



Final report

Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef – Independent review

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to review and pilot test the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef (ECGB) project platform before release. This included ensuring all elements of the platform were working correctly. A thorough review was conducted of the ECGB platform, including:

- the credentialling process
- biodiversity questionnaire process
- learning modules content and navigating the learning journey
- ease of navigation and linkages between the different aspects of the platform.

Feedback was provided regarding elements not performing correctly and/or suggestions for improvement or identified gaps considering:

- ease of use for producers
- value of the platform as a data sharing mechanism
- potential for platform to raise producer awareness of sustainability
- how to manage and improve it on farm, links within the platform and links with external resources etc (to be determined in consultation with MLA).

Overall, the ECGB platform has been well designed and implemented. There are several rather minor items that need to be fixed to further improve the platform. It is strongly recommended that a professional editor review all the written materials and improve the readability of the text, using plain English.

Executive summary

Background

The purpose of this project was to review and pilot test the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef (ECGB) project platform before release. This included ensuring all elements of the platform were working correctly.

Objectives

The following objectives have been achieved:

1. Perform a final test on the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef platform.
2. Provide a feedback report for elements not performing correctly and/or suggestions for improvement or identified gaps
Plan and facilitate a project wrap up webinar for the co-design/advisory group in consultation with MLA.

Methodology

MLA provided access to the ECGB platform, learning modules, and checklists for the review. This included the use of a fictitious “Test company” property at Eudlo. A final test was performed on the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef platform, including:

- the credentialling process
- biodiversity questionnaire process
- learning modules content and navigating the learning journey
- ease of navigation and linkages between the different aspects of the platform.

Results/key findings

The review determined that the ECGB platform has been well designed and is visually pleasing. It provides a generally logical learning pathway for producers to learn more about environmentally sustainable production practices. However, there are some areas that can be improved to increase its usability and effectiveness. It is strongly recommended that a professional editor review all the written materials and improve the readability of the text, using plain English. This will also improve consistency between the modules.

Benefits to industry

The review of the prototype ECGB platform has provided MLA with an opportunity to further fine-tune the platform, so that the public launch in early 2024 should go smoothly and be well received by industry.

Future research and recommendations

This review has now been completed and no further activity is required. It showed that overall, the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef platform has been well designed and implemented. There are several rather minor items that need to be fixed to further improve the platform, and it is strongly recommended that a professional editor review all the written materials and improve the readability of the text, using plain English.

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1. Background

The purpose of this project was to review and pilot test the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef (ECGB) project platform before release. This included ensuring all elements of the platform were working correctly.

Deliverables include, but are not limited to:

- Feedback report with suggestions for improvement or gaps in the platform to be used by the platform developer to refine the platform either within the current project or as part of a later iteration (i.e., Stage 2 of the ECGB project). MLA provided access to the platform, learning modules, and checklists for the review. Note that the review was based on the material provided, and any improvements/additions to the platform following MLA's provision of the information to the Service Provider may not be included in the review.
- Plan and facilitate a webinar conducted for stakeholders to wrap up the project summarizing what the platform sought to do initially and what the final platform is capable of (with support from the project team to create the content for the webinar):
 - Summary of the ECGB project process
 - Brief guided tour of key features of final platform
 - Next steps and plans for stage 2.

2. Project objectives

The following objectives have been achieved:

1. Perform a final test on the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef platform, including:
 - the credentialling process
 - biodiversity questionnaire process
 - learning modules content and navigating the learning journey
 - ease of navigation and linkages between the different aspects of the platform.
2. Provide a feedback report for elements not performing correctly and/or suggestions for improvement or identified gaps considering:
 - ease of use for producers
 - value of the platform as a data sharing mechanism
 - potential for platform to raise producer awareness of sustainability
 - how to manage and improve it on farm, links within the platform and links with external resources etc (to be determined in consultation with MLA).
3. Plan and facilitate a project wrap up webinar for the co-design/advisory group in consultation with MLA.

3. Methodology

MLA provided access to the ECGB platform, learning modules, and checklists for the review. This included the use of a fictitious "Test company" property at Eudlo.

A final test was performed on the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef platform, including:

- the credentialling process

- biodiversity questionnaire process
- learning modules content and navigating the learning journey
- ease of navigation and linkages between the different aspects of the platform.

4. Results

4.1 Final test on the ECGB platform and linkages

4.1.1 Ease of use for producers

The ECGB platform has been well designed and is visually pleasing. It provides a generally logical learning pathway for producers to learn more about environmentally sustainable production practices. The FAQ section is well written and covers a wide range of topics.

4.1.2 Value of the platform as a data sharing mechanism

The ECGB platform will allow beef customers to make informed decisions when purchasing beef with demonstrated environmental credentials. Industry will be able to access aggregated, de-identified data to support Australian Beef Sustainability Framework reporting, and will also be able to gain a better understanding of international and domestic market drivers and potential opportunities.

This platform can enable environmental data sharing and collaboration among various stakeholders, but particularly grass-fed beef producers. The platform has the potential to contribute to improving the quality and availability of environmental data, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental decision making, fostering innovation and knowledge creation, and supporting environmental stewardship and sustainability. However, the platform needs to address the challenges of data sharing by establishing trust-based mechanisms and preparing a data-sharing environment, so as to gain the trust of beef producers.

4.1.3 Potential for the platform to raise producer awareness of sustainability

The ECGB platform can help raise producer awareness of sustainability by providing them with various data-driven resources that are seen as credible and trustworthy. By accessing and using the environmental information from these different sources, producers can learn about the impacts and benefits of their production practices on the environment. It brings together a wide range of information, providing a one-stop-shop for beef producers wanting to explore environmentally sustainable production practices.

4.1.4 How to manage and improve it on farm, links within the platform and links with external resources etc

Each of the modules provides practical information and steps for producers to implement on-farm. Information is provided for each of the four major climate regions in Australia, making the recommendations more localised and relevant. Producers are able to easily measure and describe their own environmental performance and determine what actions (if required) they can take to improve.

A communication and extension plan should be developed to ensure that beef producers are aware of the platform and that as many as possible adopt the use of it. This should take into account the

perceived barriers and benefits, and provide ways of addressing the barriers and promoting the benefits.

4.2 Suggestions for improvement

While the overall Environmental Credentials Platform has been well designed and implemented, there are still some areas that can be improved to increase its usability and effectiveness.

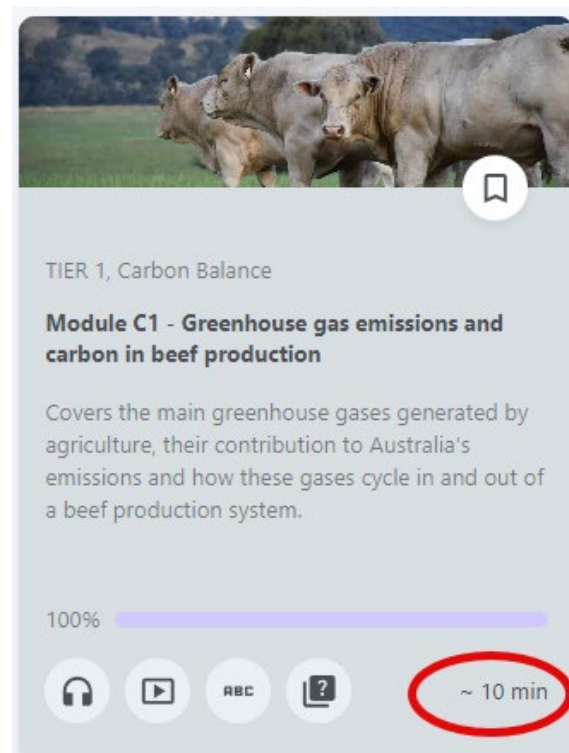
4.2.1 General feedback

- The ECGB platform registration process was clear and straight forward.
- The home page is well laid out and visually pleasing, with just four tiles to choose between. The side-bar menu on the left is clear and works well.
- The most obvious omission is an upfront clear definition of an environmental credential and why it may be beneficial. This should appear on the home page as part of the welcome text. The only place where credentials appeared to be mentioned was in Module B1, Lesson 3.
- The other omission is the lack of a feedback mechanism, so users can report bugs or factually incorrect information (which will occur over time as information changes).
- There is a mix of capitalisation of headings. There is sentence case (e.g. “Welcome to your learning library”) and title case “Sustainability Themes”. Research has shown that sentence case is easier to read and comprehend, so all headings should be changed to that.
- The onscreen font size should be increased, especially considering the target users are generally older males in their 50s and 60s.

4.2.2 Learning library

Layout and navigation

- The progress bar with colour coding is useful and will likely encourage learners to complete the modules.
- The Carbon balance module is the longest and most difficult one. It might be better to move that to be the third one displayed in the Learning library. That way learners can make quick and satisfying progress with the other two before tackling the most challenging one.
- On the landing pages of individual learning modules, the information tiles provide unrealistic time frames for completing the modules. For example, Module C1 is stated to take about 10 minutes, but there is over 15 minutes of video content to watch. Perhaps this number is automatically generated by the Learning Management System and doesn't include the time required for video and audio material, in which case it should be manually altered.



TIER 1, Carbon Balance

Module C1 - Greenhouse gas emissions and carbon in beef production

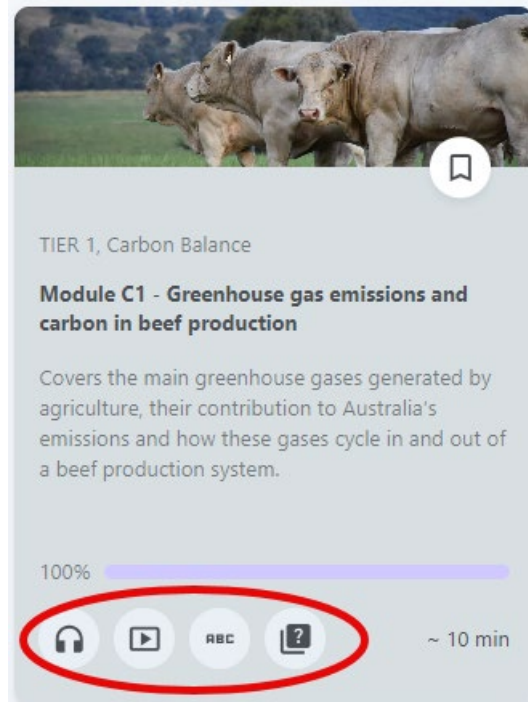
Covers the main greenhouse gases generated by agriculture, their contribution to Australia's emissions and how these gases cycle in and out of a beef production system.

100%

~ 10 min

At the end of each module, there should be an obvious link to click to take the learner to next module. Otherwise, it appears the learner must go back to their Learning library, select the Theme and then select the required module. This is time consuming and doesn't make for a smooth learning journey.

- Where a hyperlink is provided for additional information, and if that is a PDF, then the size of the download required should be stated, e.g. PDF (14.7 MB). Digital connectivity and download speeds are not great in many areas where graziers live, so they may become frustrated if they unexpectedly download a 100 MB file that might not have been of great interest to them. It is better to provide that information up-front, so there are no surprises.
- It is not clear what the four icons at the bottom of each learning module tile do. When hovered over, they say Audio, Video, Reading and Quiz; yet when clicked they all take you to the beginning of the module.



4.2.3 Content

- There are Tier 1 and Tier 2 modules, but no explanation was seen as to the difference between them. If there is a useful difference, then spell this out for the learner. If there is no difference, remove them.
- There are some minor typos in the descriptions of themes, and they could be re-written to make them more inviting. For example:

Carbon Balance

This module will help build an understanding of the science of global warming, farm operation greenhouse gas emissions, and carbon farming opportunities for beef producers. It will support graziers to undertake online calculations (using self-assessment methods) of the carbon emissions and sequestrations from their beef production. This will enable producers to assess strategies to improve the carbon balance (reduce emissions or increase sequestration) of their farm.

Learning tools

Overall, there is a good variety of learning tools (text, video, audio, and graphics) used throughout the modules. While the short audio recordings provided some variety (e.g., "Where to next" at end of Module C1, Lesson 2), the shorter (less than 10 second) audio recordings should be replaced with text to read on the screen, otherwise this could frustrate the learners. The quizzes are generally good, as are the take home messages at the end of the modules.

Writing style

While the content of the Carbon balance module appears to be technically accurate, the writing style is too academic in places, as confirmed by testing some extracts from the modules using the Flesch Reading Ease scale. This scores text on a scale from 1 to 100, where the higher the score, the easier the text is to understand (see the following table for details).

Score	Description
90-100	Very easy to read, easily understood by an average 11-year-old (grade 6 student)
80-90	Easy to read
70-80	Fairly easy to read
60-70	Easily understood by a 13- to 15-year-old (grade 10 student)
50-60	Fairly difficult to read
30-50	Difficult to read, best understood by college graduates
0-30	Very difficult to read, best understood by university graduates

For farmer-focused publications, it is best to aim for scores of 60 to 70, as that is considered understandable by 13- to 15-year-olds. Tests conducted on sections of text from the Carbon balance module produced scores from 25 to 40, indicating it is unlikely a farmer with a moderate level of education will understand the material. In comparison, an extract from the Biodiversity module scored 55, which is much more likely to be understood by farmers.

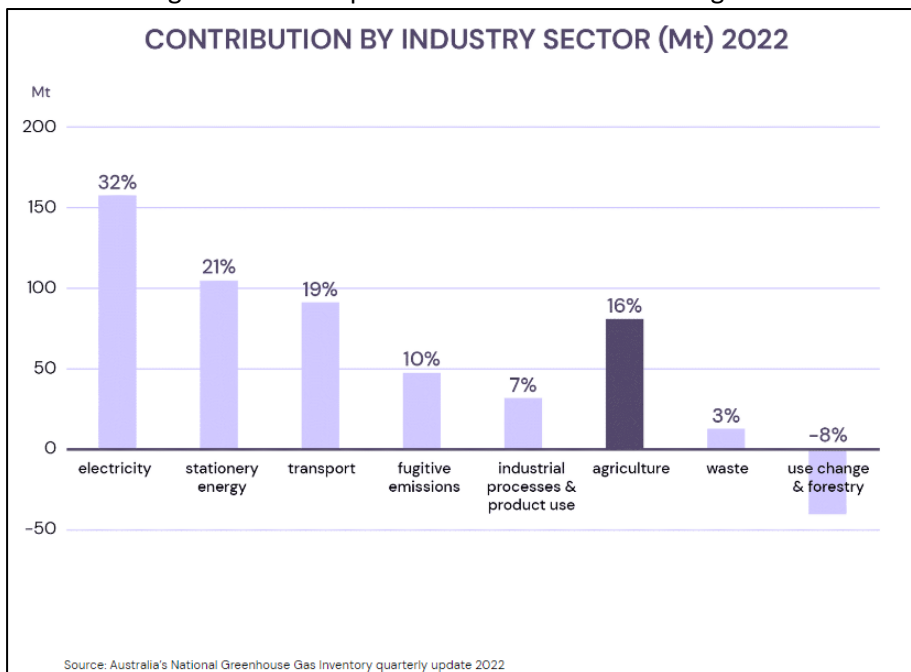
It is strongly recommended that a professional editor review all the written materials and improve the readability of the text, using plain English. This will also improve consistency between the modules.

4.2.4 Feedback on specific modules

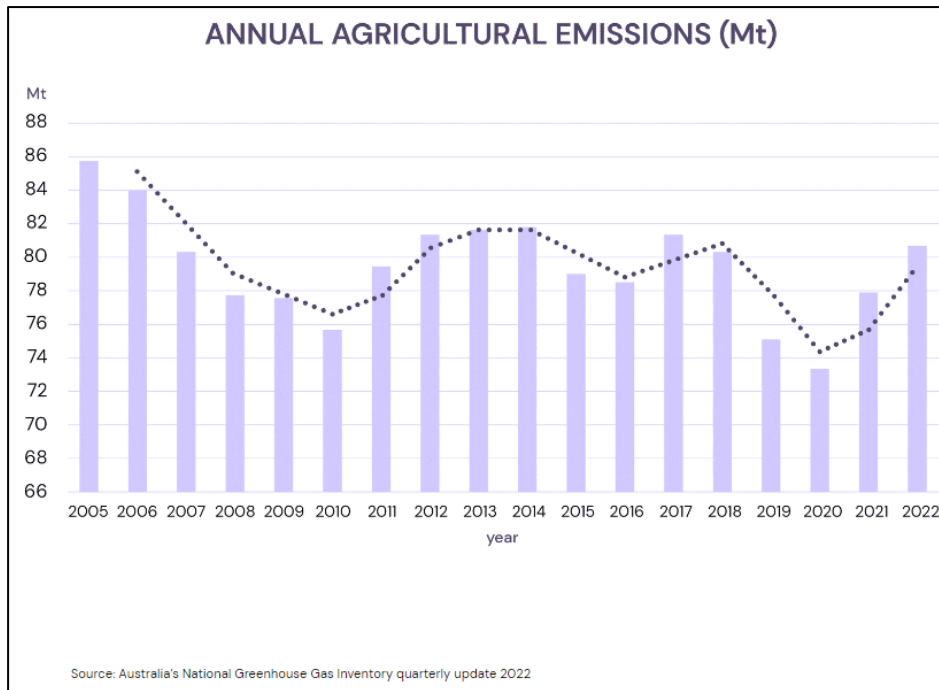
1. Carbon balance

Module C1, Lesson 1

- The following figure, and all others from the same source, would benefit from a more precise reference to indicate which quarterly report in 2022 was used as the source. Also, it is strange that the agriculture data point isn't sorted in descending order like the other data points.



- The following figure should indicate what the dotted line and bars represent (it is assumed one is actual and the other is the trend).



Module C1, Lesson 2

- Some rather complicated words were used, such as eructating. Some sentences weren't entirely clear, e.g., "Scope 3 emissions are essential to the farm's carbon footprint (i.e. emissions intensity measured as kgCO₂-e/kg product) but not to the farm's carbon account or total annual emissions in tonnes". That implies that scope 3 emissions are not essential to the farm's carbon account, whereas the better word may be 'contribute' (but I'm not a content specialist in this area).

Module C2, Lesson 1

- Well written and straight forward.

Module C2, Lesson 2

- Generally good but it would have been preferable for the 15 second audio about *Sustainability and carbon* to be presented in text form.

Module C3, Lesson 1, 2

- Well written and straight forward.

Module C4, Lesson 1, 2

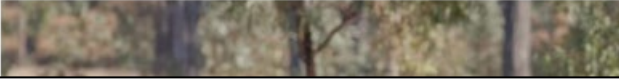
- Instead of using the previous abbreviation for carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂-e), this lesson consistently used CO₂e (where the 2 is not subscript and the hyphen is missing). No quiz was provided at the end of this module.

Module C5, Lesson 1-7

- These modules currently provide information on all four climate regions. It might be helpful if the learner could click on the region of interest to them, and see only the information relevant to that location, rather than having to cover them all. Good use of case studies in Lesson 3. Lesson 4 has some spurious text: "Placeholder image".

Click on [this link](#) for a report on managing regrowth of eu
accumulation.

Placeholder image



- Lesson 5 has some spurious text: “Rangeland pic – request from MLA”

The findings are expected to be reported in 2024.

[Rangelands pic – request from MLA]

Case study: SA rangelands carbon financial analysis

- No quiz was provided at the end of this module.

2. Biodiversity Stewardship & Tree Cover

- Module B1, Lesson 1 - 4
- Spurious text “[replace digram with revised - with Jody]”.

1 Productivity gains from healthy ecosystems	2 Market or finance acc
[replace digram with revised - with Jody]	

Module B1, Lesson 3

- The first mention of “credential” was made in this lesson. This should have happened at the beginning of the learning modules. No quiz was provided at the end of this module.

Module B2, Lesson 1

- The four climate regions seem a bit repetitive after what was covered in Module C5, but it is appreciated that the focus this time is on the vegetation.
- Spurious text: “Placeholder image”.

Healthy riparian habitats are key for native fish species, wetland birds

Placeholder image



Module 3, Lesson 2

- Spurious text “Placeholder image” occurs at three locations.

Watch this 9 minute video on [Restoring Biodiversity for Farm Productivity](#)
Tweed Shire Council, NSW.

Placeholder image



Guidelines for the management of regrowth in Brigalow, Mulga, Eucalyptus
Forests can be [found here](#).

Placeholder image



- Ensure road alignment is not interrupting water flow as it will increase erosion
and ensure tracks are not creating windrows as this can prevent

Placeholder image



3. Drought resilience

- Generally well written and straight forward.

4.2.5 FAQ section

- Generally well written, and covers a good range of topics. Need to add a description for environmental credential.

4.2.6 Biodiversity Stewardship Self-Assessment

- Generally well written and straight forward.
- The radio button selection process works well.
- Some questions could benefit from plain English editing e.g., Q6 “Do you utilize exclusion fencing...” could say “Do you use exclusion fencing...”.
- Q24 has a text box next to “Yes” but there are no instructions how to use it or if there is a character limit. Also, there appears to be unnecessary bolding on the other two responses (unless this is used to highlight the negative responses, but a different coloured font might be better if this is the intention).

Question 24

Have you implemented strategies to reduce or prevent the release of pollutants such as nutrients, to water bodies and waterways?

2020	2021	2022	2023
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable to my production system

- Similarly, in Q27 there is unnecessary bolding on the last option.

Question 27

Which methods do you use to assess available feed supply?

2020	2021	2022	2023
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote imagery
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Grazing charts
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consultant advice
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> NRM advice
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Forage budgeting tools
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Australian feedbase monitor or equivalent
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (enter)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Do not assess objectively

- When all the questions were completed, there was no obvious place to click to submit the responses. There was what appeared to be a possible error message towards the top of the screen saying “Please make sure you respond to all the Biodiversity questions”, but there was no indication as to which questions were not completed. This may just be an error in the test environment.

is

Biodiversity Stewardship Self-Assessment

Drought Resilience Self-Assessment

⊗ Please make sure you respond to all the Biodiversity questions.

< 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 >

Question 27

Which methods do you use to assess available feed supply?

2020	2021	2022	2023
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Remote imagery
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Grazing charts
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consultant advice
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> NRM advice
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Forage budgeting tools
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Australian feedbase monitor or equivalent
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (enter)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Do not assess objectively

5. Conclusion

A thorough review was conducted of the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef platform, including:

- the credentialling process
- biodiversity questionnaire process
- learning modules content and navigating the learning journey
- ease of navigation and linkages between the different aspects of the platform.

Feedback was provided regarding elements not performing correctly and/or suggestions for improvement or identified gaps considering:

- ease of use for producers
- value of the platform as a data sharing mechanism
- potential for platform to raise producer awareness of sustainability
- how to manage and improve it on farm, links within the platform and links with external resources etc (to be determined in consultation with MLA).

A summary of these results was presented at the stakeholder webinar conducted on 2 November 2023, which was attended by approximately 55 stakeholders.

6. Future research and recommendations

This review has now been completed and no further activity is required. It showed that overall, the Environmental Credentials for Grassfed Beef platform has been well designed and implemented. There are several rather minor items that need to be fixed to further improve the platform, as detailed earlier in this report.

It is strongly recommended that a professional editor review all the written materials and improve the readability of the text, using plain English. This will also improve consistency between the modules.