

**Terms of reference**

Producer Investment Call

Determining and realising the value proposition for the southern feedbase

# Expected outcome

The aim of this investment call is to fund projects that will identify and address productivity gaps in a range of pasture systems across southern Australia farming and grazing systems. Specifically, these projects are to be conducted in regions represented by the Southern Australia Livestock Research Council (SALRC), i.e. New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory.

# Background

Producers in southern Australia need better (and locally relevant) advice on pasture establishment and management to increase persistence of pastures, to deliver improved animal production outcomes. There are a range of contributing factors that impact on pasture persistence including but not limited to plant species, mixes, soil fertility, pest and disease, weeds, and grazing management.

One objective of this call is to help producers overcome the productivity gap due to underperforming (or absent) legumes in pastures. Previous reviews suggest that there is much research available to producers that has not been adopted, i.e., there is knowledge on how to improve and manage the feedbase, that is not applied by producers on-farm.

There are many actions that producers can take to address a production gap, and these vary between regions. The production system is complex and investments in pasture improvements are expensive. Risk or uncertainty contributes to a lack of producer uptake.

There are a range of agri-climatic zones across SALRC, including New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. These range from semi-arid rangelands to high rainfall zones, with rainfall patterns that transition from summer to winter dominant. All these zones are applicable to the Investment Call and can have very different “best practice” feedbase/pasture systems.

Leading producers typically focus on the actions that have maximum impact. Understanding the balance between the value proposition, key production levers, and risks is a key aspect of this investment call, as is developing an improved understanding of how to manage legumes to achieve greater persistence and productivity impacts.

The proposed research aims to address these issues in three ways:

1. Production gap analysis: identify and communicate the economic return of best-practice red-meat production compared to district averages, across applicable regions in southern Australia.
2. Best-practice benchmarking: identify and communicate the key pasture management factors that underpin high-performing animal production businesses, and the economic value associated with these key factors.
3. Conduct new research into improved agronomic practices for legumes of significance for southern Australia, to improve persistence and productivity of these legumes in perennial pastures.

Projects in each category are expected to facilitate adoption of project findings. Project design is expected to involve advisors, agribusiness and farming systems and other farmer groups in developing and delivering localised solutions that achieve significant producer uptake.

# Scope & Funding Source

# MLA is calling for preliminary proposals for projects to conduct the activities below. These activities apply to any agri-climatic zone that produces sheepmeat and grassfed beef across southern Australia.

Selected preliminary proposals will then be invited to submit a full project application.

Projects may be funded through levies, the MLA Donor Company, or a combination of both. Projects accessing funding from the MDC will be favourably considered.

# Proposed activities

The proposed projects should focus on integrated research, development and adoption that must include ***one or more*** of the following activities:

1. **Production gap analysis** **for southern production systems. (Duration of maximum 2 years)**
   * The analysis would aim to understand the economic productivity of the most profitable red meat producers at a farm and/or paddock scale, in different regions.
   * The analysis would assess the current economic productivity for each production region and quantify the potential economic gain that could be achieved in each region by widespread adoption of improved practices.

Additional information

* + The work could involve a review of existing data sets or undertake activities to establish new data sets.
  + Extension and adoption activities must be included in the activity to facilitate adoption of project findings.
  + Project design is expected to involve advisors, agribusiness, farming systems and other farmer groups in developing and delivering localised solutions that achieve significant producer uptake.
  + The project must deliver a technical Report, case studies and producer-friendly fact sheets that MLA and partners can utilise to frame the value proposition of improved production practices and communicate widely to livestock producers.

1. **Pasture best-practice benchmarking. (Duration up to 4 years)**

* The project would identify which pasture management practices are used by leading producers that are key to maximising business profitability. These key practices may differ between regions/localities or enterprise type, and these differences should be identified, along with the economic value of the key practices.
* In scope is:
  + - * Selection of pasture species (mixes) and/or varieties and their establishment (timing, pre-sowing, seeding rate, post sowing management)
      * Soil fertility and grazing management to ensure desired pasture composition and persistence is achieved.
      * optimising pasture productivity, quality and persistence through management of inherent natural resources (landform, soil, current pastures and climate)
      * other critical factors identified as relevant.

Additional Information

* The project must deliver producer and advisor relevant extension materialthat describes locality and/or region-specific best management practices and their associated effect on animal production metrics and economic returns.
* Extension and adoption activities must be included in the activity to facilitate adoption of project findings. e.g., workshops, demonstration farms, field days, etc.
* Project design is expected to involve advisors, agribusiness, farming systems and other farmer groups in developing and delivering localised solutions that achieve significant producer uptake.
* Activities that educate producers and advisors through demonstrations on the farms of high-achieving producers (i.e. existing high-performing properties) will be considered favourably.

1. **Improving management to ensure legume persistence and productivity in perennial pastures. (Duration up to 6 years)**

* The project would conduct R&D activities to improve persistence and productivity of legumes in mixed perennial pastures of Southern Australia. In scope are any agronomic practices that are capable of significantly improving the productivity of perennial pastures that contain, or could potentially contain, legumes in southern Australia.
* Prior to completion, the project should demonstrate a ‘whole of system’ value to the improved agronomic practices, i.e. what are the animal production benefits and economic value to producers.
* Given the diversity of legumes and production systems in southern Australia, more than one project may be funded.
* The preliminary project proposal should contain an assessment of the potential economic value to be gained by developing improved agronomic practices for the nominated legume(s) and production region(s), including an assessment both at paddock farm/scale and a total potential economic value across SALRC agri-climatic regions.

Additional information

* The project must deliver producer and advisor relevant extension materialthat describes the findings of the project, and best-practice recommendations for the nominated legume(s) and/or production region(s) along with their impact on animal production and economic returns to producers.
* Extension and adoption activities must be included in the activity to facilitate adoption of project findings. e.g. workshops, demonstration farms, field days, etc.
* Project design is expected to involve advisors, agribusiness, farming systems and other farmer groups in developing and delivering localised solutions that achieve significant producer uptake.
* Activities that educate producers and advisors through demonstrations on the farms of high-achieving producers (i.e. existing high-performing properties) will be considered favourably.

# Other requirements

All projects will be expected to:

* provide a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) plan aligned to the MLA framework (available upon request). Project leaders should budget for the development of a MER plan in this proposal.
* development of the MER plan will be a requirement of milestone one if the project is successful.

Small, targeted projects or an aggregate of small projects will be considered as well as larger consortia style programs.

Applicants to the terms of reference must clearly identify which of the three activities that their application is seeking to address.

It is an expectation that prior to submission of a preliminary proposal, applicant/s have engaged with producers and advisors to develop project design, as well as extension and adoption pathways.  Applicants must consider how any funded work will translate into practice change on farm. The applicant should demonstrate that they have considered potential adoption pathways.

# Project timing

Planned project start date should occur no earlier than 1st February 2025.

# Resources Required

The proposal should include all resources, personnel and budget required to complete the project.

# Completing the Preliminary Proposal:

* Word limits must be adhered to as follows for the preliminary proposal
  + Summary – 200 words
  + Purpose and description – one page
  + Project Objectives – half page
  + Additional details (Background and Significance) - half page
  + Additional details (Methodology) – one page
  + Additional details (Project deliverables) - half page
* Within the additional details section, applicants should describe the intended project deliverables other than a final report: i.e. tangible project outputs that create pathways to impact for the red meat industry such as best-practice guides, fact sheets, advisor/producer training workshops, field days, software tools, new varieties or genetic technologies etc.
* For this open call, applicants do not need to complete the milestone or cash flow tables in the preliminary proposal form, or the budget form in appendix 1.
* However, applicants are required to submit a budget table following the format below that lists expenditure in four categories (travel, operating, labour, capital purchases) for each financial year of the project duration.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | FY25 | FY26 | FY27 | FY28 | FY29 |
| Travel |  |  |  |  |  |
| Operating |  |  |  |  |  |
| Labour |  |  |  |  |  |
| Capital items |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** |  |  |  |  |  |

# Confidentiality and intellectual property

The successful applicant will be required to enter into an umbrella research agreement with MLA located here: https://www.mla.com.au/globalassets/mla-corporate/about-mla/documents/umbrella-research-agreement---v1.7.docx

# Online information session

A webinar will be held for interested participants, where there will be an opportunity to ask questions for clarification on any aspect of the open call.

# Deadline for submissions

Preliminary proposals must be received by MLA before 11.59pm AEST Thursday, 1st August, 2024. Late proposals will not be accepted.

Use the preliminary proposal template available here [mla-project-funding-application-form---preliminary.docx (live.com)](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mla.com.au%2Fglobalassets%2Fmla-corporate%2Fresearch-and-development%2Fdocuments%2Ffunding-oportunities%2Fmla-project-funding-application-form---preliminary.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK), along with a completed Request for Tender form, to submit proposals electronically to MLA at: [projectcall@mla.com.au](mailto:projectcall@mla.com.au)

Further information including guidelines can be found at this link: [Project application guidelines and forms | Meat & Livestock Australia (mla.com.au)](https://www.mla.com.au/research-and-development/funding-opportunities/project-application-guidelines-and-forms/)

Preliminary Proposals will be acknowledged and recorded on the MLA project information system.

Applicants will be advised in writing of the success or failure of their Preliminary Proposal.

# Further Information

If you have questions about these terms of reference, contact:

**Allan Peake**   
Program Manager – Sustainable Feedbase Resources   
Email: [apeake@mla.com.au](mailto:apeake@mla.com.au)

P: +61 (7) 3620 5265 M: +61 429 881 137