



# final report

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## 2015 Barkly Herd Management Forum

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## **Abstract**

The Barkly Herd Management Forum (BHMF) was held to ensure the middle management of the Barkly region's pastoral industry are receiving current information and skills that will assist them in their everyday work on the station. The 2015 BHMF included 14 participants from company owned stations and 11 presenters from both inter and intrastate. The forum gave participants a chance to interact with industry experts as well as 'take a look over the fence' and discuss the management practices utilised on each other's stations in areas such as breeder & weaner nutrition, organics, breeder & heifer management, bull selection, disease risk management etc. Participants also received information and ideas resulting from current Northern Territory (NT) research. It is envisioned that this information will be passed onto station hands and give middle managers the ability to make informed decisions and discuss management options with higher management. Such events will ensure the remoteness of the Barkly region is not a barrier to further learning and therefore allows the region to produce beef in a profitable yet sustainable manner.

## Executive Summary

The remoteness of the Barkly region limits the opportunities for those working on stations to improve the knowledge and skills that apply to their work within the pastoral industry. In an attempt to ensure distance is no disadvantage, the Tennant Creek DPIF facilitates the BHMF, of which the seventh was held this year. The forum is aimed at the middle management tier including headstockman/women, assistant managers, overseers and leading hands.

The forum attracted 14 participants from 8 different company owned stations from across the Barkly Tablelands. The total area represented at the forum was 52,530km<sup>2</sup>. Nine external key note speakers presented at the forum along with a further 2 from NT DPIF. The sessions were interactive and informative and involved group based discussion as well as outdoor practical activities. Participants gave an average score of 4.3/5 in terms of how useful the forum was in providing them with new information or ideas relevant to their management role. The communications & trust, breeder nutrition, NTCA operations and bull selection presentations were considered by participants as the topics they found the most beneficial. Participants gave an average score of 3.9/5 in terms of the quality of the forum content, materials and delivery by the presenters.

The forum is designed to impact directly on the on-ground work undertaken by those working in the Barkly region's beef industry. Some ideas discussed at the forum will take longer than others to come to fruition but it gives participants the chance to consider alternatives or justify their current practice. It is envisioned that participants will pass on their learning's to station hands working with them as well as be able to discuss management practices and options with their manager/owner. This should ensure that station staff are not only working to achieve a similar outcome but doing it in a way that will increase the profitability and productivity of the beef business.

The participant evaluation results are extremely beneficial for DPIF and will be examined again when organisation begins for the next BHMF.

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## 1 Background

In remote areas such as the Barkly region it is difficult for station staff to obtain sufficient training and information that is essential in maximising the profitability and productivity of the region's beef industry. Staff retention is also a significant issue for the region therefore those who do opt for a pastoral industry career should be given ample opportunity to develop their knowledge base and understand the basic practices that underpin a profitable enterprise. The remoteness of the Barkly region makes this even more difficult. It is for this reason that the Department of Primary Industry & Fisheries (DPIF) have been running the Barkly Herd Management Forum (BHMF) for the past few years. The recent BHMF was the seventh to be held.

The forum is traditionally aimed at middle management such as headstockmen/women, overseer's and assistant manager's, however manager's and leading hands often find the course very beneficial as well. A range of topics have been covered in past years including nutrition, reproduction, pastures, weeds, fire management, genetics, autopsies, people management etc. The forum also gives participants the opportunity to interact with experts in various fields and learn from each other as to the best management practices for the Barkly region. The forum is facilitated by Northern Territory DPIF staff from the Tennant Creek office and is held on different stations throughout the region.

## 2 Projective Objectives

The BHMF aimed to meet the following objectives:

- Delivery of BHMF to a minimum of 20 participants from stations in the Barkly region
- Provide participants with an understanding of the major issues affecting production in the Barkly region
- Provide middle management with recommendations and key strategies to improve productivity and profitability in the Barkly region
- Develop an appreciation of the region's resources and the steps necessary to preserve land condition for both environmental and agricultural purposes
- Update participants with current research projects within the Northern Territory and the implications of results to date
- Enhance motivation within middle management in their role in the north Australian beef industry
- Provide industry and department representatives the opportunity to network with professionals and industry experts

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) had the following key objectives:

- Provide an informative and interactive forum with external key note speakers for at least 20 beef cattle operational managers and overseers in the Barkly region addressing key areas of productivity and sustainability for their region.
- Assess the participants' appreciation of the content of the forum and demonstrated positive uptake of ideas and concepts which will enhance their operational capacity and their job performance.

### 3 Results & Discussion

The BHMF attracted a total of 14 participants from 8 stations covering 52,530km<sup>2</sup>, with job titles including Headstockman, Regional Analyst, Livestock Administrator, Leading Hand and Senior Stationhand (See *Appendix 5.2.2*). The participants were from company owned stations on the Barkly Tablelands (See *Appendix 5.2.3*). The forum had 19 registrations however decreased numbers of staff on some stations and trucking of sale cattle were reasons mentioned for cancellation of registration.

A total of nine external speakers attended the forum (See *Appendix 5.2.1*). The speakers came from Queensland (3), New South Wales (1) and the Northern Territory (7). The speakers represented the Northern Territory Government, a stakeholder association (Northern Territory Cattleman's Association), 2 private consulting agencies (Personis and Holmes & Co.), a rural supply company (Ridleys Agriproducts), MLA, and 2 pastoral companies (Australian Agricultural Co. & Georgina Pastoral Co.).

The BHMF covered the following topics (See *Appendix 5.1*):

- Avon Downs and Brunette Downs operations
- Communication & Trust
- Breeder and weaner nutrition
- Organic Wagyu
- Breeder and heifer management
- Bull Selection
- Strategic thinking
- Planning for financial independence
- NTCA operations
- Diseases and risk management
- DPIF project update

All sessions were interactive and included group discussion, a practical component or trips to the paddock/yards. Presenters also provided participants with key strategies and recommendations.

At the completion of the forum, all participants answered an Evaluation Questionnaire (See *Appendix 5.4*). An average score of 4.3/5 was given by participants when asked how useful they found the forum in terms of providing them with new information or ideas relevant to their management role.

Some of the key messages listed in the evaluations included communication & trust, early investment, supplementation benefits, persistence, listen to important information that is relevant and think about disease. The speakers found most useful were Phil Holmes, Geoff Stanhope and Geoff Niethe. The communications & trust, breeder nutrition, NTCA operations and bull selection presentations were considered by participants as the topics they gained most from. The topics considered the least useful were listed as organic production, strategic thinking and financial. The listing of similar subjects on both most and least useful topics could be attributed to the fact that there was a range of level and experience within the participants, and hence, what they find useful in their current situation.

In terms of the quality of the forum content, materials and delivery by the presenters, participants gave an average score of 3.9/5.

## **4 Conclusions/Recommendations**

In conclusion, the forum provided participants with key information and strategies through interactive and practical sessions. The response from participants and presenters was very positive and many commented on their eagerness for another similar event in the future.

Staff debriefing following the forum has suggested increased advertising, not only to stations and their managers, but also to Company head offices and HR departments in an attempt to recruit more participants in the future.

DPIF recommends that the BHMF be held every 2 years.

## 5 Appendices

### 5.1 Appendix 1: Barkly Herd Management Forum Program

#### **DAY 1: MONDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> JULY**

5:00pm	<b>MEET AND GREET AT AVON DOWNS STATION</b>
7:00pm	<b>BBQ DINNER &amp; '2015 BHMF TRIVIA CHAMPIONSHIP'</b>

#### **DAY 2: TUESDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> JULY – AVON DOWNS AND BRUNETTE DOWNS**

<b>6:00am</b>	<b>BREAKFAST</b>
6:30am	<b>INTRODUCTION / WELCOME</b> DPIF Tennant Creek
6:45am	<b>WELCOME TO AVON: OVERVIEW OF THE STATION AND THE RUNNING OF AVON</b> Matt Barrett, <i>Manager Avon Downs</i>
7:05am	<b>COMMUNICATION AND TRUST</b>  Geoff Stanhope, Director, <i>Personis – Performance Through People</i>
<b>8:00am</b>	<b>BREAK</b>
8:05am	<b>STRATEGIC SUPPLEMENTATION OF THE BREEDING HERD</b> Matt Callaghan, <i>Ridley AgriProducts</i>
8:50am	<b>ORGANIC WAGYU PRODUCTION AT LAKE NASH</b> Fred & Sarah Hughes, <i>Managers, Lake Nash</i>
<b>9:20am</b>	<b>MORNING TEA</b>
9:40am	<b>REPRODUCTION 101</b> Geoff Niethé, <i>Animal Production Co-ordinator MLA</i>
10:25am	<b>BREAKTHROUGH NEW PRODUCT FOR WEANERS</b> Phil Holmes, <i>Principal, Holmes &amp; Company</i>
11:10am	<b>DPIF PROJECT UPDATES</b> Helen McMillan/ Jane Douglas <i>NT Department of Primary Industry &amp; Fisheries</i>
11:40am	<b>Paddock TOUR - WAGYU</b> Matt Barrett, <i>Manager Avon Downs</i>
<b>12:40pm</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>
1:25pm	<b>DEPART AVON DOWNS, TRAVELING TO BRUNETTE DOWNS</b>
5:30pm	<b>WELCOME TO BRUNETTE DOWNS: OVERVIEW OF THE STATION AND THE RUNNING OF BRUNETTE</b> Michael Johnson, <i>Manager Brunette Downs</i>



**DAY 2: TUESDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> JULY – AVON DOWNS AND BRUNETTE DOWNS**

6:00pm	<b>POST SESSION DISCUSSION TIME AT SOCIAL CLUB</b>
7:00pm	<b>DINNER</b>
8:00pm	<b>PLANNING FOR FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE</b> Phil Holmes, <i>Principal, Holmes &amp; Company</i>

**DAY 3: WEDNESDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> JULY – BRUNETTE DOWNS STATION**

6:00am	<b>BREAKFAST</b>
6:30am	<b>WEANER NUTRITION</b> Matt Callaghan, <i>Ridley AgriProducts</i>
7:15am	<b>JUNIOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE BREEDER HERD</b> Geoff Niethe, <i>Animal Production Co-ordinator MLA</i>
8:00am (YARDS)	<b>AN INTRODUCTION TO RATIONAL BULL SELECTION</b> Phil Holmes, <i>Principal, Holmes &amp; Company</i>
9:00am	<b>BUILDING FOCUS, RELEVANCE &amp; INFLUENCE BEYOND THE NT</b> Tom Ryan, <i>Northern Territory Cattleman's Association</i>
9:30am	<b>MORNING TEA</b>
9:50am	<b>A TALE OF TWO HERDS</b> Phil Holmes, <i>Principal, Holmes &amp; Company</i>
10:50am	<b>COMMUNICATION AND TRUST</b>  Geoff Stanhope, Director, <i>Personis – Performance Through People</i>
11:35am	<b>DISEASE: RISK MANAGEMENT</b> Geoff Niethe, <i>Animal Production Co-ordinator MLA</i>
12:30pm	<b>LUNCH</b>
1:35pm	<b>ALLOCATING CAPITAL USING DISCIPLINE</b> Phil Holmes, <i>Principal, Holmes &amp; Company</i>
2:35pm	<b>POST SESSION DISCUSSION</b>
3:00pm	<b>FINAL ADDRESS, THANK-YOU AND EVALUATIONS</b> Casey Collier, Helen McMillan, Jane Douglas <i>NT DPIF</i>
3:30pm	<b>CLOSE</b>

## 5.2 Appendix 2: Presenters and Participants

### 5.2.1 Presenters

Last Name	First Name	Topic	Title	Organisation
Barrett	Matt	Avon Downs introduction & operations	Manager	AACo
Callaghan	Matt	Nutrition: Breeders & weaners	Technical Manager	Ridleys Agriproducts
Douglas	Jane	DPIF project update	Pastoral Production Officer	NT DPIF
Holmes	Phil	Critical thinking, finance and bull selection	Principal	Holmes & Co
Hughes	Sarah	Organic Wagyu at Lake Nash	Manager	Georgina Pastoral
Hughes	Fred	Organic Wagyu at Lake Nash	Manager	Georgina Pastoral
Johnson	Michael	Brunette Downs introduction & operations	General Manager	AACo
McMillan	Helen	DPIF project update	Pastoral Production Officer	NT DPIF
Niethé	Geoff	MC; Reproduction, Disease risk management, breeder management	Animal Production Co-ordinator	MLA
Ryan	Tom	NTCA operations	Executive Officer	NTCA
Stanhope	Geoff	Communication & trust	Director	Personis

### 5.2.2 Participant Job Positions

Position	Number	Percentage of total
Livestock Administrator	1	7%
Headstockman	7	50%
Regional Analyst	1	7%
Company Graduate	1	7%
Leading Hand	2	14%
Senior Stationhand	2	14%

## 5.2.3 Participants

Last Name	First Name	Station	Company	Position
Castle	Josh	Brunette	AACo	Headstockman
Connell	Rachael	Brunette	AACo	Regional Analyst
Esdaille	John	Clonagh	Paraway	Headstockman
Foster	Bryce	Walhallow	Paraway	Headstockman
Graham	Jason	Brunchilly	S. Kidman	Headstockman
Grieve	Lee	Eva Downs	AACo	Leading Hand
Hassett	George	Brunette	AACo	Headstockman
Hoolihan	Rachael	Brunette	AACo	Company Graduate
Jones	Rodney	Anthony	AACo	Headstockman
Mylrea	Melissa	Anthony	AACo	Senior Stationhand
Pocock	Michael	Anthony	AACo	Senior Stationhand
Spies	Lateisha	Avon Downs	AACo	Leading Hand
Thomson	Reilly	Helen Springs	S. Kidman	Headstockman
Vaughan	Mary	Brunette	AACo	Livestock

## 5.2.4 Cancelled Registrations

Last Name	First Name	Station	Company	Position
Croake	Emma	Rockhampton	Private	Logistics Manager
Evans	Luke	Rockhampton	Private	Manager
Keane	Chris	Brunette Downs	AACo	Operations
Raleigh	Pete	Brunette Downs	AACo	Operations
Sims	Jason	Walhallow	Paraway	Assistant Manager

## 5.2.5 Other Attendees

Last Name	First Name	Title	Organisation
Collier	Casey	Pastoral Production	NT DPIF
Wass	Toby	Vet	Wass Vet Services

### 5.3 Appendix 3: Participant Evaluation Summary

<b>1. How do you rate our presentations? (0 = Not Useful, 5 = Very Useful)</b>	
	<b>Avg /5</b>
Avon Downs & Austral Downs operations	3.40
Communications & Leadership 1	4.40
Strategic supplementation of the breeding herd	4.18
Organic Wagyu production at Lake Nash	3.07
Reproduction 101	4.00
Breakthrough new product for weaners	3.63
Brunette Downs operations	3.69
Planning for financial independence	3.77
Weaner nutrition	4.00
Junior development of the breeder herd	3.85
An introduction into rational bull selection	4.07
Building focus, relevance and influence beyond the NT	4.08
A tale of two herds	3.86
Communication & trust (2)	3.87
Disease risk management	3.93
DPIF projects update	3.62
Allocating capital using discipline	3.85
<b>2. Please rate the following:</b>	
	<b>Avg /5</b>
Accommodation	3.33
Catering	4.50
Entertainment	4.17
BHMF Overall	4.33
<b>3. Name 3 key messages that you learned:</b>	
	<b>#</b>
Communication	3
Trust	2
Early Investment	1
Calving losses	1
supplementation benefits	1
Persistence	1
Kg/AE needs to be high	1
Listen to important information that is relevant	1
Think about disease	1

<b>4. What topic(s) did you find the most useful?</b>	
	<b>#</b>
Geoff Stanhope	2
Phil Holmes	1
Paddock tour	1
Nutrition	1
Strategic thinking	1
Disease	1
Genetics	1
Marking profit from business	1
Most of them	1

<b>5. What topic(s) did you find the least useful?</b>	
	<b>#</b>
Organic production	3
Phil Holmes strategic thinking	1
Financial (money)	1

<b>6. Do you see yourself using any of the ideas/practices mentioned at the BHMf? If so, which ones?</b>	
	<b>#</b>
Yes – Not specific	2
Trust in the group	1

<b>7. Do you have any suggestions to improve the BHMf?</b>	
	<b>#</b>
No – Not specific	1
New ideas and focus on the best ones	1

### 5.4 Appendix 4: Barkly Herd Management Forum Evaluation Form

Job Title

Name (Optional)

1. How do you rate our presentations? (0 = Not useful, 5 = Highly useful)

Topic	0	1	2	3	4	5
Avon Downs and Austral Downs operations <i>Matt Barrett</i>						
Communications & Leadership (1) <i>Geoff Stanhope</i>						
Strategic supplementation of the breeding herd <i>Matt Callaghan</i>						
Organic Wagyu production at Lake Nash <i>Fred and Sarah Hughes</i>						
Reproduction 101 <i>Geoff Niethe</i>						
Breakthrough new product for weaners <i>Phil Holmes</i>						
Brunette Downs operations <i>Michael Johnson</i>						
Planning for financial independence <i>Phil Holmes</i>						
Weaner nutrition <i>Matt Callaghan</i>						
Junior development of the breeder herd <i>Geoff Niethe</i>						
An introduction to rational bull selection <i>Phil Holmes</i>						
Building focus, relevance and influence beyond the NT <i>Tom Ryan</i>						
A tale of two herds <i>Phil Holmes</i>						
Communication & trust (2) <i>Geoff Stanhope</i>						
Disease risk management <i>Geoff Niethe</i>						
DPIF project update <i>Jane Douglas &amp; Helen McMillan</i>						
Allocating capital using discipline <i>Phil Holmes</i>						

2. Please rate the following:

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Accommodation						
Catering						
Entertainment						
BHMF Overall						

