

Expressions of Interest: *Future Feedbase MDC Partnership Program*

MLA Donor Company Limited (MDC) is a fully-owned subsidiary of Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA). MDC accelerates innovation across the value chain so the Australian red meat and livestock industry can remain competitive on the world stage.

It does this by attracting commercial investment from individual enterprises and others that share a mutual interest to co-invest in innovation that will benefit the industry.

The Australian Government matches voluntary partner contributions (up to 50%) through MDC, where eligible projects deliver outcomes that address broader industry and/or government priorities and benefit the entire industry.

MDC attracts investment from every part of the red meat and livestock value chain, including processors, value-adders, breed societies, large pastoral companies, international collaborators, universities, research providers and technology providers. MDC works in partnership with these value chain partners to deliver products and services to the Australian red meat industry.

Summary

MDC is seeking expressions of interest from individuals, organisations or project teams to co-invest in the Future Feedbase MDC Partnership Program.

MDC is looking to strategically partner with Australian and international collaborators with the capability to conduct projects to inform and undertake feedbase research and delivery options by geographic zone.

Proposals should outline innovative approaches that:

- address feedgaps and contribute to lifting the sustainable carrying capacity by consulting with producers on the design, implementation and interpretation of the science and undertaking (or using prior) pre-experimental modelling/testing, and
- optimise the use of forage available on the whole farm to meet animal enterprise needs, the market specifications for those enterprises and maintain/improve the natural resource base.

In addition to ensuring that project outcomes achieve a tangible impact, proposals that also support growing industry capability and capacity (R&D) for the future growth of the red meat industry will be considered favourably.

Projects that can be implemented at scale (geographically) will also be viewed favourably.

Background

To meet future global demand for meat, the opportunity for the Australian livestock industries is to increase production whilst meeting the various market specifications and requirements. This will require optimisation of the forage resource proportionate with animal numbers – often called “sustainable intensification”. For longevity of an industry (and business), the supporting resource base for animal production will require careful management. Innovative approaches to lifting sustainable carrying capacity within the contexts of a variable and changing climate, and

accommodating regional feed gaps are key challenges for the industry.

Meat & Livestock Australia has engaged researchers, consultants and producers in consultation around the future gaps in feedbase research, development and adoption (RD&A). The five key gaps identified were: Addressing feed gaps; Stable production systems; Long term resilience; RD&A capacity and capability; and Mixed farming systems.

Objective

MDC is seeking expressions of interest from local and international co-investors to conduct RD&A activities that:

- identify approaches that will enable a sustained increase in carrying capacity from a focus on optimisation of the available forage sources and address regional feedgaps
- demonstrate and extend known approaches that have been shown to sustainably increase carrying capacity.

Collaboration is encouraged across research agencies, private sector deliverers (and their in-service), regional NRM bodies and producer groups or networks. Inclusion of participatory research and extension is encouraged.

1) Feedbase - Component projects are to address:

- **Feed gaps – providing Quality and Quantity in forage supply when needed** Where sustainable increases in carrying capacity can be demonstrated, address modifications to the feedbase to provide the required quality and quantity of forage when needed including:
 - Development of new pasture cultivars/species through conventional and novel breeding techniques, focusing on drought tolerance, persistence and resilience
- **Stable production systems:** Where sustainable increases in carrying capacity can be demonstrated by feedbase modification, investigate actions to deliver stable grass-legume pasture combinations in the production system to meet enterprise objectives, including:
 - Management strategies for pasture legumes including improved nodulation options, rhizobia strains and strategies for re-inoculation of legumes in the pasture
- **Addressing soil constraints** at scale - Soil induced constraints on pasture productivity may be physical, biological or chemical, impacting on plant production.
- **Long term resilience of the production system** - Innovation for climate change, seasonal variability and risk management on farm, grazing management
- Activities that support **research, extension and producer capacity to achieve adoption** of core actions that underpin management of a sustainable increase in carrying capacity (tools, technologies, farm system modelling, demonstration, training and understanding).

2) Mixed farming systems - Component projects are to address:

- **Feedbase diversity** - Producers grow enough of the right feed, at the right time to optimise their crop and livestock productivity goals. How can a producer capture the opportunities to achieve the best net benefit to their business from a diverse feedbase?
- **Grazing crops** - Producers make informed decisions on utilisation of crops for grazing and grain to optimise farm profit and resilience. Whole farm systems analysis that demonstrates

the benefits of utilising grazing crops for different mixed farming systems (location specific, livestock enterprise, pasture type)

- **Package information or redesign existing packages** (eg from Grain and Graze) to better reflect the whole farm implications of utilising grazing crops in mixed farming systems, with regional nuances
- **Manage animal production systems to optimise opportunities presented by mixed farming systems**
- **Use of labour and labour saving technologies** that optimise farm profit and resilience
- **Advisor skills** The Australian mixed farming industry has advisors with capability and confidence to support producers to make whole farm decisions. This can include development of a “Livestock 1.01 for cropping advisors” and a “Cropping 1.01 for livestock advisors”.

This program of work develops existing feedbase investments and supports national implementation of a next phase of RD&A in feedbase production and utilisation.

Outputs

Outputs specific to each project must be clearly identified in the proposal and include:

- research activities that can deliver stable grass-legume pasture production systems to meet enterprise objectives
- on farm technologies, decision support, delivery approaches that support research, extension and producer capacity to achieve adoption of core actions that underpin management of a sustainable increase in carrying capacity
- “cost benefit” analysis of the modification to underpin a compelling case for change. The cost benefit analysis must address multiple drivers for change – economic, environmental, social (workload, labour efficiency, fit with enterprise mix etc.)

Outputs can include, but are not limited to: Modelling, market research, delivery packages including re-design of existing packages, case studies including video and interactive case studies, and design of delivery processes.

Proposal guidelines and budget

All proposals for consideration for MDC co-investment will need to outline how the project encompasses a design thinking approach, to ensure that it:

- focusses on customer needs, with use case validated throughout project milestones (desirability)
- delivers technically feasible solutions tested throughout project milestones (feasibility)
- delivers a viable business model, demonstrating how industry impact will be achieved (viability).

All co-investment proposals that qualify for matching funding will be considered under MDC’s standard eligibility criteria available on the MDC website at www.mla.com.au/mdc

Project budgets and timeframes should be reflective of the scope of work contained in the project proposal.

MDC can fund a maximum of 50% of the project. The remaining funds will be provided by your company and other eligible funding partners. MDC is not able to match funds sourced from other Australian Federal Government programs and may be able to match (in limited cases) funds from Australian State Governments.

The total source of funds must match the expenditure and milestones totals, including project access fees. The project access fee is currently either 8% or 12% of the net value of the project. Industry levy payers will pay 8% for their project access fee. All other partners will pay a 12% access fee.

Typically, capital expenditure cannot be funded by MDC, however, limited leasing of equipment may be allowed for the purpose of R&D and proof-of-concept.

Confidentiality and intellectual property

Successful projects will be funded via matching co-investment through MDC.

Applicants must identify any background intellectual property (IP) they bring to the project.

All data and cited references must be acknowledged appropriately in the final publication and it is the sole responsibility of the applicant to ensure copyright laws are not breached.

Where further information is available which may assist the successful applicant in meeting the requirements of the project, MDC will provide such information to the successful applicant.

The successful applicant will be required to enter into a standard agreement with MDC.

MDC/MLA will share and discuss this proposal with producers, technical experts, other research organisations and research and development corporations. Please acknowledge this freedom to operate.

To apply

Complete the [MDC Application Form](#) and submit it electronically to MDC at: mdc@mla.com.au

Please refer to the [Application form instructions](#).

Proposals will be acknowledged and recorded on the MDC project register.

Further information

If you have questions, contact:
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