



# Final report

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## Understanding the value of livestock advisors on-farm

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## Abstract

Little data is available relating to the value that livestock advisors provide to the red meat industry. This Project sought to improve the understanding of the value of advisors in the sector.

An in-depth survey of 19 Livestock Producer businesses was undertaken to gain insights into how they work with advisors, practice change and impacts resulting from advisor input, and associated attribution of improvements to advisors. This allowed assessment of the overall value delivered by advisors.

The project found that 100% of respondents find advisors broadly beneficial to their business, across a range of decision-making activities (from problem definition and resolution to solution implementation, continuous improvement and as an ongoing sounding board).

Advisors were pivotal in producers delivering a range of material tangible impacts (such as production, financial impacts) but importantly extensive intangible impacts (such as confidence, wellbeing). The assessment of value was considered highly personal, but with identified improvements being attributed on average 80% to the support of the advisor, advisors are highly valued by red meat producer respondents and are a strategic industry asset.

The project will support the development of a future “Advisor Value Proposition”, intended to improve the utilisation of advisors across the red meat industry.

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## Executive summary

### Background

While it is generally recognised that livestock advisors provide a valuable contribution to the overall livestock sector, little data exists on what that value actually is.

This lack of understanding around the value of an advisor has also been proposed as a contributor to a low utilisation of advisors in the red meat sector (as compared to other sectors such as grains and cotton) because a compelling value proposition has not been clearly articulated to end-users (i.e. producers).

The “Value of an Advisor to the Livestock Sector Project” (the Project) seeks to improve the understanding of the impacts (i.e. the benefits and value) of advisors in the red meat industry.

This will support future development of an “advisor value proposition” to encourage red meat producers to appropriately use advisors, and also to enhance the attractiveness of the sector to prospective advisor professionals.

### Objectives

The key objective of the Project is to provide an improved and more defined understanding of the “Value” that advisors provide the red meat industry, across the Triple Bottom Line (Economic, Social, Environmental). This was achieved by developing and testing a framework that is nationally relevant and can be subsequently used to further evaluate the value of advisors beyond this project.

### Methodology

The methodology included:

- A literature review (of relevant information, previous studies etc)
- Establish a Project Reference Group (PRG) to provide strategic input and guidance
- Engage with the PRG and “Informed Persons” to better understand how producers work with advisors and potential challenges in developing metrics and assigning attribution
- Develop and implement a data gathering approach – based on guided, open conversations around specific examples of advisor support and associated practice change, then interviews with a Project Study Group (PSG), representative of the Australian red meat production sector; and
- Provide a final report to MLA and a briefing paper to the PRG.

### Results/key findings

A summary of the results and key findings:

- Producers seek out *advisor support for a variety of reasons*, sometimes in response to an emerging problem or a crisis, other times as part of continuous improvement or to gain support during “business-as-usual”
- *Advisors support producers across the full lifecycle of decision making*, from problem definition, solution definition and implementation to continuous improvement and use as a sounding board.

- Often *a suite of advisors are used* – on occasions to address complex problems and often, to fulfil specific technical requirements of the business and to fill skill gaps exhibited by the business owners and the team.
- Sometimes advisor led impact is clearly defined: i.e. advisor input results in specific practice change, over a defined period, with a measurable impact. However, *often advisor input is part of a bigger business change process*, possibly with multiple other advisors providing support, other dependent changes to be delivered before practice change / impact is seen, coupled with the complexities around weather, seasonality, family dynamics and so on.
- Impacts resulting from practice change were both *tangible* (i.e. a measurable change in a production related metric such as branding rates, mortality, revenue etc) and *intangible* (improved confidence in decision-making, subject-matter knowledge, well-being / “sleep-at-night” factor).
- Examples of *tangible impacts* (as reported by respondents<sup>1</sup>) include:
  - “Increase in branding rate from 60% to 70% over 5 years (increase of 2,300 calves) - resulted in approximately \$1.725M revenue increase (70% attribution to advisors)”
  - “Decrease in mortality rate from 2% down to 0.25% over 10,000 head cattle per year - resulted in approximately \$75K revenue increase (80% attribution to advisor)”
  - “Successful succession transition – shift in equity from 70:30 (parents to next generation) to 30:70. Prevented business closure and asset sell-off, enabled business growth to be activated and delivery to 5-year business plan (90% attribution to advisors).”
- Examples of commentary around *intangible impacts* include:
  - “While things don’t look great now (due to poor season), I’m much more at ease knowing we have done everything we can (supported by advice from advisor), and I’m hugely confident when things improve, we’ll be ready to capitalise and take off”.
  - “I felt like I knew what to do, but it was good to have it confirmed by the advisor, and now I’m very confident we are on the right track, and with future decisions too.”
  - “If I think about where we were at 3 years ago (headspace, stress levels, our relationship) to where we are now, it’s night and day. I’m actually glad I’ve had a chance to reflect on it through this conversation.”
- In many cases, producers engage advisors to deliver tangible practice change and impact. Often however the intangibles (confidence, sounding board, certainty around decisions, “being able to sleep at night”) were somewhat unintended benefits.
- When asked about level of improvement in certain *intangible areas* from working with advisors, on average producers reported the following (on a scale of 0-10; with 0 = no improvement and 10 = significant improvement):

Area	Average rating (out of 10)
Personal confidence and general wellbeing:	8.1
Confidence in decision making:	8.3
Confidence and ability to grow the business:	8.5
Confidence and ability in running the business:	8.2

<sup>1</sup> Any impacts documented in the projects are as reported by respondents during interviews. The project team has not validated or verified the accuracy or reasonableness of reported impacts.

Area	Average rating (out of 10)
Management of production elements:	8.2
Management of environmental elements: *	5.8
Management of animal wellbeing elements:	7.4
Personnel management: *	6.4
Technical / working knowledge:	7.8

(\* Note: Ratings for environmental and personnel elements were regarded as being outlier practice change areas and were excluded from the summary rating.)

- When considering *the level of improvement to the business, due to the strategic intangible impacts of working with advisors, the average rating was 8.1.*
- While the advisor-producer relationship is highly complex, Project Study Group respondents *attributed an average of 80% of the identified improvements to their advisor support.* This high average attribution rating highlights the weighting and value given by producers to the support of the advisor.
- *“Value” is also highly personal and specific, that varies according to business type and maturity, personality type and a range of other factors affecting the business owner and business operations. Some businesses who could not necessarily quantify the impact of an advisor, or may not have seen a measurable impact, still felt they received value from the support through the intangibles. In particular, this was through increased confidence in their decisions, or confirmation they were “on the right track”, or through knowledge they had someone else “in their corner”.*
- While some respondents were able to identify how they might formally measure Return-on-Investment, for most this was through *looking at the overall business financials* (in particular end of year financial position), but also a “gut feeling” (which captures both the tangible and intangible impacts).
- Many also noted that *“the cost of doing nothing was far more than the cost of getting support”* (at both the tangible and intangible levels).
- Accordingly, a *“one-size-fits-all” and highly prescriptive and quantifiable approach to measuring impact and value is unlikely to be feasible.* As one respondent commented *“it’s almost impossible to cut through the noise and define proxy metrics across all the variables”.*
- Respondents sought unbiased advice and insights and a majority paid fee-for-service to ensure transparency and integrity. The primary driver in their decision to use particular advisors was the experience, expertise, integrity and trust able to be placed in the advisor, based on the relationship built over time (many were longer term relationships based on mutual esteem best described as A Trusted Advisor relationship).

Further, this project was undertaken over a relatively short-timeframe, with the stated intention being to acquire high level data with a view to better understanding the impact, value, and other factors, which could lead to development of a value proposition and framework(s) aligned to the MLA frameworks.

### Benefits to industry

While there are challenges in measuring impact and attribution to advisors, there are substantial positive tangible and intangible impacts that justify the use of advisors by livestock producers.

These impacts extend to improved subject matter knowledge, improved confidence in decision-making, and confidence around running and growing a business. These impacts have potential far-reaching flow on effects into the wider industry, well beyond the specific advisor: producer engagement.

Livestock advisors could therefore be regarded as a strategic asset to support industry development.

This study has provided valuable data to support the development of a future “Advisor Value Proposition”. This is intended to increase the utilisation of advisors across the sector.

### **Future research and recommendations**

To more accurately understand the value that an advisor presents, to individual livestock producers and to red meat industry development (as a strategic industry asset), further work is proposed:

- Analyse the extent to which advisors are used and needed
- Understand and maximise the producer-advisor relationship
- Develop a value proposition(s) targeted to particular producer segments
- Define the ‘value’ for the value proposition – with a particular focus on producers, MLA and advisors themselves (as the three key beneficiaries of the value proposition)
- Create a more robust understanding of the tangible financial values – as the likely entry point for greater producer use of advisors
- Determine how to maximise the value from livestock agents – due to their significant geographic footprint and as a primary advisor interface with producers
- Enhance the professionalism of livestock agents (and other advisors) – to support increased industry professionalism
- Maximise the value of advisors to younger, more professional producers – representing the industry’s future (with their stronger ‘can-do’, professional business-like mindset)
- Examine the extent to which environmental advisors are available to meet current and emerging needs; and
- Examine and more fully understand ‘confidence’ as a key intangible impact – being a significant outcome of the trusted advisor relationship with livestock producers, as well as a being a significant influence on producers’ decision-making process.

## Definitions

Term	Definition
Project Reference Group (PRG)	Group established to provide strategic guidance to the Project.
Project Study Group (PSG)	Group of producers who provided data based on replies to a standard set of questions in support of developing project data and findings.
Respondent / Participant	A PSG member who responded and actively participated in the project
Informed Persons	A subset of the PRG and the PSG, with which deeper engagement was undertaken to inform the project methodology.
Advisor	Defined by MLA as: anyone who provides advice to red meat producers as a core part of their role. This can include private consultants, public extension officers, agronomists, veterinarians, stock agents, genetic specialists, nutritionists, AI technicians, pregnancy scanners etc.
Producer	A red meat livestock producer.
Practice Change	The adoption of new or improved farming practices.
Impact	The measurable outcomes or effects resulting from those practice changes.
Impact – Tangible	A “physical” or measurable activity or change, most likely associated with production or financial aspects (i.e. change in costs / revenue / profit, change in branding rates, mortality, vaccination use, and so on).
Impact – Intangible	Typically a less “physical”, or less measurable and more qualitative in nature activity or change, often associated with a feeling or thinking (i.e. confidence, knowledge, wellbeing, support).
Attribution	The process of crediting an amount of change to the input of another, in this case an advisor.
Value	The importance, worth, or usefulness of something, in this case the support of an advisor.
‘Through the drum’	A supplier defrays the cost of advice by providing the services of an advisor(s) as part of their merchandise and production input supply.
Business as Usual (BAU)	Applying normal, daily practice without overly reassessing the extent to which it is fit for purpose in the face of change.
SME	Small to Medium Enterprise (a generic term used in this report).

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## 1 Background

While it's acknowledged that Livestock Advisors play an important role in the Australian livestock sector, there is a lack of evidence-based data that shows the actual impact, on-farm and beyond, attributable to the advice and support that advisors offer.

This lack of understanding around the value of an advisor has also been proposed as a contributing reason to a low utilisation of advisors in the red meat sector (as compared to other sectors such as grains and cotton). This is understood to be because a compelling value proposition has not been clearly articulated to end-users (i.e. producers).

The primary purpose of this “Value of an Advisor to the Livestock Sector Project” (the Project) is to improve the understanding of the impacts (i.e. the value or the benefits) of advisors in the red meat industry across the Triple Bottom Line (economic, environmental, social).

This will support MLA's future development of an “advisor value proposition” (outside this project scope) to encourage red meat producers (now called producers) to appropriately use advisors, and also to enhance the attractiveness of the sector to prospective advisor professionals.

## 2 Objectives

The overarching objective of the project was to improve the understanding of the impacts and value (triple bottom line focus) of red meat livestock advisors<sup>2</sup> across the red meat industry; to be achieved through:

- Developing, testing and validating a methodology to define and attribute the impact and value of advisors to producers, in alignment with MLA Frameworks and MLA's Privacy Policy and across the triple bottom line
- Defining value indicators of the value and benefits of advisors to red meat producers
- Improving the understanding of the impacts and value of red meat livestock advisors across the red meat industry
- Conducting an initial assessment of the impacts and value of advisors to producers.

The project outcome was to create, test and validate a methodology of defining the value of advisors, to red meat producers, MLA and the industry, based on current MLA Frameworks.

These objectives have been met.

The Key Findings have been validated with the Project Reference Group (refer Section 3.1.1 for more information) through submission of a summary briefing paper and their agreement to / comment on the key findings.

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<sup>2</sup> The Request for Tender document issued for the project refers to red meat livestock advisors as “anyone who provides advice to red meat producers as a core part of their role. This can include private consultants, public extension officers, agronomists, veterinarians, stock agents, genetic specialists, nutritionists, AI technicians, pregnancy scanners etc”. For clarity, these are referred to collectively as “Advisors” throughout this document.

### 3 Methodology

The project followed the methodology outlined below in Table 1 and further described in Section 3.1 onwards.

Table 1: Methodology

	Phase	Key activities
1	Project establishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of Project Reference Group and Project Study Group</li> </ul>
2	Literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desktop review of available information (key previous studies, MLA Frameworks)</li> </ul>
3	Data gathering methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement with “Informed Persons” to improve understanding of advisor:producer landscape</li> <li>Identification of metrics by which to assess impacts of an advisor to a red-meat producer</li> <li>Development of an approach to obtain data on practice change, impact and attribution</li> </ul>
4	Project Study Group interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews with Project Study Group to gather data</li> </ul>
5	Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary report development (this report)</li> </ul>

#### 3.1 Project establishment

During project establishment, a Project Reference Group and a Project Study Group were established. These groups are further described below.

##### 3.1.1 Project Reference Group

A Project Reference Group (PRG) was established as a strategic guiding forum to:

- Confirm the agreed project objectives and outcomes sought
- Provide input to, and confirm, the study group participants – to ensure as wide a representation as possible (given constraints on the project scope)
- Review and confirm the proposed methodology
- Provide input to and agree on the proposed value metrics.

Members of the PRG were chosen due to their geographic location, industry representation and skills and experience. Members are listed in Appendix 1.

##### 3.1.2 Project Study Group

The Project Study Group (PSG) refers to the group of producers to be engaged with during the Project to attain insights around advisor value and benefit.

To ensure the Project has national significance, selection of the PSG participants was critical. Accordingly, it was ensured there was a diverse representation across the various segments of the livestock sector. This included elements such as:

- Enterprise type (including livestock type)
- Geographic location / production system
- Business types (corporate vs family corporates vs SMEs)
- Age categories – particularly to capture any younger generation operators
- Business operator types (family operators, professional operators, returning younger professionals, etc.)
- Mindset and way of thinking about the benefit of advisors and their use.

The PSG comprised 19 participant livestock businesses. These businesses showed an appropriate representation across the above elements, therefore ensuring the data was drawn from a sufficient representative sample, to ensure national significance and meet project objectives. A summary of the PSG participants and their characteristics (de-identified) is included in Appendix 2.

The method for engaging with the PSG is further outlined in Section 3.3 below.

## 3.2 Literature Review

A literature review was undertaken and analysed a number of reports recommended by MLA as being key credible and available sources of insight into the use of advisors by producers.

MLA also noted that these reports had been commissioned for a range of reasons, including as final MLA project reports (evaluation and review data of MLA projects) as well as to better understand the role and contribution that advisors could make in the adoption of MLA and other Research and Development Corporation (RDC) research findings.

Items reviewed included:

- MLA Report: “Valuing the contribution of livestock advisors on the Red Meat Industry” (unpublished)
- MLA Report: “Livestock Advisor Essentials Program (2023)”
- MLA Report: “Livestock Advisor Updates (LAU) (2018-2023)”
- MLA “Triple Bottom Line Evaluation Framework” (29 May 2023)
- MLA Report: “Producer Outcomes Adoption Report (2023-2024)”
- MLA Extension Program “Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Measuring Attributable Adoption and Economic Impact” (Undated)
- “A review of global adoption practices and outcomes, and recommendations for implementation within the Australian Red Meat Industry” - Reichelt et al. (30 June 2022)
- “Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D - Farmer demand for agricultural extension services (Key Findings)” - Ruth Nettle et al (June 2018)
- Australian Beef Sustainability Framework - Annual Update 2024
- AgriFutures Australia Report: “Australian extension capacity and capability: A map and a gap analysis” - Enablers of Change, Scarlatti, Coutts J&R (October 2024)
- Redefining excellence in agribusiness advisory: the role of the rural advisor in the modern world - James Allen, 2023 Nuffield Scholar (April 2024).
- Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D; Project key findings. A project of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

(DAWR) Rural R&D for profit program, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.  
Nettle et al. 2018

Results of the literature review were submitted for Milestone 1 and are discussed further in Section 4 and Appendix 4.

Further literature was subsequently reviewed while developing the methodology and findings:

- Towards an Innovative Cotton Workforce: Measuring and Reporting the Value Of Capacity Building to Improve Cotton Industry Personnel Outcomes / ROI – Project CRDC 1701 – Coutts J and Stone G (2019)
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Continuation of Pilot Testing across the On-Farm R&D Area of MLA- Phase 4 - Internal report to MLA, Coutts, J and Stone G (June 2016)
- Maximising the Connection between Research, Development and Extension Providers and Agribusiness – RIRDC Publication 08/180 – Stone, G. (2009).

### 3.3 Data gathering approach

Development of the project methodology, to define metrics and gather data, followed an iterative approach.

#### 3.3.1 Initial methodology proposed at project commencement

Initially, a somewhat prescriptive methodology was considered, including:

1. Development of a defined and comprehensive list of metrics
2. Data to be gathered by following a defined and quantitative set of survey questions for the PSG, to ascertain:
  - Level of change per metric (i.e. “what was the change in metric ‘XYZ’ before working with an advisor, compared to after working with the advisor”); and
  - Attribution of that change to an advisor (i.e. “what are the discrete factors that contributed to the change, and how much of that change could you attribute to the advisor, ideally in quantitative terms”).

A preliminary set of metrics were developed initially, based on relevant information from the Literature Review, and using ABDI’s industry and past project knowledge. The *MLA Triple Bottom Line Framework* and the *MLA Extension Program Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Measuring Attributable Adoption and Economic Impact* were used as a basis for these metrics.

#### 3.3.2 Project Reference Group feedback

An initial meeting was held on 8 April 2025. During this meeting, the initial proposed project methodology was discussed for feedback. This included tabling the preliminary set of metrics and possible approaches to obtain / describe impact and attribution data.

In summary, PRG members supported the initial proposed methodology and approach at a high-level, however they discussed the significant challenges the project would likely encounter, primarily around:

- Variability in how advisors are used (types of advisors, how they are engaged, payment methods), when they are engaged (such as once-off when there is a problem vs continuous improvement or ongoing use)
- Determining relevant metrics regarding changes to practices on ground, the contribution advisors make to producer thinking and action; proxy metrics (a stand-in or substitute measurement that represents a harder-to-measure outcome); and
- Range of contributing factors to any change process (Such as the role of various advisors vs self-effort vs advisor effort vs influence of external factors such as weather, etc.) and therefore likely difficulty in defining attribution
- The specifics of the attribution process – and making it measurable.

There was some concern about being able to create a project framework which would dovetail with the MLA Frameworks; even to the extent of alignment with the current MLA metrics.

### 3.3.3 Informed Persons feedback

Following the development of the preliminary metrics, and considering feedback from the PRG meeting on 8 April 2025, deeper engagement was undertaken with a group of “Informed Persons”. This group comprised a subset of selected members of the PRG and the PSG (two advisors and two producers).

The purpose was to better understand the relationships with advisors, the circumstances via which advisors have been used, and types of impacts / benefits that might be experienced. Ultimately this was considered to provide a better understanding on what metrics could be appropriate, and how best to gather data on these metrics.

During discussions with Informed Persons, open conversations were undertaken around:

- What are the situations in which you have used advisors?
- Which advisors do you use?
- How did you work with those advisors / how did those advisors support you?
- What was the change that you experienced as a result of working with advisors?
- If you had to quantify that change, could you and if so, how?

Engagement with the Informed Persons indicated the following:

- The complexity of the relationships and utilisation of advisors was highlighted, supporting the views of the PRG around challenges to gather data
- This included the so called “noise” of the red meat industry operating environment including seasons, markets and business challenges
- Producers were often unable to easily articulate how they worked with advisors, which advisors, the correlation between advisor input and associated practice change, and what the spread of impact was, unless they were “taken back to the beginning and then on the journey”. This was achieved best in relation to specific case study examples
- There was substantial variation in how advisors were engaged and used (sometimes in response to a specific problem, sometimes as part of continuous improvement, other times as a result of ‘a general sense of unease that there was an emerging problem which needed to be defined and resolved’)

- There was concern that attempting to gather data on specific and detailed metrics would be regarded by respondents as problematic, unduly complex and unlikely to achieve the desired result.
- The proposed alternative was to conduct open conversations based on practical examples and introducing metrics when the opportunity arose. The purpose was to ensure the richness of discussion regarding the value and benefit of the advisor producer relationship. It was considered that more qualitative than quantitative data would be more relevant to the project objectives.
- During the open conversations, the interview team sought to tease out metric related data and insights then relate them back to the MLA Frameworks.
- It is noteworthy that this proved problematic and was inconsistent throughout the project (inability of producers / lack of time to gain consistent or meaningful data). However, it is notable that a surprising quantity of rich yet relevant data was gained.
- The impacts experienced were diverse. While advisors were generally engaged to support a tangible change process, in addition to seeing associated tangible impacts (i.e. production or financial related), Informed Person producers noted a range of intangible impacts too (i.e. improved confidence, access to a sounding board, improved wellbeing). When explored further, the significant value of the intangibles was more fully uncovered.
- When specific attribution to advisors was discussed with producers, (particularly economic and quantitative data), it was consistently noted by producer respondents that general inferences on attribution could be made, but specific attribution would be challenging (effectively being outside the scope of the phone interview process and requiring further considered calculations and review by respondents).

ABDI also engaged with noted Australian and international monitoring, evaluation and extension / adoption specialist, Dr Jeff Coutts, who indicated that an emerging and relevant field of social science and his research was 'confidence'. Dr Coutts noted that understanding 'levels of confidence' and their implications to decision-making and practice change (Coutts, J personal communication) is now emerging in his mind and others as a key determinant of success in making lasting practice change. Dr Coutts also provided key insights on approaches to measuring attribution that he has utilised in recent monitoring and evaluation activities.

### **3.3.4 Final data gathering methodology**

#### ***3.3.4.1 Data gathering style – interview questionnaire***

Based on the above, it was identified that open, conversational style interviews would be the most appropriate approach to gather data, where examples of working with advisors could be explored in more detail with the respondent. A detailed, metric-driven data capture approach would unlikely yield satisfactory results, instead categories of practice change were used to guide discussions (see section 3.3.4.2).

A questionnaire was developed to guide the interviews, with the following primary components:

- Business / personal characteristics – to enable segmentation<sup>3</sup> of respondents to understand how differences in business / personal characteristics may influence the approach to using advisors
- How livestock producers work with a range of advisors – which advisors, how they are engaged, how they support decision making
- Discussion of specific examples of working with advisors – what support was provided, what changed, what impacts were experienced, and how could changes be attributed to an advisor; and
- What are some other benefits also experienced from working with advisors – which may not have been the primary reason they were engaged.

This questionnaire is included in Appendix 3.

To acquire quantitative data, questions utilising the 0-10 Likert scale<sup>4</sup> were also incorporated.

### *3.3.4.2 Practice Change Areas*

To ensure alignment with MLA frameworks, these MLA Practice Change Areas were used in the interviews to understand where impacts were being achieved

- Genetics
- Reproduction
- Feedbase and nutrition
- Animal health / welfare / wellbeing
- Environmental
- Marketing
- Business Management

### *3.3.4.3 Tangible and Intangible impacts*

Recognising the significance of distinguishing between quantitative and qualitative impacts (now referred to as tangible and intangible impacts) the questionnaire was developed so that respondents were prompted for discussion of both types of impacts.

Tangible impacts could be defined as a “physical” or measurable activity or change, most likely associated with production or financial aspects (i.e. change in costs / revenue / profit, change in branding rates, mortality, vaccination use, and so on.)

Intangible impacts are less “physical” and are typically less measurable and more qualitative in nature (i.e. confidence, knowledge, wellbeing, support). The questionnaire seeks where possible to quantify intangible impacts, through the use of survey questions using the 0-10 Likert scale.

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<sup>3</sup> Segmentation of respondents was initially proposed to be based on MLA’s internal producer segmentation data. However, this segmentation data was unable to be accessed and used in this project (advised by MLA this was due to commercial-in-confidence reasons). An alternative system previously used by the project team was applied (discussed further in Section 5.2).

<sup>4</sup> “A Likert scale is a rating scale used to measure survey participants’ opinions, attitudes, motivations, and more. It uses a range of answer options ranging from one extreme attitude to another, sometimes including a moderate or neutral option.” Extract from “What is a Likert scale?” Accessed [here](#) 10 June 2025.

## **Confidence**

At commencement of the project and based on Coutts input and ABDI's experience as an advisor, it was considered likely that confidence would be a significant outcome in terms of advisor impact. This was reinforced continually through the project, particularly at the PRG meeting and during subsequent engagement with Informed Persons.

Accordingly, the questionnaire includes a number of specific questions related to confidence.

### ***3.3.4.4 Attribution***

As noted previously, attribution of impacts to specific advisors was considered to likely be quite challenging. It was determined the most appropriate approach to gathering attribution data was to use a simple producer-nominated % based question on attribution (noting Dr Jeff Coutts's view that this aligns with approaches used in other relevant studies):

*"On a scale of 0-100%, to what extent do you attribute the improved outcome to the advisor's input / contribution?"*

Such a question would allow the producer to provide insights at a high level on what weight they give the role of the advisor in any practice change or impact.

### **3.3.5 MLA Privacy Policy**

It is noted that the methodology aligns with key requirements of the Request for Tender documentation, including adhering to the MLA Privacy Policy. This includes guaranteeing anonymity for respondents, and de-identifying any responses and respondents when undertaking the questionnaire and reporting process.

## 4 Literature review

The literature review reinforced the view that a paucity of information on the value of advisors to Australian producers exists. Very little information specific to the project objectives was uncovered, hence validating the purpose of the Project.

Findings from the literature review are detailed in Appendix 4. Key and relevant insights from this review and additional MLA references include:

- Producers take time to make decisions – including to engage an advisor to assist them; then often take time to implement outcomes of the advisory process
- ‘Confidence’ a recurring theme – including producers building confidence in the advisory process (if not already exposed to it) and confidence in the decision-making process and in following the advice
- Identification of the importance of achieving some form of impact and value for money – whether tangible or intangible impacts (current project terminology)
- Defining the skill acquisition process through which producers will evolve – using the Dreyfuss Model (applicable also to advisor skill acquisition)
- Segmentation work on defining producers’ willingness to pay – including recognition that underwriting of advice costs (commercial suppliers of input supplies) was more attractive to smaller producers with less disposable revenue (comment not made on mindset of producer segments)
- Grower groups have an increasingly significant role to play in providing information.

## 5 Results

It is noted that conclusions are being drawn from a sample of 19 producer businesses in the PSG.

As outlined in Section 3.1.2, the PSG is considered a representative sample of Australian red meat sector livestock production businesses. Further, the PRG has experience with a broader cohort of contemporaries being peers, producers and advisor clients (as do the project team members themselves being trusted business advisors to the Australian agri-sector).

This validates that the findings are representative of the broader sector. It is also noted that this Project is a relatively short sharp exploration into the value that advisors offer to producers, and therefore sets the scene for any further work that might be undertaken to build the evidence base.

### 5.1 Case study

Through engagement with the PSG respondents during the interviewing process, it became clear that the engagement with advisors, and any associated practice change and impact, was quite complex.

To best highlight this complexity, one case study has been provided here to provide the context and narrative of how a livestock producer business has engaged with a suite of advisors, and the resultant impacts.

The case study, as it is written, follows the approach guided by the questionnaire during the interviewing process, namely:

- Business / personal details
- Why did you engage an advisor, and how were they engaged?
- What advice did they provide, and how did it support your decision making?
- What was the practice change that occurred as a result of the advisor input?
- What impacts resulted from the advisor input (both tangible and intangible)?
- To what extent would you attribute any improvements to the advisor?
- What is your approach to assessing value – including any formal ROI assessment?
- What other associated benefits have you experienced from your engagement with advisors?

Two other case studies are provided in Appendix 5.

#### Case study #1

##### Business / enterprise details

- Production System: Upper Murray Region, Victoria
- Livestock Numbers: 400 head of beef cattle
- Producer segmentation (refer Section 5.3.2): Category B: Up and coming young people – business and growth mindset.

##### Context

- Two young professional women returned home more quickly than expected
- The managing parent had passed away

- They intended to take over managing and owning the family property / beef production enterprise in future
- Due to their limited knowledge they sought varied advisor input while managing the process on behalf of the estate before it passed to them. They felt they needed additional support during the transitional process, until they felt comfortable running things.

#### **Advisor input**

Advisors used: Business advisors (solicitor and accountant), Livestock agent, Veterinarian, and Livestock advisor.

Types of advice: Succession, Business Management, Markets/Marketing, Animal Health and Welfare.

- Immediate advice on business transition, succession and trading as an estate
- Early on, their Livestock agent presented an opportunity to sell into Chinese export market at a premium price instead of into domestic market as per the typical business approach. This necessitated specific animal health, biosecurity and animal husbandry matters – guided by Livestock agent, Veterinarian, and Livestock advisor
- Subsequently also had issues with liver fluke that required guidance from Veterinarian (to confirm problem) and livestock advisor (drenching protocol).

#### **Practice Change**

- Changes to normal marketing arrangements to live cattle export to China. This was a deviation from known arrangements and presented a degree of risk. It required back and forth engagement with a suite of advisors. Ultimately over several months the decision was made and the cattle exported to China.
- Also required awareness and conformity to the biosecurity protocols for live export
- Implemented a revised drenching program to manage liver fluke.

#### **Impacts: Tangible**

- Business management/succession: Ability to maintain business operations while organising personal affairs whilst trading as estate.
- Market opportunity: Sold 60 heifers into Chinese market for \$1200/head (as opposed to \$1000/head for domestic). Commission cost of \$3,240. Net financial benefit over \$65,000.
- Animal health: Liver fluke issue was resolved quickly, animals went to market as planned, meant costs not incurred associated with delay in getting livestock to market; loss in condition of livestock; the fee-for-service cost of the vet; no direct cost of the livestock advisor and agent noting that the animal health product was bought from the livestock advisor and selling was done through the agent (normal merchandise and agency commission process used).

#### **Impacts: Intangible**

- Business management/ succession:

- **Reduced emotional cost** of succession process and **‘sleep at night factor’** knowing estate elements were being looked after so they could focus on running the business.
- Market opportunity:
  - Much B knowing they had a team of advisors supporting them in making their decision to take a ‘risk’ on a new market opportunity – increased **confidence** in decision making, **wellbeing** and **‘sleep at night factor’**
  - Increased **knowledge** about wider market opportunities, and **increased confidence** to pursue other opportunities given successful sale into export markets, and knowing they had a trusted advisor as a sounding board
- Animal health:
  - Increased **knowledge** and **confidence** in managing animal health and welfare issues.
  - Just wanted to **get on with other things**, wanted the experts to resolve it so “we could sleep easy and not stress about it”.

*To what extent has there been an improvement in the following areas in your business from working with advisors (on a scale of 0-10, with 0=no improvement 10=significant improvement):*

Personal confidence and general wellbeing:	10	Management of environmental elements:	7
Confidence in decision making:	10	Management of animal wellbeing elements:	8
Confidence and ability to grow the business:	7	Personnel management:	0
Confidence and ability in running the business:	8	Technical / working knowledge:	8
Management of production elements:	8		

#### **Decision making support from Advisors**

*What role / function in your decision-making did the Advisor perform:*

- Problem Definition, Problem Resolution, Solution Implementation, Monitoring Success, Continuous Improvement, Sounding Board

#### **Attribution**

*On a scale of 0-100%, to what extent do you attribute the improved outcome to the advisor’s input / contribution?*

Response: 70%

#### **Value**

*What is your opinion on advisors?*

Response: We regard Advisors as broadly beneficial to our business

*Thinking about how you calculate your financial return on investment, on a scale of 0-10, how important is it to you to go through a formal process of calculating a financial return-on-investment:*

Response: 5 (out of 10)

*“Our view was that during these formative three years, as long as the job gets done and we can sleep at night, and learn as we go, and are not too out-of-pocket, this is all we need. But already we have seen a substantial market opportunity pay off, so this helps justify everything”.*

Key findings:

The above case study highlights the following:

- A suite of advisors were in use at the same time, sometimes to support a common issue (market opportunity), other times to manage separate issues (succession and liver fluke).
- Support ranged from problem definition, through to solution implementation, and ongoing support as a sounding board.
- Advisors were able to support on a complex, emotional topic (succession), as well as a transactional and tangible opportunity (live export to China).
- These scenarios all played out over varying timeframes, and in some cases required iterative advice and support (particularly the live export scenario).
- The advice of the advisors resulted in a range of tangible (notably \$65,000+ increased revenue) and intangible (emotional support, confidence about being on the right track, feeling supported in a potential vulnerable phase) impacts.
- Business owners reported substantial improvements in several areas as a result of working with advisors (notably personal confidence and confidence in decision making – 10 out of 10 improvement).
- Business owners reported 70% attribution of the improved outcome to the support of the advisors.
- The business owners’ assessment of value was largely informal, and heavily based off the intangible impacts.

## 5.2 Producer-Advisor Engagement Framework

A common theme that emerged in the early stages of the project is the broad role of the advisor in supporting / facilitating the decision-making of producers throughout various stages of the engagement process.

Based on open discussions during interviews with respondents, and in assessing the resulting data, the following Producer-Advisor Engagement Framework has been developed and is shown in Figure 1, and further described in Section 5.2.

While this is shown as a linear continuum, in many cases this plays out in a non-linear, iterative fashion. Additional advice may be sought as the situation changes and other factors come into play, and this may be during all subsequent phases post Advisor advice.

Figure 1: Producer-Advisor Engagement Framework

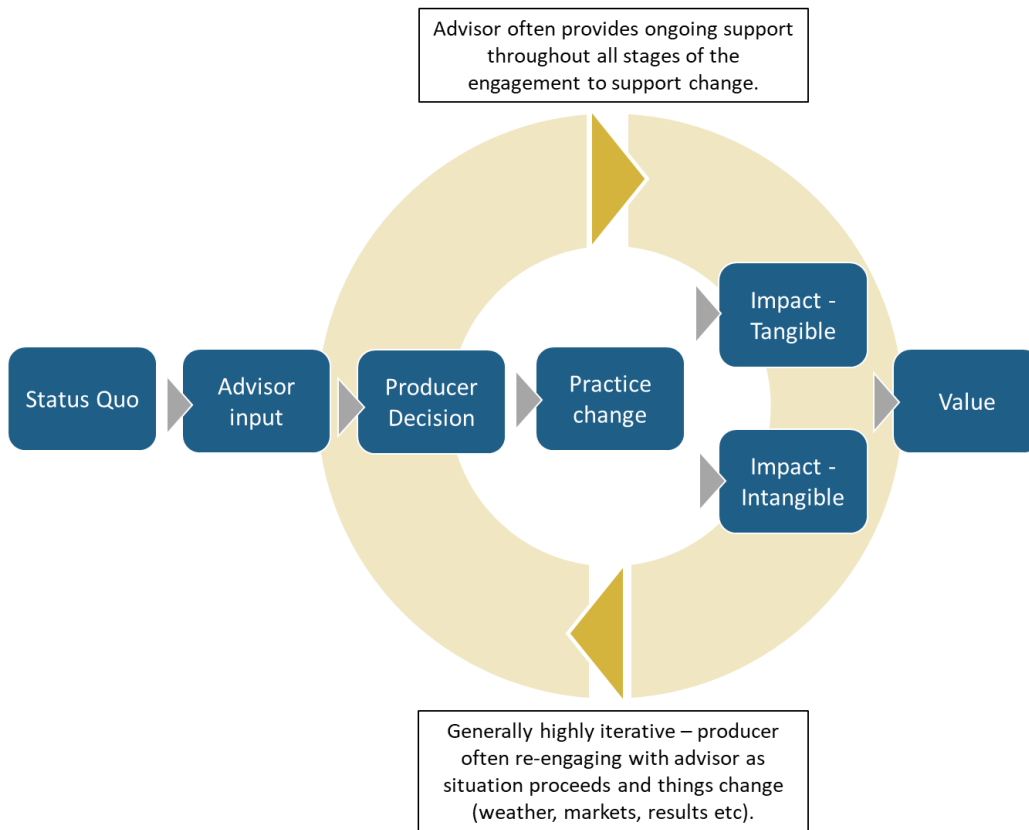


Table 2: Producer-Advisor Engagement Framework details

<p><b>Status Quo</b></p>	<p>A producer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not use an advisor at all (either due to an aversion, or they feel comfortable with their own knowledge)</li> <li>• May use advisors for basic compliance purposes (such as tax, accounting and / or meeting their biosecurity obligations)</li> <li>• May use advisors routinely as part of BAU / continuous improvement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advisor input</b></p>	<p>A producer may seek advisor input:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In response to an immediate problem / crisis</li> <li>• In response to an emerging problem</li> <li>• As part of Continuous Improvement (we don't know what we don't know)</li> </ul> <p>One or more advisors may be engaged with depending on the complexity of the situation. Other advisors may come and go from the additional advisor connection, by default creating an expanded advisor network.</p>

<b>Decision to change</b>	<p>Response to advisor input and decision on whether or not to proceed with change may be influenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producer may decide to not act on advice</li> <li>• Producer may need to obtain additional advice</li> <li>• Business / owner’s capacity to respond (may have competing priorities / needs / financial constraints)</li> <li>• Action may be required around other dependent elements</li> <li>• Seasonal / climatic / market /other considerations.</li> </ul> <p>Producer may be reengaging with advisor frequently during this process, and advice may change to suit the situation including producer way of thinking about problem / solution.</p>
<b>Practice change</b>	<p>Practice change may be a complex and circuitous process, that could play out over many years before any change occurs and impacts are achieved. This is often further complicated due to seasonal / climatic / market /other influences.</p> <p>Practice change may result in ‘quick fixes’ or take longer to deliver outcomes or be resolved due to varied influencing factors (e.g. genetic selection in beef cattle or market engagement or business plan development).</p> <p>Similarly, producer may be reengaging with advisor frequently during the change process, and advice may continue to change as more is learned and desired outcomes require adjustment.</p>
<b>Impacts – Tangible and Intangible</b>	<p>Ideally the practice change will lead to impacts being delivered.</p> <p>Impacts can be tangible (e.g. increased liveweight gain leading to higher value returns for their livestock) and/or intangible (e.g. “the advice helped us sleep at night” or “the advisor gave us confidence that we were on the right track”).</p> <p>Similarly, producers may be re-engaging with advisor frequently during the change process, and advice may continue to change as more is learned and desired outcomes require adjustment.</p> <p>This iterative process may lead to unintended consequences both positive and negative and with expanded intangible impacts.</p>
<b>Value</b>	<p>Value is highly personal and may change over time. The producer will make an assessment of the value they received from working with the advisor, and either re-engage with the advisor for further support, replicate the advice they have already received (assume</p>

	<p>they feel they have developed adequate knowledge, or shift away from this advisor if they feel value was not delivered).</p> <p>The measure of value could be a financial / tangible assessment (i.e. decreased costs or increased profit) but can also be related to positive benefits that may not have translated to a financial (intangible) outcome (e.g. better knowledge of subject matter, improved communication within the business, or greater certainty about business direction and plans).</p>
<p><b>Key findings:</b></p> <p>A Producer-Advisor Engagement Framework has been developed to document the engagement continuum between producers and advisors identified through this Project.</p> <p>While this is shown as a linear continuum, in many cases this plays out in a non-linear, iterative fashion. Additional advice may be sought as the situation changes and other factors come into play (weather, markets, outcomes etc). Often producers continually seek reinforcement and confirmation (“sounding board”) that they are on the right track (one of the key benefits of the relationship).</p> <p>This continues to reinforce the challenges around attribution to advisor input, and associated assessment of value.</p>	

## 5.3 PSG characteristics

### 5.3.1 Enterprise type and Location

The PSG comprised 19 livestock producer participants. The purpose of the Project was to provide high level insights into the benefits provided by a range of livestock advisors to a range of producers. The Project was short and sharp and conducted over a three-month period. The nature of the project precluded a wider sample of respondents, though this sample was considered appropriately representative for the data gathering purposes.

The PSG enterprise type and location characteristics are included below in Figure and Figure . This shows a broad spectrum of enterprise types and locations throughout Australia, though no wool specific or Tasmanian enterprises were included.

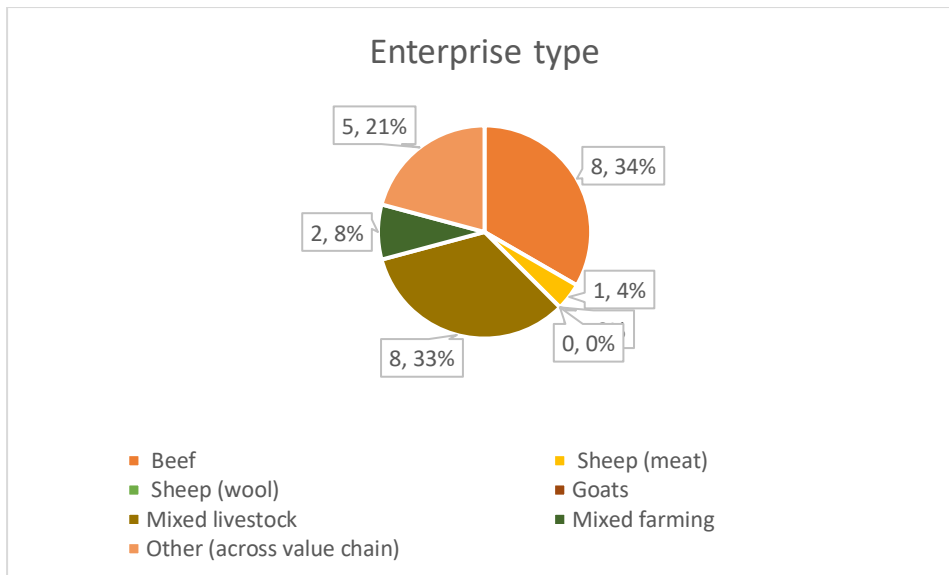


Figure 2: PSG enterprise type

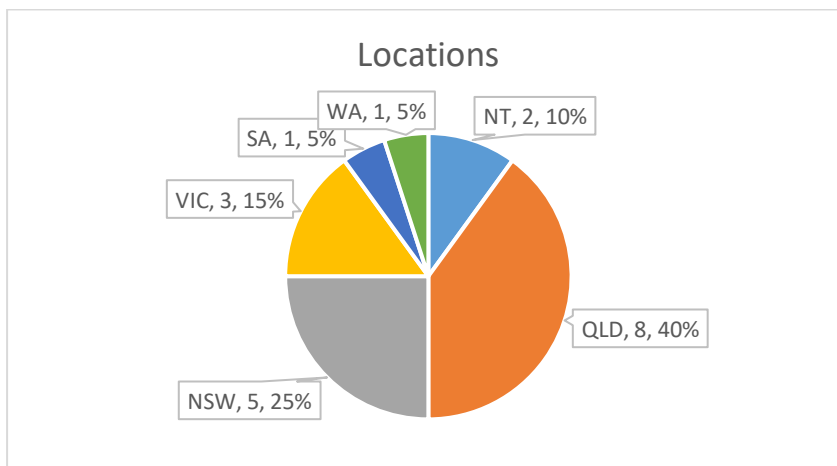


Figure 3: PSG geographic locations

### 5.3.2 PSG segmentation

The Project undertook a segmentation of PSG participants. The purpose of the segmentation is to categorise producer businesses based on business and professional characteristics (i.e. corporate / formal approach, level of business acumen and capability, mindset and approach to professional support and development). Understanding PSG respondent's segmentation and their associated attitudes towards use of advisors was considered an important piece of data to capture, to support future work around increasing the use of advisors across the industry.

The segmentation categories used in the Project are based on a hierarchy developed by (Stone, 2009) as part of an 'across-RDC' research project. This hierarchy has been further validated by

extensive commercial and research work by ABDI<sup>5</sup>. As noted earlier, the team were unable to access MLA’s producer segmentation due to commercial-in-confidence issues.

Table 3: Segmentation of producers

Producer Category	Business Mindset	Openness to advisory services
Corporate farms	Have a corporate mindset	Advisor suite already exists
Family corporates	Developing a corporate mindset; realise they need to adopt new ideas	Open to new advisors to complement their suite; but require value for money
‘A’ Class SMEs	Highly businesslike SME’s, open to new ideas	Very open, but must fulfil a missing niche in their advisor network
‘B’ Class SMEs	Up and coming ‘A’ Class	Quite open, somewhat hesitant to additional advisors, price sensitive
‘C’ Class SMEs	Very traditional, set in their ways, less open to new ideas	Quite averse to paying for advice
‘D’ Class SMEs	Expected to exit industry	Unlikely to acquire or use advice
Young professionals returning home *	Corporate professional development mindset	Realise knowledge exists with specialists.

(\*Note: An important element in the mix of segmentation is the presence of young professionals returning home to family business. Typically this group has a background of professional development, and is open to new ideas / unusual insights. This typically means they are open to new advisors to complement their arsenal of tools, and are frequently a catalyst for transitioning businesses up the segmentation hierarchy.)

Findings can be summarised as follows:

- Respondent businesses are all segmented as either “A” or “B” class business operators, corporates and family corporates businesses (with either strong or extremely strong business acumen, discipline and professional ways of operating).
- The majority (84%) regard professional development as beneficial to their business
- Several respondents have past professional backgrounds prior to returning to their farming businesses (finance, resources sector, agricultural advisors themselves) and

<sup>5</sup> Since the 2009 report, Stone and the ABDI team have worked with a major Australian reselling company in restructuring their advisory offering, commercial banks when supporting producer business owner clients in loan applications and with a range of agricultural advisors (as an advisor to these advisors) and producer business owners (as a business advisor to these business owners).

This segmentation is regarded by Stone and the ABDI team as being crucial in their work with producers and advisors as they seek to understand the mindset and business management capability of business owners.

have a predisposition towards understanding the value and benefit of outside advice and insights

- Of the 19 respondents, 2 were 35 years of age or younger, 11 were 36-50 years of age, and 6 were 51-65 years of age.
- This suggests that the cohort being interviewed are:
  - Relatively professional operators of their livestock production business
  - Bringing a strategic and growth mindset to their operations
  - Aware of their personal characteristics including their strengths and limitations
  - Understanding the importance of using their time wisely, and
  - Having used advisors and critically assessed their value at a tangible and intangible level, can speak authoritatively about the benefits, disadvantages, limitations and opportunities of advisors across a range of production systems and business types.

## 5.4 Advisor categories

Early in the project, and after consultation with the PRG, the team identified the likely advisor categories which might emerge during the project. In order to establish the questionnaire process, a level of advisor segmentation was undertaken.

Table 4: Segmentation of advisors

Advisor Category	Role (one or more across the segment)	Payment (one or more across the segment)	Notes
<b>Livestock production</b>			
Agronomist – general	Generalist	Fee for service	May be specialist
	Specialist to the site / conditions	Through the drum	May be seed / other supplier
Livestock advisor – general	Nutrition, breeding, pastures, disease, other	Fee for service Through the drum	Likely has networks
Pasture Management – specialist	Managing native and improved pastures for production	Fee for service	May be specialist
	Pasture management Soil fertility	Through the drum	May be seed / other supplier
Grazing Land Management – specialist	Integrating pastures, soils and livestock management May include benchmarking	Fee for service Partly or fully industry / government funded	May be through courses or 1:1 advisory or benchmarking - or combination
Animal Nutrition – specialist	Generalists in nutrition	Fee for service and / or product supply	Troubleshooting

<b>Advisor Category</b>	<b>Role (one or more across the segment)</b>	<b>Payment (one or more across the segment)</b>	<b>Notes</b>
	Specialists in sub disciplines		Ration development / management
Animal Health – specialist	Diseases Solutions Bio-security	Fee for service Through the drum	Troubleshooting Planning
Breeding and Genetics	Formal advice Breed specific advice Specialist on genetics and meat quality	Fee for service	May be underwritten by breed society or stud breeder
Veterinarian	May be specialist veterinary discipline – or generalist  May also be government or agency (e.g. University)	Fee for service  Under-written by government / agency	Varied service and product offerings
Environmental – livestock management	Waste, odour and other problems	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning
Environmental – land and natural resources; including carbon / greenhouse	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning Commission - selling carbon credits
<b>Business</b>			
Accountant – tax / compliance	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning
Accountant – management	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning
Advisory – business management and	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting

Advisor Category	Role (one or more across the segment)	Payment (one or more across the segment)	Notes
growth; coaching and mentoring			Planning Skill development
Advisory - financial management / benchmarking / cash flows	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning Skill development
Livestock agent	Specialists on markets and marketing	Fee for service / commission  Other services / 'through the drum'	May have value added services
Legal – conveyancing, business commercial, succession, IR	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning
Markets, marketing and value chain - including quality management	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning
Financial advisor	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning
Lending - including broker	Specialist expertise	Fee for service / commission	Troubleshooting Planning
Valuer	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning
Specialist – incl OH&S, certification, chemical, succession, organics, HR, etc.	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Troubleshooting Planning
Training and professional development	Specialist expertise	Fee for service	Technical capability Motivation

Advisor Category	Role (one or more across the segment)	Payment (one or more across the segment)	Notes
			Personnel management
<b>Industry support</b>			
Industry funded – RDC, project / program manager / special projects	Specialist expertise	Fee for service Costs may be underwritten by agencies	Troubleshooting Planning Technical capability Skill development
Government funded – specialist, special projects, project managers	Specialist expertise	Fee for service Costs may be underwritten by agencies	Troubleshooting Planning Technical capability Skill development
Extension – adoption projects / programs	Specialist expertise	Fee for service Costs may be underwritten by agencies	Troubleshooting Planning Technical capability Skill development
NRM / catchment / environment	Specialist expertise	Fee for service Costs may be underwritten by agencies	Troubleshooting Planning Technical capability Skill development
Researcher	Specialist expertise	Fee for service Costs may be underwritten by agencies	Troubleshooting Planning Technical capability Skill development

## 5.5 Attitudes towards use of advisors

In terms of attitudes towards Advisors and how advisors are engaged:

- 100% of respondents regard advisors as being beneficial to their business
- Most (68%) engage advisors through a combination of:
  - Direct Fee-for-Service
  - Underwritten by product sales (“through the drum”)

- The remainder (32%) engage advisors only through Direct Fee-for-Service
- There was no clear trend between corporates vs family corporates vs smaller businesses.

Some specific feedback from respondents includes:

- *“We’re happy to pay an advisor because this is their area of expertise, not ours”.*
- *“It’s more about the advisor than how they are engaged. We’ve followed our agronomist around while he changed from resellers to FFS. We trust him completely”.*
- *“Prefer fee for service to get transparent outcome, then we can shop around for best input prices”.*
- *“We have a range of advisors who are very important to our business. They range from fee-for-service to underwritten by merchandise through to being coached individually and group level”.*
- *‘We prefer independent unbiased advice. This is a change from our parents’ approach who did not want to pay for advice, and we feel it’s a generational change in thinking”.*
- *“Need to be careful because everyone has an agenda. But it’s important to remember that you don’t need to act on all advice given”.*
- *“I am quite wary of RDC and government advisory services; today, everyone has an agenda and it’s hard to get independent advice without the suspicion that there is a government or organisational agenda clouding what they provide”.*

#### Key findings:

All respondents regard advisors as being of benefit to their business.

Producers actively consider the payment methods of these advisors based on the level of trust and transparency sought for their decision making. They consider payment methods in general and for the specific needs of the decision or decisions required at the time (may simply be inputs required or updated information on input efficacy, or more complex insights).

One third of respondents specifically use fee-for-service; while two-thirds use a mix of fee-for-service and underwritten by the cost of inputs and other services.

It was apparent that fee-for-service is used to assure transparency and certainty that the advice is objective and meets their needs, plus that there are “no hidden agendas”.

The underlying theme is that producers are seeking independent advice tailored to their particular needs and requirements. It is noteworthy that this process is based on *trusted relationships between advisor and producer*.

## 5.6 Advisor support in decision-making

Advisors are used in a range of diverse circumstances to ‘facilitate decision making’. The project team developed an *Advisor Decision-Making Support Model* to capture data around decision-making support for use in the questionnaire:

- **Problem Definition** – to help me define the problem or a solution (in other words there is something that needs resolution which is outside my experience or ability to understand or resolve)
- **Problem Resolution** – once I understand the problem or issue; to help me figure out exactly what to do
- **Solution Implementation** – once I know what to do; to help me put the solution in place
- **Continuous Improvement** – as I continue implementing the solution over time; I use the advisor to check on progress and help me fine-tune anything that isn't quite right
- **Monitoring Success** – once the solution is in place; to keep monitoring success or problem resolution over time (in other words to make sure everything goes to plan)
- **Sounding Board** – to double check progress / level of success, in case further fine tuning is needed
- **Financial assessment** – to ensure my return on investment, or the financial viability of what I've done, or am planning to continue to do, is reasonable and can contribute to the financial success of the decision and business outcome/ improved financial position.

Results are shown in Figure . In summary, Advisors are used to support decision making for a wide range of purposes. This implies advisors are critical across the full spectrum of decision making and decisions required.

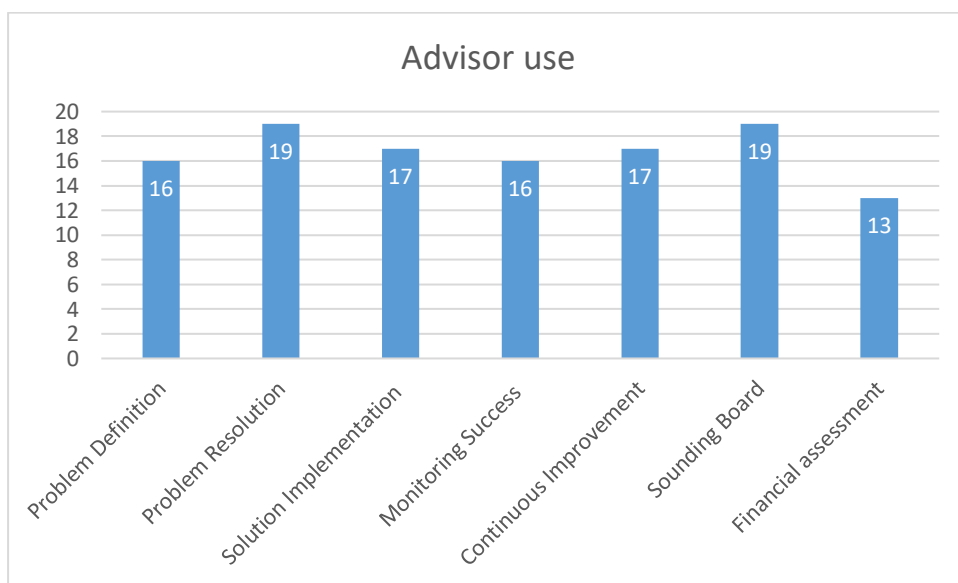


Figure 4: PSG responses - advisor use

Further insights on advisor use gained from the interviews can be summarised as:

- Advisors can be engaged short term or longer term
- They can be engaged reactively or proactively
- Shorter term engagements are generally reactive (dealing with a problem as it arises)
- Longer term engagements tend to be proactive (an intention to address a long term somewhat persistent problem that requires insight and action over time and may be need / benefit from continuous improvement, maintenance etc - as well as identifying and addressing strategic opportunities)

- Shorter term engagements may turn into longer term engagements
- Shorter term engagements dealing with significant problems may require a team of advisors – to consider the problem, the solutions, the knock-on effects and all factors affecting problem resolution and business management
- It was noted that access to a trusted advisor provides a sense of security that a network of additional trusted advisors can be drawn on (from that initial trusted advisor engagement) to continue to address problems shorter term or longer term
- Attempts to resolve one problem might lead to the need to address other associated problems – or to develop significant opportunities (managing succession, property purchase, targeting higher value marketplaces, creating strategic business plans, addressing family interactions, putting in place growth plans and monitoring their success over time)
- Advisors clearly provide support throughout the full lifecycle of business problems and business activities – ranging from problem definition through to implementation, and as a sounding board.

The support provided by advisors in providing, tangible and intangible impacts, is summarised as:

- Technical input – to assist respondents to understand technical problems, their uncertainties and specific issues of concern to them; then assist with resolving these problems, uncertainties and issues
- Analysis and support when troubleshooting – all aspects of the business (including the thinking process, implementation and continuous improvement)
- Integration of production aspects of the enterprise with business operations – so as to ensure better alignment of production activities with business operations, financials, expansion plans, implementation and planning; including focusing on higher value markets
- Streamlining and fine-tuning production activities – including resolving problems that could adversely affect production and enterprise management, including managing financial aspects of the business
- Exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking (and acting / operating in the business) – to facilitate expansion plans, while acting as a sounding board to support examination and potentially the implementation of new ideas and new ways of thinking
- Commence a change management process – whether that be on the production side of the enterprise, or on aspects of business management, including succession, property purchase and business planning (could also be financial management, cash flows and potentially lending opportunities)
- Providing a support mechanism – to work with clients to facilitate the change process over time
- Provides a sounding board and support mechanism – at times of uncertainty or crisis such as drought, flood, significant business changes or external or internal unforeseen impacts
- Maintaining focus and commitment – once clear plans have been defined to facilitate and support implementation of those plans efficiently and effectively.

## 5.7 Impacts of Advisors

A key focus of the Project is to improve the understanding of:

- The impacts delivered to producers from working with advisors, and
- How these impacts could be attributed to the advisors.

As discussed in the methodology, the data was determined to be best captured through respondent-led discussion of specific examples of advisor use in their businesses. Results are therefore shown in both qualitative and quantitative (where possible) formats.

Included below are examples from the respondents to illustrate key practice change and impacts from using advisors.

To ensure alignment with MLA Frameworks, results have been arranged according to MLA Practice Change Areas.

*(NB: For avoidance-of-doubt, it is noted that any impacts described in the results of this project are as reported by respondents during interviews. The project team has not validated or verified the accuracy or reasonableness of reported impacts. In some cases, respondents noted that more accurate data could be provided if there was more time, or it was specifically required, or sought.)*

### 5.7.1 Herd genetics

Herd Genetics
<p><b>Responses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 PSG participants provided examples related to Genetics</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advisor input:</b></p> <p>Advice around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving fertility</li> <li>• Increasing growth rates</li> <li>• Higher yielding carcasses</li> <li>• Improving marbling</li> <li>• Improving temperament</li> <li>• Maximising production of organic beef.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Practice Change:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of British breed bulls to produce F1 cross with better liveweight gain, better yield, more marbling (... “opened up higher value markets for our cattle”).</li> <li>• Selecting bulls for temperament</li> <li>• “Adjusting our commercial herd by judicious acquisition of new genetics to benefit organic production in extensive pastoral regions”.</li> </ul>

## Herd Genetics

### Impact – Tangible:

- Supplier arrangement with a feedlotter “to purchase our steers direct at a premium price, year in and year out on contract”.
- Access to higher value markets (e.g. organic)
- “Certainty regarding access to stud animals, with the required genetics leading to meat quality characteristics, to maximise that to manifest in our herd / flock”.

### Impact – Intangible:

- “We've been given exposure to new ideas and support to fine-tune current ideas to hone business ops [all aspects]. Hard to quantify as it's a package of things that fit together”.
- “It all came back to our self-confidence and understanding the possibilities, then when things went wrong, to be prepared to have another go”.
- “It's unlikely we would have done any of what we've currently done without the initial insight from the advisors (and their help along the way)”.

*On a scale of 0-10 (0 being no improvement, 10 being significant improvement), please describe the change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s:*

Subject matter knowledge	Average improvement: 8 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 8	Advisors were a major sounding board and still are. They help us fine tune the operations still - during the initial process that was a major role
Confidence in decision making	Average improvement: 8.6 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 9	The initial change was what got it all started. Once we got our confidence, we knew we could make it work and got further advice and input.
Quality of decision making	Average improvement: 8.6 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 9	Genetics is really where our big financial gains will come from given our organic status.

### Attribution:

- 83% average attribution of practice change and impacts to advisors (range of 80-90%)

### Respondent summary comment:

“Now we better understand 'the business side of things', this has expanded our thinking around the production aspects to maximise our return from organic beef. This includes fine tuning our genetics program”.

## 5.7.2 Reproduction

Reproduction		
<b>Responses:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 PSG participants provided examples related to Reproduction.</li> </ul>		
<b>Advisor input:</b>		
Advice around:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pregnancy testing to identify non-performing breeders and information on foetal aging</li> <li>Identification of more fertile animals</li> <li>Advice around management of factors that could lead to reduced reproductive efficiency (e.g. trace elements, reproductive diseases, animal nutrition etc)</li> <li>Animal reproductive performance – as “we thought it could be improved and wanted certainty around implementing our plans”.</li> </ul>		
<b>Practice Change:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Segregation of female livestock according to age of foetus (then manage nutritional inputs according to category of age range of foetus)</li> <li>Appropriate testing and analysis of performance</li> <li>Categorisation and management of breeders (e.g. turn off of animals according to pregnancy status).</li> </ul>		
<b>Impact – Tangible:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in branding rate from 60% to 70% over 5 years (increase of 2,300 calves) - resulted in revenue increase of approximately \$1.725m.</li> <li>Cashflow from sale of non-performing animals</li> <li>Calving improved from 9 weeks to just over 6 weeks. Resulted in higher average weight of cattle at the point of sale.</li> <li>Increased levels of twinning in our lamb drop.</li> </ul>		
<b>Impact – Intangible:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certainty and clarity around reproductive efficiencies</li> <li>Taking out non-performers from the herd/flock – providing increased certainty around feed availability, its utilisation and potential increased profitability</li> <li>Confidence in managing the fundamentals of herd/flock profitability</li> <li>Certainty and confidence that levels of twinning would fulfil budget projections.</li> </ul>		
<i>On a scale of 0-10 (0 being no improvement, 10 being significant improvement), please describe any improvements change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s:</i>		
Subject matter knowledge	Average improvement: 8 (out of 10) Range: Low 8 to High 8	It's unlikely we would have changed any management practices without the initial insight from the advisors

Reproduction		
Confidence in decision making	Average improvement: 8 (out of 10) Range: Low 5 to High 10	Advisors are a major sounding board and help us fine tune operations
Quality of decision making	Average improvement: 8.5 (out of 10) Range: Low 8 to High 9	Would go backwards quickly if we didn't keep (the advisor) and his team involved in the repro program.
<b>Attribution:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>79% average attribution of practice change and impacts to advisors (range of 70-100%)</li> </ul>		
<b>Respondent summary comment:</b> <p>“Reproductive advice has changed our calving period from 9 weeks to just over 6 weeks. By bringing that forward, the average weight of cattle is heavier at the point of sale on the same animals”.</p>		

### 5.7.3 Feedbase / Nutrition

Feedbase / Nutrition
<b>Responses:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11 PSG participants provided examples related to Feedbase/Nutrition</li> </ul>
<b>Advisor input:</b> Advice around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of improved pastures (e.g. high performing plant varieties)</li> <li>Management of native pastures (e.g. mapping of soil types, wet season spelling and paddock rotation)</li> <li>Soil fertility and use of fertilizers</li> <li>Targeted supplementation to increase liveweight for sale and reproduction</li> <li>Manufactured rations to finish livestock for sale</li> <li>Feed budgeting and establishing long-term carrying capacity</li> <li>Declining pasture quality due to spoiling rain.</li> </ul>

## Feedbase / Nutrition

### Practice Change:

- Changes to our lick/rations based on real time data on pasture condition/value
- Planted more productive pastures and commenced regular fertilizer program based on soil fertility tests
- Targeted supplementation of our breeder herd based on age of foetus
- Commenced feed budgeting
- Purchased neighbouring properties and completed soil tests before commencing pasture improvement and fertilizer regime.

### Impact – Tangible:

- Increased revenue of a minimum \$4 million to achieve our 5-year plan outcomes
- 30% revenue increase per hectare on both cropping country and pasture
- Over three years an increased operating margin of 44% equating to approximately \$480,000
- Significant increase in the productive capacity of our farms (3 in total) and we are now able to produce 3600 lambs and 90+ steers on our improved pastures under irrigation
- Better liveweight gains across our breeder herd from targeted supplementation equating to around \$400K in value.

### Impact – Intangible:

- Helped clarify the long-term carrying capacity of the property so we aren't eating ourselves into a drought
- The advice helped us sleep at night
- I knew the fundamentals, but it was good to have them confirmed by the advisor
- The advisor gave us confidence we were on the right track
- Formed part of our business plan and this was viewed favourably by our financier
- Helped turn an unproductive run-down farm into a viable high performing property.

*On a scale of 0-10 (0 being no improvement, 10 being significant improvement), please describe the change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s:*

Subject matter knowledge

Average improvement: 7.5  
(out of 10)

Range: Low 5 to High 10

The animal nutritionist had the specialist insights that we lacked. He provided suitable feed ration advice and advised on the overall structure of a feeding regime from conception through to meat processing

Feedbase / Nutrition		
Confidence in decision making	Average improvement: 8.5 (out of 10) Range: Low 7 to High 10	The advisor validated my thinking. Gave me increased confidence in my decision and looked at the analysis of upsides and downsides of the weather drying off and how best to tackle a feed deficit
Quality of decision making	Average improvement: 8.6 (out of 10) Range: Low 7 to High 10	The advice has led to a 30% increase in return (per hectare) on both our cropping and pasture country
<b>Attribution:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>79% average attribution of practice change and impacts to advisors (range of 50-100%)</li> </ul>		
<b>Respondent summary comment:</b> <p>“External advice on the feed lotting of prime lambs helps me manage all the competing factors and provides guidance on how I work through numerous scenarios related to our varied climate and weather. I need other ‘outside the square thinkers’ to help me figure out what to think through and how to think it through”.</p>		

#### 5.7.4 Animal health/welfare

Animal health/welfare
<b>Responses:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8 PSG participants provided examples related to animal health/welfare.</li> </ul>
<b>Advisor input:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advice around parasite control, i.e.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More robust monitoring system (e.g. faecal egg count)</li> <li>Improved management practices (e.g. drenching, paddock rotation)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Advice on vaccinations</li> <li>Advice on animal management / husbandry / behaviours</li> <li>Advice on biosecurity protocols.</li> </ul>

## Animal health/welfare

### Practice Change:

- Related to parasite control:
  - Improved understanding of parasite life cycles and similar
  - Decreased use of parasite control, or more targeted and efficient use of inputs
  - Timely or informed use of paddock rotation
- Timely management / application of inputs related to vaccinations etc
- Implement biosecurity protocols.

### Impact – Tangible:

- Related to parasite control\*:
  - Reduced costs on management and inputs
  - Increased liveweight gain and meat yield
  - Increase lamb survivability
  - Flow on benefit was less chemical resistance amongst animals
- Related to vaccinations:
  - Example: decrease in mortality rate from 2% down to 0.25% over 10,000 head cattle per year.
  - Resulted in \$75K improvement in revenue.
- Related to biosecurity:
  - Example: market access into international markets (China).
- Our average cost to produce a lamb is around \$90 and returns are approximately \$180 to \$230 at this time - so we are making approximately \$90+ on each lamb
- The advice has led to savings of around \$75k per year (particularly at the time when steers were worth \$2k/head).

### Impact – Intangible:

- Our focus was to resolve the problem and address the knock-on effects, recognising that it would ultimately positively affect the bottom line
- Increased profit due to reduced production costs through either not / less drenching, less inputs / labour costs combined with increased carcass weights due to higher growth rates
- The improved financial return is definitely there, but hard to calculate
- On this problem, we solved the problem rapidly (through the vet and livestock advisor) and the solution determined (vet and livestock advisor); appropriate animal health product supplied (livestock advisor); administered (ourselves and agent); and animals went to market as planned.

*On a scale of 0-10 (0 being no improvement, 10 being significant improvement), please describe the change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s:*

Subject matter knowledge	Average improvement: 8.7 (out of 10) Range: Low 8 to High 10	While we had to work the mechanics out, we still relied on the sounding board role of key advisors
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Animal health/welfare		
Confidence in decision making	Average improvement: 9 (out of 10) Range: Low 8 to High 10	I may have been able to resolve the problem with dad's help, but this bought immediate resolution to the problem
Quality of decision making	Average improvement: 9 (out of 10) Range: Low 8 to High 10	From our advisor we now use Cydectin which is cheaper than the previous chemical used and has helped lower costs of production
<b>Attribution:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>84% average attribution of practice change and impacts to advisors (range of 70-100%)</li> </ul>		
<b>Respondent summary comment:</b>		
<p>“Our veterinarian was the major investigator of the problem. Once the problem (phosphorus deficiency) was known we used Elders advisory and merchandise supplies to access inputs. Elders also provided an introduction to Beachport Minerals as an additional source of nutrition”.</p>		

\* unable to get quantitative data due to time constraints

### 5.7.5 Business Management

Business Management
<b>Responses:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14 PSG participants provided examples related to business management</li> </ul>
<b>Advisor input:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial management advice</li> <li>Succession planning advice</li> <li>Personnel management</li> <li>Legal advice</li> <li>Tax minimisation</li> <li>Business planning</li> <li>Valuer for property purchase</li> <li>ABDI CEO Mentoring Program</li> <li>ABDI Business School Program</li> <li>Grazing For Profit School.</li> </ul>

## Business Management

### Practice Change:

- Succession plan(s) implemented (several respondents)
- Additional property purchased after assessment of financial factors
- Business employees now have structured role descriptions and KPI's
- Completed ABDI's 12 Pillars of Business Course
- Apply CEO mindset
- Create and monitor implementation of five-year Business Plan
- Supply high value meat product to premium market.

### Impact – Tangible:

- Opened our eyes to future business possibilities and plans which has arguably resulted in a minimum \$4 million difference over 5-years.
- After year 4, reducing costs of approximately \$30,000 per year ever since, leading to the net result of minimum \$250,000 extra profit per year.
- If I wanted to I could; for example, do much more structured financial forecasting.
- I realise that I am 50% behind in my expected profit margin as a benefit: cost; but still about 20% ahead as result of the time, effort and cost of putting my cows on agistment.
- Over three years an increased operating margin of 44% equating to approximately \$480,000.
- We determined to make a significant mulesing change. Initially, there was uncertainty regarding our plan for years 1-2. Then after trialling (of the changed practice) as a result of the advisor input, the change was noticeable in years 3-4; we are now far more confident that it will translate to money in the bank so are making continued adjustments to all of our production management systems. To maximise that change; we incurred significant extra costs in years 1-4 and are now starting to see the payback which will escalate from here on.

### Impact – Intangible:

- We better understand 'the business side of things'. It also expanded our thinking around production aspects to maximise our return from organic beef, including fine tuning our genetics and engagement with customers; plus better managing personnel and treating them as our greatest asset
- Wholesale change to the business operation and production system including our mindset, then having to be 100% clear on our plans, argue the case to our advisors and the NT Department, as well as the carbon farming consultants
- Increased clarity about the options for the individual decisions, making up the collective decision on implementing the practice of (several interrelated changed practices described); then considering upsides and downsides, plus business risk in the changing business operating environment of markets, weather and financials
- We decided to change our business to focus on higher value markets. Initially developing and implementing the plan (years 1-2) was very stressful, but our advisor demonstrated through other examples that it would be achievable (and that we should keep our nerve) and now four years on we're starting to see the financial benefits.

<b>Business Management</b>		
<i>On a scale of 0-10 (0 being no improvement, 10 being significant improvement), please describe the change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s:</i>		
Subject matter knowledge	Average improvement: 8.1 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 9	Increased knowledge on those issues, plus increased confidence in our ability when we applied technical knowledge gained over time
Confidence in decision making	Average improvement: 8.6 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 9	Validated my thinking. Gave me increased confidence in my decision and looked at the analysis of upsides and downsides of the weather drying off.
Quality of decision making	Average improvement: 8.3 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 9	Our long-standing accountant not interested in assisting our revised plans.  We then knew we needed a more professional management accountant and more accommodating bank.
<b>Attribution:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 75% average attribution of practice change and impacts to advisors (range of 60-90%)</li> </ul>		
<b>Respondent summary comment:</b>		
<p>“Our initial mindset was we were in this for the long haul but we had no idea whether our business plan would work. However, after the first year it seemed a good idea and we committed to it. For the last 4-years we have generated roughly \$250,000 benefit / year, which doesn't yet account for our prime lamb price premium which we expect will start next year”.</p>		

### 5.7.6 Environmental

There were limited insights and data provided by respondents to understanding the impacts regarding environmental areas of practice change. The following summarises the findings:

- 3 PSG participants provided examples related to the environment
- Primarily, support from advisors was around:
  - Fire management (for woody weed control and to rejuvenate native pastures)

- Use of wet season spelling and paddock rotation to rejuvenate pastures
- Land type/soils mapping using satellite imagery to help determine long-term carrying capacity
- One producer has commenced steps to enter into a carbon farming arrangement with a potential payback of \$3M per annum
- One has a biodiversity agreement with a state government netting an average of \$15,000 a year in exchange for setting aside land for biodiversity.

Apart from these examples, limited quantifiable change and attribution data was able to be provided.

Several study group members are corporate pastoral entity managers who largely determine their own approaches to improved environmental objectives (advisors and peers both play a role in these examples).

Another was a family corporate who is aware they are moving towards applying a biodiversity reporting threshold and intend to seek professional advice in good time before doing so.

### 5.7.7 Marketing

#### Marketing

##### Responses:

- 6 PSG participants provided examples related to marketing.

##### Advisor input:

- In two cases, advisors provided their networks and contacts that allowed producer access to higher value markets. “We initiated the process and provided much of the insight required. We then used the advisors as sounding boards as we implemented plans”.
- While we had to work the mechanics out, we still relied on the sounding board role of key advisors.
- The initial change was what got it all started. Once we got our confidence, we knew we could make it work and got further advice and input, even though it continued to be confronting to ourselves, our family and to others around us. Ultimately it did work even though there were difficulties”.
- We needed to have the problem solved and 70% of that was the work of the vet and livestock advisor. We didn't possess the knowledge; we had the problem; they had the solution and they helped us solve it.

## Marketing

### Practice Change:

- Selling livestock into higher value markets at a premium price.
- Established supplier arrangement with a feed lotter.
- Enhanced biosecurity protocols that allowed the export of live cattle to China
- Improved and documented animal welfare practices – leading to price premiums
- Resolved trace element issues that allowed us to get our meat quality back up and re-entry to a premium market for our livestock and meat.

### Impact – Tangible:

- Export to China resulted in a \$68,750 revenue increase for the year.
- “Hard to quantify however conservative figures suggest 10-20% improvement on revenue although this may be greater (still to finalised when we do our quarterly accounts).
- Opened our eyes to business possibilities which has arguably resulted in a minimum \$4 million revenue difference over five years. We then expect it to be sustainable year on year.
- Initially, there was some uncertainty regarding our plan for years 1-2; however, after trialling our new plan we had increased certainty that it would work by year 3-4. Now this has resulted in gradually increasing profits.

### Impact – Intangible:

- Our focus on animal welfare also sets us apart from others in the industry (having an "addressing/managing animal welfare story to tell" as positioning)
- Access to a premium supermarket opportunity that was viable until supermarket prices no longer aligned with product market value
- We got significant self-confidence to be able to argue the case; our advisors had confidence in us, which enhanced our own self-confidence. From this increased confidence came the desire to expand the business. Also, an understanding that professional development was essential to our growth.
- After working these things out, we realised the importance of cutting out all the noise in the background to focus on what was most important to us.

*On a scale of 0-10 (0 being no improvement, 10 being significant improvement), please describe the change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s:*

Marketing		
Subject matter knowledge	Average improvement: 8.1 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 9	Our attitude was we need to sleep at night, have a problem resolved, get the specialists to help on all aspects of problem identification and resolution; move onto the next opportunity or problem so we are not slowed down
Confidence in decision making	Average improvement: 8.6 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 9	Advisors were a major sounding board and still are. They help us fine tune the operations still; during the initial process that was a major role and now its fine tuning.
Quality of decision making	Average improvement: 8.3 (out of 10)  Range: Low 8 to High 9	Firstly, we had to ensure our meat quality and consistency of supply was suitable for specialty butcher markets.  Secondly, we had to access the marketplace to test it for suitability and thirdly commence regular supply.
<p><b>Attribution:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>84% average attribution of practice change and impacts to advisors (range of 70-100%)</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Respondent summary comment:</b></p> <p>“We wanted to avoid the variation in price received from sale yards and well as the high sale yards fees. By selling direct to feedlot/works or private sales in paddock, we found that ‘you can agree on price while livestock still on your property’. However not all agents are as honest as they should be, so careful consideration to assess the integrity of the individual is paramount”.</p>		

**Key findings:**

Producer-led discussion of *specific examples / instances of advisor use* proved to be an effective way of enabling producers to best articulate and provide data on practice change, impacts and attribution to advisors.

Discussions with respondents highlighted the variability of ways in which advisors provide support, across all practice change areas considered (with the exception of Environmental). Data on quite material tangible impacts was captured, around financial / economic / production / business management gains. While respondents were able to provide tangible impact data at a high-level, it's clear that more comprehensively capturing and analysing this tangible data will require a more focused, longer-term data capturing exercise.

The data also highlights the extent of the intangible impacts experienced by producers, or the change in thinking or feeling – “confidence” used as an umbrella term for this change.

When considering specific examples / instances of advisor use, in context of tangible examples of practice change, respondents reported substantial improvements\* in:

- Subject matter knowledge: Average **7.8** out of 10 (*range of 5 to 10*)
- Confidence in decision making: Average **8.2** out of 10 (*range of 5 to 10*)
- Quality of decision making: Average **8.3** out of 10 (*range of 5 to 10*).

\* *Averaged across all respondents and Practice Change Areas.*

## 5.8 Attribution to advisors

Insight was sought from respondents on the extent to which they could attribute practice change and impact to their advisor. Specific attribution data per MLA Practice Change Area is outlined above in the previous section.

When asked “*On a scale of 0-100%, to what extent do you attribute the improved outcome to the advisor’s input / contribution?*”, respondents provided an average Attribution rating of **80%** to the contribution of advisors to the reported practice change and tangible / intangible impacts (low of 50% and high of 100%).

While this was a deliberately open and high-level question, the fact that *respondents provided an average attribution rating of 80%*, and no lower than 50%, is a clear demonstration that producers place a very high weighting and value on the support of the advisor.

The common theme of responses was “we couldn’t have done this without the advisor”. It is noteworthy that respondents were more than happy to quite rapidly assign a very high attribution value after being asked the above question.

Examples of discussion that surrounded attribution responses include:

- “*Things would go backwards quickly if we didn't keep (the advisor and team) involved in the repro program*”

- “The initial change (initiated through a business advisor) was what got it all started. Once we got our confidence, we knew we could make it work, and we got further advice and input to keep going, even though it continued to be confronting”
- “(The advisor) is amazing, he helped turn an unproductive run-down farm into a viable high performing property.”
- “We needed to have the problem solved and 70% of that was the work of the vet and livestock advisor. We didn't possess the knowledge; we had the problem; they had the solution, and they helped us solve it.”
- “We initiated the process and provided much of the insight required; (the advisor's) major role was as sounding boards to keep us on track, which they did. Invaluable.”
- “The vet was the key problem solver, then input suppliers helped finalise the problem resolution, then business advisor to support our confidence to continue on”.

#### Key findings:

Respondents universally provided high Attribution ratings when considering the role of their advisors in practice change and impacts (average **80%** Attribution, range of 50% to 100%).

This highlights the weighting and value given by producers to the support of the advisor.

Reasons behind such high attribution varied: for some it was that their advisor helped them get started, for others it was the role of the advisor as a sounding board, and for yet others, it was the level of, and extent of, support through the entire decision-making process.

There is a degree of complexity in this attribution process, which could usefully be teased out.

## 5.9 Intangible impacts flow from tangible impacts

While the impacts described above include both tangible and intangible impacts, of note is that respondents reported significant value and benefit from the intangible impacts (qualitative aspects of their decision making) derived from the input of advisors.

Due to the recurring significance of the intangible impacts when the Project team were developing the questionnaire, a number of specific questions around intangibles were included for detailed discussion with project respondents.

These intangible benefits are specifically discussed on the basis that they are potentially the most significant benefit and value obtained from the input of advisors (likewise noted in the literature review).

The below ratings on intangible impacts in Table are in addition to those discussed earlier in Section 5.7. The previous ratings covered *intangible impacts* (subject matter knowledge, confidence in decision making, quality of decision making) related to *the specific “business operation examples”* of advisor support provided by respondents.

Table provides more general respondent ratings related to *overall advisor support*, in response to the following *more general* question :

*“To what extent has there been an improvement in the following areas in your business **from working with advisors**”:*

*Table 5: Intangible impacts from working with an advisor*

Area	Average (out of 10)
Personal confidence and general wellbeing:	8.1
Confidence in decision making:	8.3
Confidence and ability to grow the business:	8.5
Confidence and ability in running the business:	8.2
Management of production elements:	8.2
Management of environmental elements:	5.8
Management of animal wellbeing elements:	7.4
Personnel management:	6.4
Technical / working knowledge:	7.8

These data reveal an overall average rating of 7.6 out of 10 attributable to the intangible impacts obtained from working with an advisor.

When reviewing Table it is noteworthy that there are two major outlier questions with lower ratings regarding:

- Management of environmental elements; and
- Personnel management.

It was noted earlier that there were limited responses from respondents to the extent to which advisors contributed to environmental elements of business plans and operations.

Likewise, personnel management was considered by the majority of respondents (personal communication during the interviews) to be less of a key issue at a strategic level. Addressing personnel management issues was more an operational issue (needed to be resolved on a daily basis) as a result of emergent operational problems.

Conversely, the other benefits were more about true intangible benefits of advisors assisting producers with difficulties, issues, problems and opportunities derived from running the wider business operations (more so than specific operational issues such as managing personnel).

If the two potential outlier issues of ‘management of environmental elements’ and ‘personnel management’ were to be removed, then the average rating – with *the common theme of confidence and ability* – results in an overall average rating for Table of **8.1 out of 10**.

Some respondents noted the following:

- “While things don’t look great now (due to poor season), I’m much more at ease knowing we have done everything we can (supported by advice from advisor), and I’m hugely confident when things improve we’ll be ready to capitalise and take off”.
- “I felt like I knew what to do, but it was good to have it confirmed by the advisor, and now I’m very confident we are on the right track, and with future decisions too.”
- “If I think about where we were at 3 years ago (headspace, stress levels, our relationship) to where we are now, it’s night and day. I’m actually glad I’ve had a chance to reflect on it through this conversation.”

#### Key findings:

Respondents also universally provided a high rating (average **8.1** out of 10 – adjusted to remove outliers) to the more Intangible Impacts provided by advisors when supporting them through difficulties, issues, problems and opportunities.

In particular, this project identified *confidence in decision making* and *in themselves* (as result of using advisors) as being *key elements of the intangible impacts of support from advisors*.

### 5.9.1 Confidence

It is noted from respondents throughout this project that improved confidence consistently emerges as a key intangible impact related to advisor support. It is also noted that Coutts (personal communication) has concluded that confidence is a significant indicator of enhanced decision making and this as an emerging area of Social Research (support in literature review).

An underpinning rationale of this project has been to better understand *the decision-making process* used by producers, through the input of their suite of livestock advisors, to:

- Resolve direct, immediate and / or abiding problems; and/or
- Address underlying concerns or uncertainties – about a proposed or likely course of action; and/or
- To seek a sounding board – to help them work through complex and difficult issues and problems; and/or
- Maximise their levels of confidence – a result of using advisors to facilitate decisions.

Recognising the Producer-Advisor Engagement Framework and KASAP (Knowledge, Attitude, Skills, Aspiration & Practice) methodology<sup>6</sup>, the way in which livestock producers are supported by their suite of livestock advisors is clearly crucial to them when making decisions about how to make adjustments to their operations, thinking and action, across practice change areas.

It appears that a core issue for producers is *their decision-making capability*.

Another core issue appears to be to address *the nuances required in decision making*, particularly in an incomplete and inaccurate operating environment with a range of competing influences (rapid decisions required, climate and weather variability and changing market conditions).

<sup>6</sup> Also reported by Coutts as a consistent approach used by researchers and extension practitioners as a way of understanding the application of the [Bennetts Hierarchy approach to Practice Change](#).

In the experience of Coutts (personal communication) and in discussion with one of the authors (Stone. G) using his anecdotal experience (as the trusted advisor of trusted advisors), it is apparent that there is benefit in business owners having a *sounding board* to demystify key elements of the complexity involved in their decision making.

The project data demonstrates that the use of advisors collectively contributes to gains in their confidence, clarity and certainty around the decision-making process. It appears this commences as they resolve smaller problems.

Coutts and Stone are in accord that resolving smaller problems, leads to incremental gains in their business operations and profitability as their confidence increases. In this respect, the sounding board function, as well as providing technical insights, appears to be the catalyst for this change in increasing their confidence in their ability and acumen.

This appears to consistently translate to incremental *gains in confidence, clarity and certainty* and *sets them up for bigger decisions*. Many respondents noted that their use of advisors occurs over a longer term (two to five-years was regularly reported) as they address bigger and bigger, and increasingly complex, problems over time.

**Key findings:**

The Producer-Advisor Engagement-Framework is a sound demonstration of the decision-making process undertaken by producers as they use their suite of advisors.

The continuum implicit in the application of this framework can also be regarded as a feedback process. As producers continue through the feedback loop using the continuum, over time it appears to facilitate further continuous improvement in decision making ability.

In turn, this continues to lead to increased confidence as better and better decisions are made over time based on their expanded experience and skill sets.

Due to the Increasing complexity of the decision making required, particularly as businesses expand, the sounding board role of advisors appears to continue to grow in importance and value.

This has an impact on both tangible and intangible decisions.

This sounding board role appears to assume increased importance as producers address increasingly complex nuances in the decision-making process.

### **5.9.2 Confidence and ability – key intangible benefits of working with an advisor**

Due to the early identification of confidence as being a potential major driver and benefit in using an advisor, the interview team recorded a number of keywords / statements used by respondents (some of which come through in the questionnaire data).

These keywords / statements can be summarised as:

- Confidence – in thinking, problem solving and action including reassurance
- Certainty / Peace of mind / Sleep at night – that all aspects have been considered and decisions have been made with highest potential for success
- Clarity – a clear plan exists, understand upsides and downsides of decisions without the distractions of ill-considered and ill-conceived opinions vs knowledge

- Reaffirmed thinking – production, business management and reconfirmation through an outside specialist influence
- Access to trusted sources – being open to being proven wrong, discussing possibilities, applying trial and error and minimising mistakes while recognising imperfect decision making
- Get time back – by using a sounding board to minimise distractions, focus the thinking and take a laser sharp focus to problem solving and business growth
- Sounding board (from using an advisor) – by linking practical insight on ground (producer) with strategic, theoretical and accessing insights from other networks including advisor client / professional experiences
- Improved knowledge and appropriate mindset – by balancing on-ground and theoretical knowledge, experience in problem solving and applying varied expertise from wider networks with a degree of emotional detachment.

One respondent summarised their thinking this way:

*“Personally, I have most skills I need but am always looking for a sounding board to support my continuous improvement thinking. For that reason, I consistently build networks in case they are needed, to challenge my way [of] thinking, to bring new ideas and apply better approaches to innovation using other people’s knowledge to solve my specific problems. I find advisors bring unexpected gems to facilitate (and challenge) my thinking”.*

A second respondent summarised their thinking:

*“It’s a combination of factors that demonstrate the value of advisors to us as livestock producers – their level of experience, their “can-do mindset”, they come to our farm, we have a stability of relationships, so they are available 24/7 and I choose advisors with an inquiring mind so both of us are open to all possibilities. To do this, the benefits I’m looking for are: their knowledge, their understanding, their practical experience and capacity to look for ‘shades-of-grey’ and apply that to the same ‘can-do attitude’ that creates synchronicity between us”.*

A key project objective was to define the value / benefits of advisors to producers. Implicit in this was an examination of the decision-making process, which has been defined as the Producer-Advisor Engagement Framework (see Figure 1).

## **5.10 The Trusted Advisor relationship – between producer and advisor**

A majority of respondents commented on the extent of trust they place in their advisor.

An underpinning element of understanding the “value and benefits” derived from advisors is that advisors provide:

- A Sounding Board, which in turn creates
- Clarity, which provides
- Increased Confidence, that leads to increased
- Certainty (about decisions and in the decision-making process); which is based on
- Trust in the advisor; leading to (over time)
- Increasing Trust in themselves, when then leads to

- Increasing overall Clarity, Confidence, Certainty and further trust 'in self' and current and/or future advisors.

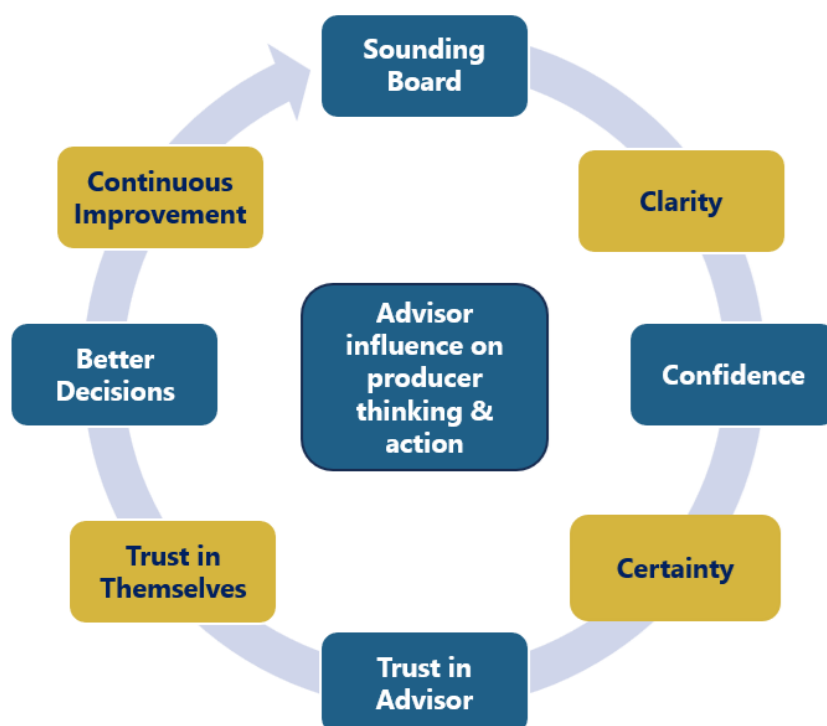
In its work as a commercial business advisor, ABDI works with producer clients in a trusted advisor relationship. ABDI also works with advisors who understand, respect and value this trusted relationship with their clients. They recognise the mutual benefit it provides both parties.

At a strategic level, many advisors are seeking to elevate their position as The Trusted Advisor.

Many producers are seeking access to individual and networks of trusted advisors.

Both parties see mutual benefit in The Trusted Advisor Relationship.

Figure 5: Influence of the Trusted Advisor on producer decisions



#### Key findings:

A significant degree of complexity exists in understanding the benefit provided to a producer by one or more of their advisors.

The Producer-Advisor Engagement Framework (Figure 1) provides an understanding of the sequence of decision making. The true benefit of the advisor appears to be in facilitating effective operation of that continuum within the framework.

The actions of the advisor provide a *sounding board*, which supports *increased clarity*, leading to *increased confidence*, which creates *increased certainty about decisions* and in the process applies *trust in the advisor* which in turn leads to *increased trust in producers' own decision-making ability*.

(Note: Both parties recognise the value of The Trusted Advisor relationship – see Figure 5).

## 5.11 Defining “Value”

Drawing from these project results, 100% of respondents regard advisors as being beneficial (valuable) to their business.

### Value and payment

One-third of the respondents (all of whom were categorised as business like, business focused, professional and / or with a corporate mindset) preferred only to pay direct fee-for-service, so as to maintain integrity and transparency in the advisor’s advice provided to them (as the client).

While two-thirds of respondents used a combination of direct fee for service and services underwritten by product sales, the underlying feature was a degree of wariness about the integrity of the advice provided when linked to a product sale. The general concept was a ‘buyer be aware’ process when advice was underwritten by an associated product or service sale.

### Value at a personal and business level

Based on the data derived from this project, and the discussion with project respondents, “Value” is considered highly personal, and varies according to business type and maturity, personality type and a range of other factors affecting the business owner and business operations.

Some businesses, who could not necessarily quantify the impact of an advisor through a formal ROI assessment, or may not have seen a measurable impact, still felt they received value from the advisor support through the intangible impacts.

In particular, this was from / as a result of increased confidence in their decisions, or confirmation they were on the right track, or through knowledge they had someone else “in their corner”.

When asked “Thinking about how you calculate your financial return on investment, on a scale of 0-10, how important is it to you to go through a formal process of calculating a financial return-on-investment for using an advisor”, the average response was 6.1 out of 10 (range of 3 to 10).

This indicates significant variability in how producers formally measure value. When prompted, some respondents were able to identify how they might formally measure Return-on-Investment, but for most “looking at the overall business financials (in particular end of year financial position)” and also “by gut feel” (which captures both the tangible and intangible impacts).

Many also noted that “the cost of doing nothing was far more than the cost of getting support” (at both the tangible and intangible levels), and “we wouldn’t be doing it if it wasn’t working”.

## 5.12 A working definition of “the value of advisors to livestock producers”

As an outcome of this project, a working definition of the value of an advisor to a producer, is:

- A person in the livestock sector with known skills and abilities – and with capability to
- Facilitate livestock producer decision making – that occurs in every aspect of the livestock production enterprise (see Section 4.6); which has the effect of
- Improving the clarity, certainty and confidence of the producer in the decision-making process – through a continuum of decision-making activities (which can stop, start and continue at varied rates throughout the process; see Section 4.2); and which will have the effect of
- Assisting with providing subject matter knowledge; and/or

- Instilling confidence in the decision-making process; and/or
- Improving the quality of decision making; and/or
- Supporting producers through the decision-making process and its aftermath; resulting in
- Impact being provided, through this process, at a *tangible level* (with quantitative benefits) and most importantly at an *intangible level* (with qualitative benefits); noting that
- Arguably the intangible benefits are more important than the tangible benefits, while recognising that
- Formally calculating financial return on investment values rarely occurs (no project respondents actively calculate an ROI; most noted they could do so if they chose to but preferred to use ‘gut feeling’ and ‘sense that the advisor provided value’, and normally validated at end-of-financial year / assessment of quarterly financial results); with the real operational value and benefit being to
- Provide immediate reactive solutions to problems as they arise – or more proactive, longer-term considered and strategic solutions to more complex problems; through
- A relationship with a trusted advisor who is able to support producer decision making on all aspects of the business and its operations.

### 5.13 In summary

The project Terms of Reference were focused on developing rapid, high-level insights, using data from a straw poll type sample <sup>7</sup> of the red meat and livestock sector. It is noted that more traditional producers and those likely to exit the industry were unrepresented amongst respondents.

There was high consistency in the data provided across respondent segments of this small sample.

In terms of the impact provided by advisors in the decision-making process of producers:

- Respondents in this study *attributed 80% of the value in their decision-making process to advisors*, on average across the key issues, for which the process was used.
- All respondents regarded advisors as being beneficial to their business and to their decision-making (*80% attribution*) across tangible and intangible impacts.
- They were clearly defined tangible impacts – which could be quantified
- A highly important element of the value provided by advisors was related to intangible impacts – the more qualitative elements of confidence, clarity and certainty in decision-making, potentially encapsulated as ... A Trusted Advisor providing A Sounding Board.

This group of respondents can be described as a more business focused, business-like, professional and forward-thinking cohort of producers. They clearly value advisors and can define their impact.

As a result, these advisors, who provide decision making support to this particular cohort of the red meat industry, could be regarded as *a strategic asset of significant benefit to the sector*.

The influence of the trusted advisor is to provide a *sounding board*, which supports *increased clarity*, leading to *increased confidence*, which creates *increased certainty about decisions* and in the process applies *trust in the advisor* which in turn leads to *increased trust in producers’ own decision-making ability*.

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<sup>7</sup> Straw Poll – an unofficial [ballot](#) conducted as a test of opinion.

## 6 Conclusion

The project process was managed by the Project Team, in consultation with MLA and a Project Reference Group, in accordance with the Terms of Reference of the Request for Tender.

The Project team applied the MLA Privacy guidelines and developed metrics to facilitate determining value and impact in accordance with MLA's Frameworks.

### 6.1 Key findings overview

The project was successful in defining how advisors provide value and impact to producers. Both tangible (quantitative) and intangible (qualitative) impacts were defined through metrics aligned with MLA Frameworks. These impacts can be used to create a value proposition.

The Key Findings below allow for recommendations to be made on how to maximise the value of advisors more widely across the red meat livestock production sector of Australia.

The crux of this project is about understanding and defining Value (and Impact).

To describe the value of advisors to producers, the project has found:

- Producers value *transparency, independence and timeliness* from their advisors – highlighted by their willingness to pay direct fee for service.
- They value *support across the full decision-making process* – whether it's identifying a problem, designing and implementing a solution, or as part of ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement.
- Overwhelmingly they value *having a sounding board* – whether this is to provide advice if things change, or just to validate things are on the right track.
- They value having *someone on the journey with them*. Any business / production change process is often circuitous, and full of 'shades of grey', and often an emotional rollercoaster.
- For many there is significant value in *having someone in their corner* – as these untidy processes play out.
- Most often advisors are engaged to support in *resolving tangible problems*. The findings identified a range of material and substantial impacts (valued by producers) as a result of advisor support.
- Example valuable *tangible impacts* identified include:
  - A sustainable \$4M profit improvement by implementing a defined business plan over five-years
  - A \$68,750 revenue increase by selling opportunistically one-time into a niche market (market intelligence from livestock agent;) and
  - Being able to successfully navigate and refinance into a viable business post an 'untidy' succession process (focus on opening intergenerational communication, leading re-financing based on clear business plans).
- Of equal or greater importance to understanding value is *the (sometimes unintended) intangible impacts*, such as Increases in confidence, clarity, wellbeing and feeling supported.
- Producers reported improvements in the following as a result of working with advisors (*0 being no improvement, 10 being significant improvement*):

Area	Average (out of 10)
Personal confidence and general wellbeing:	8.1
Confidence in decision making:	8.3
Confidence and ability to grow the business:	8.5
Confidence and ability in running the business:	8.2
Management of production elements:	8.2
Management of environmental elements:	5.8
Management of animal wellbeing elements:	7.4
Personnel management:	6.4
Technical / working knowledge:	7.8

- On average *producers attributed 80% of improvements to their advisor’s support*. Such a high rating provides clear indication that substantial weighting and value is placed on the role of the advisor in any change process.
- “Value” is intensely personal and is dependent on a range of factors – with *100% of respondents indicated they found advisors broadly beneficial for their businesses*.
- When asked about the *importance of a formal ROI calculation to justify use of an advisor*, this was given a comparatively *low scoring of 6.1 out of 10 (range of 3 to 10)*. For many, it was noted quantitative ROI assessments were usually captured as part of overall business financial management.
- It is noted that *the harder to quantify intangible impacts were where a huge part of the value resided*, and often a “gut feel” was used to understand the extent to which value was / is being delivered.

All of the above provides important insight into what a value proposition could look like for the Producer – and for the Advisor.

Other relevant findings include:

- A further key issue was the *potential for mutual benefit through a symbiotic and trusted advisor and trust client relationship* (apparent from PRG feedback and also drawing on the experience of the authors, being commercial fee for service advisors themselves).
- It is noted that the *respondents are generally all in the upper segmentation categories* – corporate, family corporate, or A or B Class SMEs. This provides important insights for future work, notably about where to target effort to achieve greatest results.
- It is also noted from discussions with the PRG that *Advisors themselves also prefer working with producers who are willing to change, who recognise that change is sometimes not easy, and who value their input and are prepared to pay*.
- This means that *the relationship must be mutually beneficial*.
- The mutual esteem underpinning the relationship between producer and advisor is best described as a *Trusted Advisor Relationship* (another intangible impact).

- Livestock agents were used by most respondents – with not all agents operating at the desired professional level. The potential to *expand the skills and professionalism of livestock agents* was noted and represents an opportunity for expanded advisory support which is accessible by the majority of producers.

Overall, a range of advisors to project respondents, who were representative of producer segments Australia wide, provide tangible financial (revenue increasing and cost saving) impacts (immediate and in future).

Advisors also include other forms of direct and indirect support to help producers resolve problems, forestall difficulties, consider strategic options, demystify these options and as a result to ‘sleep better at night’ (in an increasingly challenging operating environment).

## 6.2 Meeting project objectives

The project has delivered on the objectives of:

- Developing, testing and validating a methodology to define and attribute the impact and value of advisors to producers, in alignment with MLA Frameworks and MLA’s Privacy Policy and across the triple bottom line
- Defining value indicators of the value and benefits of advisors to red meat producers
- Improving the understanding of the impacts and value of red meat livestock advisors across the red meat industry
- Conducting an initial assessment of the impacts and value of advisors to producers.

As a result of this project, a methodology comprising practice change areas, metrics, frameworks and impacts has been identified which *can be applied to developing a value proposition to demonstrate these benefits and impacts more widely in the production sector.*

This methodology has *application to MLA and its reporting.* More particularly the value proposition can be applied to *demonstrate to producers how the use of advisors can be of benefit to them.*

This includes *demonstrating impacts and benefits* – both quantitative or tangible benefits, as well as qualitative or intangible benefits.

The project *respondents represent the more progressive, professional, younger and more corporate segments of the red meat livestock production sector.* They could be regarded as the early adopters or innovators of the industry who potentially contribute a higher-than-average proportion of the value of production or productivity to the Australian red meat livestock production sector.<sup>8</sup>

A set of recommendations have been proposed to expand on the project learnings, so that the value of advisors can be articulated more widely across the industry.

Recommendations include how to better define the benefit of advisors so that producers (current users and non-users or ‘under-users’ of advisors) can better understand how to capitalise on advisors (as a potentially underutilised resource, that could be of greater benefit to the current industry and its development, over time).

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<sup>8</sup> These data may be better examined in light of MLA's internal producer segmentation.

### 6.3 Additional key observations

While significant data exists in the body of this report, the following observations are particularly relevant to further work and to the insights from this project:

#### **Confidence / clarity / certainty**

The word confidence emerged as a proxy for a process described in the body of this report and which is a key element of successful producer decision making.

Because this *confidence element of decision making was consistently raised by respondents*, yet required significant inquiry to define what was most important to them and how it manifested, a stronger understanding of this concept is worthy of significant consideration in any further work.

Being an intangible impact, it is an often-unseen element of how and why producers manage their businesses, their decision-making process and the benefit they receive from advisors.

#### **Decision making**

While the decision-making process was raised early in the project by the PRG, the development of the practical case studies was a good example of the project team having to facilitate discussion with respondents, about their decision-making process. As noted earlier, the confidence proxy is also a key element of efficient and effective decision making.

The authors assume that MLA seeks to build producer capability and capacity at an individual business level and across the red meat sector at large. As a result, *examining ways of supporting more efficient and effective decision making assumes significant prominence*.

Is clear that Advisors can facilitate producers taking more effective decisions by *enhancing confidence and certainty that those decisions* are most appropriate for the circumstances.

#### **Fee-for-service and trust and integrity**

It is unsurprising that *trust and integrity, plus providing unbiased and fearless advice*, were hallmarks of the producer advisor relationship.

What is also notable is the extent to which respondents specifically nominated that advice should be provided in this way. It was also apparent that *respondents completely understood the commercial realities, and the trade-offs, between paying direct fee for service and/or through the drum*.

These issues of trust and integrity, plus providing unbiased and fearless advice, were also hallmarks of the most valued relationships. It is reasonable to interpret this phenomenon, at the tangible and intangible impact level, as *'The Trusted Advisor'* relationship.

#### **Trusted advisors – a strategic industry asset**

The results of this project demonstrate the importance of the trusted advisor relationship to 100% of respondents. If these findings were to be extrapolated across the whole industry, *access to and use of advisors has the potential to support significant industry development*.

Therefore, there is merit in considering trusted advisors being regarded *as a strategic asset*, not only to individual producers but also to the wider red meat industry (significant influencer of change).

### **Importance of relationships**

It was apparent that the high level of trust and integrity in the relationship between producer and advisor was regarded as being essential and highly valuable to producers. Trust and integrity are key ingredients of maintaining *mutually beneficially relationships in the short, medium and longer term*.

### **Value from advisor perspectives**

An outstanding issue not able to be covered in this project was *consider 'value and impact' from the perspective of the advisors, as the providers of the advice and insights*.

A stronger understanding of “value” for any future development of a value proposition is an essential. The concept of value has flow on effects throughout producer, advisor and MLA / industry relationships. This is also relevant to the view that *advisors are a strategic industry asset*.

### **Flow-on effects**

If advisors provide this positive level of benefit, to this group of respondents, then there is *significant potential for flow on effects into the wider Australian red meat industry* if advisors are able to provide an increasing influence on an increasing number of producers.

Bowen M.K., 2001 reported that *“Strategies that improved profitability also generally increased management complexity and financial risk. While strategies that could substantially improve profitability were identified, many other strategies were likely to reduce profitability at the property level. Key insights were gained into the time taken to implement the strategies, the complexity of implementation, and the level of financial risk incurred”*.

It is widely accepted that *producers function in an increasingly complex operating environment*.

As business advisors to the meat and livestock and agri-sectors, ABDI is particularly aware that, as producers expand their businesses, so the level of complexity expands significantly. As project respondents noted, it is at these times the real value of *‘a sounding board’* and *‘someone in your corner’* is particularly valuable.

Zhang Y. et al., 2023 report that *“A significant proportion of producers within the Australian beef and sheep meat supply chains express a desire to provide or pay for product quality information. The value assigned to this information demonstrates a positive relationship with higher information quality and quantity. However, variations in expressed value of different information types, and the influence of farmer and farm characteristics, suggest the presence of chain failures that disrupt information valuation”*.

### **A strategic understanding of advisors (a strategic industry asset)**

If the industry is prepared to do so, then *a far more strategic approach is required to fully understand the value proposition of how advisors best support producer decision making*.

Zhang et al also note that *“these findings have important implications for improving the performance of the red meat supply chains. Understanding the factors that influence the valuation of product quality information allows stakeholders to develop targeted strategies to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of information exchange; and ... Ultimately, these improvements can contribute to enhanced decision-making processes and overall supply chain performance in the Australian beef and sheep meat industry*.

By accepting Zhang’s view, it is arguable that increasing the effectiveness of advisors in supporting producer decision-making will in turn enhance the tangible and intangible impacts to livestock producers and to the overall supply chain performance in the Australian red meat sector.

*And if so, the flow on effect will also enhance the triple bottom line elements sought by MLA when commissioning this project.*

To fully understand the benefits and impacts, particularly of this strategic industry asset, further work is required.

This includes to understand the full impact and value, plus the nuances that influence the varied production systems and red-meat livestock production business owner and operator mindset issues, which contribute to the decision-making process / intangible benefits.

## 7 Future research and recommendations

The purpose of this project was to develop a methodology and metrics to demonstrate the impact of advisors on the businesses of red meat producers.

By default, it was to determine how it is that project respondents perceive and can define the value obtained from their relationship with their advisors.

The data has demonstrated that this value and impact exists. Opportunities have been revealed to expand on the project insights.

### **Recommendation 1: Undertake an analysis of the extent to which advisors are used and needed across the Australian red meat livestock production sector.**

Unless MLA has clear data – not apparent from the literature review – on the extent to which advisors are used by producers across the Australian red meat production sector, there is merit in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of this use.

If there is a need and opportunity for greater use of advisors by producers, then a value proposition will be an essential part of communicating the value and benefit across the sector and to individuals within the varied livestock producer segments.

In doing so, insights into the impact required by ‘C’ and ‘D’ clients will also be required.

A subset of this work may be a stocktake of available advisors (numbers, experience, location and skills), current and required, aligned with current and future expected producer needs.

### **Recommendation 2: Develop a value proposition(s) targeted to producer segments**

In order to support the use of advisors by producers in the red meat sector, producers will need to understand at a personal level the extent to which the use of an advisor will benefit them at both a tangible and intangible level. They will also need to understand how this demonstrates value for money and the problems it helps resolve.

Such a value proposition will need to be targeted to the wants, needs and desires of the individual producers in each of the segments. It will be insufficient if such a segmentation was taken at a ‘broad brush level’, due to the nuances of producer / advisor relationships identified in this project.

In doing so, the extent to which these project findings can be extrapolated appropriately will need to be considered.

It is also likely to require a review of producer segmentation, including a review of internal and external MLA data, plus other relevant insights.

### **Recommendation 3: Define ‘value’ for the value proposition**

During this project there was somewhat of a mismatch between the definition of value, benefit and impacts between those required by MLA to be aligned with their monitoring and evaluation framework and metrics; compared to the requirements of producers.

This project demonstrated the importance of having alignment between the three beneficiaries of the value, benefits and impacts of producer use of advisors – namely producers, MLA and advisors themselves.

MLA, as an industry funder of priority industry projects, has a requirement for metrics and impacts to be aligned with its frameworks.

Producers are interested in value and benefits from a tangible and intangible impact perspective.

During this project, no consideration was given to the concept of value, benefit and impacts from an advisor perspective. Several lower-level insights were gained such as the level of mutual benefit.

Should there be an intention to create a value proposition, then the requirements of these three users will have to be fully considered.

#### **Recommendation 4: Create a more robust understanding of tangible financial value**

If greater insight is required into the financial benefits and impacts from the use of advisors by producers, then significant further work is required to understand the detail of those impacts and how they can be measured.

This may be required for MLA to develop a suitable value proposition.

If so, a longitudinal study, using these project respondents would be an appropriate starting point due to the investment of effort these respondents have already applied to the project. All expressed interest in participating further if additional insights were required.

This longer-term longitudinal study if undertaken would also ensure practice change, impact and value can be better assessed across all livestock producer segments.

#### **Recommendation 5: How to maximise the value from livestock agents**

It has been noted that advisors (in general and across the segments identified) should be regarded as a strategic asset to support industry expansion, increased professionalism, and a more productive and profitable industry (and livestock businesses).

A number of these advisors are specific to the red meat sector and others operate more generally within rural and regional economies.

Livestock agents were reported as being in contact with the majority of producers. Livestock agents represent a key asset, due to their pivotal role in selling and marketing livestock, including potentially as a conduit for market intelligence insights to be returned to producers. Examples from this project demonstrated that livestock agents also have a wider role in information distribution and feedback throughout the industry.

Several respondents noted the importance of maximising the value the industry gains from livestock agents, due to their wide footprint and engagement with the majority of producers, whatever segmentation they represent.

It is therefore beneficial to fully understand how best to maximise the value from livestock agents.

#### **Recommendation 6: Enhance the professionalism of livestock agents (and other advisors)**

Several respondents specifically called into question the level of professionalism of their livestock agents.

As noted in Recommendation 5, the livestock agency sector has the widest footprint across Australia. Due to their perceived importance in sales of livestock, they have engagement with the majority of red meat producers.

If livestock agents are such a pivotal advisory force, then further consideration is required in how best to support the increased professional development of this sector.

It is noted that there is a potential flow on effect from advisors into a more professional industry and to support red meat industry professional development at large.

Professional development of agents would complete the loop on industry development and professional development.

There is also merit in considering the professional development of other advisors who are equally pivotal to industry development. In doing so, a review of the efficacy of current professional development activities, including those undertaken already by MLA, would form part of this recommendation.

### **Recommendation 7: Understand and maximise the producer-advisor relationship**

This project amply demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between producers and advisors.

There is merit in fully understanding, at a social research level, how this relationship operates.

As well as supporting longer term relationship management between advisor and producer, this understanding would support the adoption by the industry of any value proposition developed, which has as its intention, facilitating expanded advisor and producer relationships.

It would also support insights by the advisor community and how best to secure and manage advisor-producer client relationships and to develop those relationships over time. This may also support evolution of livestock advisory as a career.

A key element of this is to fully understand the trusted advisor relationship, by building on the insights created in this project and more fully investigating the relationship's operation.

This in-depth study should specifically determine what are the barriers preventing producers from engaging advisors and what are the skills/qualities that producers look for in their advisor(s).

### **Recommendation 8: Maximise the value of advisors to younger, more professional producers**

It has been noted that particular segments of respondents in this project included younger more professional producers, family corporates and corporations.

Is reasonable to assume that corporations and most likely family corporates have the resources to undertake their own professional development. This assumption would need to be tested.

This may be less reasonable where family transitions are taking place and young professionals are returning home as a generational transfer occurs.

While the full extent of the wants, needs and drivers of this particular producer segment are unknown (and the need to better understand it has been noted in this project) there is merit in considering the extent to which a particular focus on younger, more professional producers would be valuable.

### **Recommendation 9: Extent of environmental advisors available to meet current and emerging needs**

Based on the results of this project, there is little current use of environmental advisors (all disciplines). There is also a recognition that this is an emerging area likely to impact on livestock production businesses.

Assuming the management of environmental issues is an emerging area of concern to the industry and/or to producers, a core question is: *‘To what extent are there sufficient advisors to satisfy that demand and are they credible (in a way that satisfies the trust, capability, relationship based and integrity criteria so apparent in producers’ use of advisors in their decision-making)?’*

Furthermore, *“To what extent can those future needs be predicted”?*

### **Recommendation 10: Fully understand ‘confidence’ as an intangible impact**

A strong emerging issue from this project was the extent to which confidence is a key indicator of the capability and capacity of livestock producers to operate and expand their businesses in the face of changing operating environments.

Coutts and other workers, including members of the project team, have noted that confidence, certainty, clarity and related intangible impacts, are key elements that support producer decision-making.

Developing a greater understanding of the importance of confidence and how it manifests will be an important element of finalising any advisor-producer value impact assessment framework and value proposition.

How the implementation of confidence plays out in this relationship will be a key element of determining how any proposed framework operates, while also increasing the level of understanding, and relevance, of impact metrics (at levels required by MLA, advisors and producers).

### **These insights**

The ABDI team commends this further work to MLA and will be happy to participate in any future endeavours where these matters are investigated and ABDI’s skills can be beneficially used.

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## Appendix 1 – Project Reference Group Members

Name	Organisation / profession	Location	Relevant skills / experience
Peter Gordon	Yenda Producers – livestock advisor  Sth Australia industry contacts	Central NSW / Nth Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent Livestock advisory practice manager</li> <li>• Former Elders Ltd Executive</li> <li>• Former MDC project contact</li> </ul>
Ian Braithwaite	Veterinarian	Based in Mt Isa, Nth West Qld  Practices across Nth Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NW Qld RBRC Chair</li> <li>• Widely respected for novel thinking</li> </ul>
Angus Hobson	Beef, sheep meat and wool producer  Wide industry networks in Sth Australia	Located south of NSW-Vic border  Monaro region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insights into suite of advisors / suppliers / from wearing many hats</li> <li>• Former MLA Program Manager and SALRC Chair</li> <li>• Wool Producers Board rep</li> </ul>
Mick Taylor	Livestock advisor	Southwest QLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former MLA Project Manager (Feedbase)</li> <li>• Current private consultant / advisor</li> <li>• Former role running MLA livestock advisor engagement</li> </ul>
Chris Howie	RMA Network General Manager	Adelaide, SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages Wodonga TAFE livestock advisor Next Generation Agency and Supply Chain training</li> <li>• Former, Senior Manager in Elders Pastoral division.</li> </ul>
Ang Hammond	Manager Landcare Australia	Inverell NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former MLA Project Manager (PGS) and former role running MLA livestock advisor engagement</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
Keely Kovacevic	Adoption Capability Building Project Manager at MLA	Armidale NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages MLA livestock advisor engagement</li> </ul>
George Waldthausen	MLA Impact Assessment reviewer	Sydney NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background in economics</li> <li>• Responsible for impact assessment reviews</li> </ul>
ABDI Project team			

## Appendix 2 – Summary of the PSG participants and characteristics

Project Study Group members		#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10	#11	#12	#13	#14	#15	#16	#17	#18	#19	
Location	NT	Northern Territory;				Northern Territory;															
	QLD		Desert Channels, QLD; Southwest QLD; Fitzroy Basin, QLD;	Southern Gulf, QLD;			Fitzroy Basin, QLD;					Queensland Murray Darling Basin QLD;			Southwest QLD;Central West NSW;			Southwest QLD;	Fitzroy Basin QLD;		Southwest QLD; Queensland Murray Darling Basin QLD;
	NSW							Southern / SE NSW;		Southern / SE NSW;			Southern / SE NSW;			Northern Tablelands NSW;					
	VIC				Upper Murray and region VIC;								Upper Murray and region VIC;				Upper Murray and region VIC;				
	SA								Southeast SA;												
	WA										Southwest WA;										
Enterprise Type	Beef (only)	X	X	X	X	X					X	X								X	
	Sheep (meat) (only)														X						
	Sheep (wool) (only)																				
	Goats (only)																				
	Mixed livestock – some or all of the above						X		X	X			X	X			X	X			X
	Mixed farming (at least one livestock species and some form of cropping, other than for fodder)								X							X					
	Other: including involvement elsewhere in the value chain (e.g. a livestock agent who runs a farming business; or a beef producer also running a commercial feedlot; or meat producer who has significant financial interests elsewhere in the value chain)		X			X	X	X													X
Stock numbers:	No of Head of Cattle:	56000	98,000	25,000 - 30,000	350-400	6500	750		1200	60	2000			500		2000ha, 320 bi	190	600	6000	1400	
	No of Head of Sheep:						5000	5000	7500	6000				4000	8500			2691	100		1200
	No of Head of Goats:						500											100			150
Age:	Under 35 years									X						X					
	36-50 years	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	X	X	X					X		
	51-65 years						X		X						X		X			X	X

## Appendix 3 – Data gathering questionnaire for Project Study Group

### Valuing the Contribution of Livestock Advisors to Assist On-Farm Decision Making

Meat & Livestock Australia or MLA has initiated this project to better understand the value provided by livestock advisors to the red meat production sector.

You are being invited to contribute to this higher-level understanding of the value that a range of livestock advisors make to varied meat production businesses. These questions will guide that process.

#### Project Purpose and Process

This project and associated interviews are being conducted by the Agri-Business Development Institute or ABDI. ABDI is a business advisory firm whose role is to support agri-business decision making.

##### 1.1 Why these questions?

MLA is seeking to understand the influence that all types of livestock advisors provide to support the decisions made by meat and livestock producers; as well as the contribution that livestock advisors provide in supporting the decision-making process. This includes applying those decisions to improving daily management and expansion of a livestock business.

By better understanding the role and function of a livestock advisor, MLA will determine the extent to which it could facilitate future initiatives, focused on supporting livestock advisors as they support meat and livestock producers in their decision-making.

##### 1.2 Who is a livestock advisor?

MLA is using a broad definition of a livestock advisor. For the purposes of this activity, a livestock advisor is defined as:

Any specialist or professional person(s) providing insights or advice to a livestock producer to facilitate their on-farm production enterprise and business decision making.

The cost of providing the livestock advice or insights might be from public or industry funds; direct payment on a fee-for-service basis by the producer, or through separate product / service purchase, including a livestock agent type business.

##### 1.3 How will this survey process work?

A representative sample of livestock producers will be interviewed to seek their views on 4 Key Areas:

- The type and role of advisors used (broad definition)
- The reasons why the advisor or advisors were engaged, in other words what problems to be resolved
- The value provided by the advisor to a producer (e.g. confidence, financial or technical); and
- The extent to which any changes implemented could be attributed to the advisor.

This survey is being provided to facilitate an open phone discussion on the 4 Key Areas using these questions as guidance.

#### 1.4 Your response

As we respect your right to privacy, while recognising that some producers seek more information:

- Your responses will be de-identified, and all responses will be aggregated across all respondents to create higher-level insights.
- Some case studies may be developed from responses (remaining de-identified) to illustrate key points.

You may also wish to obtain a copy of the insights from the project. If so, there's the opportunity at the end of these questions to provide your contact details.

Internal data for ABDI:

Interviewer name:	Respondent name:	Date:
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#### Your Meat and Livestock Production Business

First, it's important to understand your meat and livestock production business:

##### 2.1 Type of Enterprise:

Which of the following apply to you (may be more than one).

My / our primary business is:

- Beef
- Sheep meat
- Wool
- Goats
- Mixed livestock – some or all of the above
- Mixed farming (at least one livestock species and some form of cropping, other than for fodder)
- Other: including involvement elsewhere in the value chain (e.g. a livestock agent who runs a farming business; or a beef producer also running a commercial feedlot; or meat producer who has significant financial interests elsewhere in the value chain)

If Other, please elaborate briefly

##### 2.2 Your Background and Experience

We understand that meat and livestock producers who have varied backgrounds, may have a particular view on paying for, or using, advisors (as a way of getting access to expanded thinking):

Which of the following apply to you (may be more than one, or none):

Personal / business characteristics

- I / we are key workers in, but not owners of, this business
- I / we are now (recently) the owners / operators of the business
- I / we have always been a meat and livestock producer
- I / we have returned home from a professional background
- I / we regard professional development – including attending professional development programs – as beneficial to our business operations
- Opinion on advisors
- I / we regard Advisors as broadly beneficial to our business
- I / we regard Advisors as being primarily of benefit when it comes to managing business compliance e.g. tax and other mandatory / regularity functions including livestock selling
- Generally speaking I / we regard advisors as being of limited value to our business.
- Attitude towards engaging advisors
- I /we look to pay advisors directly through fee-for-service
- I /we look to pay advisors underwritten by our product purchases (“through the drum”)
- A combination of above
- I /we prefer not to pay them at all

Please comment where relevant on above:

### 2.3 Your Age Group

It would help us to understand your age group:

- Under 35-years
- 35-50 years
- 50-65 years
- Over 65 years

### 2.4 Your Location

For internal purposes, MLA uses specific meat and livestock production regions.

In which of the following region or regions (may have more than one enterprise) do you operate:

- NT
- Northern Territory
- QLD
- Desert Channels, QLD
- North Queensland Dry Tropics, QLD
- Northern Gulf QLD
- Southern Gulf, QLD
- Fitzroy Basin, QLD
- Burnett Mary QLD
- Queensland Murray Darling Basin QLD
- Southwest QLD
- NSW
- Northwest NSW
- Northern Tablelands NSW

- Western NSW
- Central West NSW
- Riverina NSW
- Southern NSW
- Victoria
- Western Victoria
- Glenelg Hopkins VIC
- West Gippsland VIC
- Goulburn Broken VIC
- Corangamite VIC
- Upper Murray Region VIC
- SA
- Rangelands SA
- Clare Valley SA
- Eyre Peninsula SA
- Southeast SA
- Southern SA
- Tasmania
- Tasmania in general
- WA
- Rangelands, WA
- Southwest WA

Or alternatively please add your postcode:

Thanks that gives us an insight into the type of meat and livestock producer you are and the type of business operation.

### **Advisors You've Used over The Last 5-years**

Thinking about the range of advisors you've used over the last 1-5 years:

Do you **regularly use advisors** in your business?

- Yes – on a regular basis
- No
- Occasionally – only when a significant problem emerges.

Please comment if necessary, on the regularity of advisor use:

### **3.1 How have You Used Advisors in Your Business?**

When you think about how input from an advisor has benefited your business, please use some examples (could be: resolving a trace element deficiency, improving your pastures, organising a business plan, market research to get into premium markets):

Before getting to the detail, what could be relevant examples to choose from:


Now thinking of one immediate example, which is

--

### 3.2 Example 1

Thinking of this specific example, what areas of your farm enterprise have advisors provided input / improved outcomes?

- Herd genetics
- Reproduction
- Feedbase
- Animal health/welfare
- Business Management
- Environmental
- Marketing
- Other:

Any further notes:

--

Thinking about this example, and the advisors that you used, what specific issue or areas of concern/opportunity did it relate to?

--

Which advisor/s provided support in this example - and was there one main advisor used (may have coordinated others into a team)?

Is this related to on-going advice or one-off?

Level of change

What was the change or outcome that you experienced as a result of working with the advisor/s?  
Can you quantify it?

Are you able to determine a financial impact or “dollar value” to this change (Increased revenue or cost savings)?

Are there any other comments related to financial impact?

Attributing change to the advisor

On a scale of 0-100%, to what extent do you attribute the improved outcome to the advisor’s input / contribution?

No attribution	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% <input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 30 <input type="checkbox"/> 40 <input type="checkbox"/> 50 <input type="checkbox"/> 60 <input type="checkbox"/> 70 <input type="checkbox"/> 80 <input type="checkbox"/> 90	Complete attribution
	<input type="checkbox"/> 100%	

Comment/s:

Would you have made the change anyway without the advisor/s?

If so, did working with the advisor/s bring forward the change at all? If so, by how much?

Wider benefits relevant to this example

Related to this example, on a scale of 0-10, please describe the change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s.

Subject matter knowledge:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Confidence in decision making:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Quality of decision-making:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Other:

### 3.3 Example 2

In this specific example, what areas of your farm enterprise have advisors provided input / improved outcomes?

- Herd genetics
- Reproduction
- Feedbase
- Animal health/welfare
- Business Management
- Environmental
- Marketing
- Other:

Further details if required:

Thinking about this example, and the advisors that you used, what specific issue or areas of concern/opportunity did it relate to?

Which advisor/s provided support in this example - and was there a lead advisor?

Is this related to on-going advice or one-off?

Level of change

What was the change or outcome that you experienced as a result of working with the advisor/s?  
Can you quantify it?

Are you able to determine a financial impact or “dollar value” to this change?

Are there any other comments related to financial impact?

Attributing change to the advisor

On a scale of 0-100%, to what extent do you attribute the improved outcome to the advisor’s input / contribution?

No attribution	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% <input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 30 <input type="checkbox"/> 40 <input type="checkbox"/> 50 <input type="checkbox"/> 60 <input type="checkbox"/> 70 <input type="checkbox"/> 80 <input type="checkbox"/> 90	Complete attribution
	<input type="checkbox"/> 100%	

Comment/s:

Would you have made the change anyway without the advisor/s?

If so, did working with the advisor/s bring forward the change at all? If so, by how much?

Wider benefits relevant to this example

Related to this example, on a scale of 0-10, please describe the change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s.

Subject matter knowledge:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Confidence in decision making:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Quality of decision-making:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Other:

### 3.4 Example 3

In this specific example, what areas of your farm enterprise have advisors provided input / improved outcomes?

- Herd genetics
- Reproduction
- Feedbase
- Animal health/welfare
- Business Management
- Environmental
- Marketing
- Other:

Further details are:

Thinking about this example, and the advisors that you used, what specific issue or areas of concern/opportunity did it relate to?

Which advisor/s provided support in this example?

Is this related to on-going advice or one-off?

Level of change

What was the change or outcome that you experienced as a result of working with the advisor/s?  
Can you quantify it?

Are you able to determine a financial impact or “dollar value” to this change?

Are there any other comments related to financial impact?

Attributing change to the advisor

On a scale of 0-100%, to what extent do you attribute the improved outcome to the advisor’s input / contribution?

No attribution	<input type="checkbox"/> 0% <input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 30 <input type="checkbox"/> 40 <input type="checkbox"/> 50 <input type="checkbox"/> 60 <input type="checkbox"/> 70 <input type="checkbox"/> 80 <input type="checkbox"/> 90 <input type="checkbox"/> 100%	Complete attribution
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Comment/s:

Would you have made the change anyway without the advisor/s?

If so, did working with the advisor/s bring forward the change at all? If so, by how much?

Wider benefits relevant to this example

Related to this example, on a scale of 0-10, please describe the change in wider benefits you have seen from working with this advisor/s.

Subject matter knowledge:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Confidence in decision making:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Quality of decision-making:

No improvement 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Significant improvement

Other:

Interviewer note: review below list of metrics to align respondent data / insights with MLA Practice Change Areas:

Category	Specific metric
Herd genetics	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of EBV's <input type="checkbox"/> Data on conception rate <input type="checkbox"/> Data on live weight gain <input type="checkbox"/> Level of change in any one of the above.
Reproduction	<input type="checkbox"/> Number of cows or ewes joined per year <input type="checkbox"/> Number of calves branded or lambs marked per year <input type="checkbox"/> Number of animals turned off per year <input type="checkbox"/> Price per head or per kilogram at turn-off <input type="checkbox"/> Level of change in any one of the above.
Feedbase	<input type="checkbox"/> Changes to your pasture base - through better managing native / improved pastures <input type="checkbox"/> Changes to your feedbase - as a result of cropping or similar <input type="checkbox"/> Implementation of some form of rotational grazing, cell grazing or regenerative ag type management <input type="checkbox"/> Some form of feed supplementation - either to maintain livestock condition, or improve condition, or for market access improvement <input type="checkbox"/> Acquiring or preparing a feed ration - to support a more intensive and structured animal feeding regime <input type="checkbox"/> Level of change in any one of the above.
Animal health/welfare	<input type="checkbox"/> Disease or parasite management <input type="checkbox"/> Managing feral animals <input type="checkbox"/> Using low stress animal handling techniques <input type="checkbox"/> Using pain relief products or methods

	<input type="checkbox"/> Farm bio-security plan and actions <input type="checkbox"/> Level of change in any one of the above.
Business Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Business planning – to create certainty and guidance for the business <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in number of livestock / quality turned off annually <input type="checkbox"/> Level of profitability – based on defined profitability criteria <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate financial management systems and processes <input type="checkbox"/> Managing business risk – after assessing areas of risk <input type="checkbox"/> Internal systems and procedures - to manage efficiency and risk <input type="checkbox"/> Owner well being <input type="checkbox"/> Capability to expand the business <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate personnel – and their management <input type="checkbox"/> Level of change in any one of the above.
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of one or more sustainability type frameworks <input type="checkbox"/> Greenhouse gas emissions / carbon credits <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding and management of climate variability <input type="checkbox"/> Managing bio-diversity and creating healthy ecosystems <input type="checkbox"/> Data on key elements of environmental management <input type="checkbox"/> Level of change in any one of the above.
Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/> Access to higher value markets <input type="checkbox"/> Access to commodity markets <input type="checkbox"/> Defined marketing plan in place <input type="checkbox"/> Sales and marketing strategy and procedures underway <input type="checkbox"/> Level of change in any one of the above.

### 3.5 Other factors affecting the producer-advisor relationship

Are there any other factors affecting your relationship with advisors that come to mind?

Interviewers note: for any categories of metric they have not provided any data for, please query if they have had support from advisors in this category too

### Summarising the Types of Advisors used over the last 5-years

Thinking about those examples, then more broadly across all advisors used over the last 5-years, how would you summarise the overall position on advisor use?

#### 4.1 Types of advisors overall

Which type of advisor have you used over time, to provide advice, information or insights?

Category	Details (i.e. vet, accountant, extension officer)
<input type="checkbox"/> Herd genetics	
<input type="checkbox"/> Reproduction	
<input type="checkbox"/> Feedbase	
<input type="checkbox"/> Animal health/welfare	
<input type="checkbox"/> Business Management	
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental	
<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other:	

How were they engaged?

Select all that are relevant:

- Private sector direct fee-for-service (i.e. financial / business advisor, agronomist, vet etc)
- Advisor underwritten / subsidised by some other form of payment: e.g. someone who provides advice in association with a product or service and employed by a supplier of merchandise and/or on-farm services, or an agent / livestock agency
- A government, or publicly funded, or industry funded, contractor or employee, providing advice or insights at a subsidised fee / no-cost / limited cost
- A farming group or membership-based employee or contractor providing advice or insights e.g. industry association.
- 
- Please provide any comments relative to above:

#### 4.2 How does the Advisor(s) provide support?

**What role / function in your decision-making** did they perform (may be more than one and across all your decision making or problem solving):

- Problem Definition – to help me define the problem or a solution (in other words there is something that needs resolution which is outside my experience or ability to understand or resolve)
- Problem Resolution – once I understand the problem or issue; to help me figure out exactly what to do
- Solution Implementation – once I know what to do; to help me put the solution in place
- Monitoring Success – once the solution is in place; to keep monitoring success or problem resolution over time (in other words to make sure everything goes to plan)
- Continuous Improvement – as I continue implementing the solution over time; I use the advisor to check on progress and help me fine-tune anything that isn't quite right
- Sounding Board – to double check progress / level of success, in case further fine tuning is needed
- Financial assessment – to ensure my return on investment, or the financial viability of what I've done, or am planning to continue to do, is reasonable and can contribute to the financial success.

We realise that advisor use may not be straightforward; please elaborate on where they fit / fitted in your normal decision-making process:

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**4.3 Return-on-Investment for using an Advisor**

Thinking about how you calculate your financial return on investment, on a scale of 0-10, how important is it to you to go through a formal process of calculating a financial return-on-investment:

Not important 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely Important

Please comment on how you think through your return on investment for money spent on an advisor; whether for production, business or other purposes:

--

**General benefits from advisors**

These questions seek to understand your general thoughts around benefits from working with advisors.

To what extent has there been an improvement in the following areas in your business **from working with advisors**:

Personal confidence and general wellbeing:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Confidence in decision making:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Confidence and ability to grow the business:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Confidence and ability in running the business:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Management of production elements:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Management of environmental elements:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Management of animal wellbeing elements:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Personnel management:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Technical / working knowledge:

No improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10	Significant improvement
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Are there any other benefits you would like to comment on?

## Your Response and Privacy

### Privacy

We respect your right to privacy, while recognising that:

- Some contributors to this project may want more information
- We intend to aggregate your information so it is de-identified
- It may be beneficial to use small case studies to explain advisor use – again de-identifying its origin.

We may also need to be in touch again to discuss these details with you.

### To stay in touch

To obtain a copy of the insights from the project or to maintain contact with ABDI please complete:

- I am happy to be contacted regarding my information – and / or receive a copy of the project insights
- I recognise that the MLA privacy protocols apply to these data.

**Please complete these details:**

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Your phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Many thanks!**

On behalf of the ABDI team, many thanks for the time, effort and thoughts put into answering this set of questions. We expect that these insights will contribute significantly to considering the potential for MLA to support further initiatives regarding the capability and capacity of the livestock advisor sector in Australia.

**As Our Thank-You to you:**

If you'd like to accept our offer of a free 15-min strategy phone / online session, as some recompense for your time and thinking:

- Please tick this box; and / or
- Click [this link](#) to get access to Gordon Stone's calendar to make a time for the call / online session.

Gordon Stone

ABDI Director

19 May 2025

## Appendix 4 – Results of the Literature Review

This literature review covers contemporary research on the use of advisors in the Australia and New Zealand agriculture sectors. It is based on papers / reports proposed by MLA as being key reference documents of past work which may facilitate understanding of the value of advisors to producers.

The Australian red meat sector is geographically diverse and characterised by large corporate holdings (principally located in northern and central Australia), large (multi property) family farms and smaller (single property) family farms.

Historically, livestock advice was largely provided by State Department's of Agriculture. However, in the last two decades private sector consultants and advisors have filled the gap created by the erosion of the traditional sheep and beef cattle extension officers out of the Public Service.

The table below provides a snapshot of current research into the red meat advisory sector and the use of advisors by farmers in Australia and New Zealand. The information is not designed to provide an exhaustive list of contemporary thinking on the role and value of advisors, rather it focuses on what the research has located regarding:

- The project terms of reference, namely
- The value of advisors
- How they are regarded by producers and
- The key drivers' motivators for their engagement by red meat producers.

### Issues for Consideration

While the information contained in the table below touches on some of the barriers that producers consider when engaging advisors, or not engaging advisors, these issues are not sufficiently explored and quantified. The purpose of this review is to 'flag the issues'.

MLA and ABDI considers producer attitudes toward advisers and R&D outcomes isn't sufficiently understood within the Australian red-meat sector.

Unpacking why producers don't, or won't, use advisors is expected to produce a better understanding of how to tackle the problem of low adoption rates of R&D in this sector. It will consider the role advisors, do, can or could contribute to this process.

### Counterfactual

ABDI notes that additionally, none of the reports summarised as part of this project contained information about the role of the education sector (schools, Universities and TAFE) on educating future producers about the role/benefits of advisors and/or preparing students for entry into the advisory sector.

There is also limited data on what causes producers to be "non-advisor-users".

Paper / author	Key Findings
MLA Report:  "Valuing the contribution of livestock advisors on the Red Meat Industry"	<b>Key findings</b>  Advisory services have a defined impact on producer production effectiveness, financial impact and social well-being. It has been thought that such services within the red meat industry enable crucial, timely and beneficial decision-making support to producers. Comparable findings throughout both the project survey and case studies indicated that

	<p>producers saw most benefits in areas that <i>increased calving/lambing rates and reduced mortality</i>.</p> <p>Insights gained through survey results and case studies indicate that although, yes there was beneficial change to production practices resulting in economic gain, <i>this did not occur immediately once advice was sought</i>.</p> <p>It <i>took a period of time</i> before producers saw results and <i>they had to build confidence in the process</i> before larger scale changes were initiated, indicating that this needs to become a crucial aspect to the framework implemented for future producers who are not using advisory services and may in the future.</p> <p>Areas of change producers identified that have occurred since using a livestock advisor correlate to <i>two crucial key performance indicators in both production and economic gain</i>. Such metrics are independent of market influences and help build a more resilient business.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Production measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased lambing and weaning percentage.</li> <li>• Increased dry sheep equivalent per hectare (DSE/Ha) of 17% for Beef/sheep1, 40% for Beef1 and 26% for Beef/sheep2.</li> <li>• Increased beef production (kg's/lwt/ha of 91% for Beef/sheep1, 32% for Beef1 and -20% for Beef/sheep2.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Economic measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher returns on investment for both return on assets managed and return \$/hd.</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p>Aside from the production and economic value an advisor enhances, <i>producers also value some other key qualities</i> that are important to a 'great service':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Providing a sounding board</i> for issues in the producers business they don't share with others.</li> <li>• Having the ability of an <i>external third party looking in through a different lens</i>.</li> </ul> <p>Producers value getting <i>appropriate, timely advice to enhance their confidence in decision making</i>.</p> <p>On average producers who currently work with advisory services have <i>used them for at least five years</i> and would <i>contact their advisory five-six times per year</i>.</p> <p>Noted that producers who do not currently engage with an advisory service could be for following reasons including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Cost of, or sceptical of, advice given</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of understanding of how valuable the advice is.</i></li> <li>• <i>Not knowing the right service available.</i></li> </ul>
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	<p>Aspects of engaging with an advisor that respondents in the survey noted <i>could have been better</i> include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need to be able to give <i>constructive criticism</i>.</li> <li>• <i>Follow-up after care</i> and communication of actionable items from meetings, in order to <i>keep accountable</i> on decisions made.</li> </ul> <p><b>Next steps</b></p> <p>One of the key reasons identified for not engaging an advisor was <i>lack of awareness</i>.</p> <p>The authors note the results of this project can be used to <i>develop awareness programs for producers</i> to better inform them of the range of advice available and how it can add value to their business.</p> <p>This could include <i>case studies with testimonials</i>, like those presented in this project. <i>Access to locally relevant and trusted advisors has been identified as a barrier</i> to using advisors amongst producers.</p> <p>It is recommended that the <i>industry work to further develop advisors</i> in local regions and assist the development of well-rounded advisors who can adapt to different regions.</p>
<p>MLA Report: Livestock Advisory Essentials Program (2023)</p>	<p>MLA’s Livestock Advisor Essentials program (formerly known as Red-meat Industry Professionals Program (RIPP)) was a national pilot program designed to better connect MLA-funded R&amp;D outputs with people in industry who can use the outputs to improve the profitability and sustainability of red meat businesses. This investment was designed to fast track the adoption of MLA outputs by developing regional ‘champions’ to demonstrate and promote the benefits of adopting MLA RDE&amp;A outputs within red meat industry businesses.</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <p>A network of livestock advisors motivated to <i>support producer clients with skills, experiences and tools in business, feedbase, value chain and people management</i> is now established in southern Australia.</p> <p>The authors propose that building collaborative networks will enable advisors to know how to connect with others or reach out for support. They note the project has significantly lifted the technical capability of the professional network, building the profitability of the livestock industry.</p> <p>An important target audience for the LAE survey was the private commercial sector because of their intermediary role working with livestock producers. The relatively low response rate from this cluster highlights <i>how difficult it is to access and engage those working in this sector</i>. Conversely, the high level of response from <i>the public sector reflects their willingness to engage</i> and be part of processes that sustain and build livestock advisory services.</p>

	<p>Respondents were asked to identify all regions where they work providing support, advice and information for livestock producers. NSW was the region most nominated by respondents at 33% followed by northern Queensland at 28%, southern Queensland at 28%, Victoria at 18.5%, South Australia at 18% , a combined pastoral zone (SA, NSW,WA) at 14%, Tasmania at 13%, southern WA at 12%, Northern Territory at 9%, northern WA at 8% and ACT at 3%.</p> <p>Data suggested that depending on their area of work each advisor has the ability to <i>reach between 20 and 50 producers – hence highly leverageable opportunity.</i></p>
<p>MLA Report: Livestock Advisor Updates (LAU) (2018-2023)</p>	<p><i>300 industry influencers (advisors and pioneering producers) engaged in LAU, with 60% of participants increasing their utilisation of MLA RD&amp;E outputs, tools and resources.</i></p> <p>The program has resulted in the establishment of a connected network, with advisors engaging with the program for high quality professional development.</p> <p>Through social media channels, the network is now approaching the level of being self- perpetuating, with members from across Australia sharing updates about tools and resources, key industry issues.</p> <p><b>MER</b></p> <p>Baseline demographic data was captured at all events and is summarised below. LAU events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contact details (name, business name, phone, email)</li> <li>• role in the industry</li> <li>• years of experience</li> <li>• areas of advice given</li> <li>• number of producer clients serviced</li> <li>• average herd/flock size of clients</li> <li>• average number of hectares of clients</li> <li>• permission for follow up.</li> </ul> <p>LAU webinars captured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contact details</li> <li>• role in the industry</li> <li>• years of experience in this role</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• permission for follow up contact.</li> </ul>
<p>A review of global adoption practices and outcomes, and recommendations for implementation within the Australian Red Meat Industry</p> <p>Reichelt et al (30 June 2022)</p>	<p>Estimates based on survey results from 392 extension practitioners and deep-dive interviews with 12 industry experts allowed us to estimate the capacity of the extension system across Australia. Estimated number of extension specialists in Australia – 3330 (Public - 1520 &amp; Private - 1810). Most of the 392 respondents to the extension practitioner survey have completed university studies and supplemented this with on-the-job experience.</p> <p>In the context of extension capability in Australia, this could mean anything from undertaking daily responsibilities as an extension practitioner, developing customised solutions for individual farmers, to acquiring new skills to adapt to evolving needs in agriculture.</p> <p>A useful framework for understanding this skill acquisition process is <i>the Dreyfus model, which consists of a progression from novice to expert through five stages of learning and experience. A sixth stage was later added for highly motivated performers who can go beyond and look for opportunities to excel that are not noticed by satisfied experts (Rousse and Dreyfus 2021). The six stages are as follows:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Novice: Learners follow rules without context or flexibility, focusing on rote learning and specific instructions.</li> <li>2. Advanced beginner: Learners begin to apply context but still rely on rules and guidelines, with limited situational awareness.</li> <li>3. Competent: Practitioners can devise their own plans and make decisions, managing multiple elements and prioritising effectively.</li> <li>4. Proficient: Practitioners see situations holistically, adapting experience-based intuition and fine-tuning their approaches.</li> <li>5. Expert: Practitioners exhibit deep, tacit understanding, relying on intuition and creativity to manage complexities fluidly and respond effortlessly.</li> <li>6. Master: Practitioners reach a level of almost instinctual competence, innovating, redefining standards and creating new approaches. They embody wisdom, vision and spontaneous responses that influence and shape their field.</li> </ol> <p>Adoption and practice change on farm is occurring. Changes related to use of farm inputs; the purchase/use of farm machinery/infrastructure; farm business management and farm practices.</p> <p>More than <i>70% of farmers</i> mentioned specific changes made to the management or operation of their farm, <i>as a result of interaction with a 'main' source of information, advice or support.</i> Farmers credited their</p>

	<p>engagement with <i>their ‘main source’ as influencing changes in their farm operations.</i></p> <p>Private, industry, not for profit and public sector organisations were all used by farmers in practice change. Further analysis of changes made by farmers showed patterns of use of different main sources of advice relative to the type of farm management decisions. For example, farmer-owned organisations were used more than other advisors/organisations for decision making related to infrastructure, machinery and equipment. This reflects the importance of farm demonstrations and trust in peer experiences relating to product choices and large investment decisions.</p>
<p>MLA Report: Producer Outcomes Adoption Report (2023-2024)</p>	<p>During 2023/2024 10,202 producers engaged across MLA’s adoption programs. Further, 514 advisors engaged in capability building programs.</p> <p>78% of attendees indicated intent to change practices as a result of an MLA adoption program.</p> <p>Underpinning MLA’s adoption pathway are livestock advisors who often provide guidance and advice to producers implementing a change in their business.</p> <p>Livestock advisors are defined as anyone who provides advice to red meat producers as a core part of their role. This can include veterinarians, private consultants, agronomists, livestock agents, sales representatives, and public extension officers.</p> <p><b>PGS:</b></p> <p>On average, and depending on the area of practice change, northern beef producers participating in a PGS SLP can expect an additional net benefit of \$6–26/km<sup>2</sup> annually.</p> <p>On average, southern producers participating in an PGS SLP can expect an additional net benefit of \$5.53–7.52/ha annually.</p> <p><b>PDS:</b></p> <p>On average, and depending on the area of practice change, producers can expect an additional net benefit of between \$2.29 to \$5.89/ha annually as a result of their participation in the program.</p> <p><b>Edge Network:</b></p> <p>545 producers engaged over 48 workshops.</p> <p><i>\$0.14 - \$6.21/ha average net benefit for southern producers</i></p> <p><i>\$10 - 100km<sup>2</sup> average annual net benefit for northern producers</i></p> <p>93% of producers planned to make changes following workshops.</p> <p><b>Bred Well Fed Well</b></p>

	<p>347 producers engaged over 19 workshops.</p> <p>93% of producers planned to make changes following workshops.</p> <p><b>Beef Up Program</b></p> <p>101 producers engaged over 4 forums</p> <p>1.16– \$ 2.83/hd average annual net benefit for participating producers.</p> <p>87% of producers plan to make changes after a forum.</p> <p><b>Meat Up Forums</b></p> <p>152 producers engaged over 2 forums.</p> <p>\$0.14– 14.88/hd average annual net benefit for participating producers</p> <p>64% of producers plan to make changes after attending the forum.</p>
<p>Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&amp;D - Farmer demand for agricultural extension services (Key Findings) – Nettle et al. (2018)</p>	<p>This report draws upon the results from four focus group workshops held in 2016 and a national survey conducted in 2016. It provides a snapshot of Australian farmers’ demand (and willingness to pay) for agricultural advisory and extension services (information, advice and support).</p> <p>Although farmers currently use a wide range of information sources, <i>independent advisers are the most prevalent main source of information.</i></p> <p><i>There is some ambivalence among farmers about the trustworthiness, independence and value of the information, advice and support they pay for.</i></p> <p>No single provider has the monopoly on providing information, advice or support. While commercial advisers (product resellers/farm input suppliers) were most commonly used, independent advisers were also a prominent main source. Other sources included research and development corporations, government, independent advisers and processing companies.</p> <p>The use of different sources of information, advice and support varied by farm size. For example, smaller farms tended to use commercial advisers (product resellers/farm-input suppliers) and government agencies as a main source of information, advice and support; larger farms (&gt;\$501,000 average gross farm income) tended to use independent (fee for-service) advisers. See Figures in Report.</p> <p>Farmers rely on private sector advisers in their farm management. <i>However, 70% of farmers don’t always know where to source the information, advice and support they need.</i></p> <p><i>Further, 70% of the advisory and extension service providers are not sufficiently connected or involved in important areas of RD&amp;E and seek more involvement (i.e. in priority setting; in the start of projects; in development; in research translation and delivery).</i></p>

	<p>In the near future (five years) there is a likely increase in use of information and advice, particularly in the fee-for service sector but less so for the Government sector.</p>
<p>AgriFutures Australia Report</p> <p>Australian extension capacity and capability A map and a gap analysis</p> <p>Scarlati and Coutts October 2024</p>	<p><b>Current extension capacity</b></p> <p>Across industries, we have estimated the current capacity of the extension system to be approximately 3,000 people.</p> <p>It's important to note that there is significant variation in capacity across different states and regions. For instance, the Northern Territory is estimated to have the smallest capacity at about 30 people, while New South Wales is estimated to have the largest at roughly 700 people.</p> <p>These figures are derived from the best estimates provided by various industry stakeholders and should be considered as approximations. Additionally, discrepancies may arise depending on the specific definitions applied to what units are being used (e.g., FTE or the number of people) and which roles are within the scope of extension practitioners in the extension and advisory system.</p> <p>Based on the survey findings, most extension practitioners operate within small teams that typically comprise one to five individuals. This trend holds true whether these services are managed in-house or outsourced. Practitioners dedicate a significant portion of their time to extension activities, finding the work rewarding yet challenging. They are happy with access to tools and infrastructure but have concerns over salaries, working conditions, and sufficient time and funding.</p> <p>A significant increase (likely over 10%) in the number of extension practitioners will be required to meet the needs of their industry in the next 5 to 10 years.</p> <p>While many extension practitioners see themselves remaining in a role in the agricultural sector for the next three years, <i>there was some churn with people moving outside of agriculture due to a variety of reasons, such as a desire for new challenges and career progression.</i></p>
<p>Redefining excellence in agribusiness advisory: the role of the rural advisor in the modern world</p> <p>James Allen 2023 Nuffield Scholar</p>	<p>This Nuffield report explores the trends and issues facing the rural advisor and provides guidance for the future roles and necessary skillsets of the advisor so they can continue to add value to the primary industries sector. The objectives of this Nuffield research report were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To understand the trends in the use of technology in the agricultural sector, and how these trends will affect the role of the agricultural advisor.</li> <li>2. To provide recommendations on the future role of the agricultural advisor, and to investigate optimal business models for the agricultural advisory sector.</li> </ol> <p>Traditionally the service offered by the rural professional to the farmer is <i>based on a deep understanding of the farmer's business, and by using</i></p>

	<p><i>decades of experience to quickly analyse complex problems</i>, the advisor aims to quickly find solutions that will add value for the farmer.</p> <p>As highlighted in the previous section, the role of the rural adviser to support and add value to the farmer. Throughout the Nuffield journey farmer perspectives on the role of the adviser were gathered. The value derived from involving an adviser in a farmer’s business will vary greatly depending on <i>their perception of what value means and how it is measured</i>.</p> <p>For some farmers the definition of adding value will be as simple as <i>increasing farm profitability</i>. For other farmers value may be derived from <i>resolving a conflict with the worker or business partners</i>. Thus, the benefit of <i>introducing new technology into the system</i> will vary greatly on the issue at hand.</p> <p>The farmer feedback was less around the technology itself – that is simply seen as a ‘tool of the trade’. But what came through very strongly was the <i>importance of the adviser as a mentor, a coach, a motivator, a challenger of ideas, and a person of trust</i>. Once again, this highlights the <i>value of the ‘soft skills’, the interpersonal skills that create change</i>.</p>
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### **In summary**

These external reports were noted by MLA as being key credible sources of insight from workers other than ABDI.

## Appendix 5 – Additional Case Studies

### Case Study # 2

**Production System:** Northern Territory

**Livestock Numbers:** 6,500 head of beef cattle

**Practice Change Areas:** Business Management, Marketing, Environment

**Demographics:** Category B: Up and coming young people – business and growth mindset

**Key Advisor Impacts:** Developing a 5-year business plan to double livestock numbers; sell into high value markets and leverage with carbon trading

#### Context:

Based in the extensive pastoral zones of the NT and operating as a family business; they commenced business professional development in 2019. Prior to this, no professional development of any sort had been undertaken.

After speaking with peers in their age group (early 30s at the time), they understood the need to better understand running ‘the business side of things’. Accordingly, they a personal and professional development journey which resulted in significant transformation of themselves and their business.

#### Advisor(s) input:

The following advisors contributed to this process:

- ABDI – a business professional development and business advisory firm [fee for service]
- The Grazing For Profit Program - continued involvement over some three years [fee for service]
- Access to state department livestock advisors – no cost, apart from hosting on property trials
- Insights gained from merchandise and product resellers – payment through product purchases
- Accountant – managing their tax and financial affairs, including being on their Management Advisory Board
- Access to a carbon farming specialty advisory firm
- Becoming knowledge seekers – so they could continue to expand their knowledge and its application on property.
- The culmination of the use of this suite of advisors is that they were to able to argue the case with the department that the carrying capacity, nominated by the department, could be safely increased by better managing particular land and pasture systems.

They have also been able to navigate emotions associated with family dynamics and take a far more objective view to property and business decision making than previously.

**Practice Change:**

They attended an ABDI Agri-Business Management Program (part funded by MLA) over 12-months. Three out of four intergenerational partners attended; the fourth (older generation) didn't believe in professional development.

As result of commencing their five-year business planning (an outcome of that program), it became apparent they needed to better understand pasture management and fine tune their production management systems in order to target high value markets.

They attended A Grazing For Profit Course which provided these insights at a higher level. They then came to understand that the local departmental personnel were best placed to advise on on-ground operational management processes.

These insights were augmented by knowledge gained from their merchandise reseller, although they were aware that the product sales system may not necessarily ensure they received the most appropriate animal health or animal nutrition product required to meet their needs (their view being that corporate reseller sales targets and other internal priorities might prevent them getting the best most unbiased advice). As a result, they made contact with a veterinarian.

After developing their five-year plan during the 12 month business course, it became apparent that further understanding of targeting high value markets and maximising pasture production was required.

As they had "limited knowledge on how to achieve those things"; they used the collective expertise of business advisors, production advisors, product and inputs support from resellers, then their accountant (their Management Advisory Board learned from the business program).

By actively building their relationship with the feedlotter, getting specific genetic advice on their animal breeding programs, increasing numbers of cattle at roughly 700 cows per year over a 5-year period and convincing the NT government that a viable carrying capacity was 7400 head; they noted they were now 'on track' to grow from their current 6,500 head to their ultimate objective of 7400 head.

By thinking outside the square, they have also been able to commence a carbon farming project.

**Impact (Tangible):**

After implementing the above plans and following through other professional development opportunities, they have been successful in increasing their herd numbers from 4000- 6500 with an intention to increase to 7400 which they now know is the property's maximum sustainable carrying capacity.

"At a simple averages level, we are now carrying an additional 900 adult equivalents at an average of \$1,000 per head or an extra \$900,000 per year income with minimal extra cost.

Furthermore, we're carrying another 600 steers which on average generate another \$200 per head per year when supplied directly to the (higher value) feedlot who wants 100% of our output. That provides another \$120,000 a year revenue - when totalled together; this is in excess of \$1 million a year additional revenue.

We're now close to adding a potential \$3 million a year revenue from carbon farming over the 5-year period; that equates to significant change as a result of developing a 5-year plan and implementing the change by also coming to understand how to manage our emotional drivers."

**Impact (Intangible):**

- After developing a five-year business plan, in collaboration with business coaches, and in discussion with their peers, this next generation of business owners had increased certainty that they had the skills, capability and capacity to run and operate the business
- The development of the business plan and undertaking further professional development enhanced their skills and increased their confidence in undertaking the planned business developments (with budgets)
- The continued use of coaches and mentors over time help them expand their thinking and provided a 'can do mindset'
- The importance of the sounding board (advisors and mentors) was to gain positive insights and think outside the square, which until this time, had not been a characteristic of the family
- The increased confidence, clarity and certainty allowed them to cut out the noise of negative comments, while also understanding that the data which demonstrated their level of success, is it true an accurate record of their demonstrated capability
- They acquired communication skills to manage internal and external engagement with persons pivotal to the business
- Overtime, their successes meant they had the level of certainty required to investigate options and stand their ground in the face of opposition.

*To what extent has there been an improvement in the following areas in your business from working with advisors (on a scale of 0-10, with 0=no improvement 10=significant improvement):*

Personal confidence and general wellbeing:	8	Management of environmental elements:	4
Confidence in decision making:	8	Management of animal wellbeing elements:	0
Confidence and ability to grow the business:	10	Personnel management:	8
Confidence and ability in running the business:	10	Technical / working knowledge:	8
Management of production elements:	8		

**Decision making support from Advisors**

*What role / function in your decision-making did the Advisor perform:*

Problem Definition, Problem Resolution, Solution Implementation, Monitoring Success, Continuous Improvement

**Attribution**

*On a scale of 0-100%, to what extent do you attribute the improved outcome to the advisor's input / contribution?*

Response: 80%

**Value and ROI:**

*What is your opinion on advisors?*

Response: We regard Advisors as broadly beneficial to our business

*Thinking about how you calculate your financial return on investment, on a scale of 0-10, how important is it to you to go through a formal process of calculating a financial return-on-investment:*

Response: 5 (out of 10)

The significant improvement in financial performance provides a clear value proposition and supports a positive ROI calculation.

We have a book-keeper and regular engagement with the highly competent management accountant. Both provide feedback at monthly board meetings on prior grade metrics. We focus on managing property business performance with feedback from them on financial data.

**Other observations:**

During their “practice change journey” they reported learning the importance of improved self understanding (personalities, behaviours and mindset), particularly of their own of self-beliefs and being prepared to go against the local and industry trends, including trends and beliefs within the family.

They report also learning that, in order to maintain their own confidence and remain consistent to / focussed on ‘their own vision’, “it's essential we cut out all the white noise and focus on what's most important to us. It's interesting as we look back, that we have operated within \$15,000 of our budget projections made back in the day.

“That’s not bad for a bloke who was a Jackaroo 10 years ago and had to rapidly step into the role of the business CEO over about a 5-year period”.

## Case Study #3

**Production System:** Southern Gulf, Queensland

**Livestock Numbers:** 24,000 head of beef cattle

**Practice Change Areas:** Reproduction, Feedbase/Nutrition

**Demographics:** Corporately owned beef cattle property

**Key Advisor Impacts:** Tailored nutritional advice, regenerating native pastures and increased branding percentage.

### Context:

Based in the extensive pastoral zone of Queensland's Southern Gulf this property is an important 'calf factory' for one of Australia's pastoral companies. The Station Manager has significant experience of working on larger corporate beef properties with some flexibility, while adhering to company objectives.

One of the biggest constraints to this area's beef production is calf survival and therefore branding rates. These are key reproductive indicators reflecting better herd health and management, and are key factors in driving revenue and long-term profitability. In this context, branding rates provide a critical measure of reproductive performance and operational resilience.

This station carries approximately 24,000 breeders on approximately 320,000 hectares of land.

### Advisor(s) input:

In 2020, the station manager engaged 3 advisors to assist him improve the herd's branding rates. Their focus was on:

- Improved breeding herd management
- Targeted supplementation and real time pasture assessment.
- Improved pasture utilisation and regeneration of degraded areas/rundown pastures.

### Practice Change:

The different advisors helped the manager to:

- Identify non-performing females through pregnancy testing
- Use foetal aging to determine nutritional requirements of pregnant cows
- Segregate the breeder herd onto pasture types correlated to the age of their foetus
- Provide nutritional supplements, based on real time pasture assessments and tailored to the age of the cow's foetus – to increase liveweight gain in pregnant females and improve foetal and new-born calf survivability rates
- Commence wet season paddock rotation and spelling.

### Impact (Tangible):

Before intervention of the advisors, the property recorded a branding rate of 60%. After adopting the advice/recommendations of the advisors the branding rate increased to 70%.

The below table highlights the financial benefit this increased branding rate has provided to the property's financial performance.

Metric	Baseline	Post-intervention	Incremental Change
Total Breeders	21,000	24,000	
Branding Rate	60%	70%	+ 10 percentage points
Number of Branded Calves/Year	14,500	16,800	+ 2,300 calves/year
Average Gross Revenue per Calf	\$750	\$750	
Additional Revenue	-	$\$750 \times 2,300 = \$1,725,000$	\$1.725M increase in revenue

### Impact (Intangible):

Aside from the financial benefit, further benefits included:

- **Enhanced Herd Genetics:** With an increased number of calves, a broader base was created for selecting superior animals, setting the stage for future improvements in genetic merit.
- **Improved Efficiency:** Better maternal care and reduced neonatal losses lead to lower cost per branded head due to optimized feed, veterinary, and labour costs.
- **Market Positioning:** A high branding rate signals good herd health and robust management, potentially opening avenues for premium pricing and more reliable long-term contracts.
- **Improved Pasture Resource:** The use of paddock rotation, wet season spelling and regular burning of paddocks has facilitated the regeneration of native pastures in areas that had experienced pasture rundown through over grazing.
- **Better Animal Health:** Targeted supplementation of the breeder herd based on real time pasture assessment and correlated to age of foetus means that pregnant females are receiving adequate nutrition sufficient to maintain pregnancy and produce a strong healthy calf better able to survive the rigours of northern Australian summers. First and second calf heifers are also in better condition and more likely to rear their calf and cycle again more quickly – leading to early and better re-conception rates in the herd.

*To what extent has there been an improvement in the following areas in your business from working with advisors (on a scale of 0-10, with 0=no improvement 10=significant improvement):*

Personal confidence and general wellbeing:	7	Management of environmental elements:	5
Confidence in decision making:	7	Management of animal wellbeing elements:	7
Confidence and ability to grow the business:	7	Personnel management:	7

Confidence and ability in running the business:	5	Technical / working knowledge:	8
Management of production elements:	5		
<p><b>Decision making support from Advisors</b></p> <p><i>What role / function in your decision-making did the Advisor perform:</i></p> <p>Problem Definition, Problem Resolution, Monitoring Success, Continuous Improvement</p>			
<p><b>Attribution</b></p> <p><i>On a scale of 0-100%, to what extent do you attribute the improved outcome to the advisor's input / contribution?</i></p> <p>Response: Average 60%</p> <p>Note: The manager confirmed that previous experience working on similar types of properties (working for different companies) in northern Australia has given him learning in many of the practice change areas – but it was beneficial to have his thinking reaffirmed by the advisors. Despite this the Manager confirmed that he regularly talks with his peers who he knows have had similar issues. These peers can be internal to the company or may be on neighbouring properties.</p>			
<p><b>Value and ROI:</b></p> <p><i>What is your opinion on advisors?</i></p> <p>Response: We regard Advisors as broadly beneficial to our business</p> <p><i>Thinking about how you calculate your financial return on investment, on a scale of 0-10, how important is it to you to go through a formal process of calculating a financial return-on-investment:</i></p> <p>Response: 8 (out of 10)</p> <p>In this case study, the additional 2,300 branded calves (achieved over 4 years) contribute an extra \$1,725 in gross revenue. While this simplified calculation does not account for the variable costs linked to animal rearing or the investment into supplementary feeding, it clearly illustrates that incremental improvements in branding rates can lead to a notable revenue upswing, as a result of improved calf survival which leads to further downstream benefits of increased genetic quality and market reputation.</p>			
<p><b>Other observations:</b></p> <p>The case study shows that improving branding rates provide immediate financial benefit and long-term operational sustainability. Shorter term costs and additional management requirements include upfront investments in technology, training, and management practices.</p>			

It's apparent that the longer term benefit is that increased calf survivability delivers a strong return on investment and increased profitability, while navigating inherent challenges of northern Australia's cattle systems.

The Manager commented that these strategic improvements support his intention of creating a cycle of continuous improvement; with increased revenue allowing reinvestment to further strengthen herd management, which in turn drives even higher levels of performance.

This experience has created a compelling argument for embracing rigorous breeding and management protocols. In particular, the increase in branding rate, from 60% to 70%, has generated significant financial benefits by converting former losses (before involvement of the advisors) into revenue gains.

The Manager believes that while some of the increased branding rate percentage can be attributed to improved seasonal conditions the jump from 60% to 70% can largely be attributed to the use of advisors.

As a result of this experience, the Manager has increased confidence in being able to continue his cycle of continuous improvement, is able to better focus on longer term business growth plans as a result of being able to call on a proven advisor cohort to support identification of problems and solutions and has improved his career prospects in the pastoral industry.

In general though, his level of happiness and certainty about his capability and capacity in the job, has significantly improved and provided increased stability and certainty in his business and operational life (particularly operating in a remote area of Australia).