

Landholder and Community Benchmarking Study 2009



The Western CMA Landholder and Community Benchmarking Study was undertaken to better understand attitudes and practices relating to natural resource management by landholders, urban residents and relevant organisations and to assess how effectively the Western CMA is meeting their needs.

The independent research involved a telephone survey of 381 landholders; a telephone survey of 100 urban residents and interviews with 21 relevant organisations.

The research outcomes are being used to guide the Western CMA's activities so that they meet the needs of local people and improve the health of the Western Catchment.

A full copy of the survey can be downloaded from the Western CMA website www.western.cma.nsw.gov.au or if you'd like a copy sent to you please ring 1800 032 101.



The Western Catchment Management Authority (CMA) works with local people to improve the way we manage our natural resources: land and vegetation, rivers and groundwater, cultural heritage, and biodiversity.

Study Highlights

Landholder Survey

The landholder survey was primarily designed to measure and benchmark attitudes and practices towards sustainable agricultural management and to understand land managers' awareness, knowledge and skills in natural resource management.

Landholder Characteristics

The mean age of landholders was found to be 55 years, with a secondary school education being the highest level of education achieved by the majority of landholders (68%) although 19% also indicated they had achieved a university level of education.

Landholders had lived on their current properties for an average of 26 years, with 68% intending to pass their property onto the next generation in their family.

Forty-five percent of landholders had more than one property in the district and when multiple properties across each landholder were taken into account, the average property size was 17,806 hectares, which compares to 14,082 hectares for landholders with single properties.

Sheep production (76%) was the most common land use in the region, followed by cattle production (56%), harvesting feral goats (22%) and dryland cropping (17%).

Cropping

Nineteen percent of landholders indicated they undertook dryland or irrigated cropping on their land with the average area of land under cropping across multiple properties owned by landholders being 1,006 hectares. If single property ownership amongst landholders is examined, the average area of land under cropping was 805 hectares.



No tillage or one pass sowing is the most common cultivation method used.

No tillage or one pass sowing was the most common cultivation method used in cropping and was used by 51% of landholders on 53% of their cropping land. The most common cropping practice undertaken by landholders within the past two years was stubble retention (78%), crop rotation (61%), soil testing (57%) and selective grazing (50%). The least common practices were precision farming (28%) and controlled traffic (19%).

Grazing Management

Ninety-three percent of landholders indicated they had run stock on their property within the last two years. Amongst these landholders the average area grazed for stock across multiple properties was 17,903 hectares. However, when only single property ownership is examined amongst landholders, the average area grazed was 16,000 hectares.

The average property area under grazing is larger than the overall average property size within the catchment. This is because many of the grazing properties in the catchment are significantly larger than the average property size.

Kangaroos, foxes, pigs, feral goats and rabbits were the most common native and feral animals on properties, with over 80% of landholders indicating they attempted to control these animals.

Ninety-seven percent of landholders indicated they adjusted stocking rates to better manage their pastures and in time of drought the most common methods of managing pastures included reducing stock numbers to a core herd (82%); moving their stock off the property (46%); and moving stock to other locations on their property (36%).

In relation to groundcover in their paddocks, 73% of landholders tried to maintain 'whatever they could', with the average percent of groundcover maintained in paddocks reported to be approximately 55%.

Sixty-five percent of landholders indicated they controlled stock access to watering points as part of their management of domestic or feral stock, with the main reason for controlling stock access to watering points being the control of domestic stock movements (74%).

Vegetation Management

The majority of landholders (66%) reported a problem with invasive native scrub (INS) or woody weeds, with an average of 33% of their property areas being affected. The majority of landholders (55%) indicated they had attempted to control INS or woody weeds on their property in the last two years and this was most commonly done through mechanical (58%) and chemical

(53%) methods. Furthermore, 88% of landholders used multiple follow up treatments in the control of INS and woody weeds, with follow up treatments generally using the same method as the initial first treatment.

Landholder training and skills

Twenty percent of landholders were found to have undertaken agriculture, grazing or land management related courses within the last two years and 64% indicated they had later changed their land management practices on the basis of what they learnt at the course.

Forty percent of landholders indicated they would be willing to attend a one day training course on property management held by the CMA, with the average distance landholders would be willing to travel to such a course being 106 kilometres.

Thirty-four percent of landholders had a documented or written property management plan or map, with 50% of landholders having developed their property management plan within the last four years. Amongst landholders with property management plans, 47% referred to them either 'always' or 'often', while 29% referred to them only 'occasionally' or 'never'. The three most common components of property management plans were natural or man-made watering points (98%); an air photo or satellite imagery (87%); and a description of fencing requirements (82%).



Participants at a Saltbush Field Day held on Willoring Station, near Lightning Ridge.

Landholder awareness of the Western CMA

It was found that 68% of landholders were aware of the Western CMA, with the highest level of awareness being in the Bourke Local Government area (80%) and lowest in the Central Darling (55%). In addition, 50% of all landholders

indicated they had had contact or communication with the Western CMA in the last 12 months.

Seven attitude statements were used to assess landholder attitudes towards the Western CMA. An analysis of each attitude statement showed that the majority of landholders believed that:

- The CMA was doing a good job supporting land managers to manage natural resources in the region (93%);
- The CMA was responsible for controlling vegetation clearing (72%);
- The CMA was a government department (93%);
- They knew about the CMA and what it does (90%);
- That the CMA did not only work with landholders (69%);
- They were generally supportive of the CMA and what it does (94%); and that
- The CMA was responsible for water management (68%).
This statement is not actually correct. Although the Western CMA works towards improving water quality, it is not responsible for water flows or water allocations

Urban Residents Survey

A telephone survey of 25 urban residents from each of the four towns including Bourke, Brewarrina, Cobar and Wilcannia was undertaken in March 2009. The survey focussed on:

- (i) awareness and understanding of the Western CMA;
- (ii) environmental issues in the local area;
- (iii) beliefs about the health of land in their local area; and
- (iv) participation in activities to address environmental issues.

Across the four town locations, between 11 and 20% of urban residents were found to be aware of the Western CMA, with the majority of residents believing the main activity of the Western CMA was related to water management, including river management and the management or irrigation and water licences.

Residents were asked to identify the most important environmental issues in their local area. While the issues that were identified were often specific to the town location of the resident, the three most commonly reported issues all related to water management, which included the lack of river flows and riparian and river management.

Residents were asked to consider the current and past health of the land around where they lived on a scale from one to ten, with one being very unhealthy and ten being very healthy. With the exception of Brewarrina, the land around Bourke, Cobar and Wilcannia was seen as being healthier now when compared to 10 years ago. In the

case of Brewarrina there was essentially no change in the perceived health of the land around this town over the past 10 years.

One-third of urban residents in Bourke (36%) and Brewarrina (32%) had participated in activities to address environmental issues in their local area in the last two years, although the level of participation was much higher in Cobar (76%) and Wilcannia (84%).



Wilcannia was one of the four urban areas surveyed.

Stakeholder Organisations Survey

Telephone interviews with relevant organisations were undertaken in April 2009 and included 11 non-Government organisations and 10 Government organisations.

The level of knowledge of the CMA amongst organisations was above average. On a 10 point scale, the mean score was 7 amongst non-Government organisations and 7.7 amongst Government organisations.

The majority of both non-Government and Government organisations indicated they had an understanding of the role of the CMA and of the regional natural resource management processes and programs implemented by the CMA.

Both non-Government and Government organisations believed the CMA had been 'somewhat successful' in its progress towards the achievement of natural resource management targets as identified in the Western Catchment Plan. On a 10 point scale, the mean score was 6.8 amongst non-Government organisations and 6.0 amongst Government organisations.

Survey participants support RFDS

To compensate survey participants for their time, landholders were offered a \$25 IGA Supermarket voucher and the urban residents, whose survey was considerably shorter, were offered a \$10 IGA Supermarket voucher.

It quickly became apparent that a number of survey participants preferred to donate the money value of the voucher to the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and future participants were offered the choice of donating to the RFDS.

Of the 572 people interviewed, 412 or 72% of participants chose to donate their money to the RFDS. As a result, \$9160 has been donated to the RFDS on behalf of Western Catchment residents.

The donation is testament to the generosity of Western Catchment people, particularly during a time of extended drought conditions and rising grocery prices and the importance of the RFDS in their lives.

