



# final report

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## Facilitating industry practice change via service provider EDGENetwork training

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## Executive summary

The EDGE workshop packages are one of Meat and Livestock Australia's (MLA) premier education tools designed to raise the knowledge of producers and give them the confidence to undertake practice change or seek the support they require to undertake practice change. The key EDGE packages for northern Australia are *Grazing land management EDGE*, *Nutrition EDGE*, *Breeding EDGE*, *Business EDGE* and *Grazing Fundamentals*.

A key requirement for the successful delivery of EDGE workshops is the availability of highly trained and respected Lead Deliverers with excellent technical and workshop delivery skills. MLA approves Lead Deliverers and allows them to deliver EDGE workshops under a legal agreement.

This project was designed to undertake three main activities: to upskill current Lead Deliverers, identify and train new potential Lead Deliverers and to train 50-60 extension officers in the core EDGE principles using EDGE workshops.

The three main Activities for this project were successfully completed.

1. Activity 1: Current MLA-approved EDGE deliverers were updated in the content and delivery of the recently revised *Grazing land management EDGE*, *Nutrition EDGE* and *Breeding EDGE* workshops and the new *Grazing fundamentals* workshop. Completed 19–21 July 2017 at the Watermark Hotel, Brisbane.
2. Activity 2: Six new EDGE deliverers were identified and trained to address the lack of deliverers for specific EDGE packages and to service priority regional gaps across northern Australia. Evaluation of 9 deliverers submitted to MLA. Completed February 2019.
3. Activity 3: Fifty to sixty early and mid-career extension officers (public, private and non-governmental organisation [NGO]) were trained/updated in the core grazing land management, nutrition, breeding and business principles using EDGE workshops. Fifty-five extension officers were trained. Completed November 2017 in Rockhampton.

The project monitoring and evaluation results 10 months after Activity 3 indicate this activity has been worthwhile with 79% of participants undertaking an action following participation in the workshop and 61% of participants indicating they made a change in practice, or practices, in their business or work as a result of participating in the workshop.

Evaluation of Lead Deliverer trainees and their mentors indicated that although they were generally happy with the opportunity to undertake training to become lead deliverers, the restricted timeframe to undertake the training was a significant issue due to limited opportunity to run and present at workshops, particularly in some regions.

The key project recommendation is for MLA to provide ongoing support for EDGE Deliverers, trainee deliverers and extension providers in northern Australia to continue on their learning journey which will flow onto providing support to producers to continue on their learning journey leading to effective practice change.

This project was successful in meeting its objectives and milestones, and provides a basis for continued delivery of the highly regarded EDGE workshops using high calibre Lead Deliverers.

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## 1 Background

MLA's *EDGENetwork*<sup>®</sup> (EDGE) offers professional and practical learning opportunities to help producers gain knowledge and develop skills necessary to improve their livestock enterprises.

The EDGE workshops were developed by industry specialists and tested by producers to guarantee their quality and relevance. They are the main avenue for the delivery of Research and Development (R&D) in northern Australia. The educational and informative format encourages producers to expand their current expertise, learn new skills, be motivated by other producers and access the latest information that will contribute to effective practice change in their business. To ensure professional workshop delivery, MLA approves workshop deliverers with exceptional technical expertise and adult learning skills.

Four 2–3 day EDGE workshops are applicable to northern Australia grazing systems (*Nutrition EDGE, Breeding EDGE, Grazing land management EDGE and Business EDGE*). Three of these workshops were recently reviewed and updated (E.IFL.1302 Review and update of FutureBeef extension training packages). Additionally, a new one-day workshop, *Grazing fundamentals*, was developed to address the overlap between the *Grazing land management EDGE* and *Nutrition EDGE* workshops with regards to core grazing land management principles. *Grazing fundamentals* gives deliverers the option of presenting it as a stand-alone workshop or as a modular component of the EDGE workshop suite.

This project addressed:

1. The urgent need to update current MLA-approved deliverers in the revised EDGE workshops and the new *Grazing fundamentals* workshop.
2. The lack of deliverers for specific EDGE packages and to service priority regional gaps in northern Australia by identifying and training six new EDGE deliverers.
3. The need to continuously develop the professional capacity of private and public service extension providers to the northern red meat industry in the understanding of core 'EDGE principles', promotion of the *EDGENetwork* to clients, and use the core 'EDGE principles' in their own work. This training will greatly extend the reach of MLA's *EDGENetwork* investment, as the early to mid-career extension officers will be able to: (a) apply the core 'EDGE principles' in their extension roles, e.g. explain key concepts to clients to help support practice change, (b) for a number of skilled extension officers, begin on a training pathway towards future delivery of EDGE workshops, and (c) promote EDGE workshops and the Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) program to producers.

## 2 Project objectives

The project objectives were:

1. Current MLA-approved EDGE deliverers updated in the content and delivery of the recently revised *Grazing land management EDGE, Nutrition EDGE and Breeding EDGE* workshops and the new *Grazing fundamentals* workshop.
2. Six new EDGE deliverers identified and trained to address the lack of deliverers for specific EDGE packages and to service priority regional gaps across northern Australia.
3. Fifty to sixty early and mid-career extension officers (public, private and non-governmental organisation [NGO]) trained/updated in the core grazing land management, nutrition, breeding and business principles using EDGE workshops.

### 3 Project delivery and evaluation

Linked to the project objectives, the project had three main activities:

1. Activity 1: Current MLA-approved EDGE deliverers updated in the content and delivery of the recently revised *Grazing land management EDGE*, *Nutrition EDGE* and *Breeding EDGE* workshops and the new *Grazing fundamentals* workshop.
2. Activity 2: Six new EDGE deliverers were identified and trained to address the lack of deliverers for specific EDGE packages and to service priority regional gaps across northern Australia.
3. Activity 3: Fifty to sixty early and mid-career extension officers (public, private and non-governmental organisation [NGO]) were trained/updated in the core grazing land management, nutrition, breeding and business principles using EDGE workshops.

#### 3.1 Activity 1: Bringing current EDGE deliverers up to speed with revised packages

The objective of Activity 1 was to update current MLA-approved EDGE deliverers in the content and delivery of the revised *Grazing land Management EDGE*, *Nutrition EDGE* and *Breeding EDGE* workshops and the new *Grazing fundamentals* workshop. *Business EDGE* was not covered in this activity.

Current EDGE deliverers were invited to attend a workshop in Brisbane held at the Watermark Hotel, Spring Hill, 19 to 21 July 2017. MLA set the requirement that to remain an approved Lead Deliverer that they must attend the workshop. Some 'inactive' EDGE deliverers choose not to attend and forfeited being approved EDGE Lead Deliverers.

Workshop participants included nine current deliverers: Jenny Milson, Damien O'Sullivan, Bob Shepherd, Roger Sneath, Megan Willis, Jill Alexander, Désirée Jackson, Felicity Hamlyn-Hill and Dionne Walsh. And five EDGE coordinators / project leaders: Jane Wightman, Liz Allen, Steven Bray, Rebecca Farrell and Felicity McIntosh.

Apologies were received from eight deliverers: Bernie English, Brigid Nelson, Rebecca Gunther, Col Paton, Alan Laing, Trudi Oxley, Joe Rolfe and Kay Taylor.

Key people who were responsible for revising the EDGE package (Jill Aisthorpe, Desiree Jackson and Felicity Hamlyn-Hill) were contracted to:

- Describe how 'their' package fits with and links to the other EDGE packages.
- Outline new content.
- Outline and demonstrate new delivery processes.
- Outline pre-preparation required.
- Highlight issues which people need to keep in mind when delivering the new packages.
- Presenters were encouraged to include at least one hands-on activity for participants.
- Allow plenty of time for discussion and questions.

### 3.1.1 Activity 1 outcomes

Activity 1 was successfully completed. On average, participants rated the overall workshop:

- 8.2/10 for content
- 8.4/10 for delivery
- 8.1/10 for effectiveness.

Four participants separately identified the quality and talent of deliverers, package content and passion for EDGE in response to the question ‘What are the three most important things that you learnt?’ Ten out of 13 responses to the question ‘What were the best aspects of the workshop?’ were about meeting as a group, face-to-face, discussion between and learning from peers. The opportunity to cover all packages, not just the ones they deliver, was also important.

Specific recommendations from participants to improve the workshop were:

- I would like to see *Business EDGE* ‘brought into the fold’ – I understand that these packages have had a rewrite/review but I would like there to be more effort made to integrate future initiatives (e.g. new deliverers, the 50–60 cohort) with *Business EDGE’s* needs too.
- Need a good ½ day (or more) on Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) program.
- Suspect ideally deliverers not involved in this workshop and in the package updates will need to co-deliver their first workshop to remain a Lead deliverer.

Since the workshop, deliverers who were not able to attend were informed of the process to ‘catch-up’ to remain an MLA approved EDGE deliverer. Three additional deliverers have since co-delivered a workshop and remain an EDGE deliverer for at least one workshop (Rebecca Gunther, Col Paton and Trudi Oxley).

## 3.2 Activity 2: Selecting and training new deliverers

The objective of Activity 2 was six new EDGE lead deliverers identified and trained to address the lack of lead deliverers for specific EDGE packages and to service priority regional gaps across northern Australia.

### 3.2.1 Selection of trainees

Following a prioritisation process, MLA identified that **six** new lead deliverers were required for the following packages and regions as a priority. New EDGE deliverers can be based, and also operate in areas not identified as a priority. The number of new deliverers required for each package ranges from two to three to provide flexibility depending on the applicants, however the target was **six** new deliverers across all packages.

- *Nutrition EDGE*: 2–3 deliverers servicing the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia
- *Breeding EDGE*: 2–3 deliverers servicing the Northern Territory, northern Western Australia and Queensland
- *Grazing land management EDGE* and *Grazing fundamentals*: 2–3 deliverers servicing the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia and Queensland.

Potential trainees were identified through a nomination process which briefly outlined the expertise and experience of the nominee in relation to delivering an EDGE workshop. Nominations were

supported by at least two experienced personnel (e.g. current EDGE deliverers). Thirty nominations were received from government and private extension providers to the northern grazing industries, with nominees from Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. All nominees had relevant expertise and experience and were sent a terms-of-reference (TOR).

The TOR (approved by MLA) outlined the training process and had six selection criteria which needed to be addressed by the applicants. Applicants were also required to provide a Curriculum Vitae and a referee. Ten applications addressing the TOR were received. The applications were reviewed by MLA and DAF. All applicants were deemed as suitable for undertaking the EDGE Lead Deliverer training. Following agreement with MLA, all applicants were accepted, negating the need for a formal selection panel process. This number of applicants was higher than the six target, but allowed for a safety margin for trainees not completing the training or not being recommended to become a lead deliverer.

There was a reasonable distribution of applicants from across northern Australia and from both private and public providers (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1 Distribution of applicants undertaking training to become EDGE Lead deliverers. GLM – Grazing Land Management

<b>Workshop</b>	<b>Northern Territory</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>	<b>Queensland</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Nutrition EDGE</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Breeding EDGE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>GLM and Grazing Fundamentals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>

Table 2 Distribution of applicants undertaking training to become EDGE Lead deliverers from Private and Public sector providers. Note: two State/Territory Government applicants have since left their organisation during the training period and have become private providers increasing the Private total to 5.

<b>Workshop</b>	<b>Northern Territory</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>	<b>Queensland</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Private</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>State/Territory Govt</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>

### **3.2.2 Training/mentoring process**

The successful applicants participated in the following MLA approved training process which involved:

1. The successful applicant (trainee) matched with an experienced approved deliverer as a mentor.
2. Trainee attends a full EDGE workshop as participant.
3. Trainee attends a meeting with the mentor to organise an upcoming workshop and discuss delivery processes.
4. Trainee co-delivers at least two workshops with approved lead deliverers.
5. The mentor evaluates the trainee and provides a recommendation to MLA of the trainees' ability and further training that may be required.
6. MLA reviews the evaluation and recommendation, and if acceptable to MLA, will offer the trainee an MLA Deed of Agreement or advise on future training requirements.

Initially this process was expected to be completed by 15 June 2018, however, due to difficulty in attracting sufficient workshop attendees in some areas and the impact of drought in Queensland, the process was extended to finish in December 2018 (Deed of Variation approved by MLA).

Nine mentor evaluation and recommendations were submitted to MLA (only one trainee did not complete the training due to personal reasons). Recommendations from the mentors ranged from 'Support Standard' to 'Deliverer Standard'. The MLA review and decision based on the recommendations is underway.

### **3.2.3 Evaluation of process by the trainees**

Evaluation questionnaires completed by the trainees gave the overall program 8 out of 10 for satisfaction. Most trainees commented that they appreciated the opportunity, with the main concern being the short timeframe to co-deliver the required number of workshops.

Most trainees were happy with the training and mentoring process, match with their mentor and training and mentoring provided by their mentor (average 9 out of 10).

About half the trainees had some concerns with the evaluation process, for example 'I wasn't ever quite sure of the criteria against which I was being assessed' and 'I have no idea if there are areas of



my training in which I require improvement ....or if my current knowledge is sufficient....'. There was a common concern with the time it has taken from the submission of mentor recommendations, until advised of the outcome by MLA (3 - 8 months).

Additionally it was highlighted by some trainees that this is a learning journey (requiring more than presenting at two workshops) and that ongoing financial support is required (particularly for privates not supported by a Government Department or NGO).

In summary, the most common concern was the short timeframe of the training and the difficulty in running enough profitable workshops to support the training, particularly in more remote regions with a lower number of grazing businesses.

### **3.2.4 Evaluation of process by the mentors**

Three mentors provided written feedback on the process, with the mentors rating the overall program satisfaction as 7 out of 10. The trainee nomination and application process was rated 8 out of 10 with the concise application form seen as a 'good way to go', however, one mentor indicated that they felt one accepted trainee was not suitable and they felt they did not have enough input into the trainee selection.

The training and mentoring process was rated fairly low at 6 out of 10. Reasons given were the short timeframe to run enough profitable workshops (workshops with enough paying participants) to enable the training (i.e. trainee to co-deliver). However, allowing trainees to co-deliver at commercially priced (charged) workshops was a concern as some mistakes were made by the trainees, which is not good when producers are being charged premium prices for a premium product. Co-delivering at two workshops was regarded as not enough, with more delivery experience required by most trainees to enable them to learn and benefit from the evaluation process.

Communication and feedback between mentors, trainees, project co-ordinators and MLA were seen as issues. A couple of suggestions/examples include:

- To have a standard form to fill out after each workshop for the mentor/trainer to give to the trainees (although this was verbalised), which could also be used in the final evaluation.
- Insufficient feedback (or updates) from project managers about how trainees are going, which trainees passed their training and are now accredited, and what additional support (if any) is needed by these new deliverers and what happens next for those who haven't yet reached the required standard.

Despite some concerns, it was acknowledged that the investment in training was a positive and should not be wasted. The training process should be ongoing so that trainees are given an opportunity to eventually progress to sole deliverer status. Multi-deliverer workshops are recommended for new deliverers, to capitalise on the strengths of different deliverers.

### **3.2.5 Additional observations from the project co-ordinator**

Training and accrediting additional EDGE deliverers is not a quick or cheap process. Additionally, the current EDGE deliverers are the result of a long history, with current EDGE deliverers being highly experienced and have been 'subjected' to many qualifying activities over 15 years. Therefore, it should be expected that training of new EDGE deliverers will take time and require ongoing support with these trainees being on a learning journey. MLA should be applauded for investing in training to ensure succession of EDGE deliverers.

There are some additional concerns with the training process which have not been highlighted by the formal mentor feedback. These include:

- Current lead deliverers were asked to train new deliverers, which means the current deliverers were expected to essentially train their future business competition (this is particularly an issue for the private providers).
- The time and energy required to mentor and support the trainees was more than the mentors had predicted and therefore they felt they had 'under-quoted'.
- The focus on getting more lead deliverers in more regional areas of northern Australia is potentially flawed, due to the lack of 'market' in those regions (not enough grazing businesses). (The market for more workshops is saturated after delivery of only two or three workshops for the next few years).
- The expectation that the project co-ordinator needed to provide more timely communication on the outcome of the trainee training and evaluation when that was the responsibility of MLA.

### **3.3 Report on Activity 3: Workshop for 50-60 early and mid-career extension officers**

The objective of Activity 3 was to train up to 60 early and mid-career extension providers (public, private and NGO) in the core grazing land management, nutrition, breeding and business principles using EDGE workshops.

Activity 3 was undertaken from 27 November to 1 December 2017 in Rockhampton, Queensland.

The training program included all participants undertaking the one-day *Grazing fundamentals* workshop followed by the two- or three-day EDGE workshop of their choice (*Breeding, Business, Grazing land management* or *Nutrition*). The program consisted of:

**Day 1:** *Grazing fundamentals* to give trainees an understanding of the underpinning influences on carrying capacity – including those that can't be controlled such as climate, location, land type – and those that can be influenced such as land condition and diet quality. Management decisions and strategies in other subsequent EDGE workshops then have more relevance and the links between packages will be more obvious. For example, better understanding the importance of land condition and establishing decision dates will help create management calendars across nutrition and breeding.

**Days 2, 3 and 4:** trainees undertake an EDGE workshop of their choice (either *Grazing land management EDGE, Nutrition EDGE, Breeding EDGE* or *Business EDGE*) (approx. 15 participants per workshop). MLA, as owner of EDGENetwork, explained to the early and mid-career extension officers any limitations to the use of EDGE materials, and the use of *Grazing fundamentals* as a feeder activity and the other EDGENetwork workshops in MLA's Profitable Grazing Systems Adoption program.

The training program included a dinner and social activities on one night to encourage interaction and the building of a community of extension providers across northern Australia.

### 3.3.1 Engagement of participants and attendance

The project team identified 177 northern Australia beef industry service providers including private consultants, state and territory government extension staff and natural resource management/catchment group staff from Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. An Expression of Interest (EOI) was sent to inform potential participants of the objectives of the workshop and the benefits to them, their work or businesses and their clients. The EOI also explained the need for the application process due to finite funding available for the activity and understandable requirement to ensure value for money for the funders and participants. A registration fee of \$300 per person (including GST) was charged to cover venue hire and catering.

Sixty-four applications were received, reviewed by the project team and accepted. These were distributed almost evenly between the four workshops.

The final number of Activity 3 participants was 55 representing 17 different businesses/organisations. The number of participants by workshop were: 14 (25%) for *Breeding EDGE*, 12 (22%) for *Business EDGE*, 18 (33%) for *Grazing land management EDGE* and 11 (20%) for *Nutrition EDGE*. An additional 11 presenters, project and MLA personnel participated in the event. There was a good distribution of participants with years of experience, for the State and Territories and from service provider sectors achieving activity objectives (Table 3).

Table 3 Distribution of service providers attending the EDGE workshops in Rockhampton.

Experience (Years)		State		Govt, NRM, Private, Education	
0 to 10	68%	Northern Territory	8%	Education	3%
11 to 20	26%	Queensland	85%	Govt NT	6%
More than 20	6%	Western Australia	6%	Govt Qld	48%
				Govt WA	3%
				NRM	24%
				Private	15%

### 3.3.2 Activity 3 training evaluation

Participants rated the training activity highly with 66% of participants indicating that they planned to make changes to their business/work as a direct result of attending the Grazing Fundamentals workshop (Fig. 1 and Table 4), while 73-90% of participants indicated that they planned to make changes to their business/work as a direct result of attending the core EDGE Workshops (Fig. 1 and Table 4). This was a good result given the select focus on northern Australian professional extension service providers.

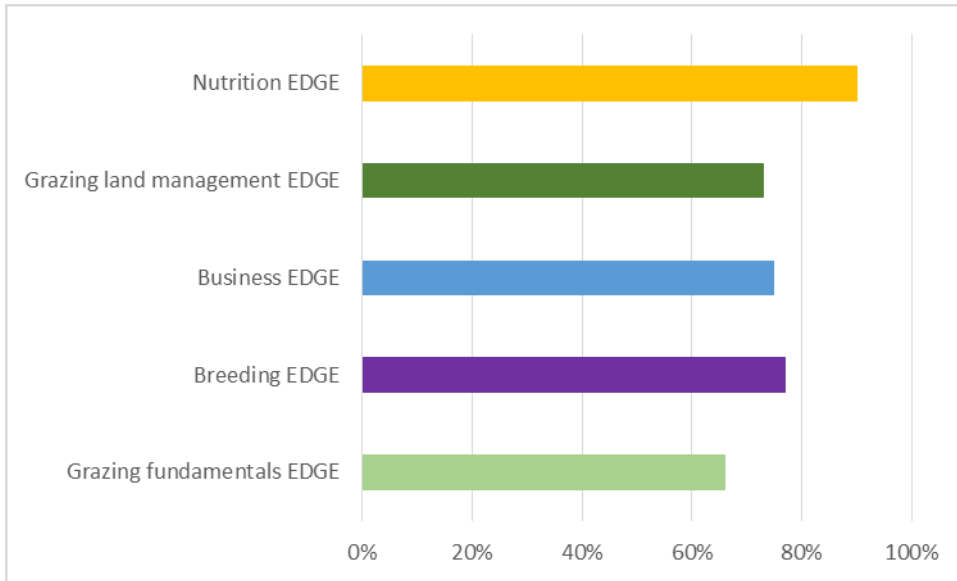


Fig. 1. The percentage of early and mid-career service provider participants planning to make changes to their business/work as a direct result of attending EDGE workshops as part of EDGE training in Rockhampton.

Table 4 Evaluation statistics for the EDGE workshops held in Rockhampton for early and mid-career service providers.

Activity	Grazing fundamentals	Breeding EDGE	Business EDGE	Grazing land management EDGE	Nutrition EDGE
Participants rated their satisfaction with the workshop overall as...	8.8 / 10	8.9 / 10	9.2 / 10	9.1 / 10	9.7 / 10
Participants rated the value of the workshop in improving their knowledge to manage their businesses as...	8.3 / 10	8.7 / 10	8.8 / 10	8.9 / 10	9.4 / 10
Participants rated the delivery of the workshop as...	9.5 / 10	8.8 / 10	9.5 / 10	9.5 / 10	9.8 / 10
Participants rated their increase in understanding and/or skills about the topics covered during the workshop as...	5.9 / 10	7.8 / 10	7.6 / 10	8.1 / 10	8.8 / 10
Participants rated the extent to which the information covered reinforced things they were already doing as...	9.0 / 10	8.4 / 10	8.7 / 10	9.1 / 10	9.3 / 10
The percentage of participants planning to make changes to their business/work as a direct result of attending this EDGE workshop	66%	77%	75%	73%	90%

### 3.3.3 Activity 3 follow-up survey

Following the post-workshop survey, an online SurveyMonkey survey was undertaken 10 months after the event. This survey indicated the event was highly regarded with a rating of 8.6 out of 10 to the question “Overall how satisfied were you with the EDGE training workshop” (Table 5). Seventy-nine percent of participants indicated that they have undertaken a specific action as a result of participating in the workshop and 61% have made a practice change to their business/work as a result of participating in the workshop.

Table 5 Activity 3 survey results 10 months after EDGE workshop for early and mid-career service providers in Rockhampton.

Question	Rating
Overall how satisfied were you with the EDGE training workshop?	8.6/10
Have you taken a specific action, or actions, as a result of participating in the workshop?	Yes 79% No 21%
Have you made a change in practice, or practices, in your business or work as a result of participating in the workshop?	Yes 61% No 39%

## 4 Conclusions/recommendations

EDGENetwork workshops are the premier MLA training workshops for the grazing industries in northern Australia to support producer practice change. Ongoing investment is required by MLA to ensure the workshops include the best available science, are delivered by experienced, highly credible deliverers and continue to be recognised as premier education packages representing good value for producer investment in time and workshop costs. This MLA investment in EDGE, in collaboration with DAF, successfully achieved its objectives to:

1. Update current MLA-approved EDGE deliverers in the content and delivery of the recently revised *Grazing land management EDGE*, *Nutrition EDGE* and *Breeding EDGE* workshops and the new *Grazing fundamentals* workshop.
2. Identified and trained six new EDGE deliverers to address the lack of deliverers for specific EDGE packages and to service priority regional gaps across northern Australia.
3. Train and update fifty to sixty early and mid-career extension officers (public, private and non-governmental organisation [NGO]) in the core grazing land management, nutrition, breeding and business principles using EDGE workshops.

These training opportunities were welcomed by the participants of the three activities and provided good satisfaction ratings.

The key project recommendation is for MLA to provide ongoing support for EDGE Deliverers, trainee deliverers and extension providers in northern Australia to continue on their learning journey which will flow onto providing support to producers to continue on their learning journey leading to effective practice change. The training process takes time, therefore activities should not be ‘rushed’ to ensure training processes achieve their potential.