consultants in the livestock sector, through:*

- *coaching in personal and business skills development; and*
- *increased understanding of the broader social context and demographics of rural communities that will be encountered in their operating environment.*

*The project will provide the following opportunities to participants;*

- *Access and exposure to experienced agricultural consultants who are prepared to provide mentoring and encouragement to establishing consultants*
- *Development of skills in understanding and managing people*
- *Increased understanding of the social aspects and demographics of rural communities*
- *Development of skills in critical thinking and strategic planning*
- *Increased understanding of the issues associated with running a business.*

*Throughout the project we will provide participants with a range of potential activities. The final program and content will be determined in consultation with the participants, so as to best meet their needs.*

*The first phase of the project will run throughout 2011 with a series of on-line activities such as podcasts, webinars and teleconferences and one face to face workshop in March/April 2011 in an eastern state. Subject to a successful outcome the project will be continued in 2012 and 2013. Please note that participation in the professional development project does not require enrolment in the Graduate Certificate course at UNE.*

*This letter is an invitation for you to nominate members of your staff that you think would benefit from participation in the project and to invite more senior members in your organisation to participate in the March/April workshop as mentors.*

*I look forward to discussing this opportunity with you and receiving nominations for the project by December 15<sup>th</sup> 2010. My contact details are Phone: 0427 687 432 or [luhogan@optusnet.com.au](mailto:luhogan@optusnet.com.au). If you would like to nominate staff from your organisation in the development project, please send me an email indicating their interest and confirming suitability as per the Selection Criteria in Appendix 1. In addition please let me know if you would like to participate as a mentor in the March/April workshop.*

*Yours sincerely*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lu Hogan'.

*Lu Hogan  
Project Leader – Industry Training  
Sheep CRC*

### **Appendix 1: Criteria for participation**

*Young and emerging consultants are defined as being, less than 40 years of age and with less than 5 years experience in providing advisory and consultancy services to the beef and sheep industries.*

*Selection Criteria for participation in the project;*

- If demand for the project is high – each organisation will be limited to nominating 2 participants per year*
- A commitment to participate in all the activities associated with the project, including evaluation*
- A commitment from their employer to allow time in their work schedules for participation in the project*
- A relevant tertiary qualification*
- Currently working in a role which involves providing advice or consultancy services to clients*
- A strong commitment to the agricultural industry and likely to contribute in the longer term to the sheep and/or beef industries*

#### **Notes:**

- 1. The e-networking, webinars and podcasts will be provided to participants free of charge. The 2 day workshop will be provided free of charge to participants. Participants will need to cover their travel costs associated with attending the 2 day workshop. The workshop will be held at a location in the eastern states that minimises travel time and costs for the most participants.*
- 2. The participant estimated time commitment to the project is as follows;*
  - Participate in a one hour long webinar each quarter for 12 months*
  - Review one podcast on the Sheep CRC secure site each quarter for 12 months*
  - Contribute to online discussions and review items of interest posted to the Sheep CRC secure site on an as needs basis for 12 months*
  - Participate in a two day workshop in March/April 2011 in an eastern states location*
- 3. Consultants attending the workshop as mentors will be asked to cover their own travel and accommodation costs to attend the two day workshop.*

**Appendix 6.2: List of participants, their place of work and location at the time of joining the group.**

	Name	Organisation	Grad Cert Student	Location
1	Simon Vogt	Consultant - Rural Directions	No	Clare SA
2	Natasha Morley	Consultant - Rural Directions	No	Clare SA
3	Mary Chirgwin	Stock Nutrition Advisor - Milne Food Group	No	WA
4	Katharine Marsh	LHPA	No	Condobolin NSW
5	Melissa Henry	Lachlan Catchment Management Authority	Yes	Harden NSW
6	Julia Smith	DAFWA	Yes	Albany WA
7	Jim Meckiff	NSW DPI	No	Armidale NSW
8	Jane Kelly	NSW DPI	no	Orange NSW
9	John Davey	Producer and Private vet	Yes	Ariah Park NSW
10	Stefan Spiker	Advanced Livestock Services	Yes	Hamilton Vic
11	Brett Smith	Landmark	Yes	Walgett NSW
12	Richard Keniry	Producer	Yes	Orange NSW
13	Glenn Murrells	Consultant	Yes	Echuca Vic
14	Anthony Shepherd	Consultant - Sheeppatters	Yes	Cootamundra NSW
15	Symon Jones	Consultant - Macquarie Franklin	No	Tasmania
16	Chris Cordiner	DPI Victoria	No	Bendigo Vic
17	Debbie Milne	Producer & Consultant	Yes	Hamilton Vic
18	Daniel Schuppan	Landmark	No	Jamestown SA
19	David Smith	Producer	Yes	Geranium SA
20	Michael Blake	Consultant & SARDI	No	Adelaide SA
21	Sally Martin	Consultant	No	Young NSW
22	Richard Manion	Producer & runner up Peter Westblade Memorial Scholarship 2012	No	Bowna NSW
23	Kate Nicholas	DAFFQ	No	Longreach Qld
24	Stephanie Fowler	CSU - PhD student & Runner up Peter Westblade Memorial Scholarship 2013	No	Wagga Wagga NSW
25	Annabel Lugsdin	AWI & Winner Peter Westblade Memorial Scholarship 2013	No	Sydney NSW
26	Jackie Staines	NSW DPI	No	Orange NSW
27	Geoff Duddy	Consultant	No	Leeton NSW
28	Brett Wilson	NSW DPI	No	Orange NSW
29	Allan Casey	NSW DPI	No	Orange NSW
30	Megan Rogers	Consultant & Producer	Yes	Forbes NSW
31	Renelle Jeffrey	MLA & Masters student	No	Sydney NSW
32	Geoff Casburn	NSW DPI	No	Wagga Wagga NSW
33	Alex Stirtion	DAFFQ	No	Charleville Qld
34	Nicole Sallur	DAFFQ	No	Charleville Qld
35	Murray Long	Producer and consultant	Yes	Ardlethan NSW
36	Tracie Bird-Gardiner	NSW DPI & Masters student	No	Trangie NSW
37	Anne Collins	Consultant - Rural Solutions SA	No	Port Augusta SA
38	Michelle Cousins	Consultant	No	Burra SA
39	Bruce Hancock	Consultant - Rural Solutions SA	No	Roseworthy SA
40	Jessica Crettenden	SARDI	No	Minnipa SA
41	Cathy Dodd	Uni of Adelaide - PhD student	No	Adelaide SA
42	Jess Revell	Landmark	No	Naracoorte SA
43	Pene Keynes	Consultant - Rural Directions	No	Freerling SA
44	Hamish Dickson	Consultant - Productive Nutrition	No	Clare SA
45	Meg Bell	Consultant - Productive Nutrition	No	Clare SA
46	David Rutley	Uni of Adelaide - Lecturer	No	Adelaide SA
47	Melissa Neal	DPI Vic - Supply chain officer	No	Bendigo Vic
48	Deanna Lush	Consultant - Lush Communications	No	SA
49	Elke Hocking	Producer and consultant	No	SE SA

### Appendix 6.3: List of participants and the activities attended 2011 to 2013.

[illegible]



## Appendix 6.4: Personal Reflections on the Project from Participants

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*First of all I thought the project was really great and thoroughly enjoyed being involved in it, even though I did not get to all of the events.*

*The networking done from this project I think was one of the best parts as you were able to meet up with some people several times over the duration of the project.*

*There seemed to be more of sheepmeat focus throughout the project which I can understand may have been linked to the funding and/or participant's preference and the current state of the sheep industry, while my personal preference would have been to have more wool focussed activities.*

*In saying that though the wool activities such as the Michell Mill tour was fantastic and that a number of the activities were equal in terms of which industry the knowledge learnt could be applied to.*

*Overall it was very worthwhile and if there were any further opportunities like this I would be more than willing to participate.*

*Also thanks to you Lu for all the hard work and organisation that you put into the project.*

---

*It has been a great program. I have really appreciated and benefitted from the following aspects:*

- *The professional development aspects from all activities – this has been excellent and a good mix of topics have been addressed and covered off on which has been great*
- *The opportunity to meet and network with other young consultants from across Australia has also been really valuable*
- *The opportunity to meet and learn from experienced consultants such as Mike Stephens, Peter Hanrahan, and others has been great*
- *It was also absolutely brilliant to be involved with LambEx – it was a first class event that addressed many important industry issues and being supported to attend this excellent event through the Professional Development Project was a fantastic professional development and industry networking opportunity.*

*In terms of future activities, I think the learning experience from actually being able to get onto leading producers properties and spending a few hours with them and understanding the way they think and go about assessing opportunities offers excellent opportunities for professional development and personal growth. Last year I was involved with a More Beef from Pastures trip to Rod Manning and Mark Ritchie's properties near Mansfield in Victoria...both large scale, professional livestock enterprises...and the collective learning from those couple of days was huge. We are fortunate to have many very innovative and professional farming operators across Australia and I think there is a huge opportunity for all of us to learn from them and share ideas.*

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*The professional development project is the best way to do 'extension' to the experts.*

*Among the many positives I think it:*

- *Was an excellent way to introduce a diverse group to each other and to other professional activities.*
- *A good way to add to classroom learning, particularly bringing in 'industry experts' to present.*

- *A great way to facilitate the participation of Sheep industry events we may not have otherwise attended. Bendigo Lambex in particular.*
- *An excellent way to see 'hands on' usage of techniques and research normally only read about.*

*And, as an older participant, an excellent way to introduce younger participants to the vast sheep industry.*

*All in all an excellent programme.*

*Thanks for including me in it!*

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*Thank you for your efforts in delivering great professional development opportunities for the group. And thanks to the funders for recognising the need to support the development of service providers.*

*I enjoyed all of the activities, but got most value from those I could apply the learning's directly to 'most of my work'. Specifically I gained value from Bruce Howie's session, which was our first activity. This was great, and I am still thinking about the process as I work with individual clients and groups and as we develop projects and products and services to deliver.*

*There is no doubt that many skills were gained and enhanced last week at the presentation and facilitation skills workshop. That was an excellent couple of days. I particularly gained a lot from the sessions that Ann Burbrook ran. We have been collating our notes and plan to run a session with team members who are interested to 'practice' their presentation skills. My thoughts are for us to all do a similar activity as we did on day 1, delivering a 3 minute presentation, then each of the team members involved provide feedback, then wrap up with some drinks etc on a Friday afternoon. The notes and tips we were able to take away will be useful to pass onto our colleagues which leverages the investment across more consultants which is great.*

*The webinars were also good – these were of value as a result of the delivery mode and length, we could participate without leaving our office and still take away key messages. In particular the one that David Heinjus ran on consulting practise, and Robbie Sefton on getting groups together were of value to me. David Sackett provided some good insights into establishing your own business. These were good business principles to apply whether you intend to start a business, or applying the principles to current business as an employee.*

*The Benchmarking session that David Heinjus ran in Feb last year was also very well received from memory. Although I didn't get as much out of this session as I did with others, I could sense it was a need covered off well for others in the group. So, definitely a worthwhile incorporation into the program. Peter Hanrahan's evaluation session during that February workshop in Glenelg was also valuable. I have used his guide of 5-7% of budget for evaluation since, and I think this is a realistic benchmark.*

*Overall, with addition of the 'production/technical' style of opportunities which were also offered, including LambEx attendance, I think it was a well rounded program and covered off on many aspects important in service delivery.*

*It was great to be involved, and also valuable in regards to building networks with others in our industry.*

*It would be nice to see a similar opportunity provided to another group in the future.*

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*Thanks again for facilitating the Professional Development Project.*

*I really valued the program and enjoyed it for a number of reasons.*

- *the networking with like minded people was good but more importantly with consultants outside of my patch. It is easier to talk to consultant from a different state on running a business, and I guess on technical topics. It was good to have the spread with not all participants from 1 state.*
- *its good to keep updated with the technical advancements in the industry rather than just reading a email.*
- *allows us to provide feedback to MLA / AWI / Sheep CRC on different sheep issues. It's hard to find time to do this but if you put time aside at these events that is good. For example walk over weighing tricked us a few years ago and I have never been able to tell the Sheep CRC that we couldn't get it to work out in the real world.*
- *keeps your skills competent and stops you getting in bad habits*
- *gives you a kick start every so often/ motivation to keep working in this great industry*
- *having the food and accommodation cost covered are really valuable as my time I can justify but my boss's don't always like the cost especially going interstate.*

*We could do more of all of the above, as well as;*

- *more facilitated discussion on different topics eg lamb survival, nutrition, genetics, pastures and grazing management.*

*I think we could get experts along but would like to have some small group discussions on different issues so you/we can nut out solutions or challenge the experts. The answers may be within the group.*

*I find it is easy for experts to stand in front of a big crowd and say what should be done, but what actually happens out in the paddock is much more difficult.*

- *We could set up Producer Demonstration sites that we monitor then we can visit each others sites.*
- *Groups of people that are interested in a particular topic eg grazing management could be set up and meet regularly.*

*I will probably get more ideas but the above is some feedback.*

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*As I came in on the program part way through my thoughts are:-*

- *Excellent opportunity to network with other Service Providers in the industry both Public and Private.*
- *Good mix of opportunities and experiences – Lambex; Service Provider Training; Vic field day; facilitation/presentation training*
- *Future options – need to get the Service Provider network working; I think there is great value in this;*
- *Possibly partnering with other organisation such as Ag Institute to host similar related events/seminars/conferences for a wider group (that has a similar focus to this group).*
- *Having a mentoring program within the network would be good. I am at a different level to some and would like to be extended more so my needs are slightly different to others that are only just moving into this space.*

*Appreciate the opportunity and value your efforts Lu, thanks.*

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