



# Final report

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## **‘Back to Business’ Bushfire Recovery Project – South Australian coordinator**

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## **Abstract**

In response to extensive bushfires in December 2019 in the Adelaide Hills (Cudlee Ck.) and on Kangaroo Island, which had significant impacts upon livestock producers, MLA funded Livestock SA to enter into contract arrangements with landholders and consultants to provide 1 on 1 consultancies to assist in and plan for recovery from the fires.

Livestock SA followed MLA Guidelines for delivering the project which included marketing and promotion, processes for establishing landholder eligibility and engagement, consultant eligibility and contracting and for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

The project funded 7 registered consultants who provided services to 40 landholders, noting that 10 consultants registered, and 58 landholder expressed interest.

Feedback from consultants and landholders consistently expressed their gratitude for the opportunity provided and of the benefits to their business and personal lives in recovering their livestock enterprise post bushfire.

## Executive summary

### Background

In response to extensive the bushfires in December 2019 which had significant impacts upon livestock producers in the Adelaide Hills (Cudlee Ck.) and on Kangaroo Island, MLA funded Livestock SA to enter into contract arrangements with landholders and consultants to provide 1 on 1 consultancies to assist in and plan for recovery from the fires.

Livestock SA followed MLA Guidelines for delivering the project which included marketing and promotion, processes for establishing landholder eligibility and engagement, consultant eligibility and contracting and for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

### Objectives

The project had specific objectives set out in the contract between MLA and Livestock SA around:

- engaging and contracting Farm Management Consultants (FMCs) to work in bushfire affected regions.
- engaging and verifying eligibility of red meat producers in bushfire affected regions.
- ensuring Farm Management Consultants met the eligibility criteria.
- pairing bushfire affected producers with an appropriate FMC.
- providing MLA with regular updates on the program progress
- collating and reporting from farm management consultants and detail in a final report.

### Methodology

Livestock SA promoted the program to landholders through industry networks, social media, recovery centres and to consultants through the SA Livestock Consultants Group.

Livestock SA:

- received expressions of interest from landholders and registered them through the 'Engagement Form'.
- received expressions of interest and subsequent applications and presentation of their bona-fides and then established contracts with eligible consultants via a formal agreement.
- oversaw 'pairing' of landholders with appropriate and/or preferred consultants, according to their needs and wants and then the subsequent delivery of the consultancies.
- received Action Plans produced by the consultants, and signed by the producers, after each of the sessions and processed invoices submitted for the time and travel spent on each session.
- paid invoices and circulated feedback forms to the landholders.

### Results / Key Findings

The project funded 7 registered consultants who provided services to 40 landholders. 10 consultants registered with Livestock SA, with 3 not following up or not being preferred by producers. 59 landholder expressed initial interest, 54 followed up but in the end 40 participated in the consultancies.

Feedback from consultants and landholders consistently expressed their gratitude for the opportunity provided and of the benefits to their business and personal lives in recovering their livestock enterprise post bushfire.

### **Benefits to Industry.**

The fires had a catastrophic impact upon the lives and livelihoods and producers. The loss of infrastructure and livestock potentially having direct impacts upon the future capacity to produce and supply product into the market, particularly on Kangaroo Island.

The consultancies were well received and demonstrated positive impacts and benefits to landholders in recovering from the fires. Funding from their industry body to support this was acknowledged and contributed to building toward a positive outlook in the recovery process.

### **Future Research and Findings**

Not all landholders were ready to take on a business planning approach, preferring to seek advice on more operational/production related matters.

With the hundreds of landholders affected by the fire, the modest uptake meant that many chose not to participate for reasons not explored. There will be a number of reasons that will be best understood in future projects.

The 'paperwork' and delivery processes were somewhat onerous and could possibly be streamlined.

In future, greater vetting of consultants to ensure integrity and standards should be followed.

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## 1. Background

The bushfires on December 2019 on Kangaroo Island and the Adelaide Hills burnt through 236,727 hectares, much of which is held by red meat producers. 1,190 farm business were impacted: On Kangaroo Island 211,474 hectares were burnt and, in the Adelaide Hills, 25,253. The estimated impact on the livestock industry was \$16.99 million.

While recovery support programs were established quite quickly at each location, these were mainly directed at providing immediate response needs, including financial, well-being and livestock survival support.

The MLA Back to Business project was aimed to provide support for a strategic and longer-term recovery process from a perspective of re-building the farm business.

The project provided the opportunity for red meat producer business members affected by the fires to spend 3 'one on-one' sessions with an experienced farm business consultant to:

1. Review where they are at and what are their recovery needs and wants,
2. Develop short-, medium- and longer-term action plans to achieve their goals, and
3. Understand what supports they need to achieve those plans.

Presented in this Final Report are the requirements set out in the Consultancy Agreement between MLA and Livestock SA which requires a:

1. a reconciliation of funds
2. a collation and summary of all data and monthly reporting, details of any initial outcomes, examples of action plans being implemented, and next steps for producers,
3. overall impact of the program, and
4. recommendations for future improvement of the program.

## 2. Objectives

The objectives of the project were set out in the contract between MLA and Livestock SA. They were to:

1. Engage and subcontract appropriate Farm Management Consultants (FMCs) to work in bushfire affected regions.
  - **Achieved:** we engaged the mix of 9 business and technical consultants.
2. Engage and verify eligibility of fire affected red meat producers and ensure completion of the registration form which includes producer consent.
  - **Achieved:** we registered 58 landholders through the MLA process.
  - Note that while this a good response and participation it is relatively small proportion of the estimated producers and landholders who may have been eligible to participate.

3. Ensure FMCs meet the eligibility criteria.
  - **Achieved**; all consultants had the requisites for participation.
4. Pair bushfire affected producers with an appropriate FMC, which can include working with producers to determine preferred FMC and does not exclude current advisors provided they meet FMCs eligibility criteria.
  - **Achieved**: we generally provided the list of consultants to the landholder for them to select the one they thought best for their needs. In some cases, where they were unsure, we provided some advice and/or more active connection.
5. Provide MLA with updates on the program at least monthly via email, reporting on the criteria detailed in Annexure B, along with verbal communication to further discuss detail.
  - **Achieved**: we regularly communicated progress and lessons as the project progressed.
6. Collate reporting from farm management consultants and detail in final report summarising the outcomes of the program.
  - **Achieving** this with this report.

### 3. Methodology

#### Livestock SA:

- promoted the program to landholders through industry networks, social media, recovery centres and to consultants. This included circulation of the MLA flyer, through the:
  - Livestock SA's membership
  - Lobethal Recovery Centre's various communication channels
  - 3 Landscape (NRM) Board website, emails, and Facebook
  - Agriculture KI membership distribution and Newsletter
  - SA Livestock Consultants Group
- received expressions of interest from landholders and registered them through the 'Engagement Form',
- established contracts with consultants via a formal agreement,
- oversaw 'pairing' of landholders and consultants and subsequent delivery of the consultancies,
- received signed Action Plans and invoices for the consultancies,
- paid invoices upon receipt of action plans developed through the consultancies with landholders, and
- circulated feedback forms to the landholders.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Participation

#### 4.1.1 Producers

Livestock SA received 58 expressions of interest from producers: 23 from the Adelaide Hills and 36 from Kangaroo Island. 54 of those registered and of those, 14 for a variety of reasons chose not to follow through. The 40 who participated provided Livestock SA with the completed Producer Engagement Form.

It is noted that, consistent with the demographics of the Adelaide Hills landownership, many of the participants were not commercial producers. As a result, the consultancies in the Adelaide Hills tended to be of a more short term, technical production nature.

The following sets out the participation reports provided MLA during the course of the program.

	8 May	15 May	29 May	12 June	7 July	31 July	7 Aug	21 Aug	Nov 30	Final
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<b>Producers</b>										
EOI	14	15	20	25	26	26	39	42	59	58
registered	1	15	20	25	26	26	39	42	54	54
participating	1	3	8	13	14	16	11	32	38	40

Note that 8 of the producers decided that after Session 1 or Session 2, they had been provided with the support they required and decided not to continue. These were lifestyle landholders in the Adelaide Hills whose focus was just on recovering pastures, water points and internal fencing and not focussed on a business recovery.

The following sets out the progress reports provided MLA during the program.

	8 May	15 May	29 May	12 June	7 July	31 July	7 Aug	21 Aug	Nov 30	Final
--	-------	--------	--------	---------	--------	---------	-------	--------	--------	-------

<b>Sessions completed</b>										
1	1	1	4	8	11		11	22	36	40
2		1	1	2	5			7	32	36
3								1	28	32

#### 4.1.2 Consultants

In all, Livestock SA entered into contracts with 9 consultants. They were a mix of skills and experience in senior farm business consultants and technical consultants.



	8 May	15 May	29 May	12 June	7 July	31 July	7 Aug	21 Aug	Nov 30	Final
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Consultants										
EOI	7	7	7	8	10	12	12	11	11	11
registered	4	7	6	6	9	12	12	11	10	10
participating	2	2	4	5	5	9	9	6	7	7

The program's plan for early sessions to be focussed on the business was only sometimes followed due to the preferences of landholders for the kind of support they sought. Generally, Livestock SA provided the list of consultants to the producers for them to make their choice of who they sought to work with. Features of the consultancies included:

- the majority of session were conducted by 5 of the 10, and
- 3 of the 10 did not pursue engagement with producers.

Sessions were shared between FMCs and Specialist Technical Consultants (STC) in a number of cases, according to the skills of the consultants and needs of the producers.

It is noted that the intention of the Program to engage 'local' consultants, with an expectation of a 200 km travel to farms did generally not play out. In particular Kangaroo Island presented challenging logistics, given no consultants on the Island engaged and for our consultants, they were required to not just travel considerable distances, but also catch the (expensive) ferry and usually stay overnight.

## 4.2 Action Plans

As per Livestock SA's Agreement with MLA and subsequently with our consultants, at the completion of each consultancy session, the consultants were required to forward a copy of the Action Plan developed with and signed by the producer.

The guidance provided by MLA for the structure of the 3 consultations provided an excellent framework for consultants around which they could respond to producer's needs and wants. It was seldom followed as a prescription, but it allowed the consultants and producers to work through and 'check off' their priorities in developing the Action Plans.

In a general sense the sessions followed through process of:

Session 1.

- General farm visit to review situation and determine immediate high-level priorities.
- Provide an information pack that contains fact sheets on general recovery considerations.
- Provide support in identifying and applying for funding and other avenues for support including mental health, access to feed, cost exemptions and subsidies.
- Provide an overview of the next session plus determine any other support required.

Session 2

- Follow up on any applications or actions arising from Session 1.
- Farm visit to complete (suggested):
  - Budget and cash flow
  - Livestock plan – keep, feed or sell.
  - Pasture and feed budgets, pasture re-establishment.
  - Infrastructure rebuild plan.
  - Other areas identified.
  - Determine any additional support required.
  - Develop an action plan and goals (short and long term) for recovering.

Session 3.

- Suggested to occur with enough time to start to implement at part of the action plan.
- Establish progress on action plan and identify any further support required.
- Determine ways to remain in contact and ensure avenues for support are in place.
- Short evaluation to be completed.

While the process for consultants to get the producers sign-off and lodge the Action Plans was frequently a tortuous one, at completion of the Program there was a 100% accomplishment.

It is apparent that the quality of the plans and their impact varied depending upon the consultant (and the producer). The approach of Livestock SA of leaving it to producers to choose consultants and to discover themselves what was best for them worked well and the feedback on the benefits of the consultancies and plans was overwhelmingly positive.

### 4.3 Producer Feedback

Livestock SA received 12 responses from requests for participants to provide feedback from their experience in participating in the Program.

The following summary shows overwhelming positivity with the experience.

Producers	Satisfaction				Value			14. Overall	20. Recommend?	21. suggestions	22. Comments
	6. admin	7 support?	8. Consultant	9. Overall	10. The advice	12. recovery Knowledge	13. confidence				
1	10	10	10	10	10	8	8	10	Yes	Follow up 6 month later	The most impactful piece of support
2	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	Yes		
3	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	Yes		
4	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	Yes		answers and advice on pasture rebuilding
5	8	7	9	7	8	5	6	8	yes	NO	Thank you for your support
6	10	10	10	10	10	10	8	10	yes	More sessions	Thank you for the opportunity
7	9	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	yes		
8	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	yes	More sessions	Nic was outstanding
9	9	9	9	9	10	9	10	9	Yes		
10	9	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	yes		
11	8	9	10	9	8	9	9	10	yes		Excellent consultant
12	Producer returned feedback form but did not fill out the ratings.										
Mean	9.5	9.5	9.8	9.5	9.5	8.3	9.0	9.8	yes		

## 5. Conclusion

Back to Business provided a pivotal opportunity for producers to expedite their recovery from the bushfires. It has assisted in prioritising what they needed to do and when, in doing some different things on the farm as opposed to just doing the 'same old thing'. In doing so, the program provided important support to people's well-being and outlook for the future.

### 5.1 Key findings

The Back to Business approach again reinforced the benefits of this kind of recovery support following an emergency event.

While not for everyone, it is an approach that:

- supports industry leaders to keep leading and showing the way in tough times,
- encourages emerging leaders to build their business after crisis, and
- helps those who are lost in the crisis to emerge and recover and rebuild.

### 5.2 Benefits to industry.

Bushfires can have a devastating impact upon the herd and flock numbers, breeding capacity, infrastructure, finances, and supply chains with significant impacts upon the industry.

## 6. Future research and recommendations

During the course of the Program, Livestock SA provide comments and suggestions as part of the regular reporting. These are summarised here.

#### Observations and examples of requested assistance

**7 July** It has become apparent that, of those participating, many are still not in a frame of mind to think in terms of longer-term business decisions, with consultancies focusing on critical production and management matters.

Given feedback that the impact of the fires remains raw for many. It is speculated that for those NOT participating yet, they may only now be disposed to participate. We are doing some additional promotion of the Program. The extension of the Program is both welcome and prudent given the situation.

**30 Sept** the majority of the consultancies have been associated with operational and production matters as opposed to structural and strategic planning matters. That is likely to be a learning from the Program. Post bushfire the sense is that for many/most, it really is about getting *back to business* rather than setting new directions and business arrangements.

#### Further Observations

**29 May:** We have clarified a number of matters relating to the roll out of the program, not least promotions through a number of platforms and now confident that there will be an acceleration in producer uptake and additions to the Consultants list from here.

**12 June.** In response to some lack of clarity of process for consultants, we have circulated a step-by-step guide. This has been appreciated but we still have an issue with consultants informing us of when and where they are having sessions. We hear on the grapevine, arrangements are being made, so these will no doubt roll in from here.

**7 August** With the extension to the funds, more awareness amongst producers and more activity by consultants, we continue to be optimistic to reach a target of 60 business participating by the end of Sept. cut-off date.

**21 August** Participation continues to steadily increase. Additional promotion on the back of the extension, including a testimonial of a KI producer is occurring through various networks and platforms to support the exhaustion of funds by end of September.

**30 Sept.** After some additional promotion there have been a number of last-minute producer registrations, with numbers approaching the target of 60.

The main issue now is to expedite the completion of existing consultancies and instigate the new later ones.

Emails have been sent to consultants and producers to explain the program had been closed off and that consultancies need to be completed by Nov 30 and for the funds to be available, between them, they need to proceed poste-haste to meet the deadline or difficulties with funding will ensue. We have received no responses, so our situation is somewhat uncertain.

In the quest to provide a timely response to the bushfire, the roll out of the program may have been somewhat hasty: on two fronts.

1. It is apparent that landholders were mostly 'not ready' for this kind of support soon after the event and the marketing and promotion campaign might initially have been for awareness, followed by enrolments sometime later after the round of 'tail-gate' sessions. The value of the suggestion is coloured by the COVID 19 impact on the roll out process and so is somewhat speculative.

Nonetheless, not all landholders were ready to take on a business planning approach, preferring to seek advice on more operational/production related matters.

2. Some time set aside early on for planning and setting in place the processes to engage producers, contract consultants, facilitate the consultancies, distribute documentation to consultants and producers. For example, it took us some time to clarify the process expectations of consultants and producers that lead to a documentation of the process presented at Appendix 3.

With the hundreds of landholders affected by the fire, the modest uptake meant that many chose not to participate for reasons not explored. There will be a number of reasons that will be best be understood in future projects.

The 'paperwork' and delivery process was somewhat onerous and could possibly be streamlined.

In future, greater clarity around vetting of consultants to ensure integrity and standards may improve the likelihood of outcomes for producers. The main point to clarify would be to have consultants clearly identify as a Farm Management Consultants (FMC) or Specialist Technical Consultants (STC) to make it clearer for program administrators when 'allocating' consultants and for producers, when 'choosing' consultants.

## 6.1 Consultants Process

