



Rural Landholder Engagement – Research Summary

This summary presents the key findings of a survey of NSW landholders conducted in 2019, funded by NSW Local Land Services. We compared the findings of this study with the findings of our 2018 survey to see how landholders felt about a range of issues.

In 2019, 552 landholders completed the survey on the telephone.

We looked at how landholders:

- found their experiences with government
- understood or used the NSW Land Management Code
- saw potential benefits of the new Land Management Framework.

Since the last survey we found that:

- landholder trust of organisations (apart from the media) had increased
- landholders continue to help each other within the farming community
- changes to communication and transport links have affected communities (not just changes to farming practices).

Landholders approaches to land management

- Most landholders think about their farming practice from season to season, and also have long term plans.
- Landholders get information from agricultural publications, field days, industry newsletters, agronomists, neighbours and family, more so than government agencies and departments. This tells us that government bodies could use these trusted channels to get information to landholders.
- Increasingly farmers sought to 'always look for new ways to improve practice', but some also indicated they 'always do things as they have been done', or were 'interested in finding ways but did not know how'.

Engagement with government

- The survey results indicated that landholders trust LLS more than local government agencies and other state government agencies involved in land management.
- Most landholders thought farmers should be supported to make their own decisions in farming, while only 20% thought government should not have a role in farming regulation.
- Engagement with government by landholders is more likely if the landholder has a need to do so, or if government representatives are helpful.

Knowledge and experience with the Code

- Similar to 2018 results, almost half of landholders surveyed had heard about the Code, including almost one-third who had heard of it but did not know how it works, and 17% who knew how it works.
- Of landholders surveyed, in the 2019 (2018) survey, 26 (16) landholders had used the Code over the previous 12 months, with variable experiences.

Landholder wellbeing

- In most areas, landholders continued to report equal or greater satisfaction with their wellbeing than the Australian average.
- Landholders surveyed are a highly resilient population; with reported confidence in their skills to independently manage their land.
- Some landholders noted that the local infrastructure, such as sports and recreation facilities, had changed or disappeared and this had affected social connections.

Barriers to landholder engagement

- Landholders are frustrated by the lack of joined up policy across different government agencies – State and Commonwealth.
- Some landholders felt there can be a lack of clear information from government, with complex processes and increased red tape. Organisational change and policy change can also create confusion and frustration for landholders.
- Some landholders indicated that had not engaged with LLS simply because they felt that they did not need assistance or were not looking to make changes to their property.

Opportunities to increase engagement with the Government

- Train staff not just in policy content and practical application, but also in engagement skills - listening and presenting options not just solutions.
- Increase face to face engagement and provide local support that suits the community's needs.
- Provide better information and different ways to get information.
- Reduce red tape and administration, and increase 'joined up' services across government departments.

The findings of this study will help inform the ongoing implementation of the Code and how government can more broadly improve their engagement with landholders.

We would like to thank everyone who took part in the study.

Research Team

A/Prof Limin Mao (CSRH), Dr Timothy Broady (CSRH), Shona Bates (SPRC)

For further information:

A/Prof Limin Mao
+61 2 9385 4482

Social Policy Research Centre

UNSW Sydney NSW 2052 Australia
T +61 2 9385 7800
F +61 2 9385 6455
E sprc@unsw.edu.au
W www.sprc.unsw.edu.au

© UNSW Australia 2020

The Social Policy Research Centre is based in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at UNSW Sydney. This report is an output of a study funded by NSW Local Land Services. The study was completed with approval from UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee.