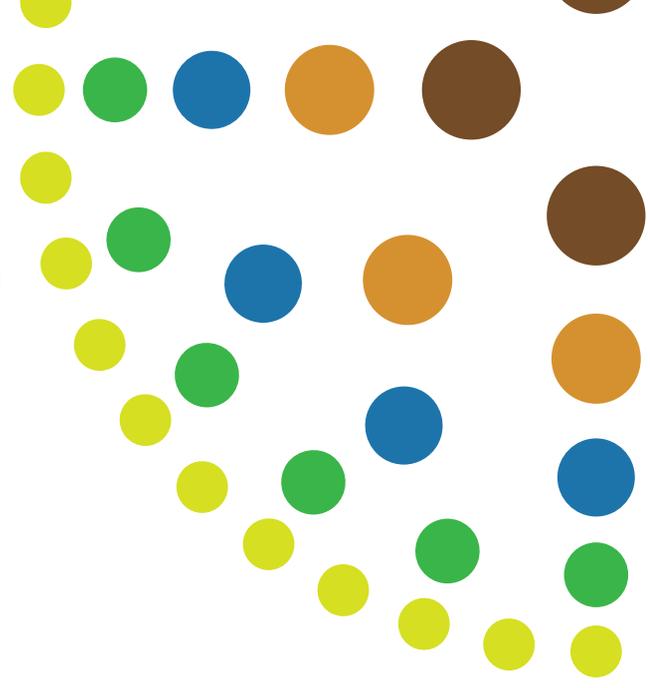




Australian Government

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation



Consolidating Targeted and Practical Extension for Australian Farmers and Fishers

Final Report

**RURAL R&D
FOR PROFIT
PROGRAMME**



RURAL INDUSTRIES
Research & Development Corporation

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RIRDC would also like to acknowledge and thank all stakeholders who participated in the project by providing valuable opinions that are presented here in the aggregated form.

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Plain English summary

In Australia we have a proud tradition of extension and adoption within primary industries. Extension services play an important role in assisting Australian farmers and fishers to adopt research and development (R&D), to innovate and change, and to keep their business profitable.

The *Consolidating Targeted and Practical Extension for Australian Farmers and Fishers* project was welcomed as the start of a much needed national conversation about the future of extension. Funded under the Rural R&D for Profit Programme, it was an ambitious project that aimed to reverse some of the drivers of fragmentation that are impacting on delivery, to evaluate the extension system, and to consolidate extension knowledge.

The project also identified practical and achievable actions that will lead to improvements to our extension systems, helping it meet future demands and opportunities in primary industries.

Key project deliverables and outcomes were:

- A practical extension information 'hub'
- An evaluation of the current extension environment systems
- Information and advice on strategic next steps to improve the efficiency of extension
- Undertaking forums and information exchange

Extension Hub

A key achievement of the project was the creation of a web-based 'hub' to support extension professionals as they plan and deliver information to Australian farmers and fishers.

The [Extension Hub](https://extensionhub.com.au) consolidates and organises existing knowledge, tools and resources in an accessible way so that it can be easily used to inform the design and implementation of extension by public and private providers. The site, established as the Extension Practice Community of Practice (CoP), went live November 2016. It currently contains 30 curated articles on extension relevant to target audiences. They are tagged with keywords, and linked to other sources including YouTube. Further resources are being added by the CoP leader. Currently there are 1300 users of the site.

Communities of Practice on crop diseases and crop nutrition are also housed on the site. Visitors can listen to podcasts, read articles or "ask an expert" technical questions on the subject area of the Community of Practice.

Visit the hub at <https://extensionhub.com.au/web/extension-practice>

Current extension environment and systems

The project also involved an evaluation of the current extension environment and systems to help better understand system strengths and weaknesses, who the key players are, and what are their needs. This work included an assessment of current and potential future extension delivery approaches and how these approaches could be used.

Insights, issues and national trends within the current system of agricultural extension in Australia are largely consistent with the literature and can be summarised as follows:

- **An increasing demand from farmers for extension services** that support both tactical and strategic decision making. The agricultural extension system needs to respond to this need, however improvements at the individual project, state or industry level will not, on their own, be enough to meet this demand.
- **An imperative for increasing for industry and government co-ordination** in agricultural extension relating to:
 - The diversity of extension providers and potential for greater private sector involvement
 - Regional extension efforts that are cross-industry
 - Extension capability and capacity planning and development initiatives
 - Engaging public and private sector extension providers in research priority setting and planning
 - Supporting cultural change in farmers' willingness to pay for advice
 - Recognition that the current extension system is favouring larger farms
- **An increasing requirement for leadership and expertise** in the planning, design and review of RD&E programs from an extension and innovation perspective.
- **An increasing need for new arrangements in the structures of RD&E projects and programs that support co-innovation.** The diverse range of service providers in extension provides the context for more complex and agile extension approaches.
- **A need for continued support for building extension capability and supporting development of best-practice extension approaches** through innovative approaches like the Extension Hub and the Communities of Practice it supports.

Strategic next steps

The project identified key issues that are impacting the effectiveness of the extension system and provided information and advice on strategic next steps for Australian primary industry extension.

The findings of the project consultants GHD, Quantum Market Research and the University of Melbourne provide insight and guidance on the nature of, and focus areas for, strategic action at the national, industry, and regional scales in order to improve the efficacy of the system and meet farmers needs in the longer term. The project Expert Panel suggest that it is the role of the Research and Innovation Committee of the Primary Industries Ministerial Council to consider and undertake on these strategic actions. These are presented in Table A.

Table A: Areas for strategic action in Australia's agricultural extension system

Principles for an adaptive extension system	Outcomes sought	Strategic actions
Leadership and priority setting	There is a vision in place for the extension system covering, priorities, institutional arrangements and appropriate leadership.	1. Clear ownership, resourcing and leadership for extension from government and industry. 2. Development and endorsement of a program for extension leadership.
Resourcing	Private and public investment in extension and extension capacity is sufficient to meet stakeholder needs.	(See action 3)
Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career pathways for new entrants into extension are visible and effective. • Professional networks are available for new and existing extension personnel. • There is continual improvement in extension capability that draws on an established and evolving body of knowledge. 	3. A national extension capability and capacity plan, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national agreement on professional standards for project design and evaluation, and training of industry, government, and private deliverers to support implementation. • Resourcing the Extension Hub and Extension Practice CoP's. • Identify and resource capacity needs.
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater interaction between farmers, extension and research. • Cross-sectoral collaboration and co-ordination of extension providers for particular regional or cross-sectoral needs. • Novel approaches to engage marginalised or vulnerable farms in accessing information, advice and support. 	4. A national agreement between governments, RDC's and key Private sector organisations in relation to their role in extension. 5. A national agreement between government and agricultural research organisations related to the formation of programme teams around key issues and priorities including extension expertise in research project design, priority setting and translation.
Collaboration and coordination	Participants in the extension system willingly share knowledge and resources around shared issues/mutual benefits.	6. Regional extension strategies and agreements between extension professionals who commit to co-ordinate and co-deliver in defined areas of mutual interest at a regional level. 7. Cross-sectoral projects related to shared issues.
Professionalism	Investors and providers of extension use agreed professional standards and a common the body of knowledge for extension design and evaluation.	(see Action 3)
Innovation	The extension system continually improves and adopts new thinking.	8. Invest in research and learning related to the extension system: how it functions; indicators of impact and evolving needs and issues.

Forums and information exchanges

The project conducted forums and facilitated information exchange activities that were designed to enhance coordination and leadership of extension provision across RDCs, state and territory governments, industries, private extension service providers, universities and other reliant stakeholders. Many extension professionals who participated expressed how valuable they were; clearly for lasting impact they will need to continue.

The project recognised that agricultural extension is being delivered by a diversity of organisations and providers, so there is no single sector or institution to drive the identified priorities and undertake the suggested actions, rather, a collaborative approach is required going forward. In bringing together key participants committed to improving approaches to extension and improve the prosperity of primary industries, the project has helped to ensure that collaboration has already begun, there is an excellent tool in place to facilitate modern extension delivery and a pathway forward has been suggested. The project has helped create the foundations and establish an effective leadership environment to catalyse action to strengthen extension delivery.

The project was funded by the Australian Government's Rural R&D for Profit programme.

Abbreviations and glossary

Community of Practice (CoP) - In this context a Community of Practice is where a community of people with common interest use the on-line Community of Practice tool to collaborate and share knowledge on a professional basis to further develop and share their knowledge in various ways online.

Community of Practice tool - is an online tool that enables a geographically separated community of interest (including researchers, extension providers and farmers) to collaborate on topics relevant to them.

Community of Interest – is a group of people with a common interest or issues who are willing to work and learn together (which in this context is likely to include researchers, extension providers and farmers).

Extension Practice Community of Practice (Extension Practice CoP) – is the Community of Practice concerning the practice of extension, established under this project and hosted on the RIRDC Extension Hub at <https://extensionhub.com.au/> .

Expert Panel – The Expert Panel was made up of extension experts and representatives from around Australia, including project partners. The role of the Expert Panel was to oversee on the strategic, tactical and operational aspects of the project delivery and the implementation of the Extension Hub. A number of members have committed to being members of a leadership group that is overseeing the ongoing Extension Practice Community of Practice.

1 Project rationale and objectives

This project was established to address the national issue of fragmentation in the Australian agricultural extension system. This issue is affecting the efficiency of extension delivery, subsequently reducing the adoption of R&D and impacting on productivity and profitability for all stake holders.

The project aimed to bring rural research and development corporation (RDCs) and other key extension stakeholders together to address the current inadequacies identified in Priority 4a and 4c of the Round 1 R&D4Profit Programme Guidelines as follows:

4. Strengthen on-farm adoption and improve information flows

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Priority 4(a)</i> | <i><u>consolidate knowledge</u> of extension and adoption to better deliver practical results to primary producers, founded on what producers want from extension services.</i> |
| <i>Priority 4(b)</i> | <i>identify practical proposals to <u>stimulate private sector extension</u> services, particularly to fill current gaps.</i> |
| <i>Priority 4(c)</i> | <i>identify practical means to <u>co-ordinate extension services</u> for producers, including the development of tools and/or platforms.</i> |

The goal of this project was not to take on the whole delivery of extension knowledge, tools and service provision but rather help create the foundations and establish an effective leadership environment to catalyse action that strengthens the extension delivery.

This project integrated with another Rural R&D for Profit program project led by Dairy Australia (*Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D*) which aims to analyse and stimulate private sector extension for Australian agriculture to address priority 4(b).

By delivering the following outcomes this project aimed to strengthen on farm information flows and adoption, to identify the future information requirements of farmers and where further interventions were required to meet these needs.

1. A practical extension information hub which consolidates and organises existing knowledge and tools and resources related to extension in a way that is accessible for information the design and implementation of extension by public and private providers.
2. An evaluation of the current extension circumstances and systems to help better understand system strengths and weaknesses who the key players are and their needs and a possible strategic path forward. This included an assessment of current and potential future extension delivery approached and advice on how these approaches could be used.
3. A synthesis of existing knowledge to draw out what we already know works and why in relation to business financial performance, responsiveness to markets NRM challenges, adoption of new technology.

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4. A synthesis of lessons that can be shared across industry sectors and jurisdictions this is particularly useful during this times of change where some industries are already utilising a greater proportion of private extension services that other and some have of trialling new technology driven approaches that could be relevant for other sectors.
5. The creation of suitable forums and information exchanges that will enhance coordination and leadership of extension provision across RDCs, state and territory governments, industries private extension service providers, universities and other reliant stakeholders.
6. A report with information and advice on strategic next steps for Australian primary industry extension.

The objectives of the project did not change during delivery; however there were some minor variations to the project. These were enacted because they were seen by the project manager, the Expert Panel and the department as opportunities to significantly increase the impact, reach and legacy of the project. The variations, as approved by the Department, were:

- Developing an Extension Hub with the ability to host a number of Communities of Practice. Noting this innovation was in part above and beyond the original scope of the project so it was predominantly funded by RIRDC, with the project funds covering only a small portion of the associated costs.
- Replacing the static website that was originally planned with a collaborative Extension Practice CoP to manage the extension resources that were gathered and curated under this project and to facilitate collaboration on an ongoing basis. This CoP has the potential to achieve a significantly greater impact than the static website and is being maintained in the longer term.

2 Method and project locations

This project involved a series of activities and associated methodologies, each of which contributed to project outcomes. Here the methods are discussed by activity.

Activity 1 - Project initiation and management

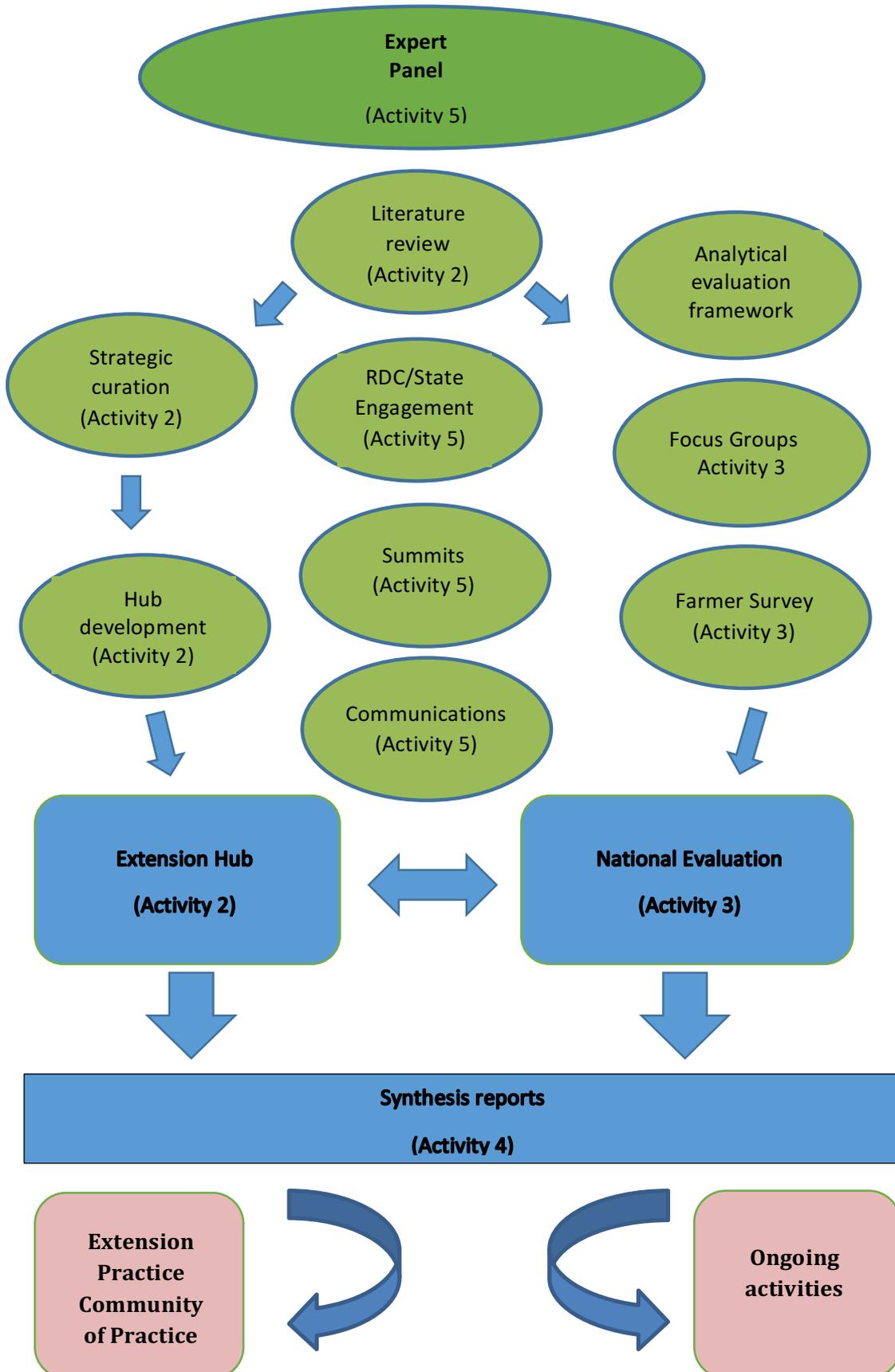
The project was managed by a dedicated Project Manager employed by RIRDC who, under the guidance of the General Manager at RIRDC, managed all aspects of the project delivery.

A project Expert Panel was convened to add additional technical expertise into the project. The Expert Panel was made up of extension experts from around Australia and included representatives from all project partners. The Panel came together four times during the project. Their role was to provide expert strategic advice to key areas of the project, to assist with the national synthesis of extension knowledge, to assist project evaluation and to make final project recommendations

Figure 1 gives an overview of how the Expert Panel operated, providing specialist input into the project elements.

It was recognised that additional technical expertise would be required to deliver this project to a high standard so a number of external service providers, were engaged by RIRDC to provide specialist services to the project. This was to deliver, or assist to deliver, Activities 2, 3, 4 and 5. The Project Manager had oversight of these service providers to ensure timely delivery of a quality product.

Figure 1 Expert Panel functionality



Activity 2 Information Hub/platform (Extension Practice Community of Practice)

The Extension Practice CoP was developed using a stepped process:

1. Consultation with the Expert Panel on the appropriate platform
2. Development of a suitable platform
3. Desktop literature review and data basing of resources
4. Strategic curation of resources for target audiences
5. Survey of target audience
6. Strategic curation of resources for certain target audiences
7. Develop, in consultation with stakeholders, standards for collating new information for addition to the data base
8. Development of the Extension Practice Community of Practice to manage the resources.

Originally the project planned to develop an extension information hub that would host a variety of curated extension information on a static website. However, it became clear that this project could deliver more than that: it could deliver an Extension Hub which could host a number of Communities of Practice, an interactive tool that enables collaboration and information sharing.

The genesis for this stems from the work originally undertaken by the US based eXtension Foundation on an e-extension platform delivering a series of extension, collaboration and information services and knowledge products via a web-based portal.

The eXtension site is an interactive learning environment delivering the research knowledge from to end users. The primary focus of the US eXtension project is connecting knowledge consumers with knowledge providers and is why that project formed a compatible base to the Extension Hub project in its aims and technological approach.

Based on the US experience, Australia via the Victorian Department of Primary Industries undertook a pilot project trailing the US developed “eXtension” model with two GRDC funded projects (crop nutrition and field crop diseases) and developed them as CoPs. This project was called eXtensionAUS and was operated under a special agreement with the eXtension Foundation.

RIRDC saw the potential of developing an Extension Hub solely for Australia, so developed this hub and in a truly collaborative effort migrated the two GRDC pilot CoPs onto the Extension Hub.

From there and under this R&D4 Profit project, an Extension Practice CoP was developed, thus delivering to stakeholder’s collaborative and interactive website which, amongst other functions, could host the extension resources. This was done as it was seen as an opportunity to enhance the deliverable as this CoP allows the members to own and interact with the resources, extension experts and end users. The Expert Panel were also keen to recommend that the project develop this collaborative platform to both to increase reach and to overcome knowledge legacy issues through the ongoing curation and management of those resources. Thus the project developed a much more influential tool that is now the Extension Practice CoP.

To enable this steps 4 involved further curation of the resources from an electronic perspective which was undertaken by a consultant with specialist expertise in electronic extension services, so that they were in a format compatible with the Extension Hub.

Activity 3 Evaluation of current system

The evaluation of the current system involved the following activities and methodologies:

1. Completion of an evaluation framework to inform the evaluation
2. Desktop and literature review of current extension situation in Australia
3. Evaluation of current extension system to understand strengths and weaknesses, and possible strategic pathways forward.
4. Research scan to identify gaps in extension services in relation to identified activities aimed at designing improved extension knowledge, tools and approaches.
5. National farmer survey with a sample of 1000 farmers from around Australia
6. Information gathering, including
 - a. focus Groups with extension stakeholders as listed in Table 1
 - b. a National Extension Summit was held on 21 April 2016 at Wagga Wagga attending by more than 70 extension professionals from around Australia
 - c. key person interviews with 14 key informants (including representatives from New South Wales and Victorian state agencies and the cotton, dairy, horticulture, meat and livestock, pork and sugar industries).
7. Discussion Paper consultation with 22 respondents (11% response rate)

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the engagement associated with the evaluation of the current system.

Table 1 – Focus group meetings

Date	Location	Participants
18th May	Adelaide SA	7
19th May	Adelaide SA	10
8th June	Northam WA	6
9th June	Bunbury WA	11
30th June	Darwin NT	10
18th July	Launceston RAS	12
19th July	Ballarat VIC	9
20th July	Benalla VIC	6
27th July	Toowoomba QLD	10
28th July	Dubbo NSW	11
TOTAL		92

Additionally a discussion paper was prepared which presented the initial project findings. This was sent to approximately 200 key stakeholders so that the initial findings could be tested. Of these, 23 people responded to the discussion paper and the results could be further refined. Locations of these discussion paper recipients and respondents are contained in Table 2.

Table 2 Discussion paper recipients and respondents

State/Territory	Expert panel	Focus group attendees	Focus group apologies	Total recipients	Respondents
NSW	2	11	14	27	7
NT	1	10	2	13	0
QLD	1	10	11	22	3
SA	0	16	11	27	1
TAS	1	13	6	20	1
VIC	3	15	28	46	3
WA	2	17	25	44	7
National	0	0	0	1	1
Total	10	92	97	200	23

Activity 4 – Syntheses and lessons

The synthesis report summarised the findings from all of the project activities with the purpose of support strategic actions by key stakeholders beyond the project. This report identified: constraints to cross-sectoral collaboration and co-ordination on agricultural extension and key priorities for action and makes suggestions related to how they can be implemented.

Work within the project explored three fundamental elements of the Australian Agricultural Extension System, namely:

- 1) How the system is structured
- 2) What we know about the methods, approaches and tools used in extension
- 3) Farmer and service provider perspectives with regards to expectations and use of extension both now and in the future

In the synthesis report insights from these ‘inputs’ was summarised into three sections:

Section 1: A description of what we know about the current situation in these three areas

Section 2: A discussion of the implications of this for the extension system of the future

Section 3: Recommendations on critical change areas necessary to build off insights from this work

The synthesis report summarise the results of the research work and information gathering into some useful lessons and to set out the collective way forward. Using desk-top literature review and project synthesis to assess current and potential future extension delivery approaches and provide advice on their applicability for primary industries.

A set of case studies were also prepared on successful extension project and programs that could inform other jurisdictions. These were undertaken by Curie Communications under the direction of RIRDC and involved focus group consultation.

Activity 5 Forums and events

Table 3 Project events and forums

Event	Purpose	Methods
Four expert panel meetings	To drive and direct the project	Facilitated discussion
One major national summit	Collaboration and setting the project framework	Facilitated discussion
One research development corporation national workshop	Collaboration and presenting the project results and discussing a way forward for extension services	Facilitated discussion
One Extension Practice CoP workshop	To upskill the Expert Panel on the CoP functionality	Facilitated discussion
Ten focus groups across all states of Australia	To evaluate the extension system	Qualitative social research
Regional NRM conference	Presented preliminary project results and CoP concepts	Presentation
APEN Board meeting	Presented preliminary project results and CoP concepts	Presentation

Project evaluation

The process of reviewing this project involved a review of the project outputs and interviews with key stakeholders in the project. Eight Interviews were conducted and one participant observation was recorded. The interviews were candid 'semi-structured reflections' of Expert Panel members and Stakeholders. The resulting data was then organised using a reflective framework (ORID) for each project component. Reflections focus on project outputs and process and any known outcomes.

3 Project achievements

Here key results for each component of the project are described.

3.1 Project level achievements

This project set out what it aimed to do; namely to reverse some the drivers of fragmentation that are impacting on delivery, consolidate extension knowledge and evaluate the extension system, identifying practical and achievable actions that when actioned will lead to improvements to our extension systems, helping it meet the future demands and opportunities in primary industries.

The project achievements and the evaluation of each are set out here by activity in Table 4.

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Table 4 Project achievements and the evaluation

Output	KPI description	Status against KPIs	Progress achieved against KPI	Outputs Some outputs contributed to several Activities, in which case the most relevant report is listed first.	Impact of activity towards objectives
Activity 1 - Project initiation and management					
1a	Project initiation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The project was initiated in a timely fashion and a suitably qualified and skilled project manager appointed.		<p>Observations The project plan was clear and contained all the appropriate components. The Expert Panel provided input into all aspects of the project.</p> <p>Changes at RIRDC during the project were well managed but did cause some disruption, particularly in communication.</p>
1b	Detailed project planning including project plan, risk management, evaluation plan completed and provided to the Department	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	All of these plans were completed and submitted to the Department. The evaluation plan was completed based on project outputs and the final report is attached here	Project plan Risk management plan Evaluation plan (Provided with Milestone Report 1)	<p>Reflections There were many comments about the project time frame and all felt it was an ambitious project in a compressed time frame.</p> <p><i>I (Expert panel member) think the project made good progress, given the timeframe.</i></p>
1c	Ongoing management, coordination and reporting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The project was successfully managed according to the project management plan ensuring all deliverables were met on time.		<p>Members of the expert panel suggested that the scope of the project and Terms of Reference of the group were not entirely clear to them at the beginning of the project. It was also unclear to some how the wrapping up activity would take place, the synthesis</p>

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1d	Deliver end of project evaluation and report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The evaluation plan was completed, based on project outputs as per 1b. The evaluation report is complete and is appended to this final report.	Project Evaluation Report (Attachment 11) Expert Panel report (Attachment 10)	report, Expert Panel Report and Project Review. All agreed that being involved in this project was a positive experience. Interpretation Expert Panel members suggested that they would be involved in a similar project in the future if the opportunity arose.
1e	Terms of reference for the independent evaluation of the current extension system completed and approved by the department	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The analytical framework (terms of reference) was completed by RIRDC in conjunction with the service providers who had the required technical skills. It was sent to the department as part of Milestone Report 2.	Analytical framework for the national evaluation of the current extension system (Provided with Milestone Report 2)	<i>The project management was responsive to circumstances and made good use of the Expert Panel. This adaptiveness was a necessary feature and a great strength of this project.</i> <i>I enjoyed the opportunity to make a contribution (as a member of the Expert Panel) and would gladly do it again.</i> <i>I can see this is the start of something and that is refreshing.</i> Developing synergies with other RDC projects, namely the Dairy Extension project (in exploring private sector investment) and the GRDC information services (for Field Crop Diseases and Crop Nutrition portals in the Extension Hub) was really important. This is

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					<p>a reflection of good RIRDC project management.</p> <p>This was a brilliant feature of the project and modelled the kind of collaborations needed in the future. Collaborative planning and development of extension must be prioritised and resourced for it to work.</p> <p>Action It is important to wrap up the project well and communicate the outcomes.</p> <p>Consider formalising the role and communications of the Expert Panel in any future projects.</p> <p>Communication across RDC's and with other Stakeholders on Extension in itself has saved resources and created better outcomes. This should continue.</p>
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Activity 2 - Information Hub/platform					
2a	Develop a framework to collect organize and present extension information an tools	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	A framework for the knowledge collection and curation of extension was been developed.	A framework for the knowledge collection and curation of extension. (Provided with Milestone Report 2)	<p>Observations The Hub is complete and populated with curated Extension Practice resources and is now operational.</p> <p>The compilation of and curation of resources was successful and is now complete.</p> <p>Reflections The Extension Hub was intended to provide a practical outcome from this project. It has achieved this outcome and it required much time and effort to bring it to completion.</p>
2b	Collate a data base of existing information , sources and tools, each assessed for relevance focus and use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The services of two organisations with extension expertise were procured to undertake the task. The University of Melbourne provided a broad literature review of extension information and tools, identifying key knowledge resources; Gavin Beaver furthered this work by providing a strategic review of the results with the express aim of ensuring their suitability for the Extension Practice Community of Practice. Furthermore this Extension Practice Community of	Desktop Curation of Extension and Adoption Knowledge (Attachment 5) Strategic Curation of Extension and Knowledge in Australia (Attachment 6).	<p>Interpretation The initial focus on the website as an extension document receptacle was a bit limited.</p> <p>It was during the life of the project that the group recognised the need to adopt a more active focus on the user of the system and a ‘Community of Practice’ approach was adopted. The expert panel agreed that pursuing the CoP approach was important as it makes the Hub much more purposeful and versatile. The Extension Practice CoP is a valuable resource for anyone providing extension services.</p> <p>The Hub is a good start and if it can get going (in the next 6 months) it will be a good legacy.</p>

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			Practice was development to manage these resources in a flexible and interactive way that will extend beyond the life of the project.		<i>'The Hub has potential to provide real value in the future, although much more work is required to make it more usable and applicable for the various needs of the extension community.'</i>
2c	Develop, in consultation with stakeholders, standards for collating new information for addition to the data base	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	As per 2b above a highly skilled contractor was engaged to review the information and resources, with target audiences, and to fill any gaps in knowledge. This work also involved developing a tagging and curation system to ensure consistent collection of resources into the future.	Strategic Curation of Extension and Knowledge in Australia (Attachment 6) Desktop Curation of Extension and Adoption Knowledge (Attachment 5)	<p>The Extension Hub, particularly with the Extension Practice CoP was felt to be able to cater for a growing diversity of practitioners and also to cater for those in isolated situations.</p> <p>Action There is more work to be done in communicating and establishing the Extension Hub as a resource for other industry groups and the Extension Practice Portal as a resource for practice leaders and practitioners.</p>
2d	Develop and release publicly accessible easy to maintain information technology platform (website)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The project developed an Extension Practice Community of Practice, which is a highly sophisticated tool that enables a community of interest to interact and share information. This delivery exceeded the development of a static website and the functionality will facilitate ongoing use of the platform, beyond the life of the project.	Extension Hub live and active https://extensionhub.com.au/ RIRDC Consolidating Extension Project Reporting – Final Report and Technical Specification	<p>Several Expert Panel members agreed to become involved as leaders of the CoP for Extension Practice on the Extension Hub.</p>

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				(Extension Hub) (Attachment 3) EAFF User Guide (Extension Hub) (Attachment4)	
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Activity 3 - Evaluation of the Current extension system					
3a	Conduct an independent evaluation of the Australian extension system for primary producers in accordance with the terms of reference developed in 1e	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	<p>The national evaluation of the extension system assessed the current situation against future demands and needs of agriculture and farmers.</p> <p>The independent evaluation involved wide stakeholder consultation around Australia and across most agricultural industry sectors.</p> <p>In addition a national farmer survey was completed to inform the national assessment.</p> <p>A desktop review of extension approaches and policies also informed the national evaluation and the final synthesis report.</p>	<p>Primary Industry Extension and Adoption in Australia (Attachment 1)</p> <p>National Farmer survey on Extension Services – Market Research Report (Attachment 2)</p> <p>Desktop Curation of Extension and Adoption Knowledge (Attachment 5)</p>	<p>Observations The evaluation of the extension system made good progress in the compressed time frame and was completed on time. The report represents and describes the data captured during the consultation phase and good use is made of appendix to include much of this information.</p> <p>Reflections Reflecting on the time frame, the whole process felt rushed including the scheduling of the focus groups, through to time frames for feedback and producing final reports. There was a lot of good will and interest from Expert panel and State contacts to assist the project and the evaluation team.</p> <p>It was a good project to be involved in. There were many people who voluntarily contributed through the survey, focus groups, Summit workshop, and Expert Panel.</p> <p>Interpretation The Expert Panel feedback on the draft Discussion Paper was important to the content of the Evaluation report, and contributed to the redrafting of the Priority detail.</p> <p>Section 3 of the Evaluation Report which is focused on identifying potential improvements was derived from the analysis</p>

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					<p>of the data and is accompanied by long lists of actions identified in the consultation. This section in particular would have benefited from further investigation and distilling.</p> <p>Some stakeholders felt that the evaluation did not go far enough:</p> <p><i>I would have liked the project to consider the effectiveness of the newer models of extension-in connecting with R&D and in creating lasting practice change.</i></p> <p>Action A decision was made to develop an expert panel statement to further refine and more broadly the messages from the evaluation.</p> <p>RIRDC also agreed to develop a follow on project/s:</p> <p>We have been invited to have some feedback in a follow up project which seeks to operationalise the hub (to deliver on evaluation Priority 3 involving building extension capability).</p>
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Activity 4 - Synthesis and lessons					
4a	Undertake a literature review and consultation process to identify cross industry and cross-jurisdictional lessons	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	<p>This output was addressed in a number of project activities, including being a research question within the desktop curation report undertaken by the University of Melbourne.</p> <p>In addition, a number of case studies of successful delivery of extension services were identified through consultation activities.</p>	<p>Taking Strategic Action to Improve Extension Services for Australian Farmers and Fishers (Synthesis report) (Attachment 8)</p> <p>Primary Industry Extension and Adoption in Australia (Attachment 1)</p> <p>National Farmer survey on Extension Services – Market Research Report (Attachment 2)</p> <p>Case study report of successful extension projects from around Australia (Attachment 9)</p>	<p>Observations The synthesis was developed after the Hub and the evaluation was completed.</p> <p>Reflections This report was important for the expert panel reflections and the two reports were developed concurrently, making it difficult for the expert panel to draw on the synthesis report in order to make their final statement.</p> <p>Interpretation It would have been good to have access to this report earlier and draw on this for the expert panel report. The synthesis was considered very important as it also considered the preliminary outcomes of the Dairy Australia report.</p> <p>The combined extension projects (this project and the Dairy Australia project) have put extension back on the map.</p> <p>Action The synthesis report and other project outputs provide a current context for new ideas around extension to be proposed and explored and several project stakeholders were interested in pursuing thought leadership in this area. The big question is- what now? There are</p>

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				Desktop Curation of Extension and Adoption Knowledge (Attachment 5)	opportunities at Extension events e.g. Townsville APEN Conference next year. The expert panel statement is intended to encourage broader adoption of the results of the whole project as described in the synthesis report.
4b	Undertake literature review and consultation process to fill identified knowledge gaps	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	<p>This task was substantially completed through the desktop review of literature undertaken by the University of Melbourne and through consultation associated with the National Assessment.</p> <p>These activities highlighted many significant gaps in extension provision however not many gaps in extension knowledge.</p>	<p>Desktop Curation of Extension and Adoption Knowledge (Attachment 5)</p> <p>Taking Strategic Action to Improve Extension Services for Australian Farmers and Fishers (Synthesis report) (Attachment 8)</p> <p>Primary Industry Extension and Adoption in Australia (Attachment 1)</p> <p>National Farmer survey on Extension Services – Market Research</p>	

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				Report (Attachment 2)	
4c	Provide a report on strategic next steps for Australian extension to primary producers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The Synthesis Report brings together all the project outputs and recommends some strategic actions or next steps for Australian extension.	<p>Taking Strategic Action to Improve Extension Services for Australian Farmers and Fishers (Synthesis report) (Attachment 8)</p> <p>Desktop Curation of Extension and Adoption Knowledge (Attachment 5)</p> <p>Primary Industry Extension and Adoption in Australia (Attachment 1)</p> <p>National Farmer survey on Extension Services – Market Research Report (Attachment 2)</p>	

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Activity 5 - Strategic forums and events					
5a	Creation of a panel of extension experts to identify gaps and opportunities in the system and contribute to the strategic next steps report (4c)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The Expert Panel met four times during the course of the project. The Expert Panel was expanded to include representations from all state and territories. Consultations and meetings with all panel members occurred on a regular basis during this period	Expert Panel	<p>Observations The events were well managed and reported and the independent evaluation National Summit suggests it was a successful event.</p> <p>The communication products and outputs (e.g. flyer, media release) were used in communicating the project in networks and enlisting support for participation in the project.</p>
5b	Hold two forums of research and development corporations, state an territory governments and other selected stakeholders to help RDC and extension providers advance and continuously improve their extension activities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	The first forum was delivered as a National Summit and was successfully conducted on 21 April 2016 in Wagga Wagga. The Summit was well attended with 70 people from around Australian attending, including government and private sector participants. The Summit was organised in partnership with NSW DPI and the related R&D for Profit project focused on private sector extension. The evaluation reported a high level of satisfaction with the Summit.	Summit 1 Workshop and Evaluation Report (Provided with Milestone 2 report) Meeting minutes	<p>Reflections A decision was made to not spend project resources (and limited time) on communicating across the broader sector, but to selectively communicate the project progress and opportunities to have input in events.</p> <p>People were keen to be involved in the focus groups and the Summit in Wagga.</p> <p>The participatory nature of the project, involving stakeholders was important. Stakeholders felt it was important to be involved, to listen to what was being communicated, and have a say, and many felt compelled to ensure their group, industry, or organisations' views were represented.</p>

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			<p>The second forum took a different shape and was delivered as a national RDC (Research Development Corporation) collaboration forum on 2 November 2016. Here the results of the national assessment of extension services and the Extension Practice Community of Practice were presented. Importantly, some options for the way forward with the Community of Practice were discussed and some strategic planning on how to improve extension strategies within the RDC systems was held.</p>		<p><i>The overall experience of being involved in the project was important to our clients.</i></p> <p>Interpretation The project connected people in many ways. In the focus groups, there were new practitioners and experienced practitioners, policy makers and professionals across various institutions. There was value in the process of engaging Stakeholders in a conversation and providing an opportunity for attendees to learn about future needs and opportunities.</p> <p>It is difficult to prove outcomes from this interaction but the feedback suggested that the project activity contributed to strengthening of local and regional connections and networks.</p> <p>Action There is a strong need to communicate the project outputs and outcomes and 'launch' the Extension Hub.</p>
5c	Promote the developed extension resources for private and public sector stakeholders and create opportunities in collaboration with the leadership team of R&D4P 14-01-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not achieved	<p>The current published extension resources that have become a major part the Extension Practice CoP of achieve over 500 hits per month.</p> <p>The project partners/team has created an ongoing management system for the Extension Practice CoP including how to manage the</p>	<p>Extension Hub Evaluation Report(Attachment 7)</p> <p>Strategic Curation of Extension and Knowledge in Australia (Attachment 6)</p>	

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	011 project for these parties to share knowledge with the goal to improve extension services for primary producers		resources and create further collaborative links between experts and practitioners on an ongoing basis.		
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The project synthesised the research done into the extension system and identified a set of strategic actions that when implemented will improve extension services for farmers and fishers in Australia. These are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5 Areas for strategic action in Australia's agricultural extension system

Principles for an adaptive extension system	Outcomes sought	Strategic actions
Leadership and priority setting	There is a vision in place for the extension system covering, priorities, institutional arrangements and appropriate leadership.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clear ownership, resourcing and leadership for extension from government and industry. 2. Development and endorsement of a program for extension leadership development.
Resourcing	Private and public investment in extension and extension capacity is sufficient to meet stakeholder needs.	(See action 3)
Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career pathways for new entrants into extension are visible and effective. • Professional networks are available for new and existing extension personnel. • There is continual improvement in extension capability that draws on an established and evolving body of knowledge. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. A national extension capability and capacity plan, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A national agreement on professional standards for project design and evaluation and training of industry, government, and private deliverers to support implementation. • Resourcing the Extension Hub and Extension Practice CoP's. • Identify and resource capacity needs.
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater interaction between farmers, extension and research. • Cross-sectoral collaboration and co-ordination of extension providers for particular regional or cross-sectoral needs. • Novel approaches to engage marginalised or vulnerable farms in accessing information, advice and support. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. A national agreement between governments, RDC's and key Private sector organisations in relation to their role in extension. 5. A national agreement between government and agricultural research organisations related to the formation of programme teams around key issues and priorities including extension expertise in research project design, priority setting and translation.
Collaboration and coordination	Participants in the extension system willingly share knowledge and resources around shared issues/mutual benefits.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Regional extension strategies and agreements between extension professionals who commit to co-ordinate and co-deliver in defined areas of mutual interest at a regional level. 7. Cross-sectoral projects related to shared issues.

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Professionalism	Investors and providers of extension use agreed professional standards and a common the body of knowledge for extension design and evaluation.	(see Action 3)
Innovation	The extension system continually improves and adopts new thinking.	8. Invest in research and learning related to the extension system: how it functions; indicators of impact and evolving needs and issues.

3.2 Contribution to programme objectives

This project contributed significantly to programme objectives. It has done so through specific activities designed to improve the productivity and profitability of farmers through improvements in the extension system and the delivery of an innovative extension tool, the Extension Hub (which was part funded by this project) and the Extension Practice CoP. Additionally, in identifying actions that will improve the extension system in the long term, the project has the potential to impact the system into the future, if these actions are taken.

Specifically the project has contributed to program outcomes through:

- Generating an innovative extension tool to the direct benefit of farmers who use the Extension Hub (which was part funded by this project) and the Extension Practice CoP. This is also a really useful tool for extension practitioners and provides a direct benefit to farmers through its impact on facilitating a stronger extension system. It also in part fulfils a demand from farmers for greater direct interaction with researchers and research organisations as CoP increase the collaborations between all participants in the CoP, which includes farmers, extension practitioners and researchers.
- Strengthening pathways to adoption through the enhanced extension system. Looking forward, has created the foundations for further improvements through the evaluation and assessment of the system, identifying farmer's information needs and how they can be better met. Importantly this work includes a set of strategic actions that when implemented have the potential to improve extension services into the future.
- Establishing and fostering industry and extension collaborative networks. The project held a number of forums that went some distance in facilitating collaboration across the extension system and establishing a framework of forums for future collaboration.

The project was as the start of a much needed national conversation about the future of extension. The work delivered in this project has only scratched the surface of what needs to be done to achieve transformational change to extension services in Australia in order to meet the information needs of farmers into the future. The project identified that there is increasing demand from farmers for extension to support both tactical and strategic decision making. One of the outputs of this project is a set of strategic interventions that are required to achieve this into the future.

4 Collaboration

This extension project was a truly national project that was delivered in a collaborative basis at a number of levels.

4.1 Collaboration with project partners

This project was a collaboration between the following partners:

- New South Wales Local Land Services;
- Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry;
- Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture and Fisheries;
- University of Melbourne;
- Victorian Government Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources

The project partners provided expert input to the project which involved a considerable amount of in-kind time. They are also committed to the ongoing success of the Extension Practice Community of Practice and are working with RIRDC on an ongoing basis.

4.2 Collaboration with other organisations and specialist service providers

4.2.1 Research Development Corporations

The project ran a number of forums including two collaborative workshops with all 15 RDCs, state agencies and the University of Melbourne

The national Summit or workshop achieved excellent collaboration with the NSW Department of Primary Industries as they helped to host and design the summit. The outcomes of the summit directly informed ongoing strategic planning meetings within NSW DPI.

Additionally this project collaborated with the R&D for Profit project focused on private sector extension (led by Dairy Australia), stakeholders involved in the extension hub platform, and research and development corporations.

4.2.2 Collaboration with Dairy Australia Rural R&D4Profit project

The two extension projects that were successful in the first round of the Rural R&D for Profit programme, of which this is one, were inter-related. They were linked through project management arrangements as well as sharing some actions to avoid duplication.

Project management:

- Dairy Australia was a participant in all Expert Panel meetings. These meetings provided the opportunity for regular interaction and for identify synergies and any overlap as the projects are implemented.
- For all the RDC meetings there was good collaboration with Dairy Australia to coordinate communications and identify the needs of both projects.
- During the delivery of the RIRDC extension project there were a number of meetings with Dairy Australia to discuss project progress and sharing insights and lessons. This provided a two way opportunity to learn from each other, coordinate communication and other activities as well and spot any emerging risks so they could be managed.

The following page demonstrates the project links between Dairy Australia and RIRDC in the delivery of the two projects, noting that the Dairy Australia project is continuing.

The value of collaborative approach to project delivery has been well demonstrated during the delivery of this project. In particular collaborating with the Dairy Australia led R&D4Profit project has led to some real synergies in delivery, for example by using the same service provider to undertake much of the evaluation meant that the job was done quicker, at less cost and more effectively, rather than risking duplication and incurring additional costs.

Project level links

Figure 2 demonstrates how the project activities have fed into each other and are linked to a common overall outcome.

Figure 2 Project activity links



4.2.3 APEN

The project collaborated with the national extension peak body, the Australasia and Pacific Extension Network (APEN). APEN is a professional organisation for extension practitioners. During the course of the project RIRDC involved APEN in major events and engagements. Many of the members of the Expert Panel are APEN members which strengthened collaborative links between this project and APEN.

APEN remains involved in the Extension Practice CoP on an ongoing basis.

4.2.4 State Agencies

All States provided a key person to co-ordinate project activities such as the engagement in their state. The project established an ongoing relationship with these contacts. Based on this collaboration an ongoing project was developed for submission for funding.

The project established higher levels of collaboration with both Victoria and NSW through the delivery of project activities. The collaboration with the Victorian Department of Economic Development Jobs and Transport (DEDJTR) involved co-development of the Extension Hub and Knowledge Curation Tool to guide the curation of the extension resources.

Collaboration occurred with NSW DPI through the co-hosting of the National Summit held on 21 April 2016.

4.2.5 Regional NRM (LLS, CMA, NRM Regions)

Regions played a role in communication of this project through communicating to farmer's about the survey in their regions and identifying potential attendees for Focus Groups. They were also engaged at a more strategic level through the partnership with the LLS in NSW, consultation with the (56) Regional CEO's at the NRM Knowledge Conference in Coffs Harbour in May, and participation in the Expert Panel.

4.3 Collaboration with broader stakeholders

The project also established a broader stakeholder list that had minor collaboration outcomes.

4.4 Collaboration Outcomes

There are a number of major outcomes from the some of the above collaborations including:

- Interest from many RDCs in the Extension Practice CoP and the larger Extension Hub platform on which it is hosted (together with three other CoPs)
- A national collaboration platform to enable collaboration across the extension sector
- An ongoing Extension Practice CoP based around the expert panel
- Involvement in the National NRM Regions CEOs Forum
- Engagement in the ongoing collaborative forum
- Ongoing involvement and interaction with the University of Melbourne to publish project outputs
- Engagement of the wider stakeholder group in the Extension Hub.

Notably the greatest outcome of the collaborative approach was the momentum gained, with so many stakeholders vested in the project outcomes there was a real will to succeed in delivering the Extension Hub and the Extension Practice CoP and to participate in the events.

5 Extension and adoption activities

It is widely acknowledged that quality extension services contribute to the adoption of rural innovation and the long term sustainability of farms, and to farm gate returns.

There are three impacts from the extension and adoption activities undertaken by this project:

1. Industry and government will be aware of the current situation with extension services in relation to primary industries and what end user needs for extension are
2. Industry and government will be informed about where to start to strengthen extension in Australia and therefore be in a better position to direct policy accordingly
3. The Extension Hub and associated Extension Practice CoP could be a really influential ongoing collaboration and knowledge curation site for extension in Australia.

1. Understanding the current situation

Activities 3, 4 and 5 have given an analysis and overview of extension in Australia as it currently operates. These activities also gave an assessment of how the current system is servicing the information needs and demands of farmers and from industry.

The relevant activities involved engagement with key extension practitioners and experts from around Australia across most industries.

2. Strengthening the system

Collectively Activities 3, 4 and 5 have made head way into the improved collaboration within the extension network and provided guidance towards a way forward for further improvements to reduce the fragmentation in the future. While these are not extension and adoption activities in themselves, they will have had a measureable impact on the improvement of extension services and pave the way for further improvement, particularly in the collaborative delivery of extension services.

3. Extending the Extension Practice Community of Practice

Activity 2, the comprehensive literature review and curation of extension materials and the development of the Extension Practice CoP that hosts the materials, is an excellent resource to assist in the capacity building of all extension providers. Boosting its adoption so that a high proportion of extension practitioners use it has required some extension activity. Initially its existence was promoted through the Expert Panel and other stakeholder engagement and at this point it is well used and supported.

To remain relevant into the future this Extension Practice CoP will need to be maintained, RIRDC has committed to doing so until June 2017. RIRDC will also promote the Extension Practice CoP as appropriate to ensure its legacy.

6 Lessons learnt

6.1 Project Challenges

The project was challenging analytically, logistically and administratively this was compounded by rapidity of project delivery due to reduced project duration, compared to the timeframe in the application.

The analytical challenges involved working on a complex topic that does not have the rigour of a consolidated discipline like pure research. For example forum and survey participants had different understandings and views on what extension was and how it should be delivered. Extension is inherently complex and it is increasingly being delivered by a diversity of organisations so it is difficult to measure impact and attribution. The project was also a national scale project across a combination of more than 20 jurisdictions and industries, adding complexity. It was therefore important that the project develop an analytical framework that answered meaningful research questions rather than spend resources collecting data which might be interesting but not contribute to project outcomes.

There were also considerable logistical challenges given the national scale of the project and the emphasis placed on the engagement tasks so additional care was required to ensure that a representative sample of practitioners was achieved.

The project also involved high transaction costs that took time to manage. These costs were associated with the procurement, management, and integration of a team of more than 10 consultants.

However, given all these challenges the project delivered quality outcomes and some cases delivered significantly greater outcomes than it set out to do.

6.2 Lessons Learnt

Lessons learnt from this project included:

- When reviewing extension using a qualitative social research approach at a national level a high level of engagement is required and this takes time.
- Significant project management time and expertise is required to manage project elements in an integrated way.
- Contractual arrangements with project partners or organisations can take considerable project time and should be resolved before project commencement if possible.
- There needs to be more time allocated to working with key stakeholders and the broader stakeholder group. This will build social capital into the project to increase the chance of project impact and legacy of impact.
- It would have been beneficial to have included an additional activity where the project results are feedback to stakeholders once all of the final reports were delivered to RIRDC from the service providers. While this was done to a degree, there was room for greater feedback to stakeholders at the end of the project.

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- There is significant demand for this work to continue and this project should be seen as the start of the conversation on extension. There is also considerable momentum to continue with this work that if not done will be an opportunity lost.
- A longer time frame and consequent better ability to sequence the delivery of outputs may have resulted in greater engagement and better outcomes.
- This project provided a focal point for the greater collaboration across RDC's and government sector, and this is an area where there is great scope for increased collaboration on extension in the future.
- There is a high degree of interest from project participants (and others) to be part of an ongoing conversation about Australia's Extension needs. This project at least partially met that untapped need. The challenge is to provide a mechanism(s) where involvement is valued and used effectively to improve the system in future.

7 Appendix - additional project information

7.1 Project material and intellectual property

Table 6 Major reports created as part of this project

Attachment	Title	Author
1	Primary Industry Extension and Adoption in Australia	GHD
2	National Farmer survey on Extension Services – Market Research Report	Quantum Market Research
3	RIRDC Consolidating Extension Project Reporting – Final Report and Technical Specification (Extension Hub)	DEDJTR
4	EAFF User Guide (Extension Hub)	DEDJTR
5	Desktop Curation of Extension and Adoption Knowledge	University of Melbourne
6	Strategic Curation of Extension Knowledge in Australia	Cumbre consulting
7	Extension Hub Evaluation Report	Cumbre consulting
8	Taking Strategic Action to Improve Extension Services for Australian Farmers and Fishers (Synthesis report)	University of Melbourne
9	Case Studies Highlighting Excellence in Extension	Currie Communications
10	Project Evaluation Report	Broderick and Associates
11	Expert Panel Statement	The Expert Panel
12	Media and communications material	Various

7.2 Equipment and assets

None.

7.3 Media and communications material

The following media products were delivered:

- Media release – project inception/first summit
- Fact sheet – for project stakeholders
- Project outcomes circular sent to stakeholders
- Article for APEN publication
- Extension hub resources - refer to hub

In addition there were numerous presentations given to research development corporation forums and a national natural resource management forum.

Please note that the media strategy changed through the course of the project as there was little broader media interest. The communications strategy focused on key stakeholders rather than the general public.

7.4 Evaluation report

The Project Evaluation Report is presented as Attachment 10.

7.5 Budget

The final financial report within 60 days of submitting this final milestone report.



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