

# FINAL REPORT

AEA00005

## Delivering multiple benefit messages - A partnership with NRM - Southern Region

### PROJECT DETAILS

PROJECT CODE: AEA00005

PROJECT TITLE: DELIVERING MULTIPLE BENEFIT MESSAGES - A PARTNERSHIP WITH NRM - SOUTHERN REGION

START DATE: 01.04.2014

END DATE: 31.12.2016

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### Summary

This project was very effective in building lasting partnerships between grains industry and natural resource management (NRM) organisations by identifying key issues affecting farm profitability and NRM, and developing and delivering four regional extension projects to address the highest priority issues. It enabled an opportunity to leverage and attract investment to extend research, development and extension (R,D&E) to new networks. Communication and extension supported growers to adopt technologies and strategies. More than 50 extension activities and more than 50 communication products were delivered. Guidelines outlining practical strategies to manage key weeds and sandy soils in low rainfall areas were distributed to 1,000 growers.

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## Conclusions

The project had three major impacts:

1. The engagement and identification of key issues affecting grains production that had NRM implications across three regions in southern Australia.
2. The development and implementation of three pilot extension and communications projects across the three regions.
3. The production of two legacy publications that brought together the key messages and research findings that supported the three pilot projects.

The project was unique in that it tapped into a previously untapped NRM network to work closely with grains industry networks across the Eyre Peninsula, Mid North and Yorke Peninsula, and the South Australian (SA), Victorian (VIC) and New South Wales (NSW) Mallee, to identify and address key grains production issues. The project built trust and provided a mechanism for those involved in grains extension and NRM at the local level to work together towards common goals. The Eyre Peninsula and Mallee pilot projects focused on issues to do with managing sandy soils, whilst the third project in the Mid North and Yorke Peninsula focused on integrated weed management (IWM).

Three surveys were conducted at the end of the project to gauge the impact of the key parts of the project. Eighty percent of those surveyed rated the approach used in the project and the impact in addressing the key grower issues as good to excellent. The same number of respondents also indicated that the project achieved strong to very strong NRM outcomes through improved farm practices.

## Recommendations

This project identified several findings that will benefit future investments in extension and communication at the regional and local levels.

Funding dedicated co-ordinators for each of the pilot projects was crucial to building relationships and delivering activities and products to growers and advisers to support adoption of improved practices. There was significant value in developing focused and targeted extension and communication on a high priority issue identified by stakeholders.

The project allowed a new delivery network to be created, filling gaps in delivery of extension. New and improved relationships between grains industry and NRM organisations allowed this to occur. NRM personnel became involved in grower groups and grain industry networks. The project built confidence for NRM and grains industry stakeholders to engage and collaborate on issues for mutual benefits. The project has developed a self-sustaining collaborative approach and enduring relationships between the grains industry and NRM organisations in the pilot regions, which will be of value in future extension programs.

The project methodology allowed targeted and localised delivery of D&E, and enabled to value add from GRDC branding and

dissemination of R&D investments through additional networks. The project enabled links to be created and provided opportunities to value add to other projects across several organisations.

Issue prioritisation and planning workshops with stakeholders were important for relationships, commitment and rationale for delivery. Common issues across regions created links and the opportunity to share information and experiences.

Issues were identified that need to be considered in planning future projects of this type:

- o Ensure the right people and mix of stakeholders are involved in the planning process.
- o Clarify and better define scope and expectations of GRDC from the project.
- o The regional focus groups established at the beginning of the project for the initial prioritisation and planning should be used throughout the project to monitor, review and adapt the project implementation.
- o Government policies and processes for communication products to be delivered through NRM are problematic and limit distribution through these networks.
- o Better manage the loss of momentum and changed expectations that occur with frequent changes in NRM staff.

## Outcomes

'Delivering multiple benefit messages - A partnership with NRM' has been an innovative and successful project which has developed strong partnerships between the grains industry stakeholders and NRM organisations. This collaborative approach has promoted and supported the adoption of improved management practices which deliver both economic and environmental benefits for growers in four pilot regions. Collaboration provided the opportunity to leverage and attract investment to more widely disseminate key messages from R,D&E through new networks.

Effective communication and extension have supported growers to adopt tools, technologies and strategies to address the identified priority issues. More than 50 extension activities and in excess of 50 communication products have been delivered to growers and advisers in the pilot project regions. Guidelines which describe practical and effective strategies to (i) manage key weed species and (ii) optimise the profitability and sustainability of sandy soils in the low rainfall areas were distributed to 1,000 growers to fill identified knowledge gaps and demand.

The priority issues affecting the environment and production identified through consultation across nine NRM regions were presented to the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture which directly influenced the Commonwealth government \$2.5 million Sustainable Agriculture Small Grants funding in 2015 and plans for future Sustainable Agriculture funding programs.

A summary of the outcomes benefits of this investment include:

1. New and improved relationships between grains industry and NRM organisations.
2. Collaborative investment and co-ordinated delivery of activities and products.
3. Targeted and localised delivery of R,D&E.
4. Promoted the profitability and environmental gains from adopting improved farming practices.
5. Planned and targeted communication and extension.
6. Outcomes of GRDC research and key messages disseminated using a range of methods and through new and additional networks.
7. Additional funding and leveraged investment from a range of sources.
8. Grains industry representatives involved in NRM planning.
9. Captured opportunities to link, value add and extend GRDC investment in R,D&E.
10. Gaps filled in delivery of extension.
11. A range of high quality communication products for growers and advisers published.
12. Effective strategy to address a priority issue.
13. Significant return on investment (ROI).
14. New and diversified networks were accessed and created.
15. Directly influenced the Commonwealth government roll out a \$2.5 million Sustainable Agriculture Small Grants funding call in 2015-2016 and plans for expanded Sustainable Agriculture programs for 2016-2017.

## Achievements/Benefits

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regions in southern Australia.

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A major aim of the project was to engage with and create linkages between NRM and grains industry extension networks. Fifty five percent of respondents indicated that the project was very successful in achieving this, whilst another 45% said the project was successful.

Project participants were also asked about the strength of their linkages with production focused groups and NRM networks. Ninety percent of respondents had strong to very strong linkages to production focused groups, whilst their linkages to NRM were weaker at 70%.

Growers involved in the pilot projects were asked about their likelihood of changing practices as a result of being involved in the project. All respondents involved in the sandy soils and dune swale projects indicated that they will definitely or are likely to make a change. Those respondents involved in the weeds projects were less likely to make changes, however 88% of those involved in the weeds activities will or are likely to make a change, whilst 65% who were involved in brome grass specific activities indicated that they will or are most likely to make a change.

Comment from respondents:

"Hope there can be more projects like this."

"I think it is a good initiative for GRDC to be supporting, and has helped support a number of useful initiatives."

"Support for the MSF regional field days, which have a very strong and practical sandy soils management component, has been very important."

Project participants rated the format and relevance of the content of the publications highly. All respondents indicated that the publications improved their knowledge and understanding of the topics. Eighty seven percent of respondents indicated that they will recommend the publications to their peers.

Comments from respondents:

"Would recommend if someone asked for help or strategy on weed management."

"I don't think I will change my strategies, but I will certainly use information... to reinforce what I am attempting to do and help with decision making within my strategy."

"Excellent effort, great booklet."

"Well presented in a logical format. Good amount of information provided."

## **Additional information**

### **Attachment**

Additional information.