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# **EVALUATION OF PAST PARTICIPANTS FUNDED TO PURCHASE COMPUTER MAPPING SOFTWARE AND OTHER TECHNOLOGIES FOR PROPERTY MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As part of the Neighbourhood Catchment Incentive Scheme (NCIS), the Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) has funded the purchase of property mapping and/or planning software, GPS units, and imagery for landholders over the past five years. To determine if FBA should continue funding landholders for these property mapping and planning technologies as a way of promoting improved land management they initiated a survey of past participants as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of this funding.

## **METHODS**

A survey of 22 landholders funded to purchase property mapping and/or planning software, GPS units, and imagery was conducted. Original project data was combined with a semi-structured telephone interview to evaluate the effectiveness of the incentive scheme against the three key evaluation questions:

1. Are landholders using the software and GPS technologies?
2. What are the important factors in software and GPS being of use to farmers for property planning?
3. Is funding software an effective way to foster improved property planning?

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

51 people were recorded as having used the software within the 22 businesses. All were family members with the main users being the Grazier / Farmer Male's and the Grazier / Farmer Female's. The ages of 16 family members were specified, with 37% in the 50- 60 year old bracket, and 37% in the 30-40 years old bracket. Two participants have never used their purchased software as a result of not actually receiving it or incompatibility with the program.

### *Reactions*

59% of participants found the software easy to use, 31% did not find it easy to use, and the remainder have not purchased or used the software yet. The ability for landholders to use the software for property layout work and management decisions were the main reasons why the software has been of use to landholders. Technical issues, such as incompatibility of maps with software and poor imagery, have been the main factors preventing the software from being of use.

### *Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Aspirations Change*

Fairport; PAM and gpMapper, and Practical Systems Software; FarmMap and Stockbook, were the two most popular brands of software purchased by the landholders. The most common reasons for purchasing a particular brand of software were advice from consultants, local catchment group or FBA, word of mouth and local support. The most popular brand of GPS purchased by participants was Garmin because of the reliability of the brand. Purchasing software and or GPS's which were linked to other software already owned or used was not a major deciding factor in what products were purchased as only 3 of the 22 participants purchased software and or GPS's which were linked to other software which they already had or had used previously.

89% of participants who were funded for software gave a comfort rating of 5 out of 10 or higher (10 being totally comfortable in using the software), with almost half of these giving ratings of between 7 and 10. Those who received funding for a GPS and imagery also gave answers of 7 and 9. Justification for the comfort ratings were the need for increased training, knowledge, understanding, and expertise, and refreshers in the use of both software and GPS.

13 of the 22 participants have an up-to-date property map on their computer; however 20 participants said their property map has led to planning projects or on ground improvements on farm. This is because 7 of the 9 people who do not have up-to-date property maps on their computer also indicated that they still use these non digital maps for planning projects

82% of landholders surveyed believed that the purchase of the software/GPS unit had led to an increased skill level within the business.

55% of landholders undertook training for the software as part of their Property Management Plan (PMP) project with FBA. Half of these completed training in addition to training outlined in their project with FBA.

#### *Practice Change*

Prior to funding from the FBA, only 5 of the 22 participants had used property mapping and/or planning software, GPS units and imagery. 82% of participants are currently still using the property mapping and/or planning software, GPS units and imagery. However 4 of the 22 participants and their family and workers no longer use the software for the business due to poor image quality, map size too large for the program, or simply no longer a need for it as they are not undertaking any further property planning.

The use of up-to-date digital property maps has resulted in 21 project plans or on ground improvements, with 18 of these being paddock layout and infrastructure plans and improvements. However an extra 12 project plans or on ground improvements have been undertaken using not up-to date, non digital maps.

Usage frequency of the different products was broken down into three categories; 'not at all, one – a couple of times, used often'. 'Used often' was the most common answer given indicating that landholders have gained a lot of usage from the software, GPS and imagery.

#### **END RESULT**

The survey found that funding landholders for the purchase of property mapping and planning technologies has led to improved property planning and property management. A total of 33 project plans or on ground improvements have been undertaken by participants using both up-to-date digital maps and not up-to date, non digital maps.

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being a negative impact, 5 being no change, and 10 being greatly improved) none of the 22 landholders reported to have noticed a negative natural resource change, although 3 have not noticed any change. The remaining 19 landholders scored natural resource change as 6 and above, with one landholder noticing a greatly improved natural resource change, giving a score of 10.

The majority of landholders believe they are considerably more aware of cattle movements, property layout etc since purchasing the software, GPS and other property planning technologies.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Funding the purchase of property mapping and/or planning software, GPS units and imagery for landholders has led to increased property planning and on ground improvements. Property maps have been the most important tool and the main instigator of project planning and on ground improvements.

Continued funding of up to date property maps and satellite imagery would ensure further property planning and on ground improvements in the Fitzroy Basin.

Minor technical issues were the only reasons why landholders do not still use their software; however this could be resolved with technical support and follow up services. Support in the form of workshops particularly for mapping and software is necessary and would be supported by the landholders.

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