



Making More From Sheep

REPORT



Development, implementation and evaluation
of the project 2005–2016



A joint initiative of Australian Wool Innovation
and Meat & Livestock Australia



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Making More From Sheep: a joint initiative of Australian Wool Innovation and Meat & Livestock Australia



Executive summary

This report contains a consolidated description of the development, implementation and closing of the *Making More From Sheep (MMFS)* project from 2005–2016, along with a review of project management.

It aims to provide:

- a resource for future program managers based on the experience and lessons learnt by project personnel
- observations and recommendations from independent project evaluators.

MMFS was instigated and funded by Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) with the overall goal of:

Providing Australian lamb and wool producers with a best practice package of information and management tools to assist them achieve profitable and sustainable sheep production.

Specific objectives of *MMFS* were to:

- raise sheep producer awareness of the *MMFS* manual and website
- motivate sheep producers to engage with the program by using the manual/website and/or participating in a related learning activity
- achieve sheep producer adoption of the key management principles and practices outlined in the manual/website to increase profitability and sustainability.

The project addressed this objective by developing initial supporting strategies and a plan for communication, delivery and extension for 2006–09. In 2010, a second phase (Phase 2 and its extension) of *MMFS* was developed based on a business case that set targets and incorporated recommendations from the Phase 1 evaluation, with the budget established by the executive committee using Phase 1 expenditure as a guide.

The project's primary audience was:

- the top 30% of sheep producers (a combination of information seekers and large flocks) who produce 70% of Australia's wool
- innovative sheepmeat producers.

Secondary audiences included:

- farm employees
- new industry entrants
- industry partners (who can influence producer adoption decisions)
- other stakeholders.

Following an initial investment over four years starting in 2005 (Phase 1) the project was extended, after which a second phase began (Phase 2: 2011–13) and was also subsequently extended (Phase 2 extension: 2014–16) ending in December 2016.

20,361 participants were engaged in 1,035 activities over the total life of the project.

MMFS was jointly managed and funded by AWI and MLA. In Phase 1 *MMFS* was led by AWI as managing agency with MLA as co-funder, with the situation reversed for Phase 2 and the Phase 2 extension (i.e. MLA managing agency and AWI co-funder).

MMFS was guided by an Executive Committee comprising two AWI staff, two MLA staff and the national coordinator and supported by a Project Advisory Panel, to act as a conduit for industry feedback, provide advice and review progress.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The national coordinator organised supporting functions, developed *MMFS* resources and oversaw implementation by the state coordinators of the project. The state coordinators managed event delivery by private and public service providers.

A communications consultant was engaged to manage the launch of the manual and related communications. Producer advocates provided case studies for videos and publications.

MMFS used a delivery model of engaging experienced event deliverers, sourced by word-of-mouth or expression of interest. This saved money on training and reduced risk of poor delivery. However, it did not significantly grow the delivery network or the skill/capability of deliverers.

The launch of the program was delayed due to time overruns with the development of the manual. Ultimately this did not affect meeting awareness and participation targets for Phase 1, as the delivery organisations stepped up the roll-out of events. Phase 2 delivery timelines were met and, again, participation targets were generally over-achieved.

Gaps in delivery occurred when one phase finished and the next started. This stop/start nature of the project caused significant extra administrative work and needs better management for future projects.

From 2005–2016 \$5,468,597 was allocated to the project on a roughly equal-shares basis by AWI and MLA with \$5,418,225 being spent – an underspend of \$50,372 (0.9%).

Project costs were scoped initially in the delivery and marketing strategy (2006) and further refined in the Communication, Delivery and Extension Plan 2006–09. The system of breaking the project down into components, each with its own contract and budget line, meant a lot of the risk associated with cost management was passed on to contractors.

The Phase 1 budget was adequate for achieving most project objectives with a couple of exceptions; hard copy manual sales only met half the target and the budget for producer advocates was insufficient to allow them to attend a large number of events.

The Phase 2 budget was developed from the executive committee's assessment of the Phase 2 business case, and their experience from Phase 1.

Complexities in the new 'user pays' model of funding activities using Category A, B and C events saw budget management become more complex for state coordinators.

There were three extensions to Phase 2, all based on a pro-rata extension of the targets from the Phase 2 business case.

MMFS was generally considered a good investment for MLA/AWI. Most targets were over-achieved and the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) (calculated twice during the program) showed a BCR of 3.9:1 at the end of Phase 1 (GHD Hassall, 2009) and a BCR of 5.6:1 at the end of Phase 2 (Beattie and Howard, 2013) and a net present value of \$13.98 million.

Evaluation of the *MMFS* manual showed that 62% of participants rated the manual as either 'very useful' or 'useful'.

The website was well supported and 1,300 copies of the full manual were downloaded in Phase 1, compared to sales of the hard copy manual of approximately 1,400. There were around 60,000 visits to the website in the 18 months of Phase 1 at an average 3,000/month, rising to around 16,000/month by the end of the project.

MMFS event quality, based on producer feedback in Phase 1, showed events were generally considered outstanding, with 97% of participants rating events as either 'useful' or 'very useful'.

Evaluation of practice change and adoption from Phase 2 found 76% of producers interviewed had made on-farm change after attending a *MMFS* event (extrapolated to 56% of all producers attending *MMFS* events).

During Phase 2, a more structured approach was developed to create a learning pathway.

Events were categorised as:

- ➔ Category A (awareness) – funded up to 100% by *MMFS* and were generally free or cost up to \$30 each for participants
- ➔ Category B (knowledge and skills) – funded up to 50% (cost for participants around \$50)
- ➔ Category C (adoption) – funded up to 20% with participants paying up to \$1,850 for a series of activities.

If there was a difference between *MMFS* funding, participant fees and event costs, the remainder of the cost was funded by sponsorship or co-funding.

This approach was met with a degree of concern resulting in discussions between state coordinators and MLA/AWI to iron out inconsistencies (some similar events attracted different costs depending on where they were held and who sponsored them) and ensure all states implemented a uniform approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

MMFS communications were managed at two levels: promotional communication to producers and internal communications to project personnel.

Promotional communication was guided initially by the communication, delivery and extension plan and included

the appointment of a communications consultant to manage the launch of the *MMFS* manual and subsequent event promotion (pre and post). After the contract expired in Phase 1, this type of communication was managed by MLA/AWI and the national coordinator in an ad hoc way.

Evaluation found high producer awareness of *MMFS* and good support for events, so a more active communications program was of limited value. A quarterly newsletter (email update) started in 2008 with 30 editions distributed in to around 3,000 subscribers, with an average opening rate of 32%.

Internal communications were mostly overseen by the national coordinator using regular telephone and email communications with state coordinators and (mostly) twice yearly face-to-face meetings. Producer advocates were brought together three times and the Executive Committee met 12 times.

Risk was managed using plans and contracts that spelt out the requirements for development and delivery. Standard operating procedures (SOP) were developed by each state to streamline event approval and funding, which managed consistency and reduced risk for event delivery. A national M&E SOP ensured consistency in the collection of information and data. Overall, there were few risks that could not be managed with contracts, the SOP and clear key performance indicators.

Final evaluation of *MMFS* included interviews with the state coordinators and selected event deliverers to gain insights on internal running and project highs and lows. The ability to customise events in the context of local issues, while still linking to the manual content, was seen as a strength of the project by these stakeholders.

Many state coordinators and deliverers found the program to be very worthwhile and provided a raft of suggestions for future extension programs, incorporating the strengths of *MMFS* and negating the weaknesses.

The five key recommendations of this report are:

- 1. Share:** Publicise this report amongst all the industry research and development corporations to create awareness of its existence as background reference material for future projects. The report is also applicable to other extension agencies, such as government departments, natural resource management and catchment management authorities.
- 2. Length:** Large flagship programs should run for a minimum of five years, with built-in review and continuous improvement processes and stop/go points to ensure adherence to needs or discontinuation.
- 3. Measure:** Build measurement and evaluation (M&E) into the planning phase to ensure M&E evolves with the needs of the project and contributes to continuous improvement from the beginning.
- 4. Investment:** While the *MMFS* funding model worked overall, future projects will need to review what constitutes delivery costs to streamline costs without compromising quality.
- 5. Revisit:** Consider commissioning a final evaluation of practice change for *MMFS* in 2017 to demonstrate post-program impact.

Each chapter of this report includes an 'at a glance' section providing lessons learnt which may be relevant to other projects.

In conclusion, this report provides a detailed history of the *MMFS* project and its achievements and is recommended as a resource for any extension professional engaging in new project development.



1

Introduction

This report contains a consolidated description of the development, implementation and closing of the *Making More From Sheep (MMFS)* project from 2005–16 and a critique against recognised functions of project management.

The report aims to provide:

1. a resource for future program managers based on the experience and lessons learnt by selected participants
2. observations and recommendations from independent project evaluators.

Significant investment by industry research and development corporations, state agriculture departments and universities from the 1960s onwards resulted in a considerable amount of information, technology and tools to assist sheep and wool producers to increase productivity, profitability and sustainability.

While most of this information existed prior to *MMFS*, it tended to be disaggregated and delivered in a piecemeal fashion (RPC Solutions Pty Ltd, 2005). Despite the availability of proven technology to enhance productivity, ABARE data shows that in the 24 years from 1978, the sheep industry had annual productivity gains of around 1%, well below the declining terms of trade of 2.1% per annum (RPC Solutions Pty Ltd, 2005).

MMFS was instigated and funded by AWI and MLA to address the above issue with the overall goal of:

Providing Australian lamb and wool producers with a best practice package of information and management tools to assist them achieve profitable and sustainable sheep production.

The specific objectives related to the goal were to:

- raise sheep producer awareness about the *MMFS* manual and website
- motivate sheep producers to engage with the program by using the manual/website and/or participating in a related learning activity
- achieve sheep producer adoption of the key management principles and practices outlined in the manual/website to increase profitability and sustainability.

Key strategies

While the project evolved over time, the overarching strategy was to engage as many producers from the target segments as possible with the manual/website, related products and learning activities, as well as to establish a supportive industry partner network.

Initial supporting strategies were:

- program coordination through national and state coordinators
- development and implementation of a communications plan
- establish and train a delivery network to engage producers in learning activities
- identify and train producer advocates as key influencers
- engage industry partners
- develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation plan.

Target markets

The primary audience for the project was specified as:

- the top 30% of sheep producers (a combination of information seekers and large flocks) who produce 70% of Australia's wool
- innovative sheep meat producers.

Secondary audiences included:

- farm employees
- new industry entrants
- industry partners (who can influence producer adoption decisions)
- other stakeholders.

Following an initial investment for four years starting in 2005 (Phase 1) the project was extended, after which a second phase started (Phase 2 – 2011) and was subsequently extended (Phase 2 extension – 2014) ending in December 2016.

Table 1: MMFS project stages

Stage	Activity	Timeframe
Initiating	Project scoping and needs analysis.	July 2005 – June 2006
Planning	Project design, development of Communication, Delivery and Extension Plan 2006–09.	Jan 2006 – June 2007
Executing (1)	Writing and road testing the MMFS manual and website development.	Jan 2006 – Dec 2007
Executing (2)	Stakeholder engagement, communications program supporting awareness, delivery of events (participation), content updating (website), newsletter, Phase 1 evaluation, Phase 1 extension, Phase 2 business case.	July 2007 – Sept 2010
Executing (3)	Phase 2 approval, Phase 2 standard operating procedures, implementation, Phase 2 extension, coordination and delivery; contract variation.	Sept 2010 – Nov 2016
Closing	Project closure and putting legacy plans in place.	Jun 2016 – Dec 2016
Controlling	Setting in place administrative and management structures and procedures and ensuring their performance. Project partner responsibilities, Executive Committee, standard operating procedures, contracting, milestones, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.	July 2005 – Dec 2016

Key performance indicators (KPIs) and results

Table 2: Phase 1 (January 2008 – June 2009) High level KPIs

	Awareness	Participation	Manuals distributed	Practices changed
KPI	15,000	2,500	5,000	50%
Actual (Jan 08 – June 09)	17,400	4,544 ¹	3,450 ²	44–57% ³

¹ Estimated businesses attending events

² Does not include individual module website downloads or online viewing

³ MLA Axiom KPI Surveys 2008 & 2009, MMFS GHD Hassall external review 2009

Table 3: Phase 2 (January 2011 – December 2013) Program participation (number of people)

State	Category A ¹		Category B ²		Category C ³	
	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved	Target	Achieved
NSW	1,328	1,818	470	634	235	309
VIC	860	1,771	303	1,005	152	515
SA	508	1,448	180	807	90	634
WA	898	1,620	318	870	160	316
TAS	117	1,047	41	633	21	327
QLD	195	551	70	242	35	109
Total	3,906	8,255	1,382	4,191	693	2,210

1 Category A participation is 'Awareness' and can be achieved by attending an A, B or C event.

2 Category B is 'Knowledge and Skills' and is measured by pre and post-event assessment at a Category B or C event.

3 Category C is 'Practice Change' and is measured at a Category B or C event where a pre and post-event assessment is completed and where the intent to change practice is nominated along with the intended change, or where practice change has occurred from a previous MMFS event.

Table 4: Phase 2 extension (January 2014 – December 2016) Program participation (number of people)

State	Category A ¹		Category B ²		Category C ³	
	Target*	Achieved	Target*	Achieved	Target*	Achieved
NSW	885	2,073	313	952	157	431
VIC	573	1,428	202	1,067	101	514
SA	339	977	120	472	60	277
WA	599	1,241	212	629	107	350
TAS	78	1,015	121	599	24	327
QLD	130	828	47	274	23	105
Total	2,604	7,562	1,015	3,999	472	2,004

1 Category A participation is 'Awareness' and can be achieved by attending an A, B or C event.

2 Category B is 'Knowledge and Skills' and is measured by pre and post-event assessment at a Category B or C event.

3 Category C is 'Practice Change' and is measured at a Category B or C event where a pre and post-event assessment is completed and where the intent to change practice is nominated along with the intended change, or where practice change has occurred from a previous MMFS event.

* Targets are taken from the Phase 2 business case. Contract variations increased some of these targets by a small amount during the final 12 months.

Benefit-cost ratio was calculated twice during the program; at the end of Phase 1 (BCR = 3.9:1) by GHD Hassall (2009) and again prior to the extension of Phase 2 (BCR = 5.6:1) by Beattie and Howard (2013).

Table 5: MMFS whole of program income and expenditure

Income	Phase 1 plus extension Jul 2005 – Dec 2010	Phase 2 plus extension Jan 2011 – Dec 2016	Total
AWI	\$1,065,211	\$1,666,630	\$2,731,841
Land & Water Australia	\$80,000	0	\$80,000
MLA	\$897,050	\$1,645,250	\$2,542,300
Manual and CD sales	\$93,165	\$21,291	\$114,456
Total income	\$2,135,426	\$3,333,171	\$5,468,597
Expenses			
Manual scoping and coordination	\$121,536	0	\$121,536
Writing manual	\$238,288	0	\$238,288
Stakeholder testing of manual	\$166,439	0	\$166,439
Manual design and publishing	\$265,889	0	\$265,889
Manual warehousing and distribution	\$20,366	0	\$20,366
Delivery strategy	\$50,105	0	\$50,105
National coordination fees and expenses	\$368,348	\$617,343	\$985,691
State coordination fees and expenses	\$357,800	\$1,011,620	\$1,369,420
Producer events and activities	\$248,150	\$1,311,731	\$1,559,881
Industry partner programs	\$25,000	\$10,548	\$35,548
Meeting costs	\$56,357	\$18,181	\$74,538
Manual update	\$18,000	\$26,999	\$44,999
Monitoring and evaluation	\$30,000	\$48,836	\$78,836
Communications, printing, distribution	\$204,714	\$135,336	\$340,050
Website development and management	\$41,729	\$24,910	\$66,639
Total expenses	\$2,212,721	\$3,205,504	\$5,418,225

2 Project chronology

Following the success of the *More Beef from Pastures* manual (developed by MLA) in 2004, AWI and MLA funded a development plan (RPC Solutions Pty Ltd, 2005) for a similar comprehensive resource package of best practice, tools and signposts for the sheep industry.

The *MMFS* development plan proposed a rationale, method, time frame and budget for creating a manual.

A steering committee instigated market research on industry demand for such a resource (Down to Earth Research, 2006), along with potential delivery channels and marketing messages to generate producer interest.

This research was used to expand on the initial concept and budget. A proposal for a three-year project to develop the manual and support its delivery via seminars and workshops under the brand *Making More From Sheep* was the outcome.

The delivery and marketing strategy was developed (Porter Novelli, 2006), and it led to a more detailed Communication, Delivery and Extension Plan 2006–2009 (MLA & AWI, 2006).

Teams, made up of industry experts, wrote each of the 11 manual modules (to become 12 in 2016) and ‘road tested’ each module with producer groups in all sheep production zones. Final editing of the manual, production of a hard copy version, creation of the website and CD were finalised in late 2007.

MMFS was launched at Goondiwindi in February 2008.

Timeline

2005	AWI and MLA Executive Committee convened
	Project Advisory Panel convened
	Development plan report
2006	Market research report, Down to Earth Research
	Marketing strategy, Porter Novelli
	Communication delivery and extension plan 2006–2009, AWI & MLA
2007	National coordinator appointed
	State coordinators appointed
	Communications consultant appointed, Sefton and Associates Pty Ltd
	Hard copy manual printed, website and CD finalised
2008	Promotional activities start
	<i>MMFS</i> launch at Goondiwindi event coinciding with Landline story
	Producer advocates training
	First M&E plan developed
2009	Communications consultant contract expires
	Coordination and delivery contracts extended to 30 September 2009
	Coordination and delivery contracts extended to 28 February 2010
	External Review of <i>MBfP</i> and <i>MMFS</i> programs, GHD Hassall

2010	<i>MMFS</i> Phase 2 business case developed
	<i>MMFS</i> Phase 2 approved by MLA (five years) and AWI (three years)
	Program administration moves from AWI to MLA
	National coordinator reappointed
	Project Advisory Panel ends
	State delivery agencies contracted to develop state business plans
2011	Phase 2 Producer advocates appointed and given media training
	State coordinators appointed (some reappointed, some new)
	Phase 2 events begin
	Standard operating procedures for Phase 2 M&E in place
	Review and update of all modules completed
2013	Phase 2 contracts for national and state coordinators end
	Phase 2 extension approved by MLA and AWI
2014	National coordinator reappointed for two years
	State coordinators appointed (some reappointed, some new) for two years
	Phase 2 extension business plans developed by states
	Phase 2 extension events begin
2015	Contract extensions for national and state coordinators to June 2016
2016	Contract extensions for national and state coordinators to December 2016
	<i>MMFS</i> events finish
	Final <i>MMFS</i> email update sent to subscribers
	Arrangements made for three further years of website maintenance
	Phase 2 extension M&E report finalised
	State coordinator contracts end
	Program management report finalised
2017	National coordinator contract ends
	<p>Activities to bring the project to a close included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> state coordinator liaison with the delivery network informing them of the end of <i>MMFS</i> local events a final <i>MMFS</i> email to subscribers advising of the end of <i>MMFS</i> local events, plans for the <i>MMFS</i> website and plans by MLA and AWI for new activities allocation of unspent funds on a series of national <i>MMFS</i> webinars development and circulation of this report, along with a program results brochure to targeted cohorts funding for ongoing maintenance of the <i>MMFS</i> website as a source of up-to-date information on sheep and pasture management.

3 Scope definition

Phase 1

A comprehensive scoping document prepared by RPC Solutions Pty Ltd (October 2005) outlined the opportunity, suggested content, strategy, timeline and cost of development of the package, as well as suggestions on delivery.

Using the model proposed by the scoping document, Down to Earth Research reported on the level of interest in a sheep industry best practice package, as well as potential successful communication messages and delivery channels for such a package.

Down To Earth Research conducted in-depth interviews with industry opinion leaders and carried out 400 telephone interviews with randomly selected producers. They found strong support for the package, mostly from industry experts and producers already involved with industry programs.

The majority of interviewed producers recognised they had room to improve performance in areas covered by *MMFS*. Porter Novelli (June 2006) prepared a delivery and marketing strategy for *MMFS* which included project objectives, performance indicators, definition of target audiences, tactics and activities, project management structure and budget. This document was the basis of the communication, delivery and extension plan, the main operational guiding document for Phase 1.

The initial scoping of *MMFS* identified a genuine need, developed suitable plans to fill the need, articulated measures of project success and aligned the objectives and deliverables with higher-level goals.

There was no ex-ante benefit-cost analysis done for *MMFS*, but a reliance on the experience from similar projects (e.g. *More Beef from Pastures*) was evident.



Phase 2

The business case document for Phase 2, developed by AWI and MLA program managers, provided a summary of achievements from Phase 1, industry strategic alignment and tactics for the new phase.

Despite providing performance expectations, there was no budget included with the business case. However it generated sufficient support from AWI and MLA for in-principle approval, with a project budget subsequently prepared.

The development of the budget became the de facto project plan, supported by updating the M&E strategy, standard operating procedures and terms of reference for key project roles such as national and state coordination.

Scoping for Phase 2 relied heavily on the Executive Committee steering the project based on their knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of Phase 1, rather than commissioning a detailed project plan (as for Phase 1). It should be noted that Phase 2, which focused on module review and additional delivery, was far less complex than Phase 1, which included resource development.

Despite being less operationally complex, Phase 2 put extra emphasis on developing a learning pathway from awareness to practice change, to stimulate greater on-farm adoption.

The learning pathway was linked to a user-pays policy as the level of private benefit associated with event types increased. Events were designated as aiming to achieve 'Awareness' (Category A), 'Knowledge and Skills' (Category B) and 'Practice Change' (Category C), with the categories having increasing participant cost and M&E requirements with lower participant numbers from Category A to Category C.

While the Phase 2 business case stated objectives for both innovation in delivery and the use of producer advocates, changes were based more on continuous improvement than developing significantly new approaches.

This was, perhaps, due to a combination of the lack of comprehensive scoping for Phase 2 and its extensions, along with participant satisfaction with the existing approach.

Lessons learnt: scope definition

- **Plan:** Investing in pre-project scoping and market research effectively tested the project concept.
- **Map:** A written plan provided a road map for implementation and helped prevent 'scope drift', while ensuring proposed initiatives weren't forgotten. It was also good for project continuity when staff members changed.
- **Evaluate:** Extending the project (Phase 2) did not require re-scoping as there was evidence from Phase 1 M&E plus the Executive Committee's feedback to enable the new project plan to be developed.
- **Improve:** Employing continuous improvement processes during Phase 2 resulted in refinements to delivery based on feedback from participants rather than developing new approaches.

4

Integrative processes and stakeholder management

MMFS conformed well to the conventional sequential model of project phases from initiation through planning, executing and closing phases, overlaid with a controlling phase running for the life of the project.

Many of the outputs of each phase had their own contracting process and could be considered as sub-projects within *MMFS*. These included writing the manual, developing the website and coordination of event delivery. Each of these activities were reasonably well integrated along a critical path of project delivery.

Hold-ups with some aspects (notably seeking feedback from stakeholders on the draft manual content) impacted on subsequent activities (such as the manual launch). Appointment of a national coordinator assisted with integrating project components. Designating a coordinator with responsibility to implement the overarching strategy and champion the project to stakeholders was an essential component of project management.

Stakeholders were involved from the early stages of *MMFS*. They included the funding bodies, sheep producers (as both advisors and participants), technical specialists, delivery organisations, communication specialists and industry service providers. Some stakeholders were involved on an ongoing basis through the Project Advisory Panel (Phase 1 only) while others helped with one-off activities like manual road testing.

During Phase 1, special effort was made to involve agribusiness in the project at the strategic and delivery level. The rationale was that involving senior management from Elders and Landmark on the Project Advisory Panel would flow through to local branch staff support for individual events, as well as provide a positive industry 'vibe' around *MMFS* through shared ownership.

While some events had significant agribusiness involvement, this was more as a result of local relationships between the delivery organisation and agribusiness agency staff, rather than representation on the Project Advisory Panel. The use of the industry partnership budget to assist with technical training of frontline agribusiness staff was well received, but once again, can't be shown to have resulted in increased agribusiness support.

MMFS existed within a fairly crowded market aiming to attract the attention of farmers, graziers and pastoralists. Programs like EverGraze, Grain and Graze, Leading Sheep, BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB, Bestprac, Prograze, EDGENetwork, Sheep Connect, 8x5, Sheep's Back, LiceSense and various Sheep CRC programs (to name only some) all provided both opportunity for collaboration and the potential for competition. *MMFS* partnered with many of the projects



and gained considerable leverage. Despite a *MMFS* communications project, brand proliferation confused participants and other stakeholders.

Producer advocates operated at a couple of levels. A core group were the subject of case studies, participated in media and delivery training, and presented at events, while another group were only involved at the case study level. Involvement of producer advocates in events was restricted by the logistics and expense.

While it was assumed that using a small number of producer advocates might run the risk of over-exposure of individuals, the effectiveness of producer advocates wasn't formally evaluated.

Phase 2

By Phase 2, *MMFS* was a fairly well-known brand, with 71% of sheep producers aware of the program (MLA Axiom KPI Survey, 2009).

The satisfaction with and value of events to participants was high, with 97% of participants finding events useful (70% extremely useful and 27% of some use, M&E evaluation report July 2007 – June 2009).

The Phase 1 groundwork in stakeholder engagement, program communication and producer advocacy had been successful to an extent that it was considered that some of the resources employed during Phase 1 could be redirected to event delivery for Phase 2.

Lessons learnt: integrative processes and stakeholder management

- **Leadership:** Designating an individual (national coordinator) with responsibility to implement the overarching strategy and champion the project to stakeholders was an essential component of project management.
- **Consultation:** The expectations of stakeholders need to be understood and may require careful management during stakeholder consultation and subsequent project implementation.
- **Size matters:** The concept of a formal, trained producer advocate team delivering at events didn't suit the large number of small *MMFS* activities and is best restricted to large forum events.
- **Corporate support:** Involvement of agribusiness senior management in the Project Advisory Panel didn't guarantee involvement at the local level. There needs to be more thought put into how to engage large agribusiness companies to get on-ground support.
- **Communicate:** Brand confusion is to be expected in the extension marketplace and can be exacerbated through partnership and user-pays approaches. While this may not necessarily be an issue, a clear communication and promotion strategy to cut through to producers and other stakeholders can help.

5 Management of time

A timeline for *MMFS* was first put forward in the delivery and marketing strategy developed by Porter Novelli (2006).

By the time the Communication, Delivery and Extension Plan 2006–2009 was developed the timeline was under pressure and some activities took longer than anticipated. The time frame blew out the most in getting feedback on the modules and during the design phase.

Feedback on the content was held up for two reasons. Firstly, there was varying quality between the modules, with some requiring minimal alteration while others needed considerable work; and secondly, time was lost due to the process of getting feedback.

Quality variability possibly had to do with selection of the writing teams, although some dissatisfaction was more related to issues around stakeholders wanting to promote commercial interests, especially in the Market Focused Wool Production module.

Other activities progressed well while the manual was being finalised, including road testing of the manual, initiating discussions and booking time with designers and printers, building the website, developing relationships with state delivery organisations, nominating and approaching producer advocates, developing a communications plan and organising the launch.

It is hard to see how all these activities could have been completed much before the manual was ready in any case, indicating the project plan had underestimated timing.

A feature of projects with multiple investors is the time it takes to get endorsement from representatives and subsequent committee approval. This can be assisted by having clear guidelines around the decision making delegation by executive staff as well as making decisions by email, rather than having to schedule meetings.

The design phase incorporated proofreading by members of the executive committee with alterations collated and checked by the national coordinator. Deadlines for feedback were extended on a couple of occasions. At this stage the emphasis was on making sure the quality was right at the expense of time, resulting in the manual launch being about six months behind. This meant the delivery phase was reduced from a planned three years to 18 months.

Targets for delivery were not adjusted as contracts had already been signed with the state delivery agencies, who remained confident of meeting the targets. It is possible (reflecting on some deliverer feedback) the emphasis on meeting participation targets resulted in reduced emphasis on the development of resources and quality control systems for event content. Despite this, participant satisfaction and value score showed events achieved a high standard, most likely due to experienced event deliverers. As a result, the development of event resources was given a low priority without fully assessing the benefits.

Achieving awareness and participation targets occurred well ahead of schedule, putting the project back on track.

Evaluation results indicated the delay in launching events did not cause harm to the project, but it did require over-achievement in the rollout of events.

Phase 1 contracts for national and state coordination expired on June 30, 2009. New three-month contracts were put in place by AWI to continue delivery activities while an external program review was conducted of *MMFS*. After the three-month contracts expired, further extensions were signed for delivery up to the end of February 2010.

The external program review was received by MLA in December 2009 and showed a BCR of 3.9:1 for *MMFS*, sufficient for MLA and AWI program managers to develop a business case for a second phase of the project, approved in March 2010.

Program administration moved from AWI to MLA in July 2010. The national coordinator was reappointed in September 2010 and state coordination agencies were contracted to develop state

business plans in December 2010. These took several months to approve and Phase 2 delivery didn't start until May 2011, some 14 months after Phase 1 events finished.

The stop-start nature of the project from July 2009 until May 2011 illustrates the significant administrative work and time required to stop and restart a project, with very little associated benefit.

The Phase 2 business case was approved by the MLA board for five years and the AWI board for three years (until December 2013). Another benefit-cost analysis was conducted by Beattie and Howard (published May, 2013) showing a benefit-cost ratio of 5.6:1 when assessed over a 25-year period.

This was sufficiently encouraging for AWI to commit to the Phase 2 extension until December 2015, matching the original MLA commitment. The executive committee decided to call for expressions of interest (EOI) for state coordination for the Phase 2 extension rather than extend the existing state coordination contracts.

This was partly due to state government departments in Western Australia and NSW ceasing to provide coordination services and resulted in some new state coordination contractors. Project objectives and key performance indicators in the EOI were taken from the last two years of the Phase 2 business case.

At this time, MLA started developing a new majority market program to be based on a coaching model for when *MMFS* ended. By September 2015 it became apparent the new program wouldn't be ready by the *MMFS* end date of December 2015 so, with AWI agreement, contracts for state and national coordination were extended for six months to June 2016 and subsequently for another six months to December 2016. While not as cumbersome as the extensions associated with Phase 1, the Phase 2 extensions added significantly to the project administration work.

Lessons learnt: management of time

- **Systems:** With multiple investors it takes time to get endorsement of outputs by organisational representatives and subsequent committee approval. Systems should be put in place to manage this.
- **Contracts:** Extending contracts or re-contracting is time consuming and can cause unnecessary delays and stops in delivery.
- **Length:** It is likely to be more efficient to design a project for a longer period with the ability to terminate the project if it fails to meet objectives, rather than to run a project for a shorter period and extend it if it is going well.
- **Flow:** New project development needs to take place in parallel with existing programs to enable continuity of engagement of producers and stakeholders through the transition. Consideration of the impact of start-stop nature of program delivery on stakeholders and producers is a factor that has not been explored.

6 Management of cost

Phase 1

Cost estimates were included in the RPC Solutions (2005) scoping document and the Porter Novelli delivery and marketing strategy (2006) and further refined in the Communication, Delivery and Extension Plan 2006–09. The system of breaking the project down into components, each with its own contract and budget line, worked well and meant a lot of the risk associated with cost management was passed onto contractors. The Phase 1 project budget was adequate for achieving most of the project objectives, with a couple of exceptions.

To balance, the budget was initially reliant on hard copy manual sales, with 2,500 produced to be sold at \$65 each to levy payers and \$130 each to non-levy payers.

Additionally 5,000 CDs were produced to sell at \$10 each. In hindsight, sales targets were ambitious, given the manual content was freely available and downloadable. By June 2009 around 1,400 hard copy manuals had been sold along with 980 CDs, for a total income of \$93,165, well below the budgeted \$181,250. Subsequently, the Project Advisory Panel recommended the project not be made dependent on the sales targets. The Executive Committee agreed and suggested the income shortfall be made up from cost savings in other areas, mostly the project launch (budgeted at \$96,000, but costing a fraction of this due to being scaled back during the severe drought at the time).

The other area where budget fell short was the resourcing of producer advocate activities. The project plan envisaged producer advocates delivering to groups, targeting information seekers and actively encouraging the adoption of improved management practices.

However, after initial promotional activities, most of the delivery was to small groups in diverse locations, making the participation logistically and financially difficult. As a result, the producer advocate program evolved away from events to media activity such as case studies and videos.

Despite some initial concerns of inadequate funding for delivery activities, all states exceeded their participation targets with 97% of attendees finding the events to be useful (M&E report, June 2009) and 57% changing management practices as a result of participation (GHD Hassall program review, 2009). State coordinators became skilled at leveraging their delivery budget through partnerships with industry organisations and programs.

Phase 2

The budget for Phase 2 (and its extensions) was developed by the Executive Committee based on the Phase 2 business case along with experience from Phase 1. Having fewer components to allow for than in Phase 1, this was a fairly straightforward exercise.

However, with the development of a more rigorous user-pays 'learning pathway' approach involving Category A (awareness), Category B (knowledge and skills) and Category C (adoption) events and associated targets, the role of budget management for state coordinators became more complex. A new standard operating procedure specified the percentage of cost contribution that *MMFS* would make to each category of event, with the remaining costs to be paid by participants, partners and/or sponsors.

Category A (low private benefit) could be *MMFS* funded up to 100%, Category B up to 50% and Category C (high private benefit) up to 20%. It resulted in *MMFS* funds becoming highly leveraged, allowing the states to massively exceed their KPIs, which had been based on the more costly approach (to the program budget) used in Phase 1.

The user-pays concept didn't always evolve as anticipated. Some partners in event organisation (e.g. NSW Local Land Services and some AWI network projects) preferred to run free events because their system didn't allow for participant fees to be collected or their source of funds didn't require participant contribution. This occasionally led to events with similar content



charging different fees. There were no mechanisms to monitor the attitude of participants to this pricing disparity and we can only speculate on its impact.

In Phase 1 when AWI were the administrators and Phase 2 when MLA were the administrators, getting up-to-date expenditure reports was a time-consuming process. This was because the standard organisational cost codes did not always line up with project expenditure lines, especially for non-contracted items such as meetings, communication costs and producer advocate expenditure.

Similarly, some partner organisations such as state departments found it difficult to allocate expenditure adequately through their internal financial systems. They appeared to ‘underspend’ funds or, alternatively, appeared to provide high levels of service provision to *MMFS* events because they could not always charge for all associated costs. This was not the case for private organisations able to directly allocate event costs to *MMFS*, which at times made the events appear more expensive, but in fact was a closer representation of the true cost.

Lessons learnt: management of cost

- **Fixed:** Using set price contractors with regular milestone reviews linked to project stop/go points provided a high level of cost control.
- **Book work:** Project expenditure categories should be aligned to organisational cost codes for easier management.
- **User pays:** Consistency in charging participant levy payers is hard to achieve when event partners have different cost-recovery policies.
- **Transparency:** Sometimes costs were hidden or absorbed by government agencies as their systems didn’t adequately record the ‘true cost’ of an event.

Phase 1

MMFS manual and website

At the start of *MMFS* the hard copy manual was often referred to as the centrepiece of the project around which the other project resources (events, website, email update) revolved. It was heavily promoted through the communications strategy developed by Sefton and Associates. Deliverers at events were asked to make clear the link between their presentations and specific modules in the manual, as well as utilise the *MMFS* tools where possible.

Feedback on the quality of the manual was generally positive, with 62% of participants rating it 'very useful' or 'useful'. Of the 300 participants surveyed (Hassall, June 2009), 73% preferred the hard copy format, 6% preferred the CD, 4% preferred the internet and 17% had not used the manual.

Despite this the website was well used with 1,300 copies of the full manual downloaded and 60,000 visits to the site in the 18 months of Phase 1. This compared to sales of the hard copy manual of approximately 1,400. URL links were updated on the *MMFS* website every six months. It became apparent that URL links in the hard copy manual had a very short lifespan, with no ability for updating them. This, along with generally improved computer skills and internet speeds, were major factors in deciding not to reprint an updated manual.

Events

Quality of events can be considered in a couple of different ways. Firstly, producer feedback on Phase 1 events was generally outstanding, with about 97% of participants rating events as either 'useful' or 'very useful'. There appears to be some variation between states and modules on the emphasis between 'useful' or 'very useful', but the total of both categories is uniformly high. This variation between 'useful' and 'very useful' was not looked at in any detail.

Secondly, event quality could be considered in terms of how *MMFS* delivery achieved the corporate objectives of AWI and MLA.

Because of time and resource constraints (due to the blow-out in manual development time), there was very little guidance given to delivery organisations on the content of workshops and how they should link to AWI and MLA corporate objectives.

Development of content was largely left up to the delivery organisation, with the overarching guideline that event participants must be able to implement at least one procedure from one module after having attended an event. This meant a Wean More Lambs event, for example, delivered in one location by one presenter could differ substantially in content, resource material provided and level of detail compared to a Wean More Lambs event delivered in a different area. This was not necessarily a problem as each module covered a lot of ground and only certain aspects may be locally relevant or timely, allowing local knowledge to influence content.

On the other hand, the Hassall Adoption Survey (June 2009) showed many events were not being tied into the manual content very well and ranged across various modules, leaving participants unsure which sections of the manual they had covered.

This was especially the case when *MMFS* events were delivered in partnership with other projects (such as Evergraze). This is just an observation and not necessarily an issue and it reinforces the integrated nature of topics within farming.

Phase 2

MMFS manual and website

A review of all module web pages, downloadable PDFs and website content was undertaken at the beginning of Phase 2. Each module review was contracted to a subject matter expert, who sought additional input through their network.

Extra tools were added and links updated. Hotlinks to websites remained problematic and web pages continued to be checked for broken links roughly every six months. Where publisher approval was granted, linked documents were uploaded to the *MMFS* website (rather than linking to another site).

Website usage increased steadily to average around 16,000 visits a month. It is assumed that website usage increased through its promotion in the quarterly subscriber email update along with a general increase in program awareness. Following the module reviews, a new module was added (Efficient Pastoral Production) along with other additional resources for event deliverers (e.g. animal health resources).

The website housed a 'member login area' for the national and state coordinators to download templates and resources.

Over the life of the project 30 quarterly email updates were sent to around 3,000 subscribers with an opening rate usually around 30%.

Events

A more structured approach to developing a learning pathway for participants was proposed in the Phase 2 business case and was introduced through the state business planning process.

States were provided with a business plan template stipulating KPIs for different types of events, being Category A (awareness), Category B (knowledge and skills) and Category C (adoption). Details around this categorisation were contained in the standard operating procedures. Modifications were made to the SOP as the project progressed (especially at the start of the Phase 2 extension) and the user-pays expectations of MLA and AWI evolved. Policy on user-pays varied between partner organisations, requiring some flexibility of partnership activities.

The implementation of these changes caused some issues for coordinators and event deliverers (further explored in the Governance and administration section), however they did not affect the satisfaction and value scores from participants, averaging 8.4/10 for satisfaction and 8.0/10 for value. The extent to which the 'learning pathway' increased on-farm adoption above the more generalised workshop approach was not specifically evaluated, however it may be possible to draw some conclusions from the higher BCR achieved in Phase 2 above the Phase 1 BCR (see section 12).



While discussed at state coordinator meetings, the provision of a nationally uniform set of resources to address issues raised by event deliverers was never comprehensively dealt with, leaving state coordinators to address deliverer issues on a case-by-case basis.

Event deliverers suggested the following areas for improvement:

- Readily available hard copies of the relevant *MMFS* modules/tools/tasks: printing resources was time consuming, costly and often not included in event costs.
- Standardised PowerPoint slides which could be modified according to context and audience, rather than just a branded template: this was only done for a couple of modules (Wean More Lambs and Healthy and Contented Sheep), well after many deliverers had developed their own resources. Some deliverers said it was a lot of work to do a one-off event/workshop because of the preparation, whereas a series of workshops allowed preparation time to be spread over several events with some minor tweaking.
- Training in the use of *MMFS* tools and how to turn the manual into a workshop/event: A lack of training increased the likelihood of an inconsistent approach and a tendency for deliverers to ignore tools they didn't know how to use.
- Following individual participant engagement with *MMFS* over time: this would allow monitoring of the intended pathway of progression from Category A to C events for individual participants.
- M&E requirements for events, especially when changes were made: in a small percentage of cases events were designed to minimise cost-sharing and M&E requirements rather than being designed to suit the learning objective. For further discussion on evaluation see section 12.

Lessons learnt: meeting quality requirements

- **Longevity:** Printed documents using web hotlinks quickly go out of date.
- **Usability:** Hotlinks on web pages need frequent monitoring to ensure they are working.
- **Resources:** Standardised resources for events, with some ability for customisation, would save considerable duplication of effort by event deliverers. These resources should be made available as early as possible.
- **Assess:** The M&E system should allow for easy tracking of individual participants' engagement with the program over time.

8 People resources

The following human resources made up the project team. Each committee or role operated under a terms of reference or contract with meeting minutes and milestone reports being the accepted record of activity. The individuals making up the committees and roles discussed below are listed in Appendix A of this report.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee was the instigator and a strong guiding influence in the early phases with significant input up until the launch of the manual. This was at the strategic level, relating to the development of the project plan and operationally until the appointment of the national coordinator and communications consultant. After that, and for the remainder of Phase 1, it was less involved due to the project being focused on delivery, with the narrower range of activities requiring less strategic input.

The development of the Phase 2 business case was led by the Executive Committee, as was the review of the modules and selection of review teams. Once again, when delivery of events became the main activity in Phase 2, the Executive Committee met less frequently, but still provided an oversight role for the project. The Executive Committee met or held tele-meetings around 12 times during the life of the project. The Executive Committee oversaw the development of the *MMFS* closing and legacy plans and activities.

Project manager

AWI had administrative responsibility for Phase 1 with MLA taking over for Phase 2.

However, the role of project manager was effectively run jointly by one AWI and one MLA program manager. The organising of contracts and the approval of contract milestones and oversight of the national coordinator were important project manager roles.

Project Advisory Panel

This panel, which operated under a terms of reference developed by MLA and AWI, was established early in the project and was made up of various industry stakeholders including producers, industry service providers, consultants and state agency representatives. The panel's purpose was to champion the project, act as a conduit for industry feedback, provide advice and review the progress of the project in conjunction with the Executive Committee. To a large extent the membership was constant, providing continuity. The group met six times with additional tele-meetings. At the beginning of Phase 2 the Executive Committee determined the Project Advisory Panel had served its purpose and dissolved the group.





National coordinator

The national coordinator was appointed in May 2007 and during the project had five contracts with two contract variations, covering 9.5 years. The number of days per year for national coordination started at 144 in Phase 1 and 90 days for Phase 2, reflecting a decreased workload as the project matured.

The national coordinator was supervised by the joint project managers according to the terms of the contract and annual work plan and had the longest involvement with the project of any individual. The role provided a central conduit for the project managers to communicate with state coordinators, and vice versa, and was critical to the project to ensure:

- consistency of message between state coordinators
- high project coordination standards
- manage conflict of interest when organisations' coordinators were employed by applied for events
- the project met its KPIs.

State coordinators

State coordination agencies were appointed (or reappointed) during Phase 1, at the start of Phase 2 and for the Phase 2 extension. Specific individuals were nominated in the contract, with occasional changes in personnel occurring through negotiation between the project manager and the coordination agency.

At the start most coordination agencies were state government agriculture departments, however this balance changed in favour of mostly consulting businesses for the Phase 2 extension. State coordinators operated under a state business plan, produced by the coordination agency according to a template and set of KPIs developed and approved by AWI and MLA.

Communications consultant

The communications consultant was appointed in August 2007 for two years with Sefton and Associates fulfilling the contract. Communication activities beyond that date were organised by the project team, with AWI and MLA communications staff.

Producer advocates

Producer advocates fell into two categories. Firstly, there were those nominated by the Project Advisory Panel or Executive Committee received media training, presented at events and featured in case studies; and secondly, those that were identified by state coordinators or the

communications consultant and were only involved in case studies. While the initial concept for producer advocates was modelled on *MBfP*, the rollout was significantly different. The *MBfP* model had a large advocates budget, tended to run small numbers of large forums, each with advocates presenting, actively involved advocates in the road testing of tools and put significant resources into their training.

MMFS only had a small advocate budget and had difficulty involving advocates in events due to the large number of small events in many locations. As a result, producer advocates for *MMFS* were mainly the subject of case studies for publications such as *Feedback* and *Beyond the Bale*, as well as case studies and videos for the website.

Event deliverers

Deliverers were sourced from the state coordination agencies, employees of other industry agencies/bodies and consultants. Selection was largely left to the state coordinator, sometimes by word-of-mouth, but in other instances via an open call for expressions of interest.

Despite a range of approaches it was reported some potential deliverers felt there was unequal access to the opportunity in some states. *MMFS* did not significantly invest in training for deliverers, mostly preferring to pay the going rate for experienced and well-regarded subject matter experts. The downside was that it did not foster development of younger/more inexperienced deliverers, or expand the delivery network and is not sustainable long term as experienced deliverers retire/move on. Not training deliverers can also affect consistency of messages as deliverers may interpret the *MMFS* manual content differently or have a different bias.

M&E coordinator

For Phase 1, M&E coordination was undertaken by the national coordinator with the support of a data entry contractor. Limitations with this approach were identified at the end of Phase 1 in the program review conducted by GHD Hassall (see section 12). As a result, an M&E coordination role was funded within MLA for both *MMFS* and *MBfP*. During the six years of Phase 2 and its extensions, six different individuals performed this role, five as MLA staff and one as an external contractor.

Lessons learnt: people resources

- **Direction:** Each committee/role in the project team needed a terms of reference, contract or position description to operate under, with clear reporting lines.
- **Centralisation:** National project manager or coordinator was an essential component of such a large project with the main benefit being that this person was a conduit of communications between delivery partners and the funding partners.
- **Spokespeople:** Producer advocates' roles and resourcing need to be better defined if they are to be used again.
- **Upskilling:** Using experienced deliverers does reduce money expended on training. However, it is at the expense of growing the delivery network and skills/capabilities of deliverers to deliver consistent messages nationally.

9

Administration and governance

Of the various committees and roles described in the previous section, most operated under a specific terms of reference or contract with stipulated milestones and within a defined reporting structure.

Governance

Once the AWI and MLA boards approved the project budget and time frame, the Executive Committee had overarching responsibility and set the strategic direction with advice from the Project Advisory Panel. The program manager was in charge of operational matters, with much of the day-to-day operations delegated to the national coordinator. State coordinators reported to the national coordinator or, in some circumstances, directly to the program manager and event deliverers reported directly to state coordinators, sometimes across more than one state.

On the whole, the governance structure worked well even if being a bit cumbersome at times. This is partly the nature of joint-investor projects where each partner needs to be equally informed to be comfortable with decisions, potentially slowing decision making. An example of this was securing approval for contract extensions for both Phase 1 and Phase 2.

MMFS governance structure



Administration

Whole-of-project administration was largely overseen at the project manager level. While the project manager was a joint role for major decisions, for day-to-day administration the responsibility rested with the AWI project manager for Phase 1 and the MLA project manager for Phase 2. With the project structured so most of the operational activity was outsourced to contractors, budget, contract and performance management became key activities.

Budget management

Considerable effort was put into costing the project at the beginning of each phase. For Phase 1 consultants provided costed project plans that were refined by the Executive Committee and for Phase 2 the actual project costs of Phase 1 were used as a guide. The fact that virtually all the major activities were outsourced by contract meant much of the cost risk was transferred to the contractors, who were paid according to performance against milestones. This meant cash flow was predictable and budgets were only updated annually.

The only major budget shortfall was in the income from manual sales (discussed in section 6). However, it should be noted that getting budget reports wasn't easy as the organisational cost codes for both MLA and AWI didn't always align with the project expenditure lines. This meant uncontracted items like producer advocate expenditure, meetings and committees, M&E expenses, ad hoc website maintenance and availability of surplus funds for opportunistic activities were managed by gut feel and annual checking, rather than more regular monitoring.

Contract management

Contract management was conducted according to AWI (Phase 1) and MLA (Phase 2) organisational systems and subject to the two organisations' *MMFS* joint project funding agreement.

Most contracts for service provision were established after calls for expressions of interest. Contract negotiations with states were done by the national coordinator for Phase 1 and by the MLA project manager for Phase 2. State agriculture departments were given the first offer of the state coordination role for Phase 1, with all states except Western Australia accepting. This was done on the assumption that more financial leverage would be gained from the state agencies.

With most state agencies moving to a cost-recovery model and MLA and AWI moving to a user-pays model, the decision was made by the Executive Committee to call for EOI from all interested service providers for state coordination in Phase 2.

Performance management

All contracts were broken into milestones with associated payments for achievement.

In most cases milestones were six monthly, meaning timely action could be taken if milestones weren't being met. State and national coordinator performance was monitored on a more regular basis against the state business plans and the national coordinator's work plan. No contracts were terminated due to performance-related issues, although some contracts had ongoing issues with contractor availability, notably the development of Module 12 resulting in a significant blow-out in time required to complete the task.

State level administration

In the case of event delivery, administration rested with the state coordination agencies who had the budget and responsibility to deal directly with event deliverers and partners under a process developed by each state, but consistent with some overarching project guidelines.

For Phase 2 (especially the Phase 2 extension) a strong emphasis was put on developing a user-pays culture scaled to the category of event, as per the MLA extension/adoption framework embedded in the Phase 2 extension standard operating procedures. After some initial confusion an 'Agribusiness Value Proposition' was developed and circulated to state coordinators in September 2014 specifying the following *MMFS* contribution to event funding.

Event category	<i>MMFS</i> funding (of total event cost)*
Category A (Awareness)	Up to 100%
Category B (Knowledge and skills)	Up to 50%
Category C (Practice change)	20%

* With the remainder of the cost to be funded by participant fees, event sponsorship or co-funding from other programs/projects.

Lessons learnt: administration and governance

- **Partnerships:** Joint-investor projects often required long lead times for decision making.
- **Adaptability:** Overarching program guidelines needed to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate differences in regional operating environments.
- **Deadlines:** Ensuring timely submission and assessment of contractor milestone reports was essential to performance management.

10 Communications

The Communication, Delivery and Extension Plan (2006–2009) for *MMFS* provided for the development and implementation of a communications strategy. A terms of reference for a communications consultant was advertised in July 2007 with Sefton and Associates Pty Ltd being appointed to manage the *MMFS* launch and related communications until June 2009.

Launch of *MMFS*

The initial intention for the launch of *MMFS* was to have a significant national event with high-profile industry speakers, followed by a series of state launches. As the launch approached it became apparent that most of the sheep-producing regions of Australia were suffering from serious drought. It was decided a high-profile event might not have suited the industry mood and the launch should be via a media campaign that included a Landline TV segment on the first delivery event (at Goondiwindi, February 2008) and on-farm profiles of producer advocates.

The Seftons proposal included paid advertorials for rural papers (to ensure space and content), but the executive committee decided to use media releases on the basis that January was a slow news month, meaning the launch was likely to get good coverage in any case.

The result was a mixed and somewhat disappointing coverage in the rural media, but a very good segment on Landline. Events got underway and were generally well supported.

By July 2008 (six months after launch) the results of the MLA KPI survey put the awareness figure among sheep producers at around 20,000 (well above the target of 10,000 for one year after launch); however, understanding of the program objectives was only 39%.

This low understanding prompted a series of producer case studies and industry expert stories aligned to particular modules to better showcase manual content and the benefits of implementation of recommended procedures. There was no follow-up on the effectiveness of this initiative, however event participation was tracking above target.

Other communications

Seftons also created branding templates for events, conducted producer advocate training and assisted with event planning and publicity. An area of missed opportunity was follow-up stories for local media on individual events. This was only built into Seftons' contract in a limited way and relied on the initiative of event organisers/deliverers.

In subsequent years there was little post-event publicity. The main Seftons contract expired in June 2009 at the end of Phase 1. Communications support for Phase 2 relied on the AWI and MLA communication teams, with the emphasis being put on providing content for *Feedback* (MLA) and *Beyond the Bale* (AWI).

MLA updated the event flyer and PowerPoint templates to better control branding, given the increasing amount of partnership activities.

In 2013 an 'Introduction to *MMFS*' video was produced, along with producer case study videos for use at events, field days and on the website. *MMFS* was represented at major field days and industry events on an opportunistic basis, mostly by the national coordinator, particularly early in the program. With high producer awareness and no difficulty in getting support for events, a more active communications program was considered to be of limited value.

A quarterly *MMFS* newsletter (email update) started in 2008. Thirty editions were sent out during the program to around 3,000 subscribers with an average opening rate of 32%. It featured industry news, management tips and coming events.

Within-program communication

In addition to regular telephone and email contact, the Executive Committee mostly met annually, the state coordinators met twice yearly and producer advocates were brought together on three occasions. These meetings helped develop a team approach and facilitated the process of information transfer between states. Feedback from state coordinators (see section 13) indicated team meetings were valued highly to share progress, thrash out issues and hear what was going on in MLA/AWI. Some felt they could have been used more to work together on delivery approaches and strategies.

Communication to event deliverers was 'as needs' with no formal communication channels developed. The state coordinators who wore multiple hats had their own communications with event deliverers through other programs i.e. the BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB program in Victoria had a means of communicating with group coordinators about opportunities for *MMFS* events, but this was mostly left to state coordinators to manage as they saw fit.

Lessons learnt: communications

- **Respond:** Be prepared to modify project plans based on changes to the operating environment (such as drought) and the results of project implementation monitoring.
- **Media monitoring:** Marketing and promotion require a strategy that can be evaluated for effectiveness. This is different from just having a communications plan that creates pathways for sharing information and gaining feedback.
- **Follow up:** Closing the loop with post-event publicity would have helped reinforce the *MMFS* brand and outcomes to producers and stakeholders. This requires a strategy and plan to enable it to happen as a routine part of the program rather than an add-on.
- **Conversations:** Communication with state coordinators and Executive Committee was planned and managed in a timely manner. Communication with event deliverers was as needs and ad hoc regarding event coordination and delivery, rather than overall project progress.

11 Risk management

MMFS was structured as a partnership between AWI and MLA and operated under a partnership agreement developed through the normal contracting processes of each organisation. The normal risk management framework for partnership projects applied. This included controls on contracting, contractor insurance, contract termination, organisational sign-off and program manager supervision. This section will focus on the risks specific to *MMFS*, in particular the management of reputational risk to AWI and MLA through project implementation. There was no formal risk identification and management matrix developed for *MMFS*, with the approach to risk being relatively informal.

Quality risk

Manual

The initial scoping document (RPC Solutions Pty Ltd, 2005) and the delivery and marketing strategy (Porter Novelli, 2006) both identified the need for *MMFS* to be a 'best practice package' that could engage information seekers across a range of existing current management capabilities, enterprise types and climate zones. As such, rather than develop 'management recipes' the manual focused on identifying the principles behind a range of profit drivers, the procedures to follow or consider within the context of the individual business, the relevant information sources (signposts) appropriate to the context and the benchmarks for success.

More than 100 technical experts and sheep producers were involved in the development and testing of the manual for its suitability as both a standalone publication and as the centrepiece for workshops, seminars, field days and other expert-led engagement. Subsequent evaluation of the manual showed that 62% of participants in *MMFS* activities found the manual useful as an information source (GHD Hassall, 2009). Over time it has become difficult to disentangle the manual from the events.

It became apparent early on that while the manual procedures and tools mostly remained relevant, the hard copy manual signposts sections quickly became out of date due to website addresses and URLs changing.

In 2009 the decision was made not to reprint the manual, but to focus on the website. All modules were reviewed, but the issue of broken URL links remained for downloadable PDFs. HTML pages were checked for 'broken links' roughly every six months. The 'broken links' issue continues to be a risk for any online content and requires ongoing maintenance if the manual is to remain online and relevant beyond the life of the project.

Events

Risk associated with event quality was managed through the development of state business plans containing proposed events. These were reviewed by the national coordinator with recommendations made to the project manager (and state coordinators) for modification or approval. Many events were held that weren't a part of the proposed events due to changes in circumstances at the state level, such as the onset of drier than usual seasonal conditions. Quite a bit of latitude was given to the states to do this on the basis of the consistently high levels of satisfaction and value expressed by participants through their evaluation forms.

On a few occasions, feedback was received from industry experts that some messages may not have been best practice or were aligned too closely to commercial interests. Where this occurred state coordinators were informed in the interests of continuous improvement.

In general, state coordinators did a good job of selecting and briefing event deliverers and providing written operating procedures for deliverers. It was a requirement for all *MMFS* events that state coordinators' approval be sought by deliverers using an event expression of interest. This allowed the event to be scoped and mapped to relevant *MMFS* modules and for the state coordinator to ensure it met their standards for a particular event (including evaluation requirements).

Event quality was also managed by selecting experienced deliverers (rather than by selecting and training deliverers – seen as a costlier strategy).

Communications

Managing the reputation of the project was built into the initial communications sub-project managed by Sefton and Associates at the start of the delivery phase. This included providing support to the national and state coordinators on media releases, producer advocate training, case studies and template development for flyers and PowerPoint. However, after the Seftons project finished there was little formalised monitoring of compliance with communication guidelines or assistance for things like media stories (other than in MLA and AWI publications), particularly for the states. One exception to this was a brief period after the Seftons contract when all media releases from states mentioning *MMFS* required approval from AWI for release. One unintended result of this was a reduction in state post-event media releases.

As project personnel changed, many communication activities became ad hoc rather than part of a nationally planned framework. There were no communication disasters of note, but this had more to do with the experience of the people involved rather than implementation of a risk management framework.

Time risk

As previously mentioned, a blow-out in the development time for the manual was a risk to the project time line early in the project. Fortunately lost time was quickly made up through early achievement of participation targets in Phase 1. In fact, KPIs related to participation in the program were significantly exceeded right throughout all delivery phases.

While the delay between ending Phase 1 and beginning Phase 2 could have resulted in a loss of momentum for the program, there was no difficulty in finding event presenters and participants, even in the early stages of Phase 2.

Cost risk

Cost risk was mostly managed through contract specifications and milestones around outsourced activities. See the cost management section for further details on risk management related to the project budget.

Lessons learnt: risk management

- **Agility:** While state business plans helped in planning and accountability, being flexible in plan implementation in the face of changing circumstances was important.
- **Coordination:** Assigning responsibility for designing and using program communication templates early, rather than allowing them to evolve, helps set the expected process and standard. If this is done well the impact can last well into the project.
- **Hurdles:** Making compliance requirements too stringent (for example, media release approval) can result in a lack of activity.
- **Know-how:** The use of experienced staff and contractors is likely to have greatly assisted in risk management.

12 Evaluation

Phase 1

An evaluation plan was developed at the beginning of event delivery in Phase 1. It addressed the KPIs and provided for other qualitative and quantitative measures of project performance, using the Bennett's Hierarchy framework.

Evaluation sheets from events were collated by state coordinators and submitted to the national coordinator for data entry. The data management system was not designed for easy use or retrieval of information, especially at the individual participant level. Other information used in evaluation came from sources such as MLA and AWI surveys, media monitoring (included in the Seftons communication project) and website usage data.

At the end of Phase 1 GHD Hassall conducted an external review of both *MMFS* and *MBfP* (MLA project B.COM.0254). For *MMFS* they found awareness, participation and practice change targets were exceeded and a benefit-cost ratio of 3.9:1 was achieved. Separate to the BCR, participants also claimed activities had produced benefits in natural resource management and a range of social indicators.

Phase 2

Recognising the limitations of Phase 1 event evaluation, it was decided to develop a common system for *MMFS* and *MBfP* so that results could be aggregated more easily. This led to the in-house (MLA) development of an Excel spreadsheet system. States entered their data quarterly and it was collated into a larger spreadsheet, which generated a report. The system was prone to data entry mistakes and required regular checking.

On the positive side, the database provided a basis for evaluation at an event level and allowed MLA to commission further external evaluation of *MMFS* and *MBfP*. Both the 'Assessing the impacts of MLA's Southern Majority Market Program' (MLA project B Com. 0341) and 'Benefit Cost Analysis of the MLA Majority Markets Programs Making More From Sheep and More Beef from Pastures' (MLA Project E.COM.1300) were undertaken by Inspiring Excellence, Farming Answers and Beattie Consulting Services.

These Phase 2 evaluations focused on:

1. adoption of changes on-farm by producer participants as a consequence of their involvement in *MMFS* (participant interviews)
2. putting a value on the practice changes producers have made to the farm business resulting from participation (case studies)
3. calculating a BCR for *MMFS* (based on information collected above).

The *MMFS* database was used as the starting point for selecting participants for interview and follow-up farm case studies. Despite the 'clunkiness' of the database (it was difficult to follow an individual's progress/participation across multiple events), it provided an invaluable resource for evaluation.

The interviews of 179 *MMFS* participants at 130 events between 2010 and 2013 showed that 76% of participants adopted changes on their farm as a result of attendance. The case studies on 37 participants showed a range of benefits from adoption, from increases in productivity and profitability to cases where there was a negative or minimal benefit financially, but other intangible benefits (labour saving, OH&S improvements, changes in stress levels, knowledge, skill etc).

Eleven recommendations were made to improve adoption from events and measuring practice change. A key recommendation was to redesign the *MMFS* database to reflect participation

rather than events records. This would allow individuals' or businesses' participation to be tracked easily for evaluation and to target promotions to past participants.

Unfortunately, this did not happen due to the large volume in the database that needed re-configuring. The legacy is a database that is difficult to interrogate at this level (this issue is slated to be addressed in MLA's next adoption program).

Other recommendations related to how M&E data could be collected, collated and analysed to enhance adoption by producers (i.e. be incorporated into delivery processes to facilitate adoption) and how it could be used to support marketing/promotion of *MMFS*.

The BCA showed for the investment period from 2010–11 to 2012–13, with a time horizon for future expected benefits of 25 years from the final year of investment, that the BCR for *MMFS* was 5.6:1 with a net present value of \$13.98 million (Beattie and Howard, 2013).

Approximately half of the benefits resulting from adoption of practices in the *MMFS* program resulted from producers attending Category B events, with 20% of benefits resulting from attendance at Category C events.

A sensitivity analysis on *MMFS* data showed adoption of change would need to drop below 15% before negative returns on investment were generated. Given the majority markets evaluation showed adoption was 76% for producers interviewed (extrapolated to 56% of all producers attending *MMFS* events), evaluation of investment into *MMFS* returned measurable benefits to the industry.

Lessons learnt: evaluation

- **Review:** External evaluation at each phase of a project provided valuable insights and evidence on project performance in a timely fashion.
- **Drill down:** The *MMFS* database provided 'big data' to aid evaluation but its structure needs careful consideration to reduce errors and enable greater interrogation for continuous improvement, evaluation and promotion.
- **Response:** Practice change/on-farm adoption of producers participating in *MMFS* showed that three-quarters of producers interviewed, extrapolated to 56% of participants overall, made changes on farm. This equated to a BCR of 5.6:1 and a net present value of \$13.98 million, showing *MMFS* to be a good investment.
- **Ongoing:** Updating the adoption, BCR and net present value figures post the program would complete the evaluation of *MMFS*.

13 Feedback from State Coordinators and deliverers

Informal interviews with current and past state coordinators and deliverers were undertaken by Inspiring Excellence for this report. The purpose was to gain their perspectives as to the positives and negatives of *MMFS*, insights into what worked and didn't and suggestions for future programs. Their responses to the interview questions are summarised here.

State coordinator feedback

Observations and insights by the state coordinators were:

1. Positives and negatives of the AWI/MLA partnership

- Having AWI and MLA collaborating was generally a positive, as the program allowed a focus on sheep per se rather than segregating the program into meat and wool.
- AWI was perceived as more of a silent partner with MLA the lead agency in Phase 2, as opposed to Phase 1 where AWI had greater management input.
- Sometimes there were mixed messages from AWI/MLA about priorities, especially where AWI and MLA strategies diverged.
- The partnership was perceived as messy when leadership suddenly changed at AWI, but this was resolved.
- There were some issues with AWI being involved in both *MMFS* and other sheep network programs – often had both programs collaborating and some coordinators wondered about branding and mixed messages.
- AWI/MLA had different attitudes to user-pays and this caused some issues during the project, especially where AWI network events were normally free.

2. Positives and negatives of having a national coordinator

- The positives of having an independent national coordinator were that: they were there for the entire life of the project which allowed for a consistent approach; were independent of AWI/MLA which allowed the role to be objective and provide a filter between AWI/MLA and coordinators; they interpreted jargon and guidelines and had a pragmatic approach (not caught up in bureaucracy) which simplified issues and helped streamline.
- There was only one negative of having an independent national coordinator – that on occasion they weren't clear what MLA wanted, but this was possibly lack of direction from MLA.

3. Communications between stakeholders – positives and negatives.

- Almost all the state coordinators felt the face-to-face meetings and teleconferences were well worth it and 'just enough'. Only one coordinator felt the face-to-face meetings could have been better spent on discussing innovative strategies for delivering the project, such as how to get more producers involved and spend less time on the AWI/MLA updates (which could have been in written format).
- There was a general feeling that the AWI/MLA updates were useful and helped to capitalise on opportunities.
- AWI was perceived to have less input into communications over the lifetime of the project and left it up to MLA and the national coordinator to manage. There was some criticism of AWI in that they did not always share what was going on in their other programs and that this would have been useful to create more synergies between programs.
- Towards the end of the program it was perceived teleconferencing could have been replaced with video conferencing to reduce travel and expense.

4. Monitoring and evaluation – positives and negatives

- M&E was by far the biggest challenge in delivering the project with lots of comments from the state coordinators about what did and didn't work. The overarching feeling was that it evolved to be more useful, but it still generated large amounts of data and its use by MLA/AWI was questioned.
- One issue raised was collecting demographic data repeatedly for people who had previously attended workshops. The database required a single entry for every participant that attended every event and did not reflect attendance at multiple events. It was difficult to track individual/business activity and resulted in a lot of double-ups in the database, some of which contained slightly different contact details or errors.
- Another issue was the categorisation of events, especially how an event could be a Category A but record B outcomes – this was confusing and messy, even though it was eventually sorted out.
- The question was asked by some coordinators *“how was the data used by MLA/AWI other than to report overall ‘bums on seats’?”* One mentioned their Department of Primary Industries had seen the value of ‘big data’ and adopted a similar model internally that has allowed them to specifically target producers based on information collected, but noted that MLA/AWI did not seem to be using it for anything other than reporting. This was perceived as a missed opportunity.
- Some coordinators questioned the types of questions asked, the method of collecting information (paper questionnaires pre-and post-workshop) and asked *“was pre and post questionnaires the best way of doing this to make it more than an add-on at the end of a workshop?”*
- The question was raised *“does every event need evaluating every time?”* prompting the discussion about what is M&E actually there to do? Does it need to measure every participant's response or monitor trends to ensure the program is on track?

5. Move to user-pays – positives and negatives

- Once the program shifted to the user-pays model, there was a reported drop-off in Category C events. The reason was the 80:20 payment model (80% producers/sponsors 20% MMFS) put deliverers and event organisers off in most cases. Even with the 50:50 for Category B, many commented that they used ‘in-kind’ and sponsorship money to keep the producer contribution to about \$50 per participant or business per day, rather than have them pay the full 50%.



- The greatest challenge was charging for an event being run elsewhere for free and competing with other free events funded by AWI through other programs. The extension space is full of events with different funding models and state coordinators felt this impact negatively on *MMFS* when attendance fees were introduced.
- State departments/universities lacked the internal processes to handle money/credit cards at events, which made fee collection harder and often came down to the event coordinator. It was easier and preferable for such organisations to run free events.
- There is the perennial issue of MLA/AWI members questioning where their levy money goes. Why do they as members need to pay the same for events as non-members? This was a difficult question for event organisers to answer.

6. Definition of roles

- Most felt this was clear although there were some comments that it could have been spelled out a bit more for deliverers versus event coordinators.

7. Budget

- Most state coordinators felt the budget was adequate.
- One state coordination organisation had to give back funds as it was underspent and had no capacity to deliver (note: they did not offer the money to private delivery organisations but kept delivery in-house).
- It was sometimes difficult for government state coordinators to show how the money was spent due to their internal processes having different ways of attributing cost to MLA. In some cases, not all the event costs were attributed to the event as it was too difficult to assign cost internally.
- Different states had different budgets – states with smaller budgets found it harder to manage as coordination was still required for fewer events and coordination has a cost that is not always recognised.

8. Reporting requirements

- Most found reporting requirements were fine – some commented a standard template would have made it easier to judge how much was required.
- A couple of state coordinators questioned if AWI read the reports as they only received comments from MLA
- Due to central analysis of evaluation, feedback from the database was not always aligned with reporting deadlines.

9. SOP

- Most state coordinators reported that the flexibility to design delivery to fit each state was a good thing and allowed states to learn from each other about how different approaches were working.
- The development of templates (i.e. flyers, how to write M&E questions etc) by the state coordinators was an essential improvement to the program, as were the examples of pre and post-event questions.

10. Resources

- There were not a lot of resources provided, other than some banners or flyers with the *MMFS* branding. The manual was online but essentially the program ran on deliverers/ coordinators developing their own materials ad hoc.
- One negative was that there was no money for printing sections of the manual for use in workshops, or hard copies available for use. This had to be done at the event deliverer's expense and was an example of another hidden cost.

11. Issues that impacted on delivery

- The biggest issue for most was the introduction of 80:20 payments for Category C events and the reconciling of AWI network programs' different philosophy with MMFS on user-pays (as mentioned previously).

12. Highlights of MMFS

- MMFS was complementary to existing networks and allowed events to value add to existing projects and networks.
- The ability to leverage funds to deliver collaborative events to a wide network with good deliverers on topics of local relevance was a highlight.
- The common database for collecting evaluation data (even though use of data was questioned) was considered of value.
- The ability to link Category A to B to C events (where a C package was already developed) was highlighted as a way of progressing participants along a pathway of adoption.

13. Recommendations for future projects from the state coordinators

- *"Create better linkage between awareness (A) events and the next level of Category B and C events and more consultation on how to deliver these events."*
- *"Tweak the Category C funding model – 20% funding is not enough incentive to get a lot of uptake or development of these activities."*
- *"Work on M&E – some modules i.e. business, is hard to do pre and post-event questions. Simplify and integrate session M&E more. Also better tracking of participants in the database would allow monitoring of participant progress from Category A to B to C events or what changes they were making (i.e. could better track adoption)."*
- *"Provide alternate ways to access the manual – in some areas the manual was downloaded onto flash drives to allow producers to access it. Despite widening internet access in rural and regional Australia and the NBN, there are still a lot of areas with little or no internet access so consideration of this is needed in production of support materials."*
- *"Sort out the payment issue and who pays what i.e. levy payers pay less than non-levy payers, set charges for days etc. This space is still confusing and full of free versus paid events and highlights issues related to perceived value from free versus paid events."*
- *"Put more resources into Category C events including what happens after the activity finishes – how can a producer extend their learning via online tools etc. between events or stay connected to keep the support going?"*
- *"Set clear and realistic guidelines for M&E and event delivery from the start and ensure the project can be regionally relevant."*
- *"Make sure the information behind the program stays up to date – review if the MMFS manual is still needed as it is now old and content needs updating to stay relevant."*
- *"Ensure private provider needs are taken into consideration as there are not many public providers left to deliver and coordinate events. Private providers have different needs and requirements i.e. pay rates, ownership/IP of extension materials and processes etc. Work on ways of addressing these before they become barriers or problems."*
- *"Streamline the projects nationally or within states so that producers are not brand confused with lots of similar products and projects on offer – make better linkages so that producers understand who is funding what."*
- *"Ensure it is not just Category C events that are funded – still need awareness activities to draw in the network of producers and create desire for more."*

Deliverer observations

The key observations and insights from this process by the deliverers were:

1. General highlights

- Deliverers appreciated the flexibility to deliver an event to match perceived need of producers – as long as it could be mapped back to the *MMFS* manual.
- *MMFS* events provided stepping stones to other events or enhanced existing programs that were short on delivery resources.
- *MMFS* allowed local experts to be used.

2. General lowlights

- Pre and post questionnaires were perceived to have little value by some deliverers and it was hard to get producers to complete them. Some deliverers also thought it hard to get the questions right and the process of designing questions was not well resourced.
- The Category C events involved too much paperwork and effort for monetary resources provided (20% of cost). There were suggestions that deliverers should get paid more to do these as they are related to change (adoption). The cost of Category C events was perceived as a barrier to producers and consultants.
- Applying a fee to events when previously they were free, or when a similar event costs nothing to attend.
- Needing to run a series of events i.e. same event multiple locations or same event multiple days, to make it cost-effective.
- Some deliverers thought *MMFS* underestimated the cost of delivery and needed to take travel time and preparation into account, along with administration and promotion.
- Some state coordinating organisations were perceived to have kept the delivery in-house and thus limited opportunities for others to deliver (and thus underspent their budget in some cases).



3. Obtaining funding for delivering an event – positives and negatives

- The process was deemed simple by majority of deliverers. State coordinators assisted and gave feedback to make the event fit and this was seen as valuable.
- Some deliverers commented that there was an upper limit on delivery funds that made it cost ineffective to do anything that required a lot of preparation. They tended to repurpose existing material rather than tailor each presentation to fit.
- It was sometimes difficult to nominate the *MMFS* tools, as not all were useful or user-friendly.

4. Event organisation – materials and resources

- Manual – many saw it as a framework rather than a resource. There were many comments regarding the usefulness of the tools in the manual.
- Many deliverers prepared their own workshops from scratch or based on other events. They said it would have been useful to have partial plans for delivery of each module including PowerPoint presentations. This would have cut down preparation time and made delivery of some topics more cost-effective.
- Some deliverers used flyers prepared by *MMFS* state coordinators using the template, others said they received little or no resources other than the manual to support delivery.

5. Event organisation – need for additional resources

- Many deliverers (mainly private) wanted more assistance or budget to cover administration, promotion and sourcing local contacts/content. They also commented that it would have been valuable to have access to the information from the *MMFS* database of producers in their area to cast a wider net. Similarly, extra resources for administration and promotion were desired as *MMFS* funds only covered cost of delivery and catering (sometimes it was covered by sponsorship).
- Again, the request was made for draft delivery plans/PowerPoint presentations for each module to use as a starting point for preparation.

6. M&E requirements

- This was a non-issue for some deliverers as they thought it necessary and relatively easy to do. These deliverers commented that the pre and post-event questions got producers thinking and could be used to add value.
- There were considerable issues for other deliverers including: it was hard to get producers to complete them properly; clickers were good but required extra preparation and extrapolation to individual level (good for group evaluation); the evaluation time was not sufficiently resourced financially; no effort was made to collect unintended benefits of the events/activities.

7. Other things that would have helped delivery

- Catering, preparation, travel time and administration came up again as not being considered a cost and had to be absorbed as in-kind contributions. Note: travel not always covered as a separate item to delivery and preparation time was assumed to be included in delivery in most cases.
- The need for a working list of suitable presenters and topics was raised by deliverers that also coordinated events or groups. They mentioned that it was hard to know what and who was available (state coordinators would have been able to help here).
- Provision of base presentations that could be modified.
- Development or signposting to better apps i.e. like the LifeTime Ewe Management app.

8. Missed opportunities to deliver

- Many commented that they could have run more events but did not have the time to do the preparation/coordination for them.
- Some deliverers would have liked to be able to use *MMFS* money for more than one event per group per year (there was a restriction in some states as to how much *MMFS* funds each producer group could access each year).
- It was hard to work out what producers wanted unless the deliverer worked directly with the group. A process to capture this would have been useful.
- There was nothing in the *MMFS* manual on sheep feedlotting or very little to run a workshop on – missed opportunity during the drought years and poor seasons.

9. Recommendations/advice for the future from deliverers to MLAs:

- *“Use technology like clickers to make evaluation easier.”*
- *“Put more resources into coordination and promotion of events.”*
- *“Keep event application process simple and streamlined.”*
- *“Design events in series i.e. Category A → B → C to create opportunity to go deeper as well as get to a wider audience initially.”*
- *“Higher deliverer fees to cover preparation or alternatively provide base presentations to reduce preparation time.”*
- *“Small groups and demo sites with linked series of activities – these are where practice change occurs. But they need to be flexible to cater for individual needs.”*
- *“Keep flexibility to adapt delivery to local areas/issues.”*
- *“Newsletters aimed at producers not consultants. Consultants need their own network to stay up to date from a deliverers’ perspective and need different information from producers.”*
- *“Keep *MMFS* manual up to date – great resource for new entrants to farming and consulting. Not as good for experienced farmers but valuable nonetheless.”*

Lessons learnt: coordination and delivery

- **Flexibility:** State coordinators and event deliverers, in the main, found the project enabled local issues to be addressed through events and via modules in the manual. This made it relevant and applicable to producers.
- **Funding:** Being able to leverage additional funds through sponsorships and partnerships as the program’s funding model changed garnered support and the initial hesitation and uncertainty over the new event category structure and M&E requirements was eventually replaced with understanding to enable them to be used effectively.
- **Foundations:** Many state coordinators and deliverers found the program to be very worthwhile and provided a raft of suggestions for the new extension program that would incorporate the strengths of *MMFS* and negate the weaknesses.

14 Conclusions

The purpose of this report was to provide a consolidated description of the development, implementation and close of the *MMFS* project from its inception in 2005 to its finish in 2016. The intention is for this report to be a resource for future managers of programs in the extension field to show the sequence of events and resources used, pitfalls and achievements of the approach taken, and recommendations for how to do it better.

The reflections of the project personnel involved and independent evaluators showed that *MMFS* met its objectives of 'providing Australian lamb and wool producers with a best practice package of information and management tools to assist them achieve profitable and sustainable sheep production' as evidenced by:

- production and publication of the *Making More From Sheep manual* (hard copy and online versions)
- over-achievement of delivery targets – target 9,000 participants versus 20,361 participants achieved
- adherence to budget
- extrapolated adoption rate of 56% of all producers attending events making a change on farm
- a BCR of 3.9:1 in 2009 and 5.6:1 in 2013 and a net present value of \$13.98 million (measured in 2013)
- a legacy of goodwill between the people involved who built networks, partnerships and relationships as a result of being involved in *MMFS*.

The overarching recommendations from undertaking the process of recording the history and achievements of *MMFS* are the following:

1. **National partnership projects between major RDCs (AWI and MLA) targeting the same audience (all sheep producers) have many benefits** in terms of sharing and leveraging resources, consolidating information for multiple industry sectors (in this case meat and fibre) into one source online, developing partnerships, and tackling national as well as local issues and priorities. While this approach is not always easy, there are many lessons that were learnt in the course of this project that serve as a guide for others contemplating a similar approach.

Recommendation 1: Publicise this report amongst all the RDCs to create awareness of its existence as background reference material for future project development. It also has applicability to other extension agencies such as government departments of agriculture, natural resource management and catchment management authorities.

2. **Phased project planning, coupled with continuous improvement, allows a project to evolve over a period of time to best suit the audience and project partners' needs.** *MMFS* began with careful scoping and adherence to plans for Phase 1 but evolved using a continuous improvement process to meet the challenges and changing needs of the funders, coordinators, deliverers and audience for Phase 2 and its extension. While this did create 'on the run' development of processes at times, it did allow the project personnel the leeway to modify and change what wasn't working in time for it to be useful immediately rather than in hindsight. Similarly, MLA and AWI's changing needs for M&E and new funding models for delivery were incorporated as needed in a way that allowed them to be refined as they went. The only criticism of this type of development was the stop-start nature between phases of funding, which sometimes contributed to delays in the project timelines. It would have been smoother to simply continue the funding or, at least, the discussions to commitment of funding before the phase finished. It is more efficient to terminate a project that has outlived its needs than to extend a project that is going well, especially where the project has more than one funding source.

Recommendation 2: Large flagship programs should be given approval for a minimum of five years, with built-in review and continuous approval processes and stop/go points to ensure adherence to needs.

3. **M&E needs to be built in the project up-front.** One of the ongoing criticisms of the project by state coordinators and event deliverers was the M&E processes used and the ultimate fate of the data collected. The majority markets evaluation of *MMFS* and this report present many recommendations for making M&E more seamless and useful for future projects, including use of the dataset collected by *MMFS*.

Recommendation 3: Build M&E in the planning phase to ensure the M&E evolves with the needs of the project and adds value as the project progresses (contributes to continuous improvement) rather than be an add-on at the end or after the fact (or halfway through).

4. **Event delivery funding models need to take into account the ‘in-kind’ and additional activities involved in the planning, execution and evaluation of events.** The changing nature of extension service provision (public to private) has changed the expectations of what is reasonable reimbursement of time and expenses for event delivery and this is emerging as an ongoing issue for future projects. At the start of *MMFS* most state departments of agriculture were the state coordinators and majority of event deliverers. This bought with it a certain amount of in-kind time for coordination, promotion, administration, preparation and follow-up activities associated with event delivery, so project money could just be used for direct event costs and delivery, hiding the true cost of event delivery. However by the end of the project, only two states had state coordination from government and all were using private service providers to deliver services. The in-kind services formerly provided free now required reimbursement. Sponsorship, partnerships and some private in-kind filled some of this gap but it also created a situation where some private service providers were questioning the cost-effectiveness of delivery (and hence their participation) for this type of project. Considering the project did not train new deliverers and relied on experienced deliverers (and now these people are private providers), this is an issue that needs to be addressed for future projects. Streamlining promotion, administration, preparation (use of templates) and evaluation are ways to reduce this cost in the future.

Recommendation 4: While the funding model used in *MMFS* worked overall, future projects will need to review what constitutes event delivery costs to find ways to streamline costs without compromising quality of delivery.

5. **Measureable practice change takes time (5–10 years).** The *MMFS* project was evaluated externally twice in the lifetime of the project and the positive results helped to support the ongoing funding of the project. However, there is still a considerable lag time between event attendance and on-farm adoption, especially for complex changes. Unfavourable seasonal conditions, market prices and other local factors can see a desire to change not manifest into actual change for a number of seasons. To gain the true impact of *MMFS* on on-farm practice change requires a final evaluation in 2017 to capture the long-term changes producers may have made and to follow up with previous evaluation participants to check in on success of their changes.

Recommendation 5: Consider commissioning a final evaluation of practice change for *MMFS* in 2017 to demonstrate impact, post program completion.

In conclusion, this report provides a detailed history of the *MMFS* project and its achievements and is recommended as a resource for any extension professional engaging in new project development in the future.

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- State coordinator, Project Advisory Panel and Executive Committee meeting minutes, various dates
- Making More From Sheep* state business plans for Phase 2 and the Phase 2 extension, various dates

Appendix A: Personnel involved in *MMFS*

MMFS Phase 1 Delivery, July 2007 – February 2010

Managing agency AWI; Project leaders Mary Goodacre, AWI, Michael Goldberg, MLA

Executive Committee

Membership of the Executive Committee varied over the life of the project and usually consisted of two AWI staff, two MLA staff and the national coordinator. The following people sat on the committee at various times in roughly chronological order:

Role	Member
AWI staff	Mary Goodacre
	Lu Hogan
	Mimi Han
	Claudia Wythes
	Ian Evans
	Marius Cuming
	Emily King
MLA staff	Michael Goldberg
	Jane Weatherley
	Alex Ball
	Rob Banks
	Richard Apps
	Renelle Jeffrey
	Tessa Cousins
National coordinator	Mike Wagg

Project Advisory Panel

Membership of the Project Advisory Panel varied over the first three years of the project, after which it was disbanded. The following people sat on the committee at various times:

Member	Sector
Richard Apps	R&D, MLA
Alex Ball	R&D, MLA
Rob Banks	R&D, MLA
Michael Blake	Agribusiness, Elders
Anthony Boatman	Agribusiness, Landmark
Phil Clothier	Sheep producer
Richard Drummond	Agribusiness, Landmark
Tom Dunbabin	Sheep producer
Martin Dunstan	State agency, Vic DPI
Michael Goldberg	R&D, MLA
Mary Goodacre	R&D, AWI
Mimi Han	R&D, AWI

Angus Hobson	R&D, MLA
Lu Hogan	R&D, AWI
David Jupp	Agribusiness, Landmark
Belinda Murray	Sheep producer
Ian Rogan	R&D, AWI
Ben Ryan	Sheep producer
Rebecca Ryan	Consultant/contractor communications
Geoff Sandilands	Sheep producer
Robbie Sefton	Consultant/contractor communications
Gary Tapscott	State agency, NSW DPI
Graham Truscott	R&D, Sheep CRC
Gary Want	State agency, NSW DPI
Mike Wagg	Consultant/contractor project management
Claudia Wythes	R&D, AWI

Producer advocates

State	Advocate	Enterprise	Location
QLD	Don Perkins	Mainly wool, involved in road test, committee member SE Leading Sheep	Dirranbandi
NSW	Allison Tancred	Mixed, wool and cropping, board of management approach	Gulargambone
	Jenny Bradley	Prime lamb, BL stud, lamb marketing co-op director	Armatree
VIC	Andrew Dufty	Mainly wool, agribusiness experience	Melville Forest
SA	Greg and Jane Kellock	Wool and lamb producers, Poll Merino stud, board of management approach	Farrell Flat
	Ben Ryan	Prime lambs	Delamere
TAS	Matt Dunbabin	Wool, lambs, 8x5 coordinator	Dunalley
	Rob Tole	Prime lambs, involved with <i>MBfP</i>	Cressy
WA	Bindi Murray	Wool and lambs, ex DAFWA	Katanning

Coordinators Phase 1 September 2007 – February 2010

	Coordination organisation	Coordinator	Location
National	Jarrapool Project Management & Consulting	Mike Wagg	Cavendish
QLD	Dept of Primary Industries and Fisheries	Geoff Knights, then Tony Hamilton	St George Toowoomba
NSW	Dept of Primary Industries	Alex Russell	Dubbo
Vic	Dept Primary Industries	Ross Batten	Maffra
Tas	University of Tasmania	Andrew Bailey	Launceston
SA	Dept of Primary Industries and Resources	Ben Hebart	Adelaide
WA	Icon Agriculture	Ed Riggall	Darkan

Phase 2 Delivery, September 2010 – November 2013

Managing agency MLA; Project leaders Richard Apps, MLA, Claudia Wythes, AWI

Coordinators

	Coordination organisation	Coordinator	Location
National	Jarrapool Project Management & Consulting	Mike Wagg	Port Fairy
QLD	Dept of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation	Tony Hamilton, then Nicole Sallur	Toowoomba
NSW	Dept of Primary Industries	Lloyd Kingham, then Shelly Anderson, then Sally Duff	Dubbo Orange Forbes
Vic	Dept Primary Industries	Lyndon Kubeil	Benalla
Tas	University of Tasmania	Andrew Bailey	Launceston
SA	Rural Directions Pty Ltd	Natasha Searle	Clare
WA	Dept of Agriculture and Food	David Kessell, then Jonathan England	Perth

Producer advocates

	Name	Location
QLD	Mark Murphy	Billa Billa
NSW	Not in place	
VIC	Tim Leeming	Coojar
SA	Joe Keynes	Keyneton
TAS	Nathan and Kirstie Anderson	Avoca
WA	Bindi Murray	Woodanilling
WA	Dept of Agriculture and Food	David Kessell, then Jonathan England

Phase 2 Extension Delivery, January 2014 – December 2016

Managing agency MLA: Project leaders Renelle Jeffrey, MLA, Emily King AWI

Coordinators

	Coordination organisation	Coordinator	Location
National	Jarrapool Project Management & Consulting	Mike Wagg	Port Fairy
QLD	Dept of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry	Alex Stirton	Charleville
NSW	Holmes Sackett Pty Ltd	Sandy McEachern	Wagga Wagga
Vic	Dept Primary Industries	Lyndon Kubeil	Benalla
Tas	Macquarie Franklin Pty Ltd	Leanne Sherriff	Launceston
SA	Rural Directions Pty Ltd	Natasha Searle	Clare then Dubbo
WA	PlanFarm	Danielle England, then Alana Starkie	Narrogin Manjimup

For the most up-to-date *Making More From Sheep* information, including web signposts, products, publications and events, visit www.makingmorefromsheep.com.au

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