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BEST PRACTICE SURVEY

Natural Resource Management & Australian Wool Growers

Wool Grower Survey: Introduction

This "Best Practice Survey" is the most comprehensive look at natural resource management by Australian wool growers: their attitudes, current practices and their needs for additional information and support.

The survey, which was conducted by independent market analysts, is a core component of the wool industry's new national *Land, Water & Wool* program.

Land, Water & Wool is a partnership between Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI) and Land & Water Australia that focuses on sustainable and profitable wool production. It is the most extensive natural resource management initiative ever undertaken for wool growers and already hundreds are involved.

The survey data sets benchmarks for *Land, Water & Wool* to measure its effectiveness and ensure it is relevant to wool growers.

As part of the survey, wool growers were questioned on five different topics, which are addressed by the *Land, Water & Wool* program - climate variability, salinity management, river management, native vegetation management and pastoral zone management practices.

Methods

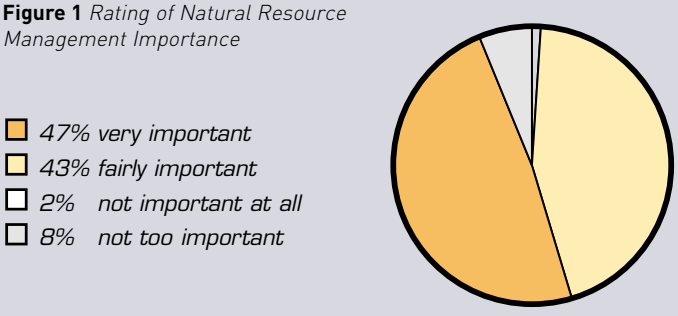
The project collected three types of data

1. Six wool grower discussions groups (one each in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia)
2. 1500 Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) with wool growers shearing at least 750 sheep in the past 12 months. A stratified random sample was used (to represent the true geographic spread of wool growers in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia)
3. Thirty in-depth interviews with industry opinion leaders. The participants came from all six wool growing states.
4. The Best Practice Survey was approved by the Statistical Clearing House.

Key findings

- The Best Practice Survey results show that wool growers believe they are custodians of the land, with 90 per cent considering that natural resource management is a key component of their whole farm enterprise.
- Qualitative research found that stakeholders in the wool industry strongly believe NRM results in productivity, profitability and sustainability gains – good NRM can significantly improve their business' bottom line and doesn't necessarily come at a cost.
- Ninety-one per cent of wool growers are either currently doing something about natural resource management (NRM) on their farm or have adopted practices in the past. However, many want more information to assist them in the future, which is a strong endorsement of the *Land, Water & Wool* initiative and its aims to provide growers with viable, practical and beneficial NRM solutions.
- Wool growers who have already undertaken NRM changes in the past are more likely to adopt changes in the future.
- To help growers identify NRM solutions, LWW will undertake a number of projects evaluating the commercial implications of NRM activities. Current information will be disseminated to wool growers.
- The survey found that awareness and adoption of NRM is usually higher among wool growers who are tertiary educated, female, younger than 60, and members of an NRM or producer group.
- Wool growers, who have embraced NRM, believe there are benefits which range from improvements in water quality and increased shelter and stock feed, to biodiversity gains such as the provision of wildlife corridors and control of erosion and salinity.

Figure 1 *Rating of Natural Resource Management Importance*



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NRM THE REAL DEAL

Stakeholders in the wool industry strongly believe natural resource management results in productivity, profitability and sustainability gains – good NRM can significantly improve their business' bottom line and doesn't necessarily come at a cost.

Key Findings: LWW Sub-Programs

Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands (SGSL)

- The *Land, Water & Wool* 'Best Practice Survey' has found salinity directly affects 41% of wool growers nationally. In Western Australia, the figure is as high as 78%.
- 64% of wool growers monitor and/or map their salt-affected areas.
- 79% of wool growers with salt-affected land are very positive about the potential benefits of NRM and believe saline areas can be made more productive or profitable.
- Of those wool growers with salt-affected land, as many as 70% of wool growers have implemented improved NRM practices to make their land more productive and profitable. The most common practice has been planting salt-tolerant pasture or fodder species (43%) and planting trees (38%).

River Management and Water Quality

- The *Land, Water & Wool* 'Best Practice Survey' has revealed more than half (55%) of wool growers with properties adjoining waterways have adopted practices to maintain or improve water quality. The two most common practices are replanting or retaining vegetation along waterways and limiting stock access.
- Wool growers list the main benefits of riparian management as land stewardship, (such as stopping erosion or addressing salinity) and improving water quality. Additional benefits are considered to be providing more shelter and cleaner drinking water for stock.
- 78% of wool growers have a reasonable knowledge about what to do to maintain or improve water quality.

Native Vegetation and Biodiversity

- The *Land, Water & Wool* 'Best Practice Survey' has shown more than half (55%) of wool growers who have native vegetation on their farm have implemented improved NRM practices.
- The most common management practices mentioned were fencing off areas of native bush/scrub or native grasslands or altering grazing management of these areas.
- A high percentage (68%) of wool growers with native vegetation on their farm believe it is useful for production. Benefits are mainly listed as providing shelter (40%) and stock feed (36%). Additional benefits cited were providing wildlife corridors (7%), controlling erosion (5%) and salinity (3%).
- Many growers manage their native vegetation differently to the rest of their property so as to increase habitat for native plants and animals, create wildlife corridors, keep the property in good condition and provide shelter and shade for stock.

Table 1 *Percentage of properties affected by salinity*

Property Affected	TOTAL (n = 1289)	NSW 474	VIC 358	QLD 13	SA 155	WA 239	TAS 50
Yes	41%	26%	39%	0%	41%	78%	30%
No	59%	74%	61%	100%	59%	22%	70%

Managing Climate Variability

- The *Land, Water & Wool* 'Best Practice Survey' revealed almost half of wool growers (44%) take notice of seasonal forecasts and are likely to take some precautions or alter management strategies as a result.
- 60% say they would be likely to take precautions if a seasonal forecast predicted double the chance that next season would be dry.
- Among those who take action as a result of adverse weather forecasts, the most common reaction is to destock sheep (41%), supplementary feed (40%), stockpile grain (33%) and monitor the water supply (27%).
- Scepticism about the accuracy of weather forecasts is the main reason why some wool growers don't react to unfavourable predictions.

Table 2 *Source of seasonal forecasts*

Source	**%**
Forecasts in rural papers	39%
Bureau of Meteorology	37%
ABC radio/TV	21%
Walker forecasts	13%
Websites/internet	7%
El Nino or La Nina alerts in press	6%
Don White	6%
Private forecasters	5%

Managing Pastoral Country

- There is high awareness of NRM practices among wool growers in the pastoral zone. The *Land, Water & Wool* 'Best Practice Survey' shows 95% of growers are able to nominate at least one way to manage their land more sustainably.
- Adoption of improved NRM practices is also high among wool growers in the pastoral zone. Eighty-eight per cent say they have undertaken improved NRM practices to manage their land profitably and sustainably, 45% say they limit stocking rates and 21% say they look at the correct placement of water points.
- The perceived benefits of undertaking improved NRM practices mainly relate to feed availability and sustainability.

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NINE OUT OF TEN FOR NRM

Ninety-one per cent of wool growers have adopted improved NRM practices in the past or are currently embracing it and 91 per cent consider NRM to be a key component of their whole farm enterprise.

Western Australia

Salinity is a bigger problem in Western Australia than any other state in Australia with 78 per cent of wool growers directly affected.

Despite the extent of the problem, a positive attitude prevails and 73 per cent of WA wool growers believe that saline soils can be made productive or profitable.

The Best Practice Survey found that the most common practices used to combat salinity in WA were planting salt-tolerant pasture, fodder species or trees and managing surface water flows. In addition, 68 per cent of WA growers with land affected by salinity either map or monitor these areas.

WA wool growers, who are not personally affected by salinity but live in a district where there is a current or potential problem, are also proactive with 76 per cent taking preventative steps.

But for wool growers with severely-affected land in WA, there is frustration. Growers participating in a group discussion at Katanning as part of the survey said greater knowledge and technical expertise is needed.

South Australia

Three out of four of South Australia's wool growers have taken steps to address salinity on their farm, according to the Best Practice Survey.

And of those growers directly affected by salinity, 81 per cent are confident that their situation can be improved.

Wool growers participating in the group discussion at Naracoorte commented that awareness of natural resource issues was increasing but there was still a lack of knowledge about how to solve current problems.

"We're aware we need to look after our natural resource base, but we know what we're doing isn't working. It's exceedingly difficult to find information - it's not easily available," one SA wool grower said.

Victoria

Nearly two-thirds of Victorian wool growers with land adjoining waterways have adopted practices to maintain or improve water quality.

Of the 64 per cent who had already taken action, 42 per cent had retained or replanted vegetation along waterways and 21 per cent had limited stock access to waterways.

Many growers interviewed as part of the Best Practice Survey claimed they had undertaken practices such as fencing as a direct result of the National Heritage Trust or other funding grants. In many cases it had resulted in other management benefits.

"We've got some creeks running through the place which are just winter creeks and we got some help with the cost of materials for fencing these. They've also added to the improved management of the farm because we've been able to cut the paddocks down to smaller, more manageable sizes," one wool grower from Benalla said.

Queensland

Ninety-eight per cent of Queensland wool growers consider natural resource management (NRM) as a key component of their whole farm enterprise.

Queensland wool growers, who took part in face-to-face interviews as part of the Best Practice Survey, also commented that NRM has long-term benefits for production.

"**Most pastoral people understand that if you don't manage your country according to your climate, you don't survive,**" one Queensland wool grower said.

The survey found that Queensland wool growers were similarly positive about the use of native vegetation, with 64 per cent claiming that native bush and/or native grasslands were useful to production.

New South Wales

Adopting natural resource management can have direct benefits for production and profitability, according to wool growers in New South Wales.

In face-to-face interviews as part of the Best Practice Survey, several growers drew a clear link between NRM and on-farm profits.

"**If you have better ground cover, you have increased profitability. You have less soil erosion and better stock growth,**" one NSW wool grower said.

Among all NSW wool growers surveyed, 91 per cent rated NRM as important in their whole farm enterprise.

Tasmania

Ninety-four per cent of Tasmanian wool growers are either currently implementing natural resource management on their farm or have taken action in the past.

The Best Practice Survey found wool growers in Tasmania were proactive when it came to managing all natural resources on their farm, from waterways to native vegetation.

The survey found 67 per cent of Tasmanian wool growers with land adjoining waterways had adopted practices to maintain or improve water quality.

Seventy-three per cent of Tasmanian wool growers also managed their native vegetation areas differently to the rest of their property so as to increase habitat for native plants and animals, keep the property in good condition and provide shelter and shade for stock.

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