

Classroom to paddock : delivery of grazing land management education in the northern territory , Australia

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Introduction The Northern Territory (NT) of Australia is known for its large scale cattle operations . Engaging with the management of these businesses to improve production and land condition is the target outcome of Meat & Livestock Australia EDGENetwork[®] Grazing Land Management workshop (GLM) . The GLMs are specifically designed and tailored to the regions in which they are delivered . Servicing clients after the workshop is critical to the transformation of knowledge into on-ground change .

Materials and methods Two Grazing Land Management Officers (GLMO) are employed to coordinate and facilitate the GLMs across the NT . This project is a two year partnership between the Department of Primary Industry Fisheries and Mines and the Northern Territory Cattleman's Association with funding received through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program . The GLM runs for 3 .5 days and provides principles and tools in the areas of : Understanding the Grazing Ecosystem , Managing Grazing , Fire , Tree-Grass Balance , Pasture Improvement and Restoration , Weeds and Planning . The GLMO is responsible for encouraging and supporting participants in applying what they have learnt to their own business . For each GLM delivered a follow-up day is coordinated as an opportunity to revisit and revise what was learnt during the initial workshop and discuss the realities of application in the paddock .

Results & discussion Since the commencement of the project in January 2006 , 8 GLMs have been delivered to 120 participants . This equates to a potential land mass of over 115 ,712 km² under pastoral production being directly managed by GLM graduates . A number of participants are involved in land management in an advisory capacity . When included in this calculation the total land mass becomes considerably larger and encompasses other states of Australia . Feedback from these workshops is consistently positive with 100% of participants indicating they have acquired or enhanced their understanding of grazing management as a result of participating .

Pastoralists have highlighted that the opportunity created by the workshop to share experiences and knowledge is a rare and valuable one . This is continued via the follow-up day hosted by a participant 6 months after the initial workshop .

The workshop provides a simple language which land managers can use to describe the landscape and assess its functionality . Establishing this dialogue is critical to effective communication allowing the impact of grazing management on land condition to be discussed . Grazing land condition is described as the landscape's ability to respond to rain and produce useful forage . By focusing on land condition we are able to shift from passive management "when it rains" , to active management focused on being "rain ready" through improved land condition .

Improving land condition requires instigating change ; this is often a daunting task and one that can take a long period of time to yield results . Having the knowledge and tools is often not enough . The GLMO is a human resource who mentors these changes which , as one participant said "I believe that at my age I will apply things to management since doing the workshop to reap rewards 10 years and on" .

The extent to which classroom-acquired information can be transformed into on-ground action is a function of on-going extension support . The on-ground component of the project is therefore limited by its two-year time frame .

Conclusions The GLM has proven effective for engaging land managers and encouraging a desire to change management for improved productivity and land condition . However , instigating change takes more than exposure to principles and tools at a workshop . It requires a conscious input of support from resource staff and empathy toward the realities of time . This includes both our management of time , as well as how long the landscape takes to respond .