

## Landcare Support Workers Endorse Verifying Environmental and Animal Welfare Credentials

### Overview

Seventy percent of surveyed Landcare and NRM support people deem a national voluntary system for improving and verifying natural resource and animal welfare management would be greatly advantageous for landholders and seventy six percent deemed it greatly advantageous for the delivery of support to landholders. A further twenty percent or thereabouts believe it would be somewhat useful, none indicated that it would not be useful and seven percent expressed no view.

Responses by Landcare and NRM support people to other survey questions illustrate the importance of the verification tool having features that together address the multiple factors influencing improvement.

Similar but stronger responses to the same survey were provided by a small number of landholders. Not surprisingly as compared to NRM support people a smaller proportion of landholders anticipated taking training or an auditing role for such a verification system.

These findings are based on a November 2014 web based survey on verifying environmental and animal welfare credentials. Responses were received from thirty four Landcare coordinators and other NRM support personnel representing about a third of the surveyed population. Twelve responses were received from landholders of whom seven were experienced with the Certified Land Management (CLM) system.

### Survey results

When asked if it would be useful for landholders if they could use a national voluntary system for improving and verifying natural resource and animal welfare management twenty four (70%) of thirty four respondents deemed it to be useful (8), very useful (9) or extremely useful (7) with 7 deeming it to be somewhat useful, none deeming it to be not useful and 3 not knowing. When the question was directed at the respondents themselves twenty six (76%) of thirty four deemed it to be useful (10), very useful (9) or extremely useful (7) with 6 deeming it to be somewhat useful, none deeming it to be not useful and 2 not knowing how useful would it be for them or their organizations for landholders to have a national voluntary system for improving and verifying natural resource and animal welfare management.

In other words about 7 out of 10 deemed it would be substantially advantageous for landholders and for NRM support personnel to be able to access a national voluntary system for improving and verifying natural resource and animal welfare management. This aligns closely with the 73 percent of NRM support people indicating they could envisage participating in the delivery of the verification system by becoming an accredited trainer and /or auditor or in some other support role.

Respondents were asked how important are nominated factors in constraining improvement in natural resource management (Table 1). Lack of on and off-farm financial benefits, lack of information on how to improve and lack of community recognition were all considered to be highly important pointing

clearly to the need for all of these factors to be taken into account in the design of continuous improvement verifications systems.

**Table 1. Selected factors constraining improvement in natural resource management; number of responses from 29 responders.**

Factor	Very low importance	Somewhat important	Important, very important or critically important	Don't know
Insufficient on-farm financial benefit	0	3	30	1
Insufficient off-farm financial benefit	0	5	27	2
Lack of information on how to improve	0	6	28	0
Lack of community recognition	3	7	24	0

**Table 2. Selected features of a national voluntary system for improving and verifying natural resource and animal welfare management; number of responses from 29 responders.**

Factor	Not important	Somewhat important	Important, very important or critically important	Don't know
Whole-of-farm rather than industry by industry	1	1	29	3
Linked to regional priorities and strategies	1	3	29	1
Goals customised for each property	0	1	32	1
Externally audited by accredited auditors	1	2	29	2
Supported by accredited trainers	0	4	29	1
Supported by customised software; not paper based	0	6	27	1
Compliant with internationally recognised environment management standards	0	1	32	1
Recognised as an Australian registered certification trade mark	0	3	30	1

The importance ascribed to each of the four factors constraining improvement aligns closely with the high importance ascribed to all the nominated features of a national voluntary system for improving and verifying natural resource and animal welfare management (Table 2).

These survey responses illustrate the importance of having tools that embed multiple features that together address the multiple factors influencing improvement.

### **The broader profitability context**

These survey results extend and support the use of voluntary farm certification as advocated by a broadly representative group at a Symposium in Brisbane in June 2014<sup>1</sup> and more recently by the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists<sup>2</sup> and by WWF-Australia<sup>3</sup>. The WWF-Australia report includes reference to support from industry organizations for the need to improve and verify environmental and animal welfare credentials.

Verifying environmental and animal welfare credentials would seem to be a neat and necessary activity to underpin the Brand Australia initiative. In fact it is increasingly difficult to find opposition to these proposals, putting aside Queensland based rural media attention focused on anything other than the substantive issues.

A substantive issue which receives too little attention is the need to identify and implement policies and programs that will drive the price component of agricultural competitiveness; one of these must be being able to differentiate food and fibre products on the basis of verified environmental and animal welfare credentials.

Constraining cost increases and improving access through for instance improving infrastructure and through trade negotiations are necessary but not sufficient responses to a continuing deterioration in farm profitability. For anyone prepared to look objectively at historical data<sup>4</sup> it is very clear that increased volumes of production and trade don't necessarily by themselves overcome the burden of decreased prices.

The Australian agricultural sector and in particular producers have a once in a life time opportunity to supply higher priced markets as aggregate demand grows and rapid developments in communication technology enable the rise and rise of consumer driven marketing. Continuously improving environmental and animal welfare outcomes is good farm management and, properly designed and implemented it is an increasingly powerful marketing tool and a very efficient pathway for government to support agricultural competitiveness and environmental and animal welfare outcomes.

-----

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.almg.org.au/events/almg-symposium>

<sup>2</sup> <http://wentworthgroup.org/2014/11/blueprint-for-a-healthy-environment-and-a-productive-economy/2014/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.wwf.org.au/news\\_resources/?11440/Over-2000-Aussie-ecosystems-at-risk-WWF-report](http://www.wwf.org.au/news_resources/?11440/Over-2000-Aussie-ecosystems-at-risk-WWF-report)

<sup>4</sup> <http://almg.org.au/resources/current-documents>