

final report

Project code: B.GBP.0037
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Date published: June 2020

PUBLISHED BY
Meat and Livestock Australia Limited
PO Box 1961
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

Northern Pastoral Company Group Secretariat 2018-2020

Meat & Livestock Australia acknowledges the matching funds provided by the Australian Government to support the research and development detailed in this publication.

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Executive summary

Secretariat support is provided to the Northern Pastoral Group (NPG) to improve engagement between NPG members and between NPG members and MLA. The secretariat facilitates at least two meetings per calendar year and coordinates email and telephone communications. Through the secretariat, the NPG liaises with MLA staff, R&D providers and other stakeholders on a regular basis.

Amongst the activities and achievements over the last 2 years are:

- Development of an animal welfare index for northern Australia.
- Involvement in the northern genomics project.
- Collaboration with MLA and others to improve the connectivity of properties.
- Exchange of information and policies with regard to work health and safety on property.
- A sharing of information and data on best practice with regard to property and infrastructure development.

The NPG group consists of 15 companies breeding, growing and finishing cattle mainly in northern Australia. Annual sales range from 0.9 million to 1.0 million head per annum. The purpose of the NPG is to improve the whole business performance of its members by focusing on optimising productivity, sustainability, human resources and profitability. Members benefit by sharing knowledge and experience and work cooperatively with RD&E personnel to see themselves and the rest of industry move forward.

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1. Description

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2. Objectives

1. Support engagement activities between MLA and the Northern Pastoral Group of Companies
2. Provide secretariat support that facilitates at least two meetings per calendar year for the Northern Pastoral Group of Companies
3. Liaise with the Northern Pastoral Group of Companies, MLA staff, R&D providers and other stakeholders as required by MLA.

3. Activities and achievements

Over this two-year period, the Northern Pastoral Group has met five times in Brisbane including one virtual meeting. Between meetings, communication was principally by email. Issues which were reviewed to varying levels of intensity are listed below in no particular order:

- Adoption and extension including EDGE Network and Profitable Grazing Systems by Jane Wightman and Ted Parish of MLA.
- Genetics and genomics from Ben Hayes of University of Queensland.
- Market reports from Lisa Sharp of MLA.
- Nuffield Scholarships from Jodie Dean from Nuffield Australia.
- Connectivity including an MLA funded project looking at connectivity on northern stations. Presentations by Nick Sangster of MLA Bryce Leedham/Michael White of GHD.
- Intensification of land development from NPG members.
- Northern benchmarking program involving Ian McLean of Bush Agribusiness.
- Salary benchmarking.
- Fluoroacetate poison research including update from Chris McSweeney of CSIRO.
- Hitachi technology update by Owen Keates of Hitachi.
- Solar technology options including presentation by Brian Cooke of Australian Solar.
- Enterprise Bargaining Agreements and Pastoral Awards.
- Workplace safety policies and procedures including input from legal experts.
- Carbon farming and CN30 target including a presentation by Doug McNicholl of MLA.

- Australasian Tropical Beef Centre including a presentation by Nigel Tomkins of MLA and Andrew Gatenby of Indigo Agriculture.
- MLA planning and activities including presentations from Jason Strong and Lisa Sharp.
- Wild dog research including communications with Greg Mifsud and Ben Allen.
- Remote pasture biomass sensing including discussions with Phil Tickle of Cibo Labs.
- Development of a northern, extensive Animal Welfare Index including input from AUS-MEAT and Pip Band of MLA.
- Grass-fed beef program update by Nigel Tomkins of MLA.
- Northern cattle phosphorous survey including presentation by Geoff Niethe of MLA.
- Australian Beef Sustainability Framework including input from Pip Band of MLA and Steve Moore of NAPCO.
- Lessons from Queensland floods.
- Contaminants in feedstuffs and supplements.
- Northern Breeding Business including input from Lee Fitzpatrick of NABRC.
- AgForce updates.
- Loading ramp and forcing pen standards as drafted by Standards Australia.
- COVID-19 risk management planning.
- Assessing the appetite for Australian cattle market benchmarks and risk transfer.

Attendance of NPG members at meetings has been erratic. The success of the last meeting which was a video meeting may mean more of this type of meeting in the future and likely better attendance. The rotating meeting chair is working well and gives the group more ownership of what it does. The group is keen to remain independent and is conscious of the fact that there is generally no consensus on a range of issues. Both these points provide strength to sharing knowledge and experience for the benefit of the group as a whole.

4. Conclusions/recommendations

The NPG group consists of 15 companies breeding, growing and finishing cattle mainly in northern Australia. Their land holdings amount to around 53 million hectares over approximately 182 properties. These holdings carry in the order of two million head managed by 2,800 staff. Annual sales range from 0.9 million to 1.0 million head per annum.

The purpose of the NPG is to improve the whole business performance of its members by focusing on optimising productivity, sustainability, human resources and profitability. The group is not a political lobby group rather its motivation is to utilise evidence and experience to advance strategic and operational business performance. Members of the NPG cooperate with each other and industry stakeholders for the betterment of their pastoral businesses and the broader beef industry.

Members of the group are diverse in their operations and thinking, yet take the time to communicate regularly and meet face to face at least twice a year. Members benefit by sharing knowledge and experience and will work cooperatively with RD&E personnel to see themselves and the rest of industry move forward.