

Developing a formal staff induction and mentoring program for the Department of Primary Industries extensive livestock systems RD&E work group

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Introduction

It was identified in 2023 that there was a strong demand for a structured induction and mentoring program for the extension and technical profession within the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Extensive Livestock Systems RD&E work group (Hick et al., 2023). The objective was to support career development, build extension capability, and foster more effective engagement with producers across Queensland as part of a foundational training program. Such a program would build staff capability and confidence, enabling early-career officers to “hit the ground running”. This fits well with the implementation of DPI’s Grazing Extension Practice as a framework that applies grazier-centred extension delivery and approaches to increase the frequency and reliability of graziers investing in improved management practices (Willis & Nelson, 2023). Once established, the program could be adapted for broader audiences. The Queensland Reef Water Quality Program funded a structured mentoring program for DPI extension and technical staff and the development of a structured induction program with online resources.

Discussion

The Grazing Extension and Technical (GET) Mentoring Program was implemented in November 2024. Ten mentors and ten mentees participated in a six-month program with in-person and online sessions. Outcomes included increases in confidence, facilitation and presentation skills, clarity on career direction, and peer support. Participants highlighted the face-to-face workshop and mentor matching as strengths. A draft induction checklist has been prepared, incorporating the DPI human resources requirements and expanding to include requirements specific for a grazing extension role. Two online resources have been developed as part of the induction process. A Grazing Extension eGuide has been based on a spreadsheet drafted by senior extension officers outlining the key technical skills staff need. The eGuide assists staff to develop a professional development plan and provides access to online resources. DPI extension staff co-developed, with the RWQ funded Engagement and Capacity Building project and the University of Melbourne, an Introduction to Extension eLearning module for the wider audience of agricultural extension practitioners. These tools provide consistent, evidence-based guidance for new and existing officers, ensuring programs are delivered effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion

These initiatives fast-track professional development and safeguard the long-term capability and impact of the grazing extension workforce. Embedding these programs, aligned with the Extension Model of Practice and DPI’s Grazing Extension Practice framework, enhances professional identity, supports career progression, and strengthens the delivery of triple bottom line outcomes for Queensland's livestock industry.

References

- Hick, Z. et al (2023) *Proceedings NBRUC, Darwin, Northern Territory 22-25 August 2023*, Gympie, Queensland, North Australia Beef Research Council (page 18)
- Willis, M., & Nelson, B., (2023) *Proceedings NBRUC, Darwin, Northern Territory 22-25 August 2023*, Gympie, Queensland North Australia Beef Research Council (page 24)

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