

PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY BIENNIAL CONFERENCE
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BESTPRAC – FOCUSING THINKING AND ACTION TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF RANGELAND WOOL PRODUCERS

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BACKGROUND

Bestprac is a group based benchmarking and continuous improvement program funded by Australian Wool Innovation and Meat and Livestock Australia. The Bestprac network started in 1998 and aims to enhance producer thinking skills, processes and techniques and provide them with a range of tools to move their business forward. There is currently a network of 26 producer groups across Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia.

AIMS OF BESTPRAC

By 2006, the project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Bestprac participants are applying management systems that lift individual profitability, environment and well being by 5%.
- Develop a confident proactive and capable innovation network involving 318 specialist wool and meat producing businesses (in high performance teams) and facilitators who exchange ideas, improvements, innovations and technologies for improving rural business profit, environment and well being.
- Have well established and productive partnerships between the innovation network and research, development and innovation services within the wool supply chain.

PROCESS

Bestprac groups generally consist of between five and seven wool producers from a local area that meet together a minimum of four times a year. A facilitator (agricultural consultant or extension officer) assists each member of the group to benchmark their business to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Based on this assessment, farm projects and plans are developed to improve business performance (Fig. 1). Using a process of group discussion, a tailored skills development program is developed to provide group members with the skills, confidence and networks to implement their projects.

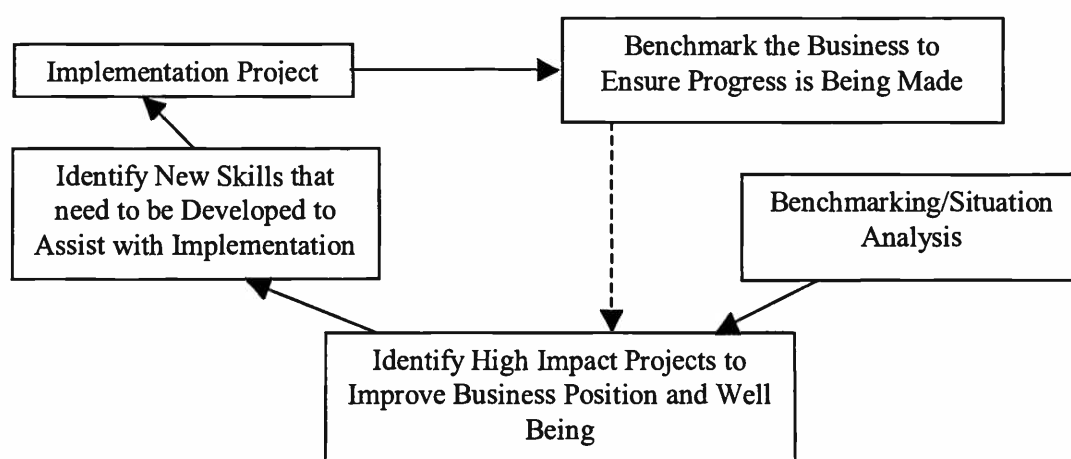


Figure 1. The Bestprac process.

The skills development program can include:

- Training sessions on technical, management, financial, resource or people issues. Examples of activities conducted by Bestprac groups include sheep breeding, animal nutrition, time management, stress management, property management and holistic grazing management.
- Field days to examine a range of issues in one day. Examples include breed diversification field days, feedlotting, merino field days, industry meat and wool days.
- Networking visits to other Bestprac groups and properties to investigate new practices and innovation.
- Visits to wool stores and meat and wool processors to better understand the market chain and opportunities for improving returns from wool and meat.

IMPACT OF DROUGHT

The 2002 drought and continuing poor seasonal conditions have placed significant pressure on rangelands businesses. In addition to confronting financial management issues, businesses have had to manage livestock and natural resource management issues. In this environment, members of Bestprac groups have benefited from the group support network by:

- Maintaining a positive outlook;
- Identifying opportunities for financial support;
- Providing a reference group to assist with difficult decision making; and
- Providing opportunities to agist stock on properties benefiting from local rainfall.

RESULTS TO DATE

Bestprac has helped to build confidence, sharpen business planning skills and brought positive changes in knowledge, attitude and skills. Groups have been encouraged to think positively in tough conditions, take ownership for improving business performance and in a supported environment, take on projects that have a high chance of improving business performance and resource management. Feedback from producers shows that up to 80% of Bestprac group members have made changes to on-farm management practices. In addition, nearly 15% have reported increased profits as a direct result of involvement with the program.

Contacts and group status for the current round of Bestprac are:

- National Bestprac coordinator is David Heinjus – Ph: 08 8842 1103.
- South Australia has ten groups operating. Contact person is Jennifer Repper – Ph: 08 8535 6400.
- New South Wales has 12 groups operating. Contact person is Mark Gardner – Ph: 02 6884 2242.
- Western Australia has five groups operating. Contact person is Greg Brennan – Ph: 08 9088 6033.
- Queensland has eight groups operating. Contact person is Lloyd Dunlop – Ph: 07 4671 6708.