



# final report

Project code: B.GFB.1715  
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Date published: 7 February 2017

PUBLISHED BY  
Meat and Livestock Australia Limited  
Locked Bag 1961  
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

## Encouraging producer adoption via follow up activity

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

The Business EDGE follow-up workshops were designed and delivered by Bush AgriBusiness Pty Ltd with the objective of assisting participants from the full 2-day Business EDGE course apply the material to their own business.

Feedback from Business EDGE participants is that they rate the course material very highly and intend to go home and make changes as a result of attending, but some later find they have not applied as much as they would have liked, either through being busy or not knowing where to start.

The opportunity to provide follow-up support and tools to implement changes saw the development of a one day workshop and purpose built spreadsheet. Invitations were extended to anyone who had participated in a Business EDGE workshop in 2016.

Participants are asked to bring along their own information including livestock schedule, income and expenditure summary and asset register. This information was used to develop the three pillars (income statement, cashflow statement and balance sheet) and whole business key performance indicators (operating return, capital return, total business return, equity percentage and finance coverage) for their own business.

Whilst not all participants from the full Business EDGE course attended a follow-up workshop, those who did attend reported that they did get a lot out of the day and the material and spreadsheet tool were successful in enabling participants to apply changes to their business.

Ongoing commitment to these types of changes will lead to greater understanding of the business, more informed decision making and improved performance in the long term and therefore, it is recommended that the follow-up workshops become an established next step to the Business EDGE course either through a PGS process or as a stand-alone activity.

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# 1 Background

## 1.1 Overarching aims and significance

The Business EDGE follow-up workshops were designed and delivered by Bush AgriBusiness Pty Ltd to assist participants from the full 2-day Business EDGE course apply the material to their own business.

Business EDGE participants rate the material very highly in terms of value to them and their business and intend to go home and make changes as a result of attending. Some make significant changes to their financial system and business analysis and all receive information that means they view their businesses differently after having attended the workshop.

However, feedback from some participants is that they have not applied as much of the principles and materials as they would have liked, either through being busy or not knowing where to start.

### Table 1 – Changes and challenges

Participants at the follow-up workshops were asked what they had changed in their business since completing the Business EDGE and what they were still finding challenging or wanted to change but there was something holding them back. The results of these responses are summarised below;

What have you changed?	What is still challenging?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in use of financial software                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ categorising information</li> <li>○ changing chart of accounts</li> <li>○ using enterprises</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Looking at information and making decisions on a production year instead of a financial year</li> <li>• Mindful of keeping labour costs down</li> <li>• Creating or updating depreciation schedules</li> <li>• Taking time to look at figures for the business</li> <li>• Being able to understand and bring required information to succession meetings</li> <li>• Started benchmarking, whole property evaluation and looking at EBIT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication within the business and getting everyone involved</li> <li>• Inventory change – having a consistent and standardised approach</li> <li>• Depreciating assets and what values to put on assets</li> <li>• Getting accurate herd numbers</li> <li>• Categorising expenses</li> <li>• Time to do more business analysis</li> <li>• Pulling the information out of own systems – don't always match up</li> <li>• Access to information where it is controlled by someone else</li> <li>• Change needs to be managed delicately</li> </ul>

## 2 Project Objectives

The objective of this project is to assist Business EDGE participants apply the material to their own business.

- Design and run a one day follow up to Business EDGE workshop with producers
- Develop a specific follow up workshop evaluation form
- Collate and analyse feedback forms from producer participants
- Make recommendations on future EDGENetwork follow up activities including suggested objectives of the follow up, process used, level of content used (strategic/ tactical/operational ) and pathways to category C programs such as PGS for producers

This project will assist in achieving MLA 2020 objective: Engage at least 2000 producers in programs that will build knowledge and skills to improve business performance by 5% or more.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Workshop requirements and outline**

Those who participated in a Business EDGE workshop in 2016 were invited to the follow-up workshops.

Participants are asked to bring along their own information including livestock schedule, income and expenditure summary and asset register. This information was used to populate a purpose-built spreadsheet tool which is designed to develop the three pillars (income statement, cashflow statement and balance sheet) and whole business key performance indicators (operating return, capital return, total business return, equity percentage and finance coverage) for their own business. For those unable to collate their own data before the workshop, there was an example or case study set of data to work through.

Participants were not required to share or disclose any of their own information during the workshop.

The outline of the workshop was as follows:

Recap of Business EDGE content & key principles

- Economic sustainability criteria
- Setting up an effective financial system
- The three pillars
- Whole business performance
- Profit & profitability
- Cost of capital

Generating Management Accounts for your own business (or a case study)

#### **Table 2 - Scheduled workshops and attendance**

A total of 21 people attended the follow-up workshops including 4 couples and a mother and daughter.

Scheduled workshop	Variations to schedule	Number of attendees
<b>Longreach, 25 August 2016</b>	5 people were registered to attend but rain meant that 3 of them were unable to get to Longreach for the workshop.	2 –when the Longreach workshop was cancelled and we were already on the road we made alternate plans to visit Mt Playfair instead and do a one-on-one follow up with two attendees.
<b>Emerald, 26 August 2016</b>	No variation – workshop conducted as scheduled	5
<b>Charters Towers, 6 October 2016</b>	No variation – workshop conducted as scheduled	8
<b>Biloela, 21 October 2016</b>	Funded by AgForce as a follow-up	4
<b>Toowoomba, 22 November 2016</b>	Did not go ahead as there were not enough registrations	
<b>Cunnamulla, no date set</b>	No workshop was scheduled in Cunnamulla as only two families from the area attended the original Business EDGE course and only one of those could take advantage of follow up.	2 – One family visited Ian when they were in Toowoomba and conducted one-on-one follow-up with two attendees. There has been phone follow up with other family.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Workshop feedback

Nineteen participants completed feedback forms as attendees of the Follow-up Workshops. These participants manage a total area of approximately 341,680 ha and 31,424 head of cattle.

#### Table 3 – Feedback summary

The following outcomes have been summarised based on the feedback forms participants were asked to complete:

Question	Responses
What was your main reason for attending this follow-up workshop?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a refresher for the first workshop (13/19)</li> <li>• Difficulty in applying information from first workshop (8/19)</li> <li>• Building on knowledge from the first workshop to get more detail or skills (16/19)</li> <li>• Other (3/19) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ to cement principles and improve understanding and help to apply the data transferring of own business</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ fantastic course, lots of information, cementing skills</li> <li>○ using own data and checking on categories</li> </ul>
<p>To what extent did the follow up workshop provide you with extra value from what you covered at the first workshop?</p>	<p>Average Score: 9.11 out of 10</p> <p>Comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gave me a lot more understanding</li> <li>● Gave me a starting point</li> <li>● The spreadsheets will be very handy</li> <li>● It really cemented things and now I feel more confident to apply more when I get home</li> <li>● We were able to analyse our own figures here at the follow-up day – great tools</li> <li>● The 1<sup>st</sup> workshop illustrated the need for such a system, the second workshop created the attitude that I can do it. A lot more confident. A better understanding decreases the time taken to complete spreadsheets/data entry and increases the likelihood of successfully applying new knowledge</li> <li>● Very important to have a second workshop to apply the new knowledge</li> <li>● Time to digest the first workshop – consolidate at second</li> <li>● Excellent small group and lots of interaction</li> <li>● Ability to ask questions about problems on implementation</li> <li>● Great to put into action. I've learnt a lot putting it into practice today.</li> </ul>
<p>Following the workshop, which of the following are you committed to doing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Do more years historically to provide indication of long term business performance <b>(7/19)</b></li> <li>● Make changes to management system (record keeping and financial system) to ensure this information is easier to generate and is generated into the future <b>(17/19)</b></li> <li>● Identifying strengths and weaknesses from the information to see what changes/strategies should be implemented as a result. <b>(13/19)</b></li> <li>● Other <b>(2/19)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Keep looking at realities of business</li> <li>○ Also use for general household - cash flow to keep track of what we're spending</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**Table 4 – Overall workshop comments**

The workshop was very well received and all participants commented that they got a lot out of the day. From the level of discussion, it was clear that not only had they learnt from the workshop content but also from each other. A summary of the workshop comments is presented below;

Question	Responses
Please make any other comment on the workshop including any suggestions on how it could be modified to maximise its value to participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent workshop – interesting conversations and points of interest from participants. Presenter very happy to answer all questions and ably presented information.</li> <li>• Follow-up has been great – I've learnt more than I thought. Great to have one-on-one help. Exactly what I needed.</li> <li>• Spreadsheet tools given were invaluable. Another follow up day in 6-12 months' time would be very beneficial. Great day. Thanks</li> <li>• The workshop is very good the way it is - wider attendance would be wonderful - every grazier/farmer/producer should be exposed to this.</li> <li>• Revision is gold. Keep to focus on track and meeting targets</li> <li>• Follow-up day is essential</li> <li>• Follow up is most important and needed to do it. Need to set a date for follow-up at the course</li> </ul>

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Workshop attendance

A relatively low number of participants from the full Business EDGE course attended some of the follow-up workshops. There were many reasons for this including weather, busy seasons, and other commitments. It became evident that the follow-up workshops needed to be introduced and a date set at the Business EDGE course to increase commitment from participants.

Those who did attend a follow-up session reported that they did get a lot out of it and having a small group made for a good level of discussion among participants and all were willing to share their ideas and challenges.

### 5.2 Objectives met

Design and run a one day follow up to Business EDGE workshop with producers  
 Develop a specific follow up workshop evaluation form  
 Collate and analyse feedback forms from producer participants

The objective of this project in terms of assisting participants of the Business EDGE workshop apply the material to their business was definitely met for those who attended, based on the feedback. The workshop content and spreadsheet tools proved to be robust, but easy to use, and were well received by participants.

Only two respondents reported that they were already fully able to use the specific business applications covered and the majority of the remaining respondents were either planning to start using or planning to improve use of the applications. While not specifically asked in the feedback questions, 2 participants mentioned the need for further follow up sessions in the future. While every effort has been made to ensure the follow up material and tools were as



easy to use as possible, given the complex nature of the concepts and applications, it is likely that further assistance will be required to ensure they are fully implemented. Any further plans for formal follow-up activities will be dependent on MLA's consideration of the recommendations below and the roll out of the PGS program however, the format and spreadsheet tool are available and can be applied in either a one-on-one or group setting as required.

## **6 Conclusions/Recommendations**

The project results validate the position that participants find it challenging to make all the desired changes in their businesses after the Business EDGE workshop. It is necessary to deliver the background and heavy content in the Business EDGE workshop to enable participants to understand their businesses and what drives improvement. It is however, difficult for them to then go home and apply some of these concepts and gain insight into their current performance.

It is for these reasons that the Business EDGE workshop lends itself well to being a feeder activity for the Profitable Grazing Systems (PGS) program. Producers who attend the full Business EDGE course have shown an interest and willingness to invest in their business, and have been exposed to the concepts and their importance in terms of improving performance. Many also reach the end of the 2 day course knowing that they will need further support to implement the required changes in their business. This is an important incentive to participate in an ongoing program. As deliverers involved in the pilot phase of the PGS, recruitment of participants was the most challenging part of the project. Learnings from the follow-up workshop attendance would indicate the importance of outlining the options for further support and activities at the end of the full Business EDGE course, before they go home and are distracted by other priorities.

The follow-up workshops are designed so that participants can apply the Business EDGE material and use the spreadsheet tool in the ongoing analysis and management of their own business. The format of the follow-up workshops means that they could be delivered as part of a PGS process or as a stand-alone activity, but are a vital step in continuous business improvement. Without the follow-up support, the analysis of necessary information, changes implemented and therefore results are limited.

Bush AgriBusiness Pty Ltd has designed a specific spreadsheet, both as a learning resource and as a take home tool, for the follow-up workshops which helps automate the process of developing the three pillars for each business, based on their own information. This has been a useful tool and process for follow-up participants, after they have gone home and started to apply the principles and concepts from the full Business EDGE workshop. As an automated pro-forma template though, it does not necessarily encourage understanding or provide background information. It is therefore, best used as part of a follow-up process rather than supplied as a standard take-home tool from the full workshop and Bush AgriBusiness agrees to the spreadsheet tool being made available to other approved Business EDGE presenters for this purpose.

It is recommended that the follow-up workshops become an established next step to the Business EDGE course, and at least partly funded by MLA, either through a PGS process, where there is interest, or as a stand-alone activity.

## **7 Key Messages**

The follow-up workshops were successful in enabling participants to apply the Business EDGE material to their business. The level value participants put on the follow-up and their commitment to making changes in their business were high. Some examples of these changes include making changes to management systems, analysing more years historically to see long term business performance and identifying strengths and weaknesses from the information to implement strategies.

Ongoing commitment to these types of changes will lead to greater understanding of the business, more informed decision making and improved performance in the long term.

## **8 Appendix**

### **8.1 Participant feedback form**

A copy of the feedback form used to gather information from participants is provided as a separate attachment to this report.

### **8.2 Follow-up workshop feedback results**

The results of the workshop feedback are summarised in an Excel spreadsheet and provided as a separate attachment to this report.



## Follow-up Workshop Feedback Sheet

Thank you for providing this feedback. This will help us to continue to improve BusinessEdge workshops.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Workshop Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Month/year of first workshop: \_\_\_\_\_  
Property Size (Ha): \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Beef Cattle (hd): \_\_\_\_\_ or:  Advisor:

1. As a result of attending the first BusinessEDGE workshop you attended, what new business tools or approaches did you apply to your enterprise (or in your advisory work)?

2. If you did not use tools or approaches that you intended, what stopped you?

- Difficulty in applying tools or information in practice
- Lack of time or resources
- Has not been the right time to use them yet
- Other:

3. What was your main reason for attending this follow-up workshop?

- As a refresher for the first workshop
- Difficulty in applying information from first workshop
- Building on knowledge from first workshop to get more detail or skills
- Other:

4. How difficult was it to pull together the information required for the workshop?

Very difficult 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very easy

Comment:

5. To what extent did the workshop provide you with extra value from what you covered at the first workshop?

Little extra value 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 A lot of extra value

Please comment on your rating:

6. How more confident are you in practically applying the following specific business applications to your own enterprise as a result of this follow up experience – and what do you plan on doing differently?:

### The three pillars

Income statement

- a.  already fully able to apply prior to the follow up workshop; or
- b. No difference 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 much more able to apply
- c.  Plan to start using or  Plan to improve use or  No planned change



- Cashflow statement
- a.  already fully able to apply prior to the follow up workshop; or
  - b. No difference 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 much more able to apply
  - c.  Plan to start using or  Plan to improve use or  No planned change
- Balance sheet
- a.  already fully able to apply prior to the follow up workshop; or
  - b. No difference 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 much more able to apply
  - c.  Plan to start using or  Plan to improve use or  No planned change

### Key Performance indicators

- Operating return
- a.  already fully able to apply prior to the follow up workshop; or
  - b. No difference 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 much more able to apply
  - c.  Plan to start using or  Plan to improve use or  No planned change
- Capital return
- a.  already fully able to apply prior to the follow up workshop; or
  - b. No difference 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 much more able to apply
  - c.  Plan to start using or  Plan to improve use or  No planned change
- Total business return
- a.  already fully able to apply prior to the follow up workshop; or
  - b. No difference 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 much more able to apply
  - c.  Plan to start using or  Plan to improve use or  No planned change
- Equity percentage
- a.  already fully able to apply prior to the follow up workshop; or
  - b. No difference 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 much more able to apply
  - c.  Plan to start using or  Plan to improve use or  No planned change
- Finance coverage
- a.  already fully able to apply prior to the follow up workshop; or
  - b. No difference 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 much more able to apply
  - c.  Plan to start using or  Plan to improve use or  No planned change

7. Following the workshop, which of the following are you committed to doing?
- Do more years historically to provide indication of long term business performance
  - Make changes to management system (record keeping & financial system) to ensure this information is easier to generate and is generated into the future
  - Identifying strengths and weaknesses from the information to see what changes/strategies should be implemented as a result
  - Other:
8. Please make any other comment on the workshop including any suggestions on how it could be modified to maximise its value to participants:

Would you be happy to be contacted 6 months after this workshop (10-15 minute telephone call) for us to gain further feedback about use of this information?

- Yes Best Number to contact me on:
- I would rather not be contacted

*Thanks for your feedback*



