

OFW Barriers and Enablers Survey

AI Summary: Overall, the project successfully delivered tangible benefits to participants who engaged, significantly enhancing their farm water management skills, knowledge, and planning capabilities, largely due to the dedication and adaptability of project staff who tailored approaches to local needs. Key successes highlighted strong collaboration (when fostered), the value of flexible delivery methods, and the positive impact of practical, on-farm activities and personalised support. However, the project's overarching impact was consistently challenged by difficulties in achieving wider landholder engagement, often attributed to a lack of immediate drought pressure making the topic less urgent, competition for farmer time, and an initial need for more diverse and concise delivery formats. Internally, while staff dedication and skill development were evident, recurring themes included challenges with initial project clarity, communication consistency, and responsiveness from central management, alongside a desire for greater autonomy and quicker adaptation of feedback. The most significant learnings underscore the critical need for future initiatives to incorporate greater flexibility in design and timelines, a deeper upfront understanding of diverse regional contexts and farmer priorities, clearer communication pathways, and highly adaptive, well-supported project management to maximise reach and effectiveness, ensuring resources and strategies are timely and relevant.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

Respondents	13 completed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 Project officers (on-ground delivery) • 5 Managers/executives (project oversight, support, advocacy) • 2 Others
Effectiveness of the project	Encouraging and supporting landholders developing Farm Water Management Plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.8 overall average (n=13) • 7.2 avg. manager/executive (n=5)

***Please note survey design and analyses was done in conjunction with Coutts J&R**



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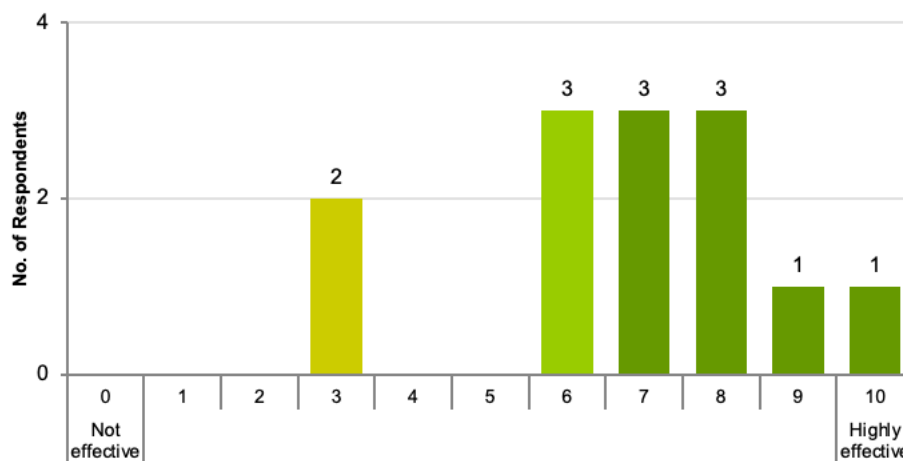


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- 6.5 avg. officer/other

project
(n=7)

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Building the skills of delivery staff/advisers in farm water management

- 7.5 overall average (n=13)
- 7.8 avg. manager/executive (n=5)
- 7.4 avg. project officer/other (n=7)



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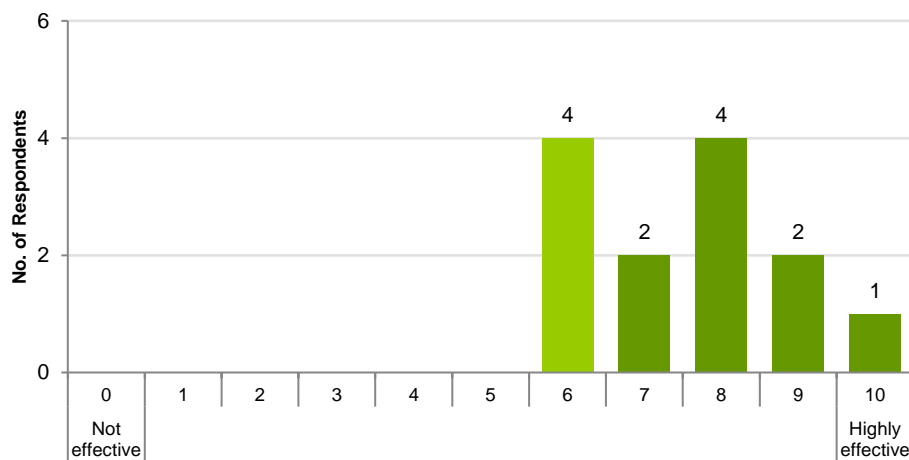
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Comments

AI Summary: Overall, feedback indicates the program provided valuable support for participants who engaged, particularly in developing farm water management plans and building skills, with these learnings considered especially beneficial given drought conditions. A significant and recurring challenge was achieving wider landholder engagement and attendance, which limited the project's overall impact despite the positive outcomes for those involved. Internally, while staff skills were enhanced, a need for further development in this area was noted. A key operational insight highlighted the considerable effort by project staff to adapt content for regional relevance, a crucial step for improving engagement and ensuring the project's applicability to local conditions.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *Attendance has been as issue [Manager/executive]*
- *For that attended our events I believe they have been encouraged to refine or develop new livestock watering plans. All participants have and are still being supported to develop their plans. [Manager/executive]*
- *we have had a change in team lead but this has allowed the business to have two takes of review by each team member [Manager/executive]*
- *No comments at this stage [Manager/executive]*
- *The program has helped to build staff skills, but there is a need to develop skills further in this area. [Manager/executive]*
- *The project was moderately successful but lack of engagement with producers limited this. [Farm water specialist]*



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- *The workshop were very good, what limited impact was getting enough farmers involved. Number were Ok but could have been better [Project officer]*
- *Encouraging and supporting landholders developing Farm Water Management Plans: Coming into drought I imagine that those landholders who took up this offer will appreciate their learnings. [Project officer]*
- *The project has been effective for those landholders that have been engaged in the development of a FWMP for their farm however wider engagement has been challenging. [Project officer]*
- *For those that attended field days, feedback was positive that skills/capacity were developed. [Project officer]*
- *Project staff from the western part of the Murray had to work very hard to convince project management that separate, regionally-applicable content was required in order to get landholders engaged with the project. Western project officers had to adapt project documents and resources to the conditions seen on farms in their region, so the project content was relevant for their landholders. This helped project officers gain a deeper understanding of the project. PO's worked very hard to adapt their approach within the scope provided by PP & PM to increase engagement and obtain meaningful positive outcomes for landholders in the project. [Project officer]*

What worked really well in helping the project to work towards its objectives?

AI Summary: The project's success was attributed to several key factors, prominently featuring strong collaboration between project partners, across the project officer team, and with external entities, which facilitated shared learning and effective event promotion. Flexibility in project design and delivery—allowing for diverse, modern participation methods and tailoring events to specific needs—was consistently praised. Crucially, direct on-ground engagement, understanding local farming operations, and dedicated follow-up by delivery partners were vital for securing participation. High-quality speakers, well-structured event formats (such as the two-day workshop), and the progressive improvement and modernisation of resources also significantly contributed. Finally, strong team cohesion, regular communication, and dedicated leadership were underscored as foundational to the positive outcomes.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *Good collaboration with project partners [Manager/executive]*
- *Our connection and understanding of farmers & their farming operations in our area helped us to engage with key people and to communicate information in a manner that will see them to continue focus on implementing effective livestock watering systems. [Manager/executive]*



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- *in the end the allowance of diversity for project completion - the take of how to reach the end goal being farmers - different touch points and moving into a more modern take of participation [Manager/executive]*
- *Flexibility [Manager/executive]*
- *Paul has worked tirelessly to make things work and adapt to challenges. [Manager/executive]*
- *Overwhelmingly it was the on-ground work of the delivery partners in contacting and following up participants - where this was done, there was good participation, where it was not, participation lacked. Modifying the workshop materials progressively and innovative delivery opportunities also helped. [Farm water specialist]*
- *Splitting the content across different days and linking it to other events to attract more people. Also, the quality of the speakers. [Project officer]*
- *I think the structured 2-day format worked well in that it gave participants an opportunity to digest the information provided at session 1, take some measurements and do some further thinking/ planning between sessions and then come back and start putting their plan together. [Project officer]*
- *There was a very good team of people who worked very well together to deliver the project on ground. The experts brought in were very knowledgeable and worked well with the group. [Project officer]*
- *Regular catch ups online with the project team, as led by Paul. This ensured we were on the right track and could learn from each other. [Project officer]*
- *The collaboration between project partners in sharing ideas and what worked for them in encouraging the engagement of landholders. The presentations from Natalee Ward & Kristy Howard in developing ideas for different ways to engage and communicate with farmers. Rebranding and reformatting the workbooks and plans into a more modern and workable format. [Project officer]*
- *I've come in late to the project, so it's hard to comment. However, flexibility in design/running of events meant individual events could be tailored to meet specific needs. I think this was worthwhile [Project officer]*
- *Collaboration between project officers across the district. We spoke frequently to share lessons learned, helpful resources, and to cross promote events from other organisations. External LLS staff not involved in the project were also integral in event scheduling and promotion. [Project officer]*

**What did not
work so
well?**

AI Summary: Several factors hindered the project's effectiveness. A dominant theme was the challenge of landholder engagement, significantly exacerbated by a lack of drought conditions which reduced the immediate relevance for farmers, who also often seek information through other channels and require a clear, immediate benefit before committing time. Internally, the project faced issues with confused or unclear direction, particularly in its early stages, and persistent communication problems including mixed messaging regarding roles,



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autonomy, and timelines. Delays in delivering crucial materials, and a perception that feedback or new approaches suggested by project staff were not always effectively adopted, also caused frustration. Furthermore, the initial project structure was sometimes seen as too rigid, with too much content requiring a significant time investment, and critical elements like demonstration sites were established too late to maximise their impact. Finally, the timing of project commencement and initial training led to missed opportunities and a later saturation of similar workshops, alongside a noted need for a deeper understanding of specific farmer groups' existing knowledge and challenges.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *Confused direction from project lead. Poor engagement. commencing the project when farm water was not in deficit. [Manager/executive]*
- *Lack of drought conditions in area meant there was not an immediate problem to drive broader interest in the project. Farmers in our region seek information from internet sources, consultants and retailers when developing plans to install infrastructure on their farms. The majority of our farmers need a problem and a clear understanding of how they (and their business) will benefit from attending an event or workshop, particularly an all day workshop prior to committing to attend. [Manager/executive]*
- *belief of group attendance and high levels of attendance - the update and fatigue of what is going on in the community has affected all projects not just farm water [Manager/executive]*
- *In the early stages of the project there seemed to be no real direction. [Manager/executive]*
- *Comms and engagement was a challenge. Delaying of early workshops has then led to a flood of similar workshops across the region at the last minute. The number of workshops possibly a little high. Landholder engagement needed more emphasis from the outset. The FWMP topic has fallen into the unknown unknowns category- ie, Landholders don't know they have an issue with water until it all hits the fan. Perhaps the groups delivering the project needed more buy-in from the outset, given it more focus and have a better understanding of the issues. [Manager/executive]*
- *Simply promoting workshops with little follow up. Also, trying to deliver a project to mitigate drought effects in the context of several quite wet years was always a hard ask. [Farm water specialist]*
- *The amount of content and time required, farmers aren't interested enough to invest the time needed to go through everything in person. Also, at the beginning, the program was a bit too structured, with no flexibility. [Project officer]*
- *Not a major issue, but in hindsight we probably should have allocated an extra 60 mins to the first session as we did have to rush through things a bit. [Project officer]*



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- *As much as the flexibility in timing was valuable. To have the demonstration sites completed 6 to 12 months earlier would have been valuable to allow the sites to establish so that landholders had experience with the function of the demonstration sites [Project officer]*
- *Holding the same session multiple times across the region, in reality to a small pool of potential workshop attendees, but having expectations of drawing larger audiences given the work and resources involved. [Project officer]*
- *The timing of the signing of contracts and initial training delayed the start of the project that resulted in a missed opportunity to engage with landholders in the quieter part of the farming calendar. Mixed messaging on the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved. In the beginning we were told that as delivery partners we know our district's farmers best and therefore we know the best way in which to engage with them to deliver the objectives of the project. This autonomy to deliver different types of events and follow up communications was restricted and controlled. Mixed messaging around the expected delivery timeframes of different components of the project. Release of the "definition of a workshop" document after the annual review where 2 consultants spoke to us about the need to try different types of events in which to engage landholders. These definitions did not always fit with what was recommended by the communication consultants. Lack of understanding of the knowledge that irrigation farmers have on managing and storing water and the challenges facing irrigation farming businesses during drought conditions. [Project officer]*
- *At the annual review in July 2024, the project officers had an incredible constructive brainstorming session, facilitated by external consultants, to address some of the issues with delivery experienced across the region. Most of the ideas and new approaches that came out of this review were knocked back or not effectively adapted for use in the delivery and promotion of the project. Crucial materials needed for delivering the project were not received in a timely manner, and often created without consultation with PO's, therefore causing further delay while they were adapted for use. [Project officer]*



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Based on the barriers/ constraints encountered, what changes/ actions were made to overcome these? – and how successful was this?

AI Summary: To overcome encountered barriers, the project implemented several key actions, prominently shifting towards more personalised landholder engagement through increased one-on-one contact and collaboration with local entities like MIL to tailor content for specific regional needs (e.g., irrigation areas). Greater flexibility in delivery models, when applied, and improved communication materials contributed positively. Project officers played a critical role by proactively adapting approaches, tailoring content to current landholder pain points, and developing revised work plans, sometimes moving away from structured workshops to more engaging on-farm



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activities. While some managers perceived limited overall change in the delivery model, and frustrations persisted regarding internal communication, responsiveness from project leadership, and the timeliness of support, the adaptability and dedication of project staff were repeatedly cited as instrumental in navigating these difficulties and ultimately achieving positive project deliverables.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *Unsure of changes. There appeared to be no significant variation in the delivery model [Manager/executive]*
- *Much of the material for the project was developed for non-irrigated farming areas. Generally undulating country with dams filled with rainfall run-off. Our irrigation areas are flat and in low rainfall areas. Most of the farms have access to livestock water except in extreme droughts. The water can become expensive (as there is a water market) and access and other cost controlled by Murray Irrigation Ltd (MIL) operational rules. To overcome this we worked with MIL to present on their rules and operational plans under different climatic (irrigation water availability) conditions and explained the water savings of reticulated livestock watering systems. This in addition to the other criteria covered by extension of this project. Based on feedback this approach was successful. [Manager/executive]*
- *more one on ones - higher content discussed at grass roots level - follow up and weekly conversations - farmer contact has been high but attendance at big group events low [Manager/executive]*
- *Eventually once more flexibility was applied it worked well [Manager/executive]*
- *Improved comms material was introduced, additional staff training, increased lead time and planning of events. [Manager/executive]*
- *Landholder engagement increased when multiple personal approaches were made. Communication improved markedly when an experienced professional was engaged. [Farm water specialist]*
- *Splitting the content across different days and linking it to other events to attract more people. [Project officer]*
- *Overall I feel the project worked really well and achieved its goals for the SE region. The project was really well supported in terms of materials, resources and support. Even though workshop attendance was good, I feel like we would have had a lot more interest if summer was hot/dry and water was a bigger issue in the lead up to running the workshops. [Project officer]*
- *getting landholders past the initial stage of the FWMP was a challenge. Individual 1 o 1 contact assisted. [Project officer]*
- *-Review of delivery modes, attempting to deliver content in conjunction with other events/activities - not successful -Communications/messaging/branding was reviewed towards the end of the project, where if this was done early in the*



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	<p>piece would have created more consistency - somewhat successful in that we have more professional resources to distribute [Project officer]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A delivery work plan was established and approved through the SNSW Innovation Hub and LLS. This work plan changed the structure of the activities that were to be delivered in terms of moving away from structured all day workshops to more engaging on farm extension activities. [Project officer] • One of the largest constraints I faced was landholders managing drought conditions at the same time events were being run. This was overcome by tailoring the presentations/content to target current knowledge gaps/pain points for landholders. Achieving this was through collaboration of projects to support multiple speakers and resources available to landholders on event days. [Project officer] • The project plan and approach to engagement was frequently reviewed and adapted based on feedback from landholders, agency staff, other project officers and FWMP project management. Tools supplied by external consultants were adapted and implemented to try increase engagement with project materials. Numerous project officers from across the region asked for more flexibility to try and pair FWMP content with other events to increase attendance and were knocked back. Competing workload was overcome internally and has resulted in positive outcomes for the project, as reflected in the deliverables. Confusion in outcomes and delivery methods was discussed throughout the last 18 months, with answers coming very late, or conflicting other information given. This made it extremely difficult to adequately deliver the project in a timely manner and support our landholders with their involvement in the project. The project manager responded when it suited their schedule and expected the same of the project officers. This was very difficult as many project officers are part time and have numerous other commitments they need to manage. Project manager has shown more interest in berating project officers, rather than assisting them with project development. Support and guidance would have been a much more beneficial response for all involved, especially considering how difficult all groups found it to register participants in the project. Issues raised by project officers were not adequately addressed, and similar themes addressed in meetings at the beginning of the project were still being discussed at the end of the project. Despite all of the significant challenges facing successful delivery of the project (both internal to the project, and external with the public), I feel proud and amazed at the positive outcomes and deliverables that have been achieved in the last 18 months. I think this points to the incredible determination, versatility and skill of the organisations and their project officers. [Project officer]
<p>What approach/ strategies were used to maximise engagement/ grower</p>	<p>AI Summary: To maximise grower participation, a multifaceted approach was employed, often moving beyond traditional workshop formats towards more personalised and flexible engagement. Successful strategies included delivering shorter "Walk and Talks" on-</p>



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**participation
in the project
activities?**

farm, conducting one-on-one meetings, and utilising direct communication channels like phone and text. Tailoring event content to current seasonal conditions, specific local needs (e.g., by collaborating on farm tours or bringing in relevant speakers), and showcasing innovative practices at chosen farm locations were also key. Developing practical tools, such as an online planning document and an integrated FWMP calculator for scenario planning, was well-received. Promotional efforts utilised diverse channels, including social media (with Facebook noted for reaching new audiences), and while integrating project activities with other field days had mixed success, it was a common tactic. Crucially, project officers demonstrated constant self-evaluation and adaptation, frequently collaborating to brainstorm and implement strategies responsive to direct landholder feedback.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *None apparent [Manager/executive]*
- *We responded to limited engagement by delivering shorter walk and talks and follow one on one meetings and used phone and text messaging. we also chose farm locations that included innovative practices to stimulate interest. All that came were well engaged with the project however we would have liked greater attendance. We developed an online planning document that has been used in one on one meetings with farmers. This has been well received along with the personal delivery. [Manager/executive]*
- *we have a strong supporter base with lack of available time - the time of the year has been challenging for many reasons but the diversity of wanting to develop the project with the project lead has been exceptionally impressive [Manager/executive]*
- *Not being ridged in the definition of the various outputs [Manager/executive]*
- *Mixing the FWMP topic with other field day events helped to increase landholder participation and better understanding of the issues. [Manager/executive]*
- *Multiple promotions in advance of the workshops/events, multiple approaches to landholders especially personal contact. [Farm water specialist]*
- *Splitting the content across different days and linking it to other events to attract more people. Was very successful [Project officer]*
- *The project was advertised through a whole range of channels including social media, direct email, flyers in local rural stores and media releases. These avenues proved to be successful to a large degree, although one location proved to be particularly challenging (Bigga). [Project officer]*
- *Various promotional methods. Calling landholders who we thought would benefit from the project [Project officer]*
- *Combining farm water field days with other field day - not successful, but could have been limited by poor weather conditions -Direct outreach to farmers - not successful - little interest in topic due to their existing, guaranteed water*



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	<p>availability -Facebook promotion to community groups - successful - reached new audiences [Project officer]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the cancellation of a workshop through lack of registrations we looked at the possible reasons why this occurred, spoke to different landholders on what sort of events they preferred and the timing of these events. We then came up with the concept of a shorter workshop held on farm with a farm tour of the landholder's stock watering system. The Farm Walk and Talks allowed farmers to fit the workshop into their busy day and was a practical way in which to deliver the objectives of the workshop. An electronic template combining all the different aspects of the FWM Plan plus the supplied FWMP calculator in one easy to use spreadsheet has been well received by participants. Participants are able to use both drought and average local weather data in which to compare the difference between the 2 types of seasons and to scenario plan. This has been eye opening for many. [Project officer] • Acknowledging that the field days had particular topics to cover but supplementing this with presentations that covered current issues as a result of current seasonal conditions. Hence the collaboration of projects/funding allowed space to design events that would focus on particular issues, specific to farm system or location. That being tailoring events to provide farm/tours (through containment yards etc) or support attendance of a speaker of interest. [Project officer] • PO's were in constant communication with one another to discuss challenges with engagement and to brainstorm ways to increase interest in the project. This was invaluable, and when combined with resources from external consultants, finally we began to see an increase in engagement from landholders in our region. Constant self-evaluation and adaptation were key to securing engagement. We had to use every tool at our disposal to encourage people to become involved with this project and were able to tailor our approach based on what landholders were telling us. [Project officer]
Usefulness of project allowing flexible time frames for delivery of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten respondents (83%) felt that allowing flexible time frames for delivery of activities was useful for delivering the project (two were unsure). • Only two would have preferred for events to be locked in (e.g. must be run in reporting period 2). <p>Comments</p> <p>AI Summary: The project's provision for flexible timeframes was generally viewed as beneficial and crucial, allowing delivery partners to tailor event schedules to landholder availability, seasonal conditions, and diverse farming operations, which "greatly assisted" with attendance. The 18-month window provided "plenty of scope" for many to adapt. However, this positive aspect was somewhat counterbalanced</p>



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by initial project delays due to late contract signing, which resulted in missed key engagement periods and a feeling that early adherence to local knowledge on optimal timing for specific activities (like demo farm promotion) would have been more effective. While flexibility generally helped avoid running events merely to meet quotas, the pressure of overarching deadlines could still sometimes compromise ideal scheduling, with a suggestion that an even longer timeframe might better accommodate certain agricultural cycles.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *Our key engagement months are February after School returns and July and August outside school holidays. Due to the late signing of contracts we lost 2 key months and needed to focus on engagement via promoting the demo Farms early in the project. Unfortunately we were directed to hold off on the demo farm promotion and focus on workshop delivery. We feel following our local knowledge would have built more engagement earlier in the project. [Manager/executive]*
- *out on farm parties run very different schedules along with their availability to water - flexibility has been paramount [Manager/executive]*
- *This didn't worry me particularly. [Farm water specialist]*
- *The 18 month window was really good - it provided plenty of scope to work with and enabled us to monitor seasonal conditions and time the delivery at a point when we felt would attract the most interest. [Project officer]*
- *Landholders have high demands and there needs to flexibility to enable we fit with their needs [Project officer]*
- *Flexibility was required to have the chance to adapt in planning so was very useful. [Project officer]*
- *Flexible timeframes were useful in delivering the project however with the double cropping nature of irrigation farming a 2 year timeframe would have allowed a greater opportunity to fully engage with farmers. [Project officer]*
- *Hard to say one way or another. Based on my experience pushing back events avoided running a field day for the sake of running a field day. However, a push back of events combined with a looming deadline didn't necessarily avoid 'running field days for the sake of running field days anyway'. I think if events are going to be locked into a certain timeframe/period, this needs to be met with the acknowledgment that seasons will do as they please and the events that are run need to reflect this. [Project officer]*
- *Tailoring the schedule of our deliverables allowed each organisation to try and run events in their region, to best suit their landholders schedules. This greatly assisted with obtaining attendees at events. [Project officer]*

**Examples of
where
project
participants**

AI Summary: Project participants, including both landholders and project staff, experienced tangible benefits. Landholders gained



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**(growers or
delivery
staff) have
benefited
from the
project**

increased understanding of stock water needs, improved access to resources and networks, and practical knowledge for developing customised farm water plans, with many surprised by factors like dam evaporation rates. The sharing of information during events like "Walk and Talks" proved highly valuable, facilitating discussions on best practices, reliable equipment, and innovative solutions. Project staff significantly enhanced their technical knowledge, particularly in farm water management and the use of planning tools, and also developed stronger problem-solving skills, resilience, and networks. While some benefits were still emerging for managers, feedback from those directly involved indicated that attendees consistently took away valuable lessons, often finding the information more impactful than anticipated, especially given drought conditions.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *Unclear at this time [Manager/executive]*
- *The Walk and Talks enabled much sharing of information. e.g best trough design-suppliers, most reliable Solar Pump brands. A number of participants noted the limited life of one brand they were using and heard of the value and quality of an alternate brand as seen at a Walk and Talk. The sharing of key information regarding a highly regarded watering system designer. At the workshops participants shared their knowledge of padding and protecting walk ways to dams and around troughs. One key learning was in our region with low rainfall and high evaporation we need a secure alternate water supply via the irrigation system, bore or river. [Manager/executive]*
- *our project lead has benefited in many ways from the development of the legal plans, meeting a massive new network but also diversifying thinking as to what is achievable [Manager/executive]*
- *Contact from individual landholders and project team members after workshops indicated these people had benefitted from the project. [Farm water specialist]*
- *Increased understanding stock water needs; improved technical/advisory expertise; improved access to resources and networks [Project officer]*
- *Staff delivering the project gained significant technical knowledge, especially in the use of the farm water calculator tool (and how to use it to develop a farm water management plan). Feedback from participants was very positive as the workshop gave them some good base knowledge to be able to develop their own, customised farm water plan. [Project officer]*
- *I have definitely learnt a lot as a project officer in my understanding of how to go about determining stock water needs and the resources available. This helped me greatly when delivering the project. Most landholders were surprised by the amount of evaporation occurs from their dams and the need to take this into account when doing a water budget [Project officer]*



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- *-Delivery staff: Better informed on the topic of farm water management, generally, where previous knowledge gap existed. [Project officer]*
- *Feedback from participants at all events has been positive with all landholders taking something away from the day. Follow up feedback sessions are proving to be beneficial with landholders learning more about the water they have available and where there is potential to change and expand their existing stock watering system. [Project officer]*
- *Although engagement was difficult, those that did attend walked away better for it. 9 times out of 10 attendees said that they took something away from the day. More often than not the feedback was that the lessons learnt and hence the changes that should be made were a lot more confronting than initially thought. Also we're in a drought - we're all better off for knowing this stuff. [Project officer]*
- *Project staff have increased resilience, problem solving and networking after working on the delivery of this project. PO's also have increased technical knowledge, and closer relationships with involved landholders. Landholders who participated in the project have increased understanding of their water use and requirements, and have been able to hear/see what other landholders in the region have done to improve their water quality. [Project officer]*

The project governance included LLS as the project manager and the SNSW Innovation Hub as the project proponent. In what way did this relationship support or hinder your activities?

AI Summary: The impact of project governance on delivery was varied. Many found the support from LLS and SNSW Innovation Hub, particularly in administration, project management, and the provision of resources like the farm water calculator, to be fundamental to the project's success, allowing delivery agents to focus on on-ground activities. The project manager was also cited by some for facilitating connections and providing appreciated flexibility. However, significant challenges were also reported, primarily concerning a lack of initial clarity regarding the project management structure, roles, and delivery expectations, which differed from previous experiences. This led to confusion and a feeling of being constricted for some experienced delivery partners. Mixed messaging, perceived inflexibility in adapting to changing farmer engagement preferences, and, for some project officers, a lack of timely support and a critical rather than supportive approach from project management, created hurdles, although one manager noted an improvement in support over the last year.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *We needed a clearer understanding of this project management arrangement and how the project was to be delivered. It was different to most projects that we have delivered and or delivering. I am not sure if it was the structure, how the project communicated and our-my ability to comprehend the communications.*



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We were well supported with materials & training and at times confused by some of the communication. [Manager/executive]

- *We have had a varied experience with LLS but overall with a few changes the program is working well [Manager/executive]*
- *The project was not hindered by this [Manager/executive]*
- *The LLS and SNSWHub carried the load of administration and project management which takes time and expertise allowing the delivery agents to focus on delivery. [Manager/executive]*
- *I was removed from this mainly, but once or twice it seems differences in requirements or expectations were not clear at the start. This caused minor hindrances to me. [Farm water specialist]*
- *Having the resources available (e.g. farm water calculator tool, farm management plan templates etc) in combination with a project manager position to oversee the whole thing was a huge benefit and fundamental to the success of the three workshops delivered in the South East region. [Project officer]*
- *LLS was highly supportive and was instrumental in the success of our on ground works [Project officer]*
- *This helped by facilitating connections with other project delivery staff, as well as connecting to topic experts, whether LLS staff or consultants. Paul's availability and flexibility was appreciated. [Project officer]*
- *As mentioned previously I found that the roles and responsibilities of all involved was not clearly defined from the beginning of the project with messaging changing on how the project should be delivered throughout the life of the project. As a delivery partner with many years for experience in landholder engagement in our district we at times felt constricted in the way in which we were delivering the project objectives. An overall project manager was needed to bring the groups together and share information and resources which was done well but at times we were left to feel that we were the only delivery partner that was finding engagement with landholders challenging. The structure of the project delivery was too inflexible to a changing environment in how farmers engage with extension activities and how to best meet their preferred methods of engagement and learning. [Project officer]*
- *As mentioned, I have only been a part of the project team for a short period of time. I've found the governance and management team to be very helpful and knowledgeable, not only on the project itself, but also for providing support to project stuff for general tasks - such as reporting, collating supporting documents etc. [Project officer]*
- *The project manager was not very supportive, and tended to be highly critical of project officers during this project. Project officers were not given the tools they needed in a timely manner or appropriate format from the project manager. Both the PM & PP spent more time questioning and criticizing PO's than they did supporting and problem-solving project roadblocks. PP changed their approach in the last 12 months and have been an integral support in the delivery of this project. [Project officer]*



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Biggest learnings from the project? And, if you were responsible for designing the next phase of the project, what would you change?

AI Summary: Key learnings emphasised the critical need for clearer project direction, enhanced upfront understanding of diverse regional farming systems (particularly distinguishing irrigation from rain-fed areas) and landholder information-seeking behaviours before designing future phases. A strong recommendation emerged for more adaptive and flexible delivery models, favouring shorter, practical, on-farm activities and hands-on planning sessions over traditional workshops, recognising that many farmers seek higher-level learning and utilise existing advisory networks. Earlier and more strategic event planning, consistent communication strategies (potentially engaging experts sooner), and the iterative refinement of project materials were also highlighted. Furthermore, recognising the dynamic nature of farming, future efforts should allow for greater responsiveness to on-ground conditions and direct landholder feedback to improve engagement, possibly by integrating such topics into broader drought resilience initiatives and clearly defining success metrics from the start.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *more clear direction and management [Manager/executive]*
- *Farm management in our irrigation region is dynamic with the regular adoption of innovative practices. This can mean changes of livestock type to changes from breeding to finishing stock and the adoption of innovative grazing and feeding practices.. We need to understand current farming systems and practices prior to planning for a project like this. Very few of our farmers will do all of the planning and design work themselves. They will engage appropriate advisers, retailers and internet resources before implementing infrastructure projects. Generally higher level learning is all that is required. Short, focused in the field extension activities with follow distribution of additional related material appears to be the most effective approach to extension at this time. Current and innovative extension practices need to be evaluated to include in the planning of the next phase of the project. [Manager/executive]*
- *Support is paramount from the project lead and clarity - the collective are an impressive group of individuals. We would definitely love to discuss diversity of areas and needs basis [Manager/executive]*
- *Plan events earlier and get the promotion right [Manager/executive]*
- *I think I would add this project as a theme into a larger body of work/project around Drought resilience with other themes or topics covered. [Manager/executive]*
- *The project material ie. workbooks and PowerPoint presentations, appeared more easily understood and accepted as the project continued - due to these being progressively revised and simplified. This is a normal experience in such projects in which I have been involved, so I while it would be nice to define some changes*



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for future projects, I suspect the process would end up much the same. [Farm water specialist]

- *In the past we have run 'farm water' workshops which have been largely information delivery. My biggest learning from these workshops was the value in stepping landholders through the process of developing their own farm water management plan. In my view they gained a lot more value from this format and walk away with a concrete plan rather than general information. [Project officer]*
- *A lot about water budgeting and planning and the resources available to get things done. It added to my knowledge of engaging and facilitating works with landholders [Project officer]*
- *Irrigation regions view this topic differently to rain-fed/dam storage regions so there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to or perspective of drought across the region at large -We learnt who the landholders of our region are, and about their water needs/assured stock and domestic water. -Set the project up for success by examining the sub-regions and learning about what knowledge is desired. -Develop a communications plan in the first months and aim for consistency. -Be clear on the metrics of success from the beginning. [Project officer]*
- *My biggest leaning from this project is that we need to take a good look at how we structure and engage with landholders in a space where they want to be. This may be on farm or dinner events that are shorter, concise and engaging for landholders. Looking at different ways in which the information is presented including both written and electronic versions. Engaging Kristy Howard and Natalee Ward earlier in the project would have been very beneficial. [Project officer]*
- *Haven't spent enough time on the project to answer this appropriately. [Project officer]*
- *Things can change very quickly on the ground. At the time of inception, I'm sure there was a healthy appetite for this project. However, by the time PO's were trying to deliver this in the region, the interest was very minimal, and this made landholder engagement very difficult. I think a key learning is that adaptation during a project is integral to its success. If PO's were able to make changes to deliverables to better reflect what landholders were after/telling them, I believe the engagement in this project would have been much higher. [Project officer]*

What key message would you like DAFF and the Future Drought Fund (project funder) to know about the project?

AI Summary: The project is highly valued for its funding support, which enabled the development of critical skills, knowledge, and lasting resources in livestock water management for participating landholders, and has provided a successful blueprint for future similar initiatives in some regions. While broader engagement faced challenges, the core objective of enhancing water security is seen as essential. Key messages for the funder emphasise that longer funding phases are more effective for projects built from the ground up, and critically, that future projects require greater flexibility in design and delivery. This adaptability



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would allow teams to better respond to specific regional needs, diverse farming systems, and evolving conditions, thereby maximising impact and ensuring quality outcomes, particularly if project timing can align more closely with acute landholder needs.

Model used: Gemini 2.5 Pro Preview 05-06

- *As a deliverer of extension in the NSW Murray Irrigation area we express appreciation for the funding support received. We know from feedback that everyone we have engaged with so far in this project has built skills and knowledge that will guide the enhancement of existing and the construction of future livestock water systems. Though we are disappointed with total engagement to date we know that word of mouth-pub conversations sees the distribution of livestock water information and extension material extend well beyond those that have participated in the program. [Manager/executive]*
- *The end objective is such a great concept and should continue to evolve once results are achieved - knowing the impact of water in our communities, supporting farming techniques is such a now and ongoing important support [Manager/executive]*
- *Nothing as far as I am concerned [Manager/executive]*
- *longer funding phases produce better outcomes when building a project from the ground up. Shorter phase projects are Ok when adding on to existing works or existing projects. [Manager/executive]*
- *I think the project addressed a clear need in a more or less effective way but the timing could have been better. If possible, respond to issues, in this case, lack of drought preparedness, more speedily, ideally while the problem(s) are still current. [Farm water specialist]*
- *This project was highly successful in the SE region which is reflected in the feedback from participants. The project enabled us to refine previous 'farm water' information days into a workshop that had far greater impact and will really help farmers in their planning and preparation for dry times. This project has given us a blue-print for how we can run this workshop in the future. [Project officer]*
- *A highly valuable project. Continuing to support landholders to be more resilient and selfsufficient in their operation is essential as their will be ever increasing demands on governments and landholders as climate change alters how we need to farm [Project officer]*
- *This project has resulted in legacy products, resources and learnings. [Project officer]*
- *Overall the project has wide reaching benefits to livestock farmers in ways in which they can maximise their stock water and what they need to consider during drier times. With the resources that have been created through the project it will allow landholders to access the information when they need it. One consideration if duplicated in other areas, the project must be flexible enough to*



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change to the specific needs of each district in terms of extension and farming systems. [Project officer]

- *Flexibility [Project officer]*
- *Despite the challenges during the delivery phase of this project, there have been some great results come out of the engagement with landholders. Please consider increased flexibility for future projects, so if challenged arise during delivery, PO"s are able to pivot and adapt, to ensure quality outcomes are able to be achieved. [Project officer]*



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