



Final report

Environmental Credentials for Beef project - Facilitation Services

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Abstract

This project provided support to the Environmental Credentials for Australian Beef project, which aims to develop an environmental sustainability tool accessible to all grass-fed beef producers wanting to measure and demonstrate their sustainable production practices.

High-quality facilitation of co-design processes in an online setting has been provided for the 33 meetings conducted. This included collaborating with the project team to set and prepare meeting agendas, reviewing meeting minutes and outcome summaries to ensure they are a complete record, conducting and reporting on the meeting series, as well as editing the recordings of the meetings prior to circulation to attendees.

Overall, the online technologies and facilitation processes worked well. This enabled a wide geographic cross-section of those involved in the beef value chain to contribute their thoughts and ideas. This style of delivery removed the usual requirement for travel and accommodation, and minimised time away from their businesses and families.

It is recommended that online meetings be considered more often for future engagement options with graziers. While physical meetings are often thought of as the preferred option for producers, the experience in this project indicated they are not only able but very willing to use online meeting options.

Executive summary

Background

This project provided support to the L.SFP.1000 Environmental Credentials for Australian Beef project, which aims to develop an environmental sustainability tool accessible to all grass-fed beef producers wanting to measure and demonstrate their sustainable production practices and gain access to resources to help them improve their performance in these areas. This will enable them to take advantage of emerging opportunities presented by markets and supply chains looking to access red meat with verified environmental credentials.

Objectives

The objectives for this project were as follows:

1. Collaborate with the Environmental Credentials for Australian Beef consortium to deliver high-quality facilitation of co-design five environmental measurement and monitoring themes
2. Participate in co-design workshop debriefs and contribute insights and observations from the co-design meetings and process to the project team
3. Facilitate up to 35 separate working group meetings, with a maximum of 10 members per group.

All three objectives have been successfully achieved.

Methodology

Zoom meetings (<https://zoom.us/>) were used to provide an online mechanism for the participants to engage with the project team. Additionally, Poll Everywhere (<https://www.polleverywhere.com/>) was used to enable the participants to easily indicate their responses to poll questions.

Results/key findings

A total of 33 online meetings were facilitated from 12/10/2021 to 19/5/2022. All the meetings were delivered on-time, on budget and to a high standard. The facilitation of the meetings worked well and enabled representatives from the beef value chain from across Australia to easily contribute their thoughts and ideas to the Environmental Credentials for Australian Beef project.

Benefits to industry

The provision of online meetings enabled a wide geographic cross-section of those involved in the beef value chain to contribute their thoughts and ideas to the Environmental Credentials for Beef project. This style of delivery removed the usual requirement for travel and accommodation, and minimised time away from their businesses and families.

Future research and recommendations

It is recommended that online meetings be considered more often for future engagement options with graziers. While physical meetings are often thought as the preferred option for producers, the experience in this project indicated they are not only able, but very willing to use online meeting options.

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1. Background

Customers and other industry stakeholders are increasingly looking for evidence of sustainable production across agricultural industries. This project, L.SFP.1012 - Environmental Credentials for Beef project - Facilitation Services provided support to the L.SFP.1000 Environmental Credentials for Australian Beef project, which aims to develop an environmental sustainability tool accessible to all grass-fed beef producers wanting to measure and demonstrate their sustainable production practices, and gain access to resources to help them improve their performance in these areas. This will enable them to take advantage of emerging opportunities presented by markets and supply chains looking to access red meat with verified environmental credentials.

An online environmental sustainability platform, with measuring tools and links to learning resources will be developed across five theme areas—biodiversity stewardship, ground cover, carbon balance, tree cover, and drought resilience. Producers and beef industry stakeholders have the opportunity to be involved in the design of this platform and associated learning resources that are practical, user friendly and meaningful.

The purpose of this project was to collaborate with the Environmental Credentials for Australian Beef consortium to deliver high quality facilitation of co-design processes in an online setting. The output from the co-design process are five environmental measurement and monitoring themes. Themes are to be co-designed with working group members to ensure they are relevant, realistic and provides benefit to producers and industry. Consortium partners are responsible for the overall design of the co-design processes and consolidating technical theme content. The lead facilitator is responsible for process delivery and management of co-design meetings, as well as participating in implementation debriefs and contributing their insights and observations from the co-design meetings and process to the project team. The expected outcome from this task is high quality engagement and contributions from working group members with truly consultative processes.

2. Objectives

The objectives for this project were as follows:

4. Collaborate with the Environmental Credentials for Australian Beef consortium to deliver high quality facilitation of co-design five environmental measurement and monitoring themes
5. Participate in co-design workshop debriefs and contribute insights and observations from the co-design meetings and process to the project team
6. Facilitate up to 35 separate working groups meetings, with a maximum of 10 members per group (details of meetings are below).

All three objectives have been successfully achieved.

3. Methodology

It was planned that up to 35 separate working groups meetings may be required, with a maximum of 10 members per group. The group members were to be predominately comprised of beef producers from across Australia, as well as some value chain representatives. Each meeting was to be a maximum of 3 hours with the majority of meetings held online. The working group processes were to occur over a 9 to 12-month time period commencing in August 2021.

Zoom meetings (<https://zoom.us/>) were used to provide an online mechanism for the participants to engage with the project team. Additionally, Poll Everywhere (<https://www.poll Everywhere.com/>) was used to enable the participants to easily indicate their responses to poll questions.

A shared responsibility model allowed the lead facilitator, the theme leads, and the co-design leads to share the responsibility for designing, implementing and evaluating the meetings.

The use of the flipped learning approach allowed participants to become familiar with important components of the content prior to each meeting, allowing greater time for in-depth discussion during the online sessions.

4. Results

While it was estimated that up to 35 meetings may have been required, only 33 meetings were actually required. The numbers and dates of these were as follows:

- Biodiversity stewardship (6): 9/11/21, 3/12/21, 15/12/21, 2/2/22, 1/3/22 and 11/5/22
- Ground cover (6): 11/11/21, 2/12/21, 17/12/21, 3/2/22, 3/3/22 and 9/5/22
- Carbon balance (8): 20/10/21, 4/11/21, 15/11/21, 8/12/21, 18/1/22, 8/2/22, 2/5/22 and 19/5/22
- Tree cover (6): 10/11/21, 1/12/21, 14/12/21, 4/2/21, 2/3/22 and 12/5/22
- Drought resilience (7): 12/10/21, 26/10/21, 23/11/21, 7/12/21, 25/1/22, 15/2/22 and 8/3/22.

The following tasks were successfully undertaken for each meeting:

1. Prior to each meeting collaborate with the project team to design the co-design process, prepare meeting agendas, and presentations;
2. Manage the technology during the meetings to ensure a high-quality experience for the participants, including recording the meeting and monitoring the chat panel;
3. Participate in post-meeting debriefs with the project team to reflect on learnings and adjust process for future meetings;
4. Edit the recordings of the meetings prior to circulation to attendees; and
5. Assist in reviewing meeting minutes and outcome summary to ensure they are a complete record.

5. Conclusion

This project has been successfully completed with all the required meetings delivered on-time, on budget and to a high standard.

Being a co-designed project, there was a certain degree of flexibility applied to the initial project design to make it work to the satisfaction of all the parties involved. Initially, it was thought that Biodiversity stewardship and Ground cover would be completed first, followed by Carbon balance and Tree cover, and finally Drought resilience. However, with the lack of availability of a theme lead for Biodiversity stewardship, Ground cover and Tree cover, it was decided to initially start with Drought resilience, closely followed by Carbon balance. This allowed the co-design team to focus on the successful delivery of a single theme in which they had the greatest involvement. The lessons from these meetings were then quickly shared with the other theme leads and applied to the design and conduct of Carbon balance. By the time Biodiversity stewardship, Ground cover and Tree cover commenced, the process was well tested and suitably refined.

In the original project design, the online meetings were planned to be three hours in duration. However, in the co-design phase this was considered to be too long for the representatives from the beef value chain. By using the flipped learning process, at the suggestion of the lead facilitator and one of the theme leads, the meetings were able to be reduced to 90 minutes. This enabled producers more flexibility in using their time, made better use of the online meeting time, and enabled shorter

and more focused meetings. The duration was extended to two hours for some of the later meetings when it was decided that greater time for discussion was required.

The Zoom meeting technology worked well, allowing the participants from across Australia to attend the meetings without the need for travel. Attendees were able to join from their computer or mobile devices, and at times participants participated in the meeting using their mobile phone in their car while parked at the side of the road. Most were able to share their web cams which improved engagement, but one or two were not able to, due to bandwidth or technology limitations. We encouraged participants to have their webcams on whenever possible to maximise interpersonal connection and maintain engagement throughout the meeting.

Zoom meeting breakout rooms were used when appropriate, to enable greater discussion and contribution from the participants. However, when consensus on an issue was required, it was better to use plenary discussions so everyone was able to participate in the full discussion and not just hear summaries of small group discussions.

The Poll Everywhere platform worked well for quickly determining the sentiment of the whole group, and deciding whether further discussion was required. It was also useful in the first meeting to visually demonstrate the geographic spread of the attendees. As the participants became more comfortable in sharing their thoughts and feelings, a simple visual thumbs-up signal using the web cams was utilised. If participants fully agreed they displayed a thumbs-up, if they partly agreed they showed a sideways thumb, and if they disagreed, they indicated it with a thumbs down.

Learnings included that virtually all the attendees had no issues using the Zoom meeting platform. Only one or two people were unable to use their web cams, either due to hardware or bandwidth restrictions. Producers, and especially those who were geographically isolated, seemed to relish discussing their thoughts and views with others in an online environment. In fact, some asked if it would be possible to start the meetings earlier to allow more informal discussion before the meeting started. This was not practical as the project team needed that time themselves in the Zoom meeting to adequately prepare and check their audio-visual settings. The Zoom meeting breakout rooms were always warmly received and often commented favourably upon during the end-of-meeting debrief.

The co-design process in particular was well received by the participants who often commented that they felt their views were being truly heard. The shared roles enabled rapid adaptation in the rare cases of emergency, such as when a theme lead lost their internet connection and when Tasmania lost internet and mobile reception (as both of the main telecommunication cables connecting it the mainland were severed).

5.1 Key findings

The facilitation of the meetings worked well and enabled representatives from the beef value chain from across Australia to easily contribute their thoughts and ideas to the Environmental Credentials for Australian Beef project.

5.2 Benefits to industry

The provision of online meetings enabled a wide geographic cross-section of those involved in the beef value chain to contribute their thoughts and ideas to the Environmental Credentials for Beef project. This style of delivery removed the usual requirement for travel and accommodation, and minimised time away from their businesses and families.

6. Future research and recommendations

It is recommended that online meetings be more often considered for future engagement options with graziers. While physical meetings are often thought as the preferred option for producers, the experience in this project indicated they are not only able, but very willing to use online meeting options.