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FROM DEVELOPMENT TO INNOVATION: THE NORTHERN MLA EDGENETWORK GRAZING LAND MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

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INTRODUCTION

Beef producers of the Burdekin rangelands, the speargrass country of the Burnett region, the Mitchell grass country of Western Queensland, and the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory now have access to a comprehensive suite of practical education tools designed to assist them in gaining knowledge and developing skills to improve their livestock enterprises. The Northern MLA EDGENetwork Grazing Land Management workshop (Chilcott *et al.*, 2003) is the product of the Grazing Land Management Education Program (Quirk *et al.*, 2001) supported by Meat and Livestock Australia.

The Grazing Land Management (GLM) Education program was born out of a belief that the industry could be getting greater benefit from the information and outputs of past research and development programs, particularly those with an ecological approach to grazing land management. The project represented a first in terms of bringing a wide range of grazing land management information together in a way that is aimed at stimulating decision-making, planning and adoption.

The GLM Workshop is a joint effort, involving a 15-strong development team, representing the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, CSIRO, Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Tropical Savannas CRC and the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. Substantial funding support has come from Meat and Livestock Australia.

WORKSHOP CONTENT

The GLM workshop was developed after extensive consultation with the grazing industry and represents a range of practical workshop sessions and learning opportunities tailored to the needs of producers in their region. Each regional package uses the best available local research and development findings, ensuring that the information given to producers is entirely relevant to their situation. A case study property complete with land types and grazing land management problems typical of the region enables participants to practice theories in a real life situation before applying the principles to their own property.

Grazing Land Management EDGE assists producers in:

- Understanding the relationships between water, soils, plants, biodiversity, fire and weeds;
- Understanding and managing climate variability;
- Managing grazing;
- Maintaining both native and sown pasture systems;
- Meeting target markets while maintaining sustainability and,
- Determining the financial implications of grazing management options.

There are seven workshop modules. Producers develop their own grazing management plan during the final session. The workshop provides a framework for assessing a property's land condition and the potential for improvements in both land condition and productivity.

The workshop requires a commitment of five days spread over six months. There is an information and preparation session, followed by an intensive three-day workshop and a follow-up day on property. The workshop uses an interactive style, building on participant's knowledge. To suit local

requirements each workshop is flexible in the allocation of time devoted to specific subjects. Workshops are organised for groups of 10-15 participants based on location and date availability.

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

The GLM Workshop has been delivered by Queensland DPI&F and DBIRD officers in the Burdekin, Burnett and Victoria River District and will soon be available for the Mitchell grass country of Western Queensland. The participants critically evaluate each workshop. Participants Feedback sheets provide a rating of each module using a one to five scoring system; where one is 'of no use at all' and five is 'extremely useful'. Participants are also asked to rate their knowledge of the subject before the workshop, and record comments on information they would like to see included, or left out of the module. At the end of the workshop participants are then asked to rate the workshop presentation, give overall comments, and consider how the workshop will alter their grazing land management.

The evaluations have shown that participants have really enjoyed and taken on the principles of the workshop. Enjoyment levels have been high because the workshop focuses on strategies to increase profit and sustainability. DPI&F officers believe the workshops have been very successful and significant changes in participants' knowledge and learning about the principles of GLM have occurred. Officers have also received extremely positive feedback from participants. The average score for workshop presentation is 4.6 out of 5. The workshop continues to draw interest from graziers in these regions, principally by word-of-mouth, which is a positive sign of the workshop's success.

The participants' level of knowledge has varied from those seeing grazing management concepts for the first time, to those who competently run intensive grazing systems. Workshop flexibility has allowed presenters to cater for groups that have a range of knowledge and skills. Not only have participants with basic prior knowledge benefited from the workshop, but evaluation has also shown that participants that manage intensive grazing systems have gained new skills, new knowledge and reinforced their beliefs in key grazing management principles.

The evaluation system has also lead to continuing improvements of the package. Feedback from participants has been incorporated for subsequent workshops and has thus contributed to a smooth running and relevant workshop.

WORKSHOP EXPANSION

The Grazing Land Management Education Program and the Northern MLA *EDGE*network Grazing Land Management Workshop has proven to be a sought after product. Customising the workshop to the Murray-Darling Basin, southwest Queensland Mulga, Coastal Burnett and Mary Regions, Fitzroy Basin, north Queensland Gulf, and central Australia (Alice Springs) will begin shortly. There are also plans to extend the program to the Desert Uplands, Lake Eyre Basin (Desert Channels) and Southern Gulf regions of Queensland.

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