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PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Abstract title	Working with service providers to improve climate and emissions services to farm businesses
Theme area	<i>Adoption and extension of climate change information</i>
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Abstract

Rationale and objectives

Working with service providers is important in assisting farmers' to respond to climate change to ensure more productive, competitive and sustainable farm businesses in the long-term (Stokes and Howden, 2010). The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Climate Extension Team was funded under the Victorian Government's Future Farming Strategy to deliver a practice change and engagement project that offered pragmatic support to guide, engage and improve the skills of rural stakeholders and organisations to plan and prepare for climate change. This project operated between 2008 and 2012.

The objective of this research was to assess to what extent had DPI's work with service providers contributed to improved services to farm businesses concerning climate change and emissions.

Approach

The research addressed five key evaluation questions (Table 1). Existing data collected throughout the project was analysed and semi-structured interviews conducted with 31 service providers. The five service provider groups included DPI (internal policy, research, extension), Government (federal, state), industry associations, universities and private sector (consultants, advisors, agronomists). The purposive sample considered the service provider group, level of interaction with the extension team, industry type and location.

Impact and results

The key elements identified by service providers that contributed to improved services to farm businesses concerning climate change and emissions are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Key findings

Evaluation level	Key evaluation question	Key elements contributing to success
Appropriateness	1. What was the service providers' opinion of the climate and emissions related information, products and services that DPI has delivered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trust and confidence — understanding the farming context, credibility and independence. Importance of networks — establishing and building networks and ongoing relationships. Mutual dependence and respect between service providers involved in policy, research and extension.
Efficiency	2. Did DPI deliver information to service providers via the most effective, appropriate and efficient suite of approaches and mechanisms?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptive and responsive to mitigation and carbon policy, seasonal conditions, adaptation and risk management. Engagement with DPI — including face-to-face interactions, knowing who to contact and providing local examples, 'what does it mean for me?' Policy, research, extension conduit, as an outcome of the networks and relationships established.
Effectiveness	3. To what extent did service providers incorporate the information into their recommendations, products and/or services to farm businesses? 4. To what extent has the service providers' capability improved through their interaction with this Project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framing the debate and science — providing a clear and consistent information baseline, being a catalyst for industry action and ensuring relevance, 'what do I need to know more of?' Improving knowledge and optimising decision-making — highlighting links to productivity and profitability, recognising adaptation as an ongoing event, and capacity building.
Sustainability and legacy	5. What future support would DPI need to provide in order to maintain capability and continue to improve climate and emissions services to farm businesses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of continued communication and engagement. Striking the balance between adaptation and mitigation. Adaptation and integration with risk management. Ongoing role of DPI — responsive not reactive, trusted and independent source of information, working with service providers, market failure and the 'no project' scenario.

Conclusions

Information, products and services were communicated in a way that engaged service providers through networks, relationships and effective framing of the debate and science, which has contributed to improved services to farm businesses.

The evaluation has highlighted some key principles for working with the wide range of service providers involved in climate change adaptation and mitigation in agriculture, including:

UNDERSTANDING

- Framing the debate appropriately and ensuring regional and industry relevance.
- Demonstrating how local information feeds into broader-scale climate models and how these models relate to local weather patterns, highlighting the relevance to the individual.
- Focusing on 'where we are now' to provide legitimacy for how individuals readily adapt.
- Drawing on learned experience and 'looking back before we look forward'.

ENABLING

- Effective policy, research and extension conduit where policy is evolving and science is developing at a rapid pace.
- Effective communication of the science that considers the needs of the target audience.
- Preparing industry and individuals to respond to change, while considering the social aspects of change management.

FACILITATING

- Utilising trusted advisors.
- Building climate variability and change into general risk management and planning approaches for farm businesses.
- Assessing climate and policy impacts on whole farm productivity, profitability, sustainability and management.

The activities required to assist farm businesses in responding to climate change will continue to evolve, as will the role of service providers. Continued engagement with service providers is important in assisting farmers' to deal with climate variability and change in the future.

References

Stokes, C. and Howden, S.M. (2010). Adapting agriculture to climate change: preparing Australian agriculture, forestry and fisheries for the future, CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne