

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY  
BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

**Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society**

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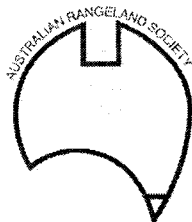
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## INSIGHTS FROM NSW INTO THE 'LOCAL BETTER PRACTICE TECHNIQUE'

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In western NSW Rangelands there were 12 producer groups who were involved in a local better practice technique better known as Bestprac. These groups were a subset of a national project funded by The Woolmark Company (now Australian Wool Innovations). This was usually a group of 7 to 15 producers and a facilitator. The focus of these groups was to "make a real difference, by improving profit, efficiency, environment, health and wellbeing and to stop doing things that don't make a real difference" (Clark et al 2001).

These groups use a Continuous Improvement and Innovation cycle (CI&I, Clark et al 2001). This is a series of steps based on the action learning cycle of plan, act, observe and reflect. The better practice process goes through six major steps. Each step has a variety of techniques/procedures that the facilitator employs to enable each step to be efficient and effective.

1. Situation analysis      Designed to find out where you are. In the case of NSW this was done by asking producers questions on the physical, operational and financial components of their businesses. This information was collated into a benchmarking document.
2. Impact analysis      What will make a real difference and how will you know? For example using a process which weighed up areas of influence against the potential gain.
3. Action Planning      Set a target or benchmark for the better practice or performance and plan the task
4. Tacking action      Putting into practice your action plan designed to change key practices
5. Observing      Measure key performance indicators. Techniques such as recording each persons Observations, Questions, Ideas and Opportunities.
6. Learning/Creating      An opportunity for another situation analysis leading to continuous improvement.

Bestprac set out to achieve the following: Empowerment of members to learn with a view of becoming more profitable (30% increase in profit). For key areas of change to be identified and action taken, in time self sufficient groups with self sufficient individuals.

In an extensive evaluation of the project Roberts (2000) found 75% of respondents (All states) had made changes in areas such as budgeting, property management, buying and selling strategies and ways of thinking. She concluded that there is no doubt that activities carried out within Bestprac achieved progress towards a 30% increase in profit. There was some doubt that this resulted from the process of CI&I and benchmarking. Most members were aware of the continuous improvement cycle in Bestprac but there was little evidence of detailed knowledge of this cycle.

Specifically in NSW the majority of people surveyed said that Bestprac was about sharing information. Approximately a quarter thought it was about benchmarking and a small proportion thought it was about improvement. The component of Bestprac which was believed to make a difference was the interaction with other producers followed by an understanding of the CI&I cycle. When NSW members were asked how Bestprac could be improved the benchmarking document attracted many comments. It took too long and the ultimate value of this approach to obtaining and presenting a situation analysis was questioned. Greater interaction between groups was encouraged (Roberts 2000). NSW facilitator feedback thought that the group focus pursued in NSW hampered individual on ground change and stopped some groups progressing past information exchange.

An improved and innovated Bestprac framework addressing concerns raised has been developed by the NSW Agriculture facilitator team. This has been document in table 1.

Table 1. Sequence and description of refined approach in NSW

Meeting	Comments
1. Introduction	An open meeting to describe Bestprac and how it works. The CI&I game that uses each step has been incorporated to address any lack in understanding of the process from the start.
2. First Meeting as a group	This is a team building exercise which includes basic goal setting.
3. Wool Profit Map 1	The Map is introduced and comprises a survey to be completed by each property in relation to land, labour, costs, animal production, selling and marketing (Symonds 2002).
4. Wool Profit Map 2	All surveys are analysed and a confidential report sent to each member prior to the meeting. The group comes together to discuss the results. This has introduced a financial and physical budget and starting point into the situation analysis. The Map is quick and effective and identifies key areas of change.
5. Individual Project ID	Having identified key areas of change each business uses the group as a sounding board to review ideas generated from the situation analysis.
6. Develop action plans	Individuals go home and develop a plan for change which includes new benchmarks, costings and budgets. Individuals return to the group and share their plan for comment.
7. Actioning	The group engenders confidence and motivates individuals into action. And individuals report back on there project
8. Monitoring and Review	Each plan includes check points for monitoring progress.

This improved approach to Bestprac in NSW has addressed some concerns of the original Bestprac by:

- providing a better framework and therefore support to the facilitator;
- replacing a frustrating situation analysis technique with a quick and targeted approach;
- integrating the CI&I cycle as an integral and natural part of the group;
- and being pro-active in its support of individual on ground change at the property level.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank all the producer members of NSW Bestprac groups and the NSW Agriculture Bestprac/Benchmarking facilitator group who helped devise the changes documented.

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