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COMMUNICATION BETWEEN LARGE AUSTRALIAN PASTORAL COMPANIES AND A

STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines contact between twelve large Australian Pastoral Companies and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (QDPI).

Most contact is with the veterinary services branch. There is a large number of contacts between stock inspectors and property managers although most contacts per person were with the middle managers of the pastoral companies. Most suggestions for improvement related to providing a more practically experienced QDPI officer, especially for contact with property managers. However, it was clearly stated that the Department should also publicise its services more widely.

INTRODUCTION

A small number of large pastoral companies conduct grazing enterprises on extensive rangelands of arid and semi-arid Australia. The companies included in this study control 260 000 km<sup>2</sup> which support 1.2 million cattle, 335 000 sheep and 22 240 ha of crop, and employ 1400 people. They therefore have a key role in the management and maintenance of these areas.

The opportunity exists to capitalize on effective liaison among extension workers, researchers and the pastoral companies by operating with a small number of powerful key personnel, consisting primarily of the general and middle managers of the pastoral companies. This report details part of a wider study on the sources of information used by large pastoral companies and the credibility of these suppliers of information (Schmidt, 1978).

## METHODS

Key personnel from twelve companies co-operated in the study. All General Managers were interviewed. Three company members operating at middle management levels and 39 of the 48 property managers who were sent questionnaires returned completed replies. Property managers surveyed were confined to Queensland although the companies concerned also operated elsewhere.

All levels of management were asked the number of contacts they had with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (QDPI) in the twelve month period coinciding approximately with the 1977 calendar year. Some assessment was made of the actual use and perception of the Department as a regulatory and advisory body. The number of invitations to QDPI field days, schools, workshops or demonstrations, and the number of publications subscribed to, received or asked for, were also assessed. These latter questions were designed to assess in part, awareness and use of QDPI publications and the extent to which the department sent written material to the pastoral company personnel.

Middle and lower level management was also asked to co-operate in a critical incident study (Steers and Porter 1975) of their contact with QDPI personnel. Finally all company members were asked to suggest improvements which might be made to the Department's service.

## RESULTS

### Contact with QDPI

The number of contacts between the company personnel and QDPI is shown in Table 1. In all but a few cases the greatest number of contacts between the two organisations was on the initiative of pastoral company personnel, and most contacts were at the field staff level (878) rather than the head office level (78). This could be expected because there are a greater number of company personnel and QDPI staff at the field than at the head office level.

Overall, 70 percent of the contacts between the two organisations are made at the lower management level of the pastoral companies, 18

percent are made at middle management level and 11 percent at the top management level. On an individual basis however, the middle managers have the highest number of contacts.

Table 1

Number of Contacts Between Pastoral Company and QDPI Personnel  
Over a Twelve Month Period

Level of Management	Top		Middle		Lower	
	From COY	From DPI	From COY	From DPI	From COY	From DPI
<b>DPI FIELD STAFF</b>						
Veterinary Officers	30	6	52	20	83	49
Beef Cattle Officers	1	1	20	5	24	20
Stock Inspectors	7	-	46	7	270	145
Agronomists	9	-	-	-	41	33
Other	-	-	-	-	4	5
<b>Total Field Staff Contacts (878)</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>252</b>
<b>DPI HEAD OFFICE STAFF</b>						
Veterinary Services	25	12	16	7	-	1
Beef Cattle Husbandry	6	4	-	-	-	1
Other	6	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Head Office Contacts (78)</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total Contacts</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>Total All Contacts</b>	<b>107</b>		<b>173</b>		<b>676</b>	

REGULATORY AND ADVISORY ROLES

Top level managers use the QDPI more as a regulatory body but they see the Department as an organisation with a greater advisory role (Table 2). Lower level managers see and use the QDPI largely as a regulatory body. Thus these managers need to be made more aware of the advisory functions of the Department before they will utilise it more fully. The number of personnel at the middle level of management was too few for the results to be meaningful.

Table 2

Proportion of Contacts with QDPI Which are Regulatory or Advisory and How Companies See QDPI at Three Levels of Management

Proportion of Regulatory to Advisory	Level of Management						
	Top		Middle		Lower		
	Actual	Perceived	Actual	Perceived	Actual	Perceived	
Regulatory							
Advisory							
100	-	5	2	-	-	13	12
75	25	1	4	2	1	9	11
50	50	1	6	-	2	9	8
25	75	1	-	-	-	4	4
-	100	-	-	-	-	2	-

ATTENDANCE AT QDPI FIELD DAYS, SCHOOLS, WORKSHOPS OR DEMONSTRATIONS

(i) Top Management

Only three of the twelve general managers said they had received invitations to attend meetings organised by the QDPI. Eight invitations had been received (four field days, two schools and two standing committee meetings) and six had been accepted. No reasons were offered for non-attendance at two of the functions, but one general manager said that he did not usually attend these gatherings and normally directed the invitations to the station managers.

(ii) Middle Management

Only one of the three middle managers received an invitation to a workshop which he attended. He also attended two field days. The other middle managers said they 'had other unavoidable commitments on these dates' and there were 'very few in this area and was tied up with work when anything was on'.

(iii) Lower Management

Five of the 39 property managers had attended gatherings organised by the QDPI during the nominated twelve month period. Eight invitations to field days had been received and seven of these had been attended. Two invitations to schools were received, and one of these had been attended.

Twenty three reasons were given by managers for not attending QDPI functions: No field days held in the area to the knowledge of the manager (14); no time to attend (3); unable to get away because of staff shortage (3); too far to travel (2); or conflicted with busy periods on the property (1).

PUBLICATIONS

The general managers have very little contact with the QDPI in this area of communication and the number of publications either asked for or received automatically from the QDPI is very restricted. Seven of them had neither asked for nor received any publication from the QDPI.

All three middle managers had asked for, and two had automatically received, publications from the QDPI.

Only six of the 39 property managers specifically asked for QDPI publications, but Departmental publications reached 50 percent of managers. Newsletters locally produced by the QDPI had the widest distribution, specially as most are published and sent out monthly.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT

### (i) Satisfying contact with DPI

The satisfying contacts middle managers had with the QDPI were in the disease control, stock movement, tick control and cross breeding areas. One middle manager did not list any contacts and said that it 'all varied with the individual officer'. Another said that 'mostly their contribution has been consultative. However, their advice has been helpful and modified my approach to tick control and breeding programs'.

The satisfying contacts of lower level management were mostly in the field of disease eradication. Over 50 percent of the satisfying contacts related to brucellosis and tuberculosis testing and the remainder covered a wide range of contacts including co-operating with trial work, advice regarding tick control and supplementary feeding.

### (ii) Dissatisfying contacts with QDPI

The dissatisfying contacts that middle managers had with the QDPI were in the disease eradication field, changing regulations, and advice received on a cattle yard plan.

The most common dissatisfying contact that lower level management had with the QDPI was with inexperienced officers. Dissatisfaction was expressed also over discontinued trials, lack of contact, tick control, and DPI officers having no interest in weed control.

## SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS TO QDPI SERVICE

Company personnel were asked what changes they would like to see to ensure that QDPI would be used more in the future.

### (i) Top management

Responses varied from 'we have a good liason from both ways' and 'I use them enough now' to 'I don't use them now, except for things of a regulatory nature. They don't particularly sell their services. No idea what they do really' and 'I haven't made any enquiries how they

could help us'.

Two selected suggestions for improving the service were:-

Publicise DPI Services: Three general managers said that the Department's Services should be publicised more. One believed that the 'Information was there but it should be widely publicised' and another said that they should 'send out lists of the services available'.

Market Information: Most general managers said this area needed much more attention. The larger companies were selling cattle every week for a major part of the year, and one of the main jobs of top management was to keep in touch with the market.

(ii) Middle management

Only one middle manager had any suggestions to improve the DPI service:

'The turnover of staff in the ..... area makes it very difficult to get meaningful information, advice and opinion in certain areas of management relevant to this area. The extensive properties often need comprehensive wide ranging advice, particularly in such areas as nutritional management, advice on improvements, infertility management and disease control. It took me a number of years (3) to become competent to handle many aspects of my job'.

(iii) Lower management

The suggestions from station managers for improvements in the departmental service were constructive and often detailed. Twenty three of the 39 station managers offered suggestions including those which follow:

- Extension staff are too theoretical and not sufficiently practical.
- "I get the impression that my brains are being picked and information gained is passed on to others".
- Extension staff have little useful information.



- "Perhaps it is our own fault that we do not use all the services available".
- QDPI should provide a booklet outlining services available.
- Regular distribution of technical bulletins for local area.
- Increase personal contact on DPI's initiative.

#### CONCLUSION

The result of contact between company members at the middle and lower levels and the QDPI varied considerably. Most satisfying contacts were related to involvement with disease eradication procedures. In these cases contact has to be made as in most instances the operation of the property is at stake. The implication could be that where property managers have had to become involved with QDPI personnel, the contact has been satisfying.

The dissatisfying contacts related mostly to lack of experience in QDPI field officers or the lack of practical experience. Many property managers saw the advice received from some QDPI officers as being impossible to implement. A possible implication is that the advice may be appropriate for the region but the timing for implementation may not be right for particular properties. QDPI officers should be aware that there is a logical sequence of adoption of practices going from the simple to the sophisticated (Crouch 1970) and it is useless suggesting sophisticated practices when the earlier ones have not been adopted.

Many of the suggestions for improvement relate to property managers not being fully aware of the services and publications provided by the QDPI. Effort by the QDPI to advertise their services and send out lists of publications should encourage greater use of their facilities.

#### PUBLICATIONS

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Steers R.M. and Porter, L.W. (1975). Motivation and Work Behaviour McGraw-Hill Series in Management.