



Growing recognition of the need for verification of environmental performance

The importance of improving management and verifying performance is increasingly recognised, as illustrated by the following:

- November 2010 farewell address by the outgoing President of the National Farmers' Federation, David Crombie:

“Our biggest task is to maintain the trust of the wider community. Trust in the quality of our food and fibre and trust in the ethics and the integrity of how we produce it. I see a future where our farmers will be valued for their production of food and respected for their environmental delivery.”

- The 2012 National Food Policy Green Paper, which identifies as an important trend that consumers are increasingly seeking information about the attributes of their food, including the nutritional benefits, production methods and environmental sustainability; and that empowered and informed consumers drive innovation and competition in well-functioning markets.

One way to respond to this trend is to use verification systems to enable credence attributes such as environmental and animal management to be embedded in food and fibre products.

- The 2012 Australia in the Asian Century White Paper, which states that:

“The long-term productivity of agriculture—both here and elsewhere—is tied to the sustainability of food production. Our environmental stewardship is also a source of competitive advantage. We will develop ways to clearly identify our ‘clean, green and environmentally friendly’ credentials so that Australian exporters can reap the benefits of this valuable national brand”.

- The Cattle Council of Australia 2012 Yearbook:

“Today’s consumer is not only concerned with nutrition, price, quality and convenience when buying food but increasingly they are concerned with how ethical and sustainable the production of their food is. Consumers want to know that the beef they enjoy was produced in an environmentally sensitive way and that cattle are humanely treated.”

It is time we responded to these and similar signals. To do that we need to step back from what we do now and look afresh. We need drivers and enablers of improved performance. For instance in relation to public funding of NRM we need to ask if our singular focus on information generation and project delivery is effective.

- Why not use Benefit Based Instruments (BBIs), such as Certified Land Management, to enable taxpayers and consumers to buy improved outcomes?
- Why not improve farm profitability by enabling landholders to use Certified Land Management to embed features like environmental and animal welfare as part of their food and fibre quality package?

It will appear to be a big call but the potential benefits of reform in how we go about driving and enabling improving land management are national, substantial and ongoing.