

FROM THE GROUND UP:

Grassroots Perspectives on Extension
and Adoption



Grassroots Extension and Adoption Appreciative Inquiry Workshop Report

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From the Ground Up: Grassroots Perspectives on Extension and Adoption

Executive summary

This report captures the collective insights of grassroots groups from across Southern NSW, gathered through two Appreciative Inquiry (AI) workshops exploring the future of agricultural extension and adoption (E&A). Fourteen participants from twelve farming systems groups, Landcare organisations, and producer networks contributed their perspectives, offering a coordinated grassroots voice that has often been absent from national reviews and inquiries into E&A over the past decade.

The workshops were convened in recognition of this gap: while grassroots groups are central to adoption on the ground, their lived experience and perspectives have not consistently informed system-level frameworks or policy directions. Capturing and embedding their voice was therefore a critical step in shaping the *Pathways to Impact Framework* and ensuring that it is practical, grounded, and supported by the right resourcing and capacity-building approaches.

It is important to note that the findings presented here reflect the perspectives of the grassroots groups which participated. They are not intended to represent the views of all grassroots organisations across Australia, nor the perspectives of other stakeholders such as government agencies, Research and development Corporations (RDCs), or industry bodies which engage with grassroots groups in different ways. Rather, this report provides a focused insight into how these particular groups see their role, the challenges they face, and the conditions they believe are needed for adoption to flourish.

Grassroots groups describe themselves as closest to farmers, deeply trusted in their communities, and essential to achieving adoption at scale. Their perspectives provide an important user-led lens for the *Pathways to Impact Framework* and can inform future investment models, helping to ensure E&A in Australian agriculture becomes more consistent, inclusive, and impactful.

Key insights

The two online AI workshops revealed a clear and consistent vision from grassroots groups about what they see drives effective E&A. While the conversations spanned diverse contexts and challenges, participants returned time and again to a set of core themes that are based on trust, relevance, and long-term impact. These insights reflect both the lived experience of working directly with farmers and the systemic conditions needed to support adoption at scale.

1. Trust is the foundation of adoption: Independent, credible, and unbiased advice, alongside peer-to-peer networks, are the strongest enablers of practice change.
2. Extension must be practical and farmer-centred: Farmers want support that is hands-on, efficient, and relevant to their businesses, with approaches tailored to local contexts, decision-makers (in the farming business), and learning styles.
3. Continuity and scale are essential: Stop-start funding erodes confidence and capability. Multi-year, program-based investment is needed to deliver lasting impact.
4. Extension is a profession: Adoption requires valuing extension as a professional discipline, with structured training, mentoring, and career pathways.

5. Co-design and flexibility drive ownership: Frameworks and programs must be co-designed with farmers and grassroots groups to ensure relevance, uptake, and adaptability, while avoiding compliance burdens.
6. Legacy matters: Success depends on leaving behind networks, repositories of knowledge, and workforce capability that endure beyond project cycles.

Key considerations

The workshops surfaced a set of potential shifts that could strengthen E&A. These are not prescriptive recommendations, but rather considerations for further exploration by funders, policymakers, the Hub, and grassroots groups. They identify opportunities where rethinking current approaches could enhance adoption outcomes. At a system level (policy and investment), participants suggested there is value in exploring multi-year investment models, mechanisms to safeguard independence, better resourcing of co-design, and strategies to preserve legacy knowledge and networks beyond project cycles.

At an industry and farmer delivery level, opportunities were identified for the Hub and grassroots partners to co-design farmer-centred programs, develop practical and inclusive approaches, and strengthen organisational capability. This included resourcing co-design properly, providing accessible tools and support, fostering communities of practice, and embedding the *Pathways to Impact Framework* into everyday delivery in a way that is enabling rather than burdensome.

Taken together, these considerations represent both immediate opportunities and longer-term directions for system and practice change. They provide a foundation for dialogue between funders, grassroots groups, and the Hub about how best to create a more consistent, inclusive, and impactful E&A system in Australian agriculture.

System-level considerations (funders and policy makers)

Consideration	Key suggestions
Shift from Projects to Programs	• Replace fragmented, short-term projects with multi-year, program-based investments. • Embed adoption planning and meaningful Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) from the outset. • Design programs to leave a legacy of knowledge, networks, and capability.
Build and Protect Trust	• Treat trust and independence as non-negotiable foundations. • Resource farmer-to-farmer learning, mentoring, and trusted adviser roles. • Safeguard unbiased advice free from commercial bias.
Professionalise Development and Extension	• Recognise development and extension as a specialist profession equal to research. • Establish training, mentoring, and accreditation pathways. • Partner with universities, RDCs, and hubs to embed extension into education.
Align and Enable Systemic Support	• Ensure policy and funding alignment across RDCs, government, and industry. • Support organisational change through leadership endorsement and coordinated frameworks. • Compensate grassroots input in participatory design as legitimate, not unpaid consultation.

Implementation considerations (grassroots groups and delivery partners)

Consideration	Key suggestions
Keep It Practical, Farmer-Centred, and Locally Relevant	• Co-design programs with farmers from the outset. • Prioritise hands-on demonstrations, decision-support tools, and practical guides. • Adapt delivery to local contexts, family decision-makers, and learning styles.
Design for Inclusion and Adaptability	• Deliver extension in multiple formats (face-to-face, digital, peer-to-peer). • Engage beyond the 'usual suspects' to include young farmers, women, and diverse decision-makers. • Build flexibility so models adapt to changing conditions.
Resource and Value Co-Design	• Provide time, funding, and tools to resource co-design processes. • Pilot approaches with groups to refine and demonstrate value. • Compensate groups and farmers for their expertise and time.
Support Organisational and Mindset Shifts	• Foster communities of practice, peer champions, and leadership endorsement. • Provide tools, training, and ongoing support to embed new approaches. • Keep frameworks simple, usable, and impact focused.

While many of the considerations outlined above apply broadly to funders, policymakers, and grassroots partners, the workshops also highlighted a particular enabling role for the Southern NSW Innovation Hub. Participants consistently observed that for the *Pathways to Impact Framework* to succeed, grassroots groups may need practical support to build confidence, skills, and capacity to use it effectively. These recommendations (see section 8) explore how the Hub, in partnership with grassroots organisations, could help strengthen capability and create the conditions for the Framework to be implemented in ways that deliver real and lasting impact.

Positive and negative insights from the workshops

Across the two AI workshops, participants shared both what they see working well in E&A and where they encounter barriers or frustrations. These perspectives provide a balanced view of the current system, highlighting strengths that should be protected and scaled, while also identifying weaknesses that require review.

The table below brings together these insights, grouped into common themes. It distinguishes between positive aspects that participants valued, negative aspects that hinder effectiveness, and where tensions or contradictions emerged. In some cases, the same theme contained opposing views, for example, while participants strongly valued peer-to-peer learning, they also acknowledged that overreliance on small networks can limit reach and diversity. Recognising both the positive and the negative is critical: it reflects the lived reality of grassroots groups and ensures future models build on what works while addressing what does not.

Theme	Positive (what's working/valued)	Negative (what's not working/barriers)	Tensions/Contradictions
Trust & Relationships	Independent, unbiased advice is trusted. Peer-to-peer networks are powerful. Grassroots groups are deeply embedded and credible.	Risk of losing trust if advice is tied to commercial interests. Staff turnover threatens long-term relationships.	Some see advisors, such as agronomists, as vital, others see over-reliance on commercial advice as a risk.
Practicality & Relevance	Farmers value hands-on, in-paddock learning, checklists, decision-support tools. Immediate applicability to farm business is highly valued.	Generic 'one-size-fits-all' approaches fail. Abstract workshops or poor follow-up erode impact.	Need for fewer but better events vs. some still calling for broad coverage across multiple formats.
Funding & Continuity	Multi-year, program-based approaches create stability. Continuity builds confidence.	'Pilot-and-pause' cycles undermine trust and impact. Stop-start funding creates fatigue and wastes effort.	Calls for long-term systemic programs vs. funders preference for short-term competitive grants.
Workforce & Capability	Extension is seen as a profession, requiring skilled facilitators, mentoring, and training.	Lack of structured career pathways, high turnover, burnout. Capability is often undervalued compared with research.	Some argue extension skills can be developed on-the-job; others want formal accreditation.
Inclusion & Learning Styles	Recognition that different people in farming families make decisions. Multiple formats (face-to-face, digital, peer-to-peer) ensure reach.	Engagement fatigue from too many events/surveys. Not all groups are resourced to deliver diverse formats.	Some producers want bite-sized info; others want in-depth technical knowledge.
Co-Design & Ownership	Producers involved early in design builds clarity and relevance. Co-design creates ownership and trust.	Grassroots groups frustrated at being treated as 'unpaid contributors.' Risk of frameworks feeling like compliance.	Desire for genuine co-design vs. limited capacity to engage deeply without resourcing.
Legacy & Knowledge Systems	Repositories, mentoring, and legacy planning are valued. Old knowledge still useful alongside new research.	Knowledge often lost at project end. Lack of systems to carry forward lessons.	Balance between investing in new innovations vs. preserving legacy systems and networks.
Systemic Support & Policy Alignment	Alignment across funders, RDCs, and government strengthens impact. Partnerships across sectors are highly valued.	Current fragmentation, duplication, and poor coordination waste resources.	Some want central coordination, others fear losing local independence.
Adoption Frameworks	Excitement about frameworks if they are flexible, practical, and producer-centred.	Risk of disengagement if frameworks are compliance-heavy, duplicative, or misaligned with existing systems.	Some groups see frameworks as enabling; others fear they add unnecessary burden.



Taken together, these insights and considerations make a compelling case for change and point to practical directions that can inform a future roadmap for strengthening E&A in Australian agriculture. The workshops highlighted not only the strengths and aspirations of grassroots groups, but also the systemic shifts required to enable their role in supporting practice change at scale. The following sections of this report expand on these findings in greater detail, presenting the voices of participants, the conditions for success, and the practical steps that could help embed the Pathways to Impact Framework in ways that are locally grounded, credible, and enduring.

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Grassroots Extension and Adoption Appreciative Inquiry Workshops Report

Introduction

This report brings together the insights of grassroots groups across the Southern NSW Hub, captured through two AI workshops. The purpose of these sessions was to explore what participants most value about their roles in extension and adoption (E&A), the impacts they seek to achieve, and the conditions that enable success. The workshops also sought to identify what features a contemporary framework must include, what barriers and enablers may affect its adoption, and how the Hub and its partners might design accordingly.

A key driver for running these workshops was the absence of grassroots voices in national reports and inquiries into agricultural E&A over the past decade. Local farming systems groups, Landcare organisations, and regional networks are deeply trusted within their communities and uniquely positioned to support adoption at scale; yet too often their perspectives have been overlooked in strategic discussions. Capturing their voice was therefore essential to ensure that the *Pathways to Impact Framework* and *Contemporary Investment Model* reflect lived realities rather than top-down assumptions.

For the Southern NSW Innovation Hub, this process reflects a core commitment: to design with our partners, strengthen local capability, and provide enabling services that drive adoption and impact. Embedding grassroots perspectives was also critical to shaping the *Pathways to Impact Framework*; not only to ground the framework in practice, but to guide how resourcing, collaboration, and capacity-building approaches will accompany its implementation.

It is important to note that the insights presented here reflect the perspectives of the grassroots groups who participated in these workshops. They may not capture the full diversity of experiences across all grassroots organisations in Australia, nor do they encompass the perspectives of other key actors such as government agencies, Research and Development Corporations (RDCs), or industry bodies, whose experiences and views may differ.

Together, these workshops ensured that the *Pathways to Impact Framework* is informed by the practical experience of grassroots groups, supported by the enabling role of the Hub, and positioned to contribute to impact at both local and system levels.

Design and approach

To capture these insights, the Southern NSW Innovation Hub partnered with grassroots groups through a structured, strengths-based engagement process. The workshops were designed not just to collect perspectives, but to actively involve participants in shaping solutions, ensuring the *Pathways to Impact Framework* is grounded in lived experience and practical realities.

The AI process was delivered through two workshops, structured around the phases Discover–Dream–Design–Deliver.

- Workshop 1 – Discover & Dream surfaced the strengths of grassroots E&A, the impacts participants aspire to achieve, and the enabling conditions for success. This stage set a constructive tone and established a foundation of values and aspirations grounded in lived experience and local context.
- Workshop 2 – Design & Deliver built on these foundations, moving from visioning to practical design. Using the *Pathways to Impact Framework* as a guide, participants explored what needs to change in current models, which principles and practices should be retained, and what supports, structures, and investments are required for adoption at scale.

Across both sessions, the approach was:

- Strengths-based: Emphasising what works and how to build on it.
- Inclusive and participatory: Ensuring all voices were heard and respected.
- Framework-anchored: Using AI and the *Pathways to Impact Framework* to provide structure and a shared language.

- Future and action-focused: Shifting from aspirations to clear priorities for design, delivery, and system change.

Together, the workshops generated both the vision and the design features of a more effective, contemporary E&A system; one grounded in grassroots experience, co-owned by participants, and structured around the principles of trust, collaboration, sustainability, and impact.

Why appreciative inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was chosen because it offers a strengths-based and participatory process that builds trust, encourages collaboration, and supports genuine co-design. By starting from what works well, rather than focusing only on problems, AI created a constructive and future-focused environment where participants could share openly, think creatively, and generate energy for change. This approach aligns with the Southern NSW Innovation Hub's commitment to empowering grassroots groups as active co-creators of solutions.

Participation snapshot

- Workshops: 2 AI sessions
- Participants: 14 people across the Southern NSW Hub footprint split into 2 groups.
- Groups Represented:
 - Central West Farming Systems
 - FarmLink
 - Monaro Farming Systems
 - Tablelands Farming Systems
 - Holbrook Landcare Network
 - Irrigation Farmers Network
 - Irrigation Research & Extension Committee
 - Little River Landcare Group
 - Western Landcare
 - West Hume Landcare
 - Bega Circular Co-Op
 - Western Murray Land Improvement Group



- Coverage: Farming systems groups, Landcare networks, irrigation groups, and producer organisations representing mixed farming, grazing, cropping, and irrigation industries across Southern NSW.

Facilitation

To create an environment that encouraged open, constructive discussion and free thinking, guest breakout group facilitators were invited to help guide the workshops. This approach reinforced the collective nature of the process and reflected a shared commitment across the sector to shaping the future of E&A.

The workshops were led by main facilitator Pip Job (Senior Manager Adoption & Extension, SNSW Innovation Hub), with breakout groups facilitated by Matt Adkins (Leader Industry Adoption NSW DPRID) and Emma Grabham (Senior Manager Adoption & Communications, AgriFutures). Support was provided by the Southern NSW Innovation Hub, which supplied scribes to capture all contributions in real time. Inputs were recorded directly onto a Miro board, displayed live during the sessions to ensure transparency, accuracy, and shared ownership of the discussion.

Workshop 1 – Discover & Dream

The first workshop centred on the *Discover & Dream* phases of AI. Its purpose was to surface the strengths of grassroots E&A, explore the impacts participants aspire to achieve, and identify the conditions that allow adoption to flourish. Through this process, participants also considered what an ideal E&A system might look like, what helps unlock organisational barriers, and what farmers most want and need. The session established a constructive, future-focused tone and created a strong foundation for the design focus of Workshop 2.

Question 1 – What do you most value about your role in supporting farmers to adopt innovation and best practice?

Overall insights

Across both groups, what participants most value about their role is the combination of trust-based relationships, tailored support, and empowerment of communities. They see themselves not just as information providers, but as connectors, facilitators, and changemakers helping farmers navigate complexity, build confidence, and adopt practices that fit their unique contexts.

1.1 Tailored and Practical Support: Ability to adapt advice to personal circumstances and farm-specific needs.

- Adapting advice to a business or farmers' personal circumstances and contexts.
- Testing and sharing information that is relevant and grounded in on-farm realities.
- Translating technical knowledge and science into practical, usable solutions.
- Supporting scaling-up of early adoption and moving from trial plots to paddock-scale change.

1.2 Relationships, Connection and Trust: Building trusted, long-term relationships with landholders and communities.

- Building relationships with members, landholders, and communities based on trust.
- Acting as a trusted advisor and reliable source of support.
- Providing opportunities to meet, listen, and connect with landholders to understand their needs.
- Facilitating access to information, networks, and experts.

1.3 Empowerment and Voice: Empowering communities, amplifying farmer voices, and being a conduit to experts.

- Empowering communities and amplifying farmer voices.
- Acting as a conduit between landholders and experts.
- Enabling collective learning, shared experiences, and supporting each other at events.
- Fostering a sense of belonging and long-term trust across communities.

1.4 Encouraging Innovation and Change: Supporting farmers to try new practices, seeing the “lightbulb” moments, and scaling early adoption.

- Encouraging farmers to try something new and “have a go.”
- Helping to identify challenges and opportunities and co-develop solutions.
- Supporting innovation through curiosity, openness, and safe spaces to experiment.
- Seeing the “lightbulb moment” when learning or practice change occurs.

1.5 Independence and Integrity: Providing unbiased, cross-commodity advice that prioritises farmers' interests.

- Valuing independence and autonomy (e.g., no commissions, unbiased advice).
- Providing support that is cross-commodity and not tied to industry-specific agendas.

Question 2 – What impact do you aim to achieve as a grassroots group?

Overall insights

Grassroots groups aim to create multi-dimensional impact which includes stronger farming businesses and communities, smarter decision-making, and broader sustainability. Their role isn't just technical, it's social, cultural, and environmental, spanning from practical adoption to strategic system change. At the core is a vision of resilient, connected, and empowered communities that can adapt to future challenges.

2.1 Stronger, More Resilient Farming Systems and Communities: Strengthening drought resilience and ensuring sustainable, profitable farm businesses.

- Build drought-resilient and productive agricultural businesses.
- Continue to grow profitable and sustainable farm businesses (beyond economics, including social and environmental).
- Foster stronger rural networks through knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and partnerships.
- Ensure preparedness for future challenges so communities remain strong even if groups wind down

2.2 Better Decision-Making and Strategic Direction: Encouraging evidence-based decision-making, smarter resource use, and risk-aware thinking.

- Promote evidence-based decision-making that connects to science.
- Encourage smarter, more efficient resource use “smarter not harder.”
- Incorporate risk thinking frameworks (e.g. slow and fast thinking) into wider delivery.
- Support mindset shifts and getting people to think differently and plan ahead.
- Set new strategic directions for individuals, businesses, and landscapes.

2.3 Innovation, Adoption and Knowledge Exchange: Connecting innovators and ensuring ideas move from trials to practice.

- Connect innovators to create a groundswell of change.
- Translate local insights (e.g. irrigated agriculture learnings) to broader grower networks.
- Contribute to innovation uptake at local scale, especially in challenging systems (e.g. low-rainfall, mixed farming).
- See ideas move from trials to practical adoption.

2.4 Equity, Social Licence and Wellbeing: Supporting fair access, improving agriculture's social licence, and promoting “work–life balance”.

- Emphasise equity and fairness in how benefits and opportunities are shared.
- Improve the social licence and public image of agriculture.
- Support better quality of life through improved work–life–family balance

2.5 Sustainability and Circularity: Building circular economies, resource efficiency, and environmentally sound farming systems.

- Drive sustainable agriculture and long-term environmental outcomes.
- Build circular economies with resource efficiency, closed-loop systems, and recycling waste back into landscapes.
- Increase local circularity within regions (e.g. Bega Valley).

2.6 Connection and Influence: Direct and indirect influence through trusted relationships, networks, and advocacy.

- Provide direct and indirect influence within communities.
- Connect people with the right information and tools at the right time.
- Create confidence and networks so people can make changes they want and recognise opportunities.
- Remain independent and producer-driven, free from commercial bias.

Question 3 – What conditions allow successful Extension & Adoption to flourish?

Overall insights

Successful E&A flourish when trusted relationships, farmer-centred design, and practical real-world learning environments are combined with adequate resources, enabling policy, and community capacity. Trust and timing are critical as the right message, delivered by the right person, at the right moment, can make the difference between resistance and widespread change.

3.1 Trust, Respect and Credibility: Trust in advisors, peer-to-peer influence, and respect for the messenger.

- Trust between farmers, advisors, and groups is central.
- Respect for the person delivering the message (“message giver”) matters as much as the message itself.
- Peer-to-peer learning and farmer-to-farmer influence is powerful.
- Independent, trusted farm advisors play a critical role in affirming decisions.

3.2 Farmer-Centred Design: Programs designed with farmer needs in mind, with clear purpose, WIIFM (What’s in it for me), and practical next steps.

- Address real needs identified by farmers. Don’t “teach” where there isn’t a problem.
- Understand the barriers and WIIFM (“What’s in it for me”) before designing workshops or programs.
- Design must be clear, purposeful, and show next steps/roadmaps for complex or new information.
- Apply adult learning principles, recognising different triggers, decision-making processes, and demographics.

3.3 Practical, Flexible and Relevant Approaches: Real-world demonstrations, hands-on learning, and flexible delivery.

- Flexibility in delivery; not being bound to one method is crucial.
- Real-world, hands-on activities (e.g. harvester workshops, trial plots, demonstrations) resonate well.
- Social learning, shared experiences, and even informal settings (like after footy, or over food) support engagement.

3.4 Compounding stress: Too much stress (climate, markets, global events) makes adoption harder, though times of flux or crisis can sometimes accelerate change.

- Adaptability in funding and program delivery is critical during these times.
- Pivot to what is needed; this could shift to social support structures.
- Simplify approaches to enable decision-making.
- Local context is a key component of effective E&A

3.5 Community and Capacity Building: Upskilling local professionals, supporting young leaders, and creating community ownership.

- Upskill local professionals to amplify learning and sustain local trust.
- Involve communities in the ownership, design, and implementation of projects.
- Support young leaders and create pathways for them to influence.
- Encourage long-term, consistent support rather than one-off events.

3.6 Enabling Environment: Supportive policy settings, financial incentives, and adequate resourcing.

- Alignment with complementary policies and avoiding clashes with regulation.
- Incentives that improve farming systems without extra cost encourage adoption.
- Resources are essential. Funding, staffing, and capacity are often lacking.
- Industry, government, and community collaboration strengthens impact.

3.7 Timing and Context: Adoption is harder under stress but can accelerate in times of flux or crisis.

- Organisations are leaner than before, requiring collaboration and shared capacity.
- Success often depends on who you target, early adopters vs. cautious farmers.
- Flux and forced change can create “windows of opportunity” for adoption.

Question 4 – If you could design the ideal E&A system, what would it look like?

Overall insights

The ideal E&A system is long-term, embedded, and farmer-driven, with strong feedback loops into research and funding. It relies on a skilled, professional extension workforce and clear coordination across stakeholders. Instead of short-term, fragmented projects, it supports strategic, sustained change, balancing commercial realities with community-wide benefits. Trust, relevance, and professional credibility are the glues that hold the system together.

4.1 Long-Term, Stable and Embedded: Funded over 5–10 years, nationally coordinated but locally delivered.

- Supported by long-term funding (5–10+ years).
- Locally embedded extension networks with national coordination but regional delivery.
- Extension workforce treated as a professionalised career, with accreditation, succession planning, and pathways for new graduates or emerging talent.
- Secure, ongoing support to reduce reliance on short-term projects.

4.2 Farmer-Centred and Co-designed: Grounded in farmer needs, with strong feedback loops to research and funding.

- Driven by real farmer needs and priorities (not imposed).
- Strong feedback loops where farmer groups inform research directions and funding priorities.
- Extension is designed with barriers, and WIIFM (What’s in it for me?) thinking, clear purpose, and next steps.
- Practical, on-the-ground relevance with advisors embedded in farming communities.

4.3 Professionalised Workforce: Extension as a career with accreditation, training, and succession planning.

- Extension staff with the capability and skills to interpret and translate research into practice.
- Skilled facilitators who can engage audiences, even if not technical experts, by making complex science relatable and/or enabling improved decision-making.
- Trusted advisors and independent experts remain central to adoption.

4.4 Efficient, Coordinated and Strategic: Reduced duplication, fewer but higher-quality events, embedded communication plans.

- Stratified ‘agro-productive ecosystem’ that have systems thinking, are interconnected, and have multi-scale approaches.
- More strategic funding that links research, extension, and adoption with clear communication plans from the outset.
- Reduction in fragmented, repetitive events. Instead, fewer but more focused activities with refined messages.
- Better coordination between industry, government, and grassroots groups to reduce overlap and duplication.

4.5 Skilled and Trusted Advisors: Independent advisors with strong facilitation and translation skills.

- Independence and freedom from commercial bias are essential to credibility and trust.
- Advisers should help balance both commercial drivers and broader community benefit in their guidance.

- Advisers should be equipped to translate research into practical, farm-ready knowledge that farmers can apply with confidence.
- Building skills in understanding behaviour change and decision-making will help advisers better support adoption.
- Advisers have an opportunity to play an active role in guiding and enabling change, supporting farmers to navigate risks and build confidence in new practices.

4.6 Sustainable and Adaptive Adoption: Funding and monitoring that continues beyond the life of projects to support lasting change.

- Incorporates innovation adoption funding beyond project life (3–5 years post-project to track and support sustained change).
- Uses risk management and peer-to-peer learning as core elements.
- Recognises both commercial and non-commercial drivers of adoption.
- Encourages multiple entry points for farmers; not a one-size-fits-all model.
- Enables skill building, growth and development for the betterment of the entire E&A system.

4.7 Clear Purpose, Outcomes, and Evaluation: Projects and programs must have a justifiable, grounded purpose.

- Outputs and outcomes are clearly defined from the start.
- Evaluation is designed to capture both tacit (experiential) and explicit (measurable) knowledge.
- Balance between commercial vantage points and community benefit.
- Shift to focus on the impact created, not just deliverables.
- Long-term approach to evaluation that recognises practice change happens over time.

Question 5 – What helps to unlock barriers for your organisation?

Overall insights

To unlock barriers, organisations need a balance of resourcing, trust-based engagement, and flexible program delivery. Sustainable funding and fair remuneration are foundational, but equally important are deep relationships, empowered champions, and healthy networks. When policy, funding, and delivery mechanisms align with grassroots needs and groups have the time to engage properly, barriers become opportunities for stronger impact.

5.1 Funding and Resourcing: Core, ongoing funding and fair remuneration for skilled staff.

- Achieving secure, ongoing funding beyond short-term grants remains a significant challenge for grassroots operating models and addressing this is critical for long-term impact.
- Ensuring fair remuneration is important to attract and retain skilled people, and to prevent the “brain drain” that undermines capability.
- Organisations need to plan for and resource co-design properly, recognising it as a vital part of delivery, not just an add-on.
- Insurance and governance supports are essential for managing risk, but are a growing cost to operating organisations, particularly for NFPs and smaller groups.
- Meeting MEL requirements requires fair remuneration and, in some cases, access to specialist expertise; areas that need deliberate planning and investment.

5.2 Engagement and Relationships: Deep engagement with farmers, being “in it for the long game,” and empowering champions.

- Deep, ongoing engagement with members, farmers, and networks. Being “in it for the long game.”
- One-on-one on-farm conversations seen as especially valuable.
- Partnerships with government, industry, and other organisations broaden reach and reduce duplication.

- Identifying and empowering champions helps drive adoption through trust and respect.

5.3 Flexibility and Responsiveness: Programs designed with adaptable delivery models, focused on a balance of outcomes and compliance.

- Flexibility in program design and delivery. Focus on outcomes, not widgets or tick-box activities.
- Ability to adjust support to meet farmers where they are (including time-poor producers).
- Co-design that values groups' time and intellectual property, not just free input.
- Information must lead to clear pathways to action, not just more messages.

5.4 Networks and Partnerships: Building healthy networks across industry, policy, and grassroots groups.

- Healthy, varied networks are essential to overcoming resource limits.
- Strong links across policy, commercial, and grassroots levels help address complex challenges.
- Extension and advisory roles act as connectors, helping farmers navigate complexity.

5.5 Policy and Structural Supports: Supportive government policy and recognition of the advisory role.

- Supportive government policy that aligns rather than conflicts with extension activities.
- Recognition of the broader system context, including the role of advisory models and insurance.
- Space for commercial and public sector partnerships to jointly support outcomes.

5.6 Time and Capacity: Time to spend with producers, to listen, and to respond to their needs.

- Having enough time to spend with producers and listen to their needs.
- Resources to allow facilitators and advisors to go beyond event-based interactions.
- Building and maintaining trust requires long-term investment of time.

Question 6 – What would farmers want or need from Extension & Adoption?

Overall insights

Farmers want E&A that is practical, personal, and trustworthy. They value tangible actions, relevant examples, peer exchange, and long-term relationships over abstract concepts or one-off events. To succeed, extension must meet farmers where they are, recognising their different learning styles, different readiness levels, and different business realities; while offering clear, credible, and efficient pathways to real-world change.

6.1 Practical, Actionable Learning: Tangible, take-home lessons, proof-of-concept examples, and solutions to real business pain points.

- Clear, practical take-home value from events and resources; something they can try/use immediately on-farm.
- Case studies and proof-of-concept examples showing why change is needed and how it works.
- Training and resources framed around pain points in the business, not abstract benefits.
- Bite-sized steps with checklists, resources, and follow-up support.

6.2 Personalised Learning and Flexible Approaches: Flexibility for different learning styles, bite-sized steps, and timing that meets readiness.

- Recognition that learning styles vary. There needs to be a bespoke approach with written, in-paddock, hands-on, visual, or discussion-based engagement.
- Customisation and timing to suit individual readiness ("tap in when they're ready").
- Adapt information to farm-specific systems so farmers can see relevance.
- Acknowledge that farming families differ in who makes decisions. Need to reach everyone, not just the financial decision-maker. Know who has power of veto.

6.3 Trust and Relationships: Transparent, reliable advisors; peer-to-peer exchange; continuity with the next generation.

- Trust, transparency, credibility, and dependability remain fundamental.
- Farmers want advisors/professionals who genuinely support them to change
- Peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and social learning valued highly.
- Relationships that bring in the next generation and create continuity.

6.4 Efficiency and Relevance: Clear, targeted messaging linked to farm systems; recognition of labour and efficiency constraints.

- Farmers want efficiency in adoption, especially with limited labour and an ageing workforce.
- Clear messaging that connects directly to their challenges (e.g., drought planning in wet years).
- Address resistance to change by framing innovations in commercially meaningful ways.
- Social gatherings linked to extension (e.g., top crop events, post-harvest discussions) create informal but impactful learning spaces.

6.5 Connection and Scale: Opportunities to connect to industry, commercialisation pathways, and exposure to new technologies.

- Connection to industry, markets, and broader networks to understand their role and opportunities.
- Extension that can help support commercialisation at scale for innovations.
- Farmers want exposure to new techniques and technologies as part of staying competitive.
- Diversity of needs acknowledged. No single solution, but flexibility to provide solutions across varied farming systems.

Workshop 1 – Summary

Key insights

Trust, relationships, and independence are the cornerstones of adoption

Grassroots groups are valued for the trust they hold with farmers and their independence from commercial interests. This credibility allows them to act as connectors, advisors, and facilitators of peer-to-peer learning. Long-term relationships, built on respect and reliability, are seen as far more effective than top-down or commercially motivated approaches.

Extension is more than information transfer. It's about empowerment and confidence

Participants emphasised that their role goes beyond providing knowledge. They help farmers navigate complexity, build confidence to trial new practices, and create safe spaces for experimentation; at times, they even provide pastoral care support. Seeing the “lightbulb moments” when farmers adopt innovations was described as a key marker of success.

Practical, tailored, and locally relevant support drives change

Farmers respond best to advice that is immediately usable, tailored to their farm systems, and delivered in ways that respect their circumstances and decision-making processes. Real-world demonstrations, case studies, and hands-on activities are consistently more impactful than abstract information.

Grassroots groups aspire to multi-dimensional impact

Their goals extend beyond technical adoption to strengthening drought resilience, building sustainable businesses, and fostering resilient, connected communities. They see their work as social, cultural, and environmental as much as technical and that they are part of the effort aiming for systems-level change that endures over time.

Enabling conditions matter

Adoption flourishes when trust and timing align with adequate resources, enabling policies, and strong community capacity. Stressful contexts (e.g., drought, markets, global events) can hinder adoption, but flux can also create “windows of opportunity” for change if groups are supported to pivot quickly.

The ideal E&A system is long-term, farmer-driven, and professionalised

Participants called for nationally coordinated but locally delivered programs funded over 5–10 years, supported by a professionalised extension workforce with clear career pathways. Strong feedback loops between farmers, research, and funders were seen as essential to ensure relevance and accountability.

Barriers reflect structural weaknesses

Short-term funding, lack of core resources, and inadequate remuneration for skilled staff remain key constraints. Groups also highlighted the need for time to build deep engagement, governance and insurance support, and recognition of their intellectual contribution in co-design processes.

Farmers want extension that is practical, personal, and trustworthy

They value clear take-home actions, proof-of-concept examples, and opportunities for peer exchange. Farmers want extension to be efficient, tailored to diverse decision-makers within families, and embedded in trusted relationships that endure across generations.

Areas for further exploration

- How to embed continuity and scale into funding models.
- How to attract, train, and retain skilled extension practitioners.
- How to support succession pathways for expertise (mentoring, coaching, knowledge brokers).
- Mechanisms for capturing and sharing knowledge across groups to avoid duplication.
- How to balance innovation with maintaining legacy networks and trust.

Conclusion

Workshop 1 established a strong foundation by surfacing the strengths, values, and aspirations of grassroots groups. Participants articulated what makes adoption effective and where the system breaks down. These insights created a positive, shared platform for Workshop 2, where the focus shifted from visioning to practical system design.

Workshop 2

The second workshop focused on the *Design & Deliver* phases of AI. Building on the strengths and aspirations identified in Workshop 1, this session moved from visioning to practical system design. Participants examined what needs to change in current E&A models, which principles and practices should be retained, and what supports are necessary to scale adoption. Using the *Pathways to Impact Framework* as a guide, participants also explored how to support organisational and mindset shifts, and what is required to embed frameworks into policy, funding, and delivery systems.

Question 1 - What needs to change in current Extension & Adoption (E&A) models

Overall insights

E&A models need to move from short-term, fragmented projects to long-term, coordinated programs that deliver continuity, scale, and lasting change. This requires stronger collaboration across organisations, flexibility to suit local contexts, and greater alignment with the commercial realities of farming so outputs are practical and valuable. Models must also be more inclusive and tailored to diverse farm business decision-makers and learning styles, while addressing engagement fatigue by focusing on quality over volume and integrating with existing touchpoints. Ultimately, success should be measured by meaningful outcomes, such as practice change, resilience, and legacy and ensuring projects leave enduring knowledge, networks, and systems beyond funding cycles.

1.1 Shift from Short-Term Projects to Long-Term Programs

- Move away from the “pilot-and-pause” cycle.
- Invest in ongoing, program-based approaches that support continuity, scale, and sustained practice change.

1.2 Collaboration and Coordination

- Reduce duplication and fragmentation across providers.
- Encourage greater pooling of resources, partnerships, and cross-organisation alignment.
- Build flexibility into models so they can adapt to different regions and systems.

1.3 Commercial and Practical Relevance

- Current models often ignore commercial drivers and realities of farming businesses.
- Extension needs to respect economic pressures, competing objectives, and risk profiles.
- Ensure outputs are practical, valuable, and directly applicable on-farm.

1.4 Tailored and Inclusive Approaches

- Recognise the diversity within farming families and businesses and target different decision-makers, not just the financial controller.
- Use varied formats (e.g. podcasts, in-paddock, workshops, peer-to-peer, online) to suit different learning styles.
- Consider behavioural and cultural factors, including fear of risk and influence of neighbours or advisers.

1.5 Information and Engagement Fatigue

- Avoid overloading producers with too many events, surveys, or competing activities.
- Add value by integrating extension into existing touchpoints rather than creating new ones.
- Focus on quality and trustworthiness of information, not just volume.

1.6 Problem Definition and Measurement

- Go deeper in diagnosing the real issues rather than working on surface-level symptoms.
- Ensure monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) reflects meaningful outcomes (practice change, resilience, legacy) rather than superficial outputs or “bums on seats.”

1.7 Legacy and Lasting Impact

- Design projects to leave a long-term footprint such as knowledge, capability, networks, system-level change.
- Improve follow-through so successful approaches endure beyond funding cycles.

Question 2: What models, methods or principles should we take forward/are effective?

Overall insights

Effective E&A relies on building trust through peer-to-peer learning and practical, action-oriented approaches that deliver immediate on-farm value. Producers want information that is hands-on, credible, and supported by follow-up, delivered in diverse and flexible formats that suit different learning styles and contexts. Embedding extension into familiar activities and leveraging existing community “hooks” helps normalise engagement, while co-design and producer-led clarity ensure relevance and respect for farmer priorities. Just as important is maintaining accessible knowledge and legacy resources alongside new research, with advice that is independent and objective, reinforcing trust and long-term impact.

2.1 Peer-to-Peer Learning

- Strong endorsement of peer networks, farmer-to-farmer learning, and using producers as sounding boards.
- Small groups and early adopters trialling ideas first before scaling more broadly.
- Encourages trust, practicality, and exchange of real-world experience.

2.2 Practical, Action-Oriented Approaches

- Events and workshops that are hands-on, relevant, and immediately applicable on-farm.
- Tools like “ute guides”, plant ID booklets, and practical how-to resources remain highly valued.
- Follow-up support and decision-making aids to help producers take action beyond the event or initial engagement.

2.3 Multiple Formats and Flexible Delivery

- Use a variety of channels to reach different audiences (print, podcasts, newsletters, social media, face-to-face).
- Meet producers where they are, both in terms of location and how they prefer to access knowledge.
- Recognise that not everyone learns the same way, so layering and diversifying formats is critical.

2.4 Hooks and Integration with Existing Activities

- Leverage existing events or community activities (e.g. sports, breakfast meetings, field days) as natural “hooks.”
- Add value by embedding extension into familiar settings rather than always creating new events.

2.5 Co-Design and Producer-Led Clarity

- Involve producers early. Test ideas with them before scaling.
- Ensure clarity from producers about their needs and priorities to guide action.
- Keep information clear, respectful, and never condescending.

2.6 Knowledge Accessibility and Legacy

- Create repositories to store and make information easy to find and revisit.
- Maintain and update legacy information as older, reliable knowledge is still valuable alongside the latest innovations, or when economic trends or conditions shift.
- Focus on broader, enduring concepts and solid principles, not just project-by-project messages.

2.7 Credibility and Objectivity

- Provide information that is independent, unbiased, and not commercially motivated.
- Objective advice is seen as trustworthy and worth its weight.
- Important to ensure messages are not tied to selling products.

Question 3: How can we (everyone, not just the Hub) support more of what works? Structures, systems, partnerships, etc.

Overall insights

Supporting what works requires trust, strong partnerships, and collaboration across sectors. Building mentoring structures and investing in capability ensures skills are sustained and shared, while knowledge repositories and legacy systems prevent valuable lessons being lost between projects. Adoption support should be built into funding and project design from the outset, not treated as optional. At the same time, the system must be willing to challenge existing models and diversify approaches, ensuring extension remains adaptive, credible, and impactful.

3.1 Collaboration and Partnerships

- Strengthen collaboration between private sector, government, and grassroots groups.
- Map and align stakeholders for future relationships, rather than working in silos.
- Partnerships (e.g. with producer associations) are seen as critical for credibility and reach.

3.2 Trust and Relationships

- Trust remains central as producers act on advice when it comes from trusted sources.
- Relationships between growers and their advisors are the most important enabler.
- Building and maintaining trusted extension officers or advisors is vital, though time and resource intensive.

3.3 Mentoring and Capability Building

- Create formal and informal mentoring opportunities across the sector.
- Build capability even in small teams to ensure adoption support is widespread.
- Retain and develop extension capacity, including peer-to-peer mentoring structures.

3.4 Knowledge Sharing and Legacy

- Develop resource repositories and knowledge platforms to make information accessible.
- Ensure lessons are transferred between projects, not lost when funding ends.
- Maintain valuable legacy information alongside new research.

3.5 Integration into Systems and Funding

- Embed E&A support into funding models and project plans, not as an afterthought.
- Ensure adoption is considered early in project development, not bolted on later.
- Consult early with those who will be engaged in the delivery so they can be part of the design for improved impact and relationships, and a stronger sense of ownership.
- Create structures that support continuity across projects and landscapes.

3.6 Challenging and Improving the System

- Be brave about questioning current structures and assumptions.
- Address challenges such as reliance on particular advisor models and the tension between commercial vs. publicly funded advice.
- Encourage system-level diversification to avoid “more of the same” outcomes.

Question 4. What must change in how we support, coordinate, or build capability?

Overall insights

Extension must be recognised as a professional discipline with career pathways, standards, and consistent investment. Structured training, mentoring, and real-world experience are needed to develop both technical and soft skills such as communication, facilitation, and leadership. Building capability requires systemic support from funders and institutions, alongside practical, relevant learning opportunities that professionals and staff can apply immediately. Sustaining capability across generations also depends on strong student pathways, workplace learning, and lifelong professional development, ensuring extension is equipped for evolving challenges.

4.1 Recognise and Value Extension as a Profession

- Extension should be treated as a specialist role with dedicated training and recognition.
- Move beyond viewing extension as a secondary skill and position it as a professional pathway with clear standards.
- Universities, Government and RDCs need to explicitly support and invest in extension roles to maintain a skilled workforce.
- Recognise that effective extension practitioners have the right mindset and social awareness, and that talent can come from anywhere such as grassroots, or out of universities.

4.2 Structured Training and Mentoring

- Use mentoring (both giving and receiving) as a core part of training and professional growth.
- Provide structured extension training that covers technical, communication, behavioural sciences, engagement and facilitation skills.
- Encourage rotation across industries to broaden experience and build transferable knowledge.
- Establish mentoring and knowledge transfer pathways with the current aging extension professionals as a dedicated succession strategy.

4.3 Experiential Learning and Student Pathways

- Expand workplace learning, internships, and paid placements for agricultural students.
- Get young people into real-world farming contexts early to build perspective and interest in extension careers.
- Universities should recruit for character and potential, then train for extension skills.

4.4 Soft Skills and Leadership Development

- Prioritise soft skills such as confidence, communication, facilitation, and critical thinking, just as much as technical expertise.
- Support leadership and public speaking development to strengthen professional capability.
- Lifelong learning should be emphasised as essential for extension professionals.

4.5 Systemic Support and Coordination

- Ensure consistent backing from RDCs, departments, and funding bodies for extension capability, not just research.
- Integrate extension capacity-building into project design, rather than leaving it as an afterthought.
- Provide mechanisms to share knowledge and lessons across projects and regions.

4.6 Relevance and Applicability

- Learning opportunities must be directly relevant to the work people are doing now.
- Support should be practical, enabling extension officers to translate training into action quickly.

- Ensure capability development reflects real needs at farm and system levels, not just theory.

Question 5 - What would make you excited to adopt a new Framework?

Overall insights

Adoption of a new framework will be exciting if it is flexible, practical, and clearly relevant to partnering organisations. It must allow adaptation to local contexts, avoid becoming another compliance burden, and focus on where real change happens. Genuine co-design, shared purpose, and strong partnerships create ownership, while adequate funding and capacity are essential to implement it effectively. Above all, a framework that helps people do things differently and better, while being credible, comprehensive, and easy to use, will inspire confidence and uptake.

5.1 Adaptability and Flexibility

- Must be adaptable to local context, not just another compliance layer.
- Flexibility to change course if something doesn't work, with the ability to try different approaches.
- Framework should support doing things differently, not reinforce the status quo.

5.2 Shared Purpose and Partnerships

- All stakeholders, including producers, working towards a common goal from the start.
- Collaboration across organisations and sectors to build ownership and shared responsibility.
- Partnerships based on give-and-take, not just top-down delivery.

5.3 Practicality and Capacity to Deliver

- Adequate resourcing and funding to implement properly.
- Building capability and capacity so organisations can do the framework justice.
- Needs to be simple, usable, and not add unnecessary burden (avoiding fatigue from field days and surveys).

5.4 Producer-Centred Design

- Producers involved from the outset, with genuine ownership and buy-in.
- A framework that aligns with how producers actually make decisions, including different speeds of decision-making.
- Must clearly demonstrate relevance and benefits to producers.

5.5 Clarity, Relevance, and Focus on Real Change

- Provides clear direction on "where change actually happens" and focuses on impact.
- Encourages thinking through a different lens and identifying current gaps.
- Exciting if it feels relevant, forward-looking, and tackles the real problems producers face.

5.6 Comprehensiveness and Credibility

- Comprehensive enough to provide guidance (e.g., not overly simplified), but still practical to apply.
- Seen as a credible, evidence-based approach, not just another layer of documentation.
- Opportunity to be part of a broader conversation about the future direction of the sector.

Question 6 - What concerns or barriers do you foresee (for self/organisation)?

Overall insights

The most significant barriers are time, funding, and staff capacity, particularly given high turnover and resource pressures. Frameworks risk disengagement if they do not fit existing systems, or if change management is poorly handled. Producers are fatigued by repeated engagement requests and may only respond to topics seen as directly relevant or backed by credible evidence. Cultural defensiveness and risks to independence also threaten trust. Without clear value, flexibility, and reduced duplication, frameworks may struggle to gain traction across organisations and farming communities.

6.1 Time and Resourcing Constraints

- Significant concern about having enough time and resources to do the framework justice, both individually and organisationally.
- Working through all steps will take time; without flexibility this could be a barrier.
- Funding pressures, particularly for farming systems groups, were highlighted as a major risk.

6.2 Staff Turnover and Capability

- High staff turnover in some groups means constant upskilling and induction is required.
- Concern about sustaining capability if new staff are not adequately trained or supported.
- Change management processes need to be done well to bring people along.

6.3 Fit with Existing Systems

- Framework must be adaptable to current systems and not create duplication or additional layers of work.
- Clear communication is needed about what success looks like, and which parts of the framework apply to which stakeholders.

6.4 Cultural and Behavioural Barriers

- Be aware that questioning the status quo can create defensiveness and threaten credibility, making change hard.
- Decision-making can be subconscious and difficult to shift without careful facilitation.
- People may not engage unless the topic is directly relevant or sparks strong passion.

6.5 Trust and Independence

- Concern that Research & Development Corporations (RDCs) may rely on professional advisors and leave farming systems groups out of the loop.
- The importance of maintaining independent, trusted advice; losing this could undermine adoption.

6.6 Evidence, Engagement and Fatigue

- Producers are fatigued from repeated requests for input, making it harder to get engagement and feedback.
- Reliance on growers' input without clear mechanisms to use it effectively risks disengagement.
- A need for data-driven discussions backed by evidence rather than just more consultation.

Question 7 - What support would help you shift (mindset-oriented)?

Overall insights

Mindset shifts are best enabled by visible leadership endorsement, peer influence, and champions who model success. Seeing frameworks in action through pilots and practical application builds confidence, while clear articulation of value and ease of use reduces resistance. Collective approaches, like communities of practice, strengthen confidence and normalise adoption. Embedding frameworks into funding requirements, partnerships, and processes further legitimises their use and makes change "how things are done," rather than an optional extra.

7.1 Leadership and Endorsement

- Internal leadership endorsement would encourage staff to trial and adopt the framework.
- Visible backing from senior levels builds legitimacy and confidence to engage.

7.2 Peer Influence and Champions

- Seeing other groups use the framework successfully would build trust and confidence.
- Champions or mentors are needed to model use, share stories, and encourage others.
- Collective confidence grows when adoption is seen across multiple organisations.

7.3 Practical Application and Demonstration

- Hands-on application, pilot programs, and observing how others respond would help shift thinking.
- “Suck it and see” — mindset change happens when people see it working in practice.
- Resources to integrate and reassess against existing models would smooth the transition.

7.4 Clarity of Value and Incentives

- Clear articulation of “what’s in it for me” on both sides of the equation.
- Easy, intuitive processes make adoption more attractive.
- If use of the framework is tied to requirements (funding, partnerships), uptake is more likely.

7.5 Collective Approaches and Support Networks

- Building collective confidence through networks or communities of practice and shared learning.
- Emphasis on being aware of different techniques and focusing on opportunities, not just challenges.
- Shared awareness and engagement stages supported through collaboration.

7.6 Embedding in Processes and Partnerships

- Shift in mindset is more likely if the framework is built into funding models, engagement processes, or partnerships.

Question 8 – What would help your organisation with adoption (systems/policy orientated)?

Overall insights

Organisational adoption depends on having the right tools, training, and resources to apply frameworks effectively. Adequate resourcing and funding are critical, particularly for smaller organisations, alongside access to templates, case studies, and ongoing support networks. Pilots and demonstrations reduce risk and help staff learn by doing, while policy and funding alignment from RDCs and government ensures consistency. Securing buy-in at multiple levels, from funders to frontline staff, and integrating frameworks into existing systems and processes will make adoption sustainable and impactful.

8.1 Practical Tools and Resources

- Ready-to-use templates, checklists, and case studies show the way forward.
- Access to shared techniques, methods, and ongoing resource libraries.
- Integration with existing processes to minimise duplication.

8.2 Training and Capacity Building

- Training sessions for staff on how to apply the framework in practice.
- Wider support networks for ongoing learning and resource sharing.
- Funding for training, especially for those engaging with extension or frameworks for the first time.

8.3 Resourcing and Funding

- Adequate funding to cover the time, people, and infrastructure needed to adopt frameworks.
- Recognition that resourcing must go beyond training and organisations need help to take the extra steps required.
- Smaller organisations, in particular, require external support to keep adoption sustainable.

8.4 Piloting and Demonstration

- Opportunities to test frameworks in practice, “system-level trial and error” to see what works before scaling.
- Being able to “do it and see how it works for us” builds confidence in adoption.
- Honest, deep reflection on past programs to learn what really worked and avoid repeating mistakes.

8.5 Policy and Structural Alignment

- Alignment from funders and policy settings that recognise and reward the use of shared frameworks.
- Collaboration with government departments, RDCs, and subject matter experts to embed frameworks into project design.
- Legacy planning to ensure frameworks outlast project cycles.

8.6 Buy-In and Engagement

- Securing buy-in from the right people across organisations and sectors is essential; organisational leaders have the power of veto.
- Clear communication of benefits and involvement of staff in co-design encourages ownership.
- Requires cultural support so adoption is not seen as “extra task” but part of how the organisation operates.

Workshop 2 – Summary

Key insights

From short-term projects to long-term programs

Participants were clear that fragmented, short-lived projects undermine trust, continuity, and adoption outcomes. They called for multi-year, program-based investments that can scale, adapt to local contexts, and leave a lasting legacy. Success should be measured not by attendance or activity counts, but by practice change, resilience, and systems-level impact.

Trust, peer learning, and independence remain central

Trust continues to be the strongest enabler of adoption. Farmer-to-farmer learning, mentoring, and long-term relationships with independent advisers were consistently valued over top-down or commercially motivated approaches. Maintaining credibility and independence is seen as non-negotiable.

Practicality, relevance, and farmer-centred design drive engagement

Farmers want information that is immediately usable, credible, and supported by follow-up. Practical tools, hands-on demonstrations, and diverse delivery formats (face-to-face, digital, in-paddock, or integrated with everyday activities like sports or community events) are critical. Tailoring to family decision-making structures, learning styles, and commercial realities ensures extension is inclusive and effective.

Build capability and professionalise extension

Extension must be recognised as a profession in its own right, with structured training, mentoring, and clear career pathways. Participants highlighted the importance of both technical and soft skills (communication, facilitation, leadership), alongside opportunities for experiential learning, talent and student pathways, and peer-to-peer mentoring. Without systemic support, workforce capability will remain fragile.

Frameworks must be flexible, practical, and co-designed

Enthusiasm for the *Pathways to Impact Framework* was strong, but conditional. For adoption to be successful, the framework must be adaptable, simple to use, and visibly relevant to grassroots organisations. Participants stressed

the importance of genuine co-design, shared ownership, and avoiding frameworks becoming another compliance burden.

Barriers are real and persistent

Time, funding, staff turnover, and engagement fatigue were repeatedly cited as major risks. Farmers are increasingly selective about where they give attention, and staff capacity in grassroots organisations is stretched thin. Without adequate resourcing and alignment with existing systems, frameworks risk disengagement or superficial uptake.

Supports needed for change

Mindset and organisational shifts require visible leadership endorsement, peer champions, and practical demonstrations (“suck it and see”). Communities of practice, networks, mentoring, and shared learning build confidence, while embedding frameworks into funding requirements and governance structures normalises adoption as “how things are done.”

Enablers for organisational adoption

To adopt frameworks effectively, organisations need practical tools (templates, case studies, repositories), training, and ongoing networks of support. Adequate resourcing is critical, particularly for smaller groups. Policy and funding alignment from RDCs and government was seen as essential to ensure consistency, avoid duplication, and sustain legacy outcomes beyond project cycles.

Areas for further exploration

- Testing funding models that embed continuity and adaptability.
- Pathways for professionalising extension, including who leads training and accreditation.
- Policy alignment across RDCs, hubs, and government to reduce fragmentation.
- Streamlining frameworks to reduce duplication and address farmer engagement barriers.

Conclusion

Workshop 2 built on the foundations of Workshop 1, shifting from aspirations to design. Participants identified the systemic changes required in funding, workforce, and policy, while also clarifying which principles and practices must be retained. Together, both workshops provide a clear, grassroots-informed picture of what a contemporary, effective E&A system could look like; one that is practical, trusted, inclusive, and professionally supported, and that leaves a lasting legacy of capability and resilience.

Common themes across both workshops

While Workshops 1 and 2 each had distinct focuses; the first surfacing values, strengths, and aspirations, and the second shifting toward design and practical change, together they revealed clear patterns. Across both sessions, participants highlighted consistent enablers of adoption, exposed tensions in how extension is currently designed and delivered and identified opportunities for systemic change.

Key findings

- **Trust and Relationships:** Independent, unbiased advice and peer-to-peer networks remain the strongest drivers of adoption. Grassroots groups, embedded in their communities, act as trusted intermediaries who engage farmers in ways government or external providers cannot.
- **Practicality and Farmer-Centred Design:** Producers value tangible, hands-on support tailored to local contexts, decision-making structures within families, and diverse learning styles. Information must be actionable and efficient, not abstract.
- **Continuity and Legacy:** Stop–start projects erode both farmer confidence and organisational capacity. Multi-year, program-based investment is essential to sustain relationships, maintain networks, and preserve knowledge beyond project lifespans.
- **Extension as a Profession:** Extension is not an add-on to research but a discipline requiring structured training, mentoring, and career pathways. Without investment in workforce development, capability will continue to erode.
- **Inclusion and Adaptability:** A one-size-fits-all approach does not work. Extension must be flexible enough to engage different learning preferences, cultural contexts, and decision-makers across farming families.
- **Systemic Enablers:** Grassroots groups are ready to support adoption at scale but cannot do so in isolation. They need aligned policy, supportive funding models, and collaborative partnerships that integrate research, delivery, and community.

Tensions and trade-offs identified

- **Short-term vs. long-term funding:** The demand for enduring programs contrasts with current funding models tied to short cycles and outputs.
- **Consistency vs. flexibility:** Participants want a shared framework but stressed it must remain adaptable to local contexts and avoid becoming prescriptive.
- **Commercial vs. public good drivers:** Balancing the realities of farm business economics with broader sustainability and community benefits remains a live tension.
- **Innovation vs. continuity:** Farmers value exposure to new ideas but place equal importance on maintaining trusted networks and long-standing knowledge.
- **Capacity vs. expectations:** Grassroots groups are central to adoption but operate under limited resources, creating tension between ambition and delivery capacity.

Opportunities for systemic change

- **Review investment models:** Move from fragmented projects to long-term, adaptive programs that resource adoption planning, workforce capability, and legacy building.
- **Professionalise extension:** Position extension as a recognised career, with pathways supported by training, accreditation, and mentoring.
- **Strengthen grassroots partnerships:** Treat groups as long-term partners in design and delivery, not contractors on short-term projects.
- **Embed adoption into system design:** Build E&A supports into funding and project structures from the outset, not as an afterthought.

- Foster learning systems: Create communities of practice, support structures, mentoring networks, and repositories to share knowledge across projects and generations.
- Promote inclusive engagement: Tailor approaches to diverse decision-makers, learning styles, and community contexts to broaden reach and impact.

System-level considerations

The workshops made it clear that grassroots groups share a strong, consistent vision for reforming E&A. Participants did not call for incremental tweaks or more short-term projects, but for structural change that embeds continuity, trust, professionalism, and inclusivity into the system.

Rather than prescribing fixed actions, this section sets out considerations for funders, policymakers, and grassroots partners to guide future design and investment decisions. These considerations highlight the conditions under which adoption is most likely to succeed and translate the common themes identified in both workshops into practical directions. They distinguish between:

- System-level shifts needed to align funding, policy, and workforce development.
- Implementation-level actions that the Hub and grassroots groups can take forward together to embed the *Pathways to Impact Framework*.

These considerations are not intended as prescriptive solutions, but as grounded reflections of what grassroots groups consistently emphasised. They provide a foundation for looking to the future and how the system can change, ensuring that adoption efforts are both farmer-centred and systemically supported.

The following section (Section 8) then builds on these system-level considerations by presenting direct recommendations to the Southern NSW Innovation Hub, outlining how the Hub can play an enabling role in partnership with grassroots groups to bring the *Pathways to Impact Framework* to life.

System-level considerations for funders and policymakers

- Shift from projects to programs: Consider how to replace fragmented, short-term projects with multi-year, program-based investments that provide continuity, scale, and impact. Programs should plan for adoption from the outset and leave a legacy of capability, networks, and knowledge.
- Build and protect trust: Treat independence and credibility as non-negotiable. Resourcing farmer-to-farmer learning, mentoring structures, and trusted adviser roles could help safeguard adoption from being undermined by commercial bias.
- Professionalise extension: Explore ways to recognise extension as a specialist profession equal to research, supported by structured training, mentoring, and accreditation pathways. Universities, RDCs, Government and hubs could play a role in embedding extension into education and career pathways.
- Align and enable systemic support: Strengthen coordination across RDC, government, and industry investments. Visible leadership endorsement and recognition of grassroots contributions as legitimate, resourced inputs (not unpaid consultation) could help normalise adoption practices.

Implementation considerations for grassroots groups and partners

- Keep it practical and farmer-centred: Co-design programs with farmers, ensuring clarity on needs, priorities, and “what’s in it for me.” Hands-on demonstrations, decision-support tools, and practical guides remain highly valued.
- Design for inclusion and adaptability: Deliver extension through multiple formats (face-to-face, digital, peer-to-peer) to reach diverse audiences. Engagement should go beyond “the usual suspects,” involving young farmers, women, and different decision-makers within families.
- Resource and value co-design: Meaningful co-design takes time, funding, and tools. Piloting approaches with groups to refine ideas, build ownership, and demonstrate value may strengthen outcomes. Recognising groups’ expertise and intellectual property as contributions of real value is important.

- Support organisational and mindset shifts: Communities of practice, peer champions, and mentoring networks can help embed new approaches. Practical training and ongoing support should ensure frameworks are seen as enabling tools, not compliance burdens.

While many of the insights gathered apply broadly to funders, policymakers, and grassroots partners, the workshops also highlighted a specific enabling role for the Southern NSW Innovation Hub. Participants consistently noted that for the *Pathways to Impact Framework* to succeed, grassroots groups will require practical support to build skills, confidence, and capacity to use it effectively.

Section 7 outlined system-level and shared considerations for reforming E&A. The following section shifts focus to direct recommendations for the Hub. These are grounded in the feedback from participants and emphasise how the Hub can act as a partner and enabler; providing tools, resources, and leadership that empower grassroots organisations to implement the Framework in ways that achieve real and lasting impact.

Recommendations to the Hub: Building capability with grassroots partners

For the *Pathways to Impact Framework* to deliver its full potential, the Southern NSW Innovation Hub must act as an enabler alongside grassroots groups. Workshop participants emphasised that while these groups are trusted and embedded in their communities, they require targeted support to build the skills, confidence, and capacity needed to apply the Framework in practice. The recommendations below set out how the Hub can help create the conditions for success.

1. Build skills and confidence in contemporary approaches

Grassroots groups want stronger capability in areas such as behavioural insights, adult learning, user-centred design, and implementation science, but stressed this learning must be practical and relevant.

- Provide short, applied learning opportunities embedded in live projects (“learning by doing”), not just stand-alone training events.
- Support peer-to-peer learning between groups by showcasing how others are applying the Framework successfully.

2. Create support networks and mentoring

Collective confidence grows when adoption is seen across multiple organisations. Mentoring and shared learning were highlighted as vital.

- Establish a support networks, or community of practice to share experiences, tools, and lessons in using the Framework.
- Resource “champion groups” to mentor others and demonstrate practical application.
- Facilitate cross-pollination (e.g. exchanges, shadowing, secondments) to spread knowledge across the network.

3. Resource co-design and collaboration

Participants expressed frustration at being treated as “unpaid contributors” in past co-design processes. Proper recognition and resourcing are essential.

- Allocate dedicated time and funding for groups to engage in co-design, recognising their over-stretched and limited capacity.
- Provide facilitation tools, templates, and shared platforms to make collaboration more efficient.
- Recognise grassroots intellectual property and ensure contributions are valued as genuine expertise, not free input.

4. Provide practical tools and resources

Grassroots groups asked for simple, actionable resources to make the Framework accessible.

- Develop ready-to-use templates, checklists, decision aids, and case studies aligned with the Framework.
- Maintain a central repository of extension resources and legacy knowledge accessible across the network.
- Support integration of the Framework into existing systems and processes to avoid duplication.

5. Strengthen organisational capability

Many groups face ongoing barriers linked to resourcing, governance, and workforce development.

- Assist groups to secure longer-term core funding to stabilise operations.
- Provide governance and risk management support (e.g. insurance, compliance tools).
- Invest in workforce development through scholarships, placements, and joint training programs.

6. Demonstrate leadership and endorsement

Visible leadership by the Hub will build confidence in using the Framework and signal its legitimacy.

- Publicly champion grassroots groups as critical partners in adoption.
- Model use of the *Pathways to Impact Framework* in Hub-led projects to demonstrate value.
- Embed the Framework into Hub planning, reporting, and investment processes to ensure continuity.

Next steps

The AI workshops provided valuable grassroots perspectives that have often been absent from national reviews and inquiries. They surfaced consistent themes of trust, continuity, practicality, professionalism, and inclusion, as well as a range of ideas, some of which align strongly with the Hub's observations and priorities, and others that will require further reflection and testing. The intention is not to commit to every suggestion made, but to ensure grassroots voices are recognised, and that their perspectives help inform ongoing development of E&A systems.

For the *Pathways to Impact Framework*, these insights will help shape principles and design features, while also guiding the development of an investment model that better reflects adoption realities. Practical tools, case studies, and resources will be refined to ensure the Framework is not only theoretically sound but also accessible and usable by grassroots groups.

For the Hub and its grassroots partners, the findings highlight areas for exploration around skills, confidence, and co-design processes. Some ideas can be acted on quickly, such as building communities of practice or embedding applied learning into projects, while others, such as professionalising extension or trialling different funding models, will need broader consultation, alignment, evidence and focussed industry leadership before they are progressed.

For funders and policymakers, the workshops reinforce the need to consider how investment and policy settings can better enable adoption. While the call for longer-term, program-based approaches was clear, further work is required to test how such models can balance accountability, flexibility, and systemic alignment.

Taken together, these workshops provide important insights to inform the next stage of the Hub's work. They are best seen as the beginning of a conversation, not the conclusion. By continuing to engage with grassroots groups, testing ideas in practice, and refining what works, the Hub and its partners can build an E&A system that is both credible and impactful, while staying adaptive to emerging needs and evidence.



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