

OUR IMPACT 2025

A series of **case studies** that capture the unique impact of the Southern NSW Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub



SOUTHERN NSW
Innovation Hub

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE,
LANDSCAPES AND COMMUNITIES



MEL: Tracking progress, strengthening impact

A formalised process for ongoing Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) provides Southern NSW Innovation Hub with an opportunity for self-assessment, informed decision-making and improved delivery.

BACKGROUND

When the Hub launched in April 2021, establishing an effective MEL system was a key priority to provide clarity on investment use and demonstration of impact. The Hub engaged specialist monitoring and evaluation firm Coutts J&R to develop a framework that aligned with Federal Government's MEL requirements for all eight Hubs funded through the Future Drought Fund (FDF).

Dr Jeff Coutts, Director of Coutts J&R said, *"The inclusion of the 'L' in MEL is a very good one and very explicit in the FDF programs around the Hub and its other programs."*

"It's not just gathering data for reporting and demonstrating impact but it's also about developing lessons on the way on what's working, what's not working, what are the gaps and what could the Hub do better. That's a critical part of evaluation," he said

COLLABORATION STRENGTHENS MEL

At the heart of robust MEL practices is collaboration. The Hub's participatory culture underpins the MEL framework and helps to build relevant programs, strengthen trust through transparency, and gather diverse perspectives.

Since its inception, the Hub has worked closely with its diverse partner and collaborator organisations, including industry and farming groups and the broader southern NSW community.

Jeff pointed out that, *"Through MEL we can bring together what these different deliverers are doing, the people they are working with, the topics they are working on, how they're working together, what they're learning from and what they're doing."*

"There are expectations between the Hub and its partners around long-term evaluations through MEL systems. There is consistency from these deliverers that allows the capture of learning activities and impact, which is very important," Jeff said.



SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS HUB IMPACT

Jeff believes showcasing how the Hub supports farmers and communities in southern NSW is critical to demonstrating effective funding use. However, measuring this impact can be challenging.

Jeff said, *“The real challenge with agricultural programs is being able to capture the benefits and impact from all those activities, and from the communication products and collaborative efforts on the ground.”*

In June 2025, the Hub surveyed 70 primary producers, agronomists and advisors to secure quantitative data. Operations & Partnership Manager at the Hub, Nick Morgan said the survey proved invaluable, confirming the Hub’s impact.

“This survey provided us with broad scale data on actions farmers in our region are taking to prepare for drought. It found that nearly 78 per cent of participants believe Hub programs are helping to manage the impacts of drought and climate change – giving it a score of seven out of 10 or higher,” Nick said

CONTINUING MEL FOR FUTURE MEANINGFUL CHANGE

According to Jeff Coutts, the Hub’s establishment phase is complete, but MEL remains central to its ongoing development.

“The first four years from 2021 were important to the Hub in working with stakeholders and collaborators. It was also when members of the public gained a greater understanding of how the Hub works and how it can improve the system,” he said.

As the Hub evolves, MEL insights will remain critical in shaping programs that benefit farmers and communities in southern NSW.

Jeff said, *“We want to listen better to producers, so that those impacts on the ground are improved through good monitoring and evaluation processes.”*

“Now we really have the opportunity to properly pick up that flow-on benefit. We all need to keep working together cohesively to gather data, analyse results and develop strategies to strive towards improvement. That leads to meaningful change and impact,” he said.

FARMERS TAKING ACTION

Nick said, “Farmers engaging in Hub programs and initiatives are finding them useful. Following participation, they are taking actions to build drought preparedness.”

When asked what actions they’ve been prompted to take following engagement with the Hub:

- 35% made a practice change in what they are currently doing (or advising)
- 19% invested in infrastructure
- 46% fine-tuned current practices; and
- 37% planned to make future changes.

Many respondents referred to on-farm actions more than two years after participating in Hub programs, including stock confinement areas, soil amelioration, maintaining groundcover, planting ideal pastures and weed control.

Cindy Cassidy, Director of the Hub said the results demonstrate the quality of work being carried out by the team and partners.

“In a very short time we have been able to demonstrate a tangible impact between our support for landholders and communities in southern NSW, and the way that farming and farming systems are adapting to drought and climate pressures.”

The survey insights clarify which programs are achieving results and where there may be gaps, all of which will inform future programming.



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