



QFF Terms of Reference

Issued: 5 August 2021

Requirement

QFF requires an external review to consider the future positioning and form of the Agricultural Extension Work Placement Program to maximise support, efficiency, effectiveness and industry impact in Queensland and reef catchments. This would take in account a concurrent light-touch review of the 2021 program, which would build on the 2019 evaluation framework and findings.

Project: Agricultural Extension Work Placement Program (AEWPP 2021-2022) funded by Queensland Reef Water Quality Program (through Department of Environment and Science – DES)

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Context

The current Work Placement Program followed a successful 'Pilot Agricultural Capacity Building Project' in 2017/18 and the two work placement programs in 2019-20. The pilot was one of the responses to the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce report which called for more effective extension and the approach was supported by the 2016 Review of Practice Change, Extension and Education in Reef Catchments.

The Pilot program consisted of six graduates and included an extensive monitoring and evaluation project. The evaluation supported the value of the program and made recommendations to improve the approach. It also developed indicators for on-going evaluation. Based on this experience, changes were made and a very comprehensive on-going internal reporting and monitoring process was implemented.

Following the pilot, the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program (through DES), funded a follow-on program concurrently with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF) under the Reef Trust Partnership supporting an additional round of graduates. Both programs were very similar in process with some key differences. The GBRF funded cohort were required to be linked to one of the other GBRF funded water quality projects – while the DES funded cohort had a more flexible remit depending on the needs of the host organisation at the time. Both rounds included greater choice by the host organisations and trainees on the placements than did the pilot. Unlike GBRF, DES allowed the steering committee to select host organisations. The selection process for the current cohorts was improved (compared to the pilot) allowing the trainee to apply directly to a specific host but managed through QFF. Between the two cohorts, 15 graduates participated in the program. An evaluation report of the two programs was completed in 2020 and is reported in the Final Report Coutts J&R / July 2020.

The current Work Placement Program provides for a 15-month placement program and is due to finish by Mid-2022. The project objective is to: *By June 2022 increase the capacity of an additional eight trainees to provide appropriate and effective extension to farmers within the GBR Catchment by providing them with a 15-month work placement program that includes mentoring from experienced advisors, training and access to networks.*

Its design was enhanced in response to the evaluation report, and included:

- a. Refinement of the successful training program and improving cost effectiveness.
- b. A new model for co-contributions for graduate salaries from host organisations, noting the benefit of skilled graduates to business delivery.

The united voice of intensive and irrigated agriculture

- c. Further alignment with training and industry network activities with the DAF led Enhanced Education and Extension program, APEN, the development of Queensland extension practice model, etc.
- d. Consideration of strategic monitoring, evaluation and promotion of the program outcomes which attracts ongoing investment and support for the graduate program and its legacy and reduces the dependency on ad hoc funding (this scope of work).

The Steering Committee sees the opportunity for the program to become an on-going pathway to ensure that a skilled workforce continues to be available for agricultural industries in the reef regions – as well as within Queensland supporting the agricultural industry as a whole. The current uptake is largely within the sugarcane and grazing industries, but there is potential to extend this to other industries. Currently, graduates are placed in extension delivery organisations, but there is also potential to include larger agricultural enterprises who employ graduates as agronomists and in other professional roles. Another potential direction is to extend the program to organisations engaged in water quality monitoring and interpretation. There are also risks for the longevity of the program associated with continued heavy reliance on reef investment streams.

Therefore, key to ensuring continuity of the program is to build industry support and commitment to the program. This will require strong business cases both for individual businesses who co-fund placement within their organisations and for industry and government who could provide on-going financial support (e.g., coordination and training) around the programs.

Evaluation scope

There are two main components to the required evaluation:

Part 1 (40% of effort)

Key Evaluation Question (KEQ) 1: *To what extent is the current AEWPP program meeting its objectives, performing against the Queensland Government Evaluation Framework and contributing towards the objective to build regional capacity - what has been learned and what can be improved?*

This involves review of the internal monitoring data/reports from the current cohort to provide an external perspective on the data emerging and its implications. This may also include suggesting refinements to the data being collected.

There is comprehensive internal monitoring of the program involving regular feedback from placed graduates and their organisations/mentors, reporting against planned activities and skill targets and a mid-term review workshop. The external evaluator would review the information to provide the external perspective. There may be a need to follow-up and interview a selection of current participants to clarify some of the emerging findings. This review of the available data from the current cohort would support the project reporting to DES against the Queensland Government criteria of: Effectiveness; Efficiency; Impact; Legacy; and Project Management.

Part 2 (60% of effort)

Key Evaluation Question (KEQ 2): *What are the ways forward to efficiently build on the experience and learning from the AEWPPs to maintain graduate pathways, maximise benefits to producers and their industries and making it attractive to wider investors?*

This part of the review is to use the secondary data available from previous evaluations of the program and emerging information from the current cohort – together with further primary data collection from

previous participants and relevant (potential) stakeholders – to develop a way forward for the program. This would include developing a business case for individual businesses/organisations to be involved in the program as well as a business case at government and industry level to explore the broader benefits for on-going investment in this type of program.

The following areas of interest have been raised as of particular interest in the evaluation:

- Confirm alignment and metrics for program evaluation against other extension capability improvement programs – and how this program compares to other similar programs (for example, within SRA or Wilmar).
- Clarify how the program complements/fills gaps/adds value to current related activities and needs.
- Conduct strategic analysis of pathways and synergies for sustainable funding models and partnership for future program roll-out with potential worst-case scenario of minimal/no funding contribution under reef programs. This includes considering the co-funding component that participating organisations should cover.
- Capture the career pathways taken by previous graduates, how this has benefited their employers, industry, regional communities and programs directly delivering land management change and how the program assisted the progress and potential career pathways for graduates.
- Develop a succinct business case considering the costs and the benefits for individual organisations joining and co-funding the program as well as for government and industry level support including the broader costs, immediate and longer-term benefits of the program.
- Propose strategic monitoring, evaluation and promotion of the program outcomes which would attract ongoing investment and support for the graduate program and its legacy and reduces the dependency on ad hoc funding.
- Consider whether a broadening of the program would assist in attracting external investment, and what this broadening could encompass.

Evaluation Approach

It is expected that as well as extensive analysis of existing and emerging information, interviews will be needed to collect extra information and views with the following groups of stakeholders:

- a) Host organisation representatives: direct costs and benefits to the organisation; with/without Graduate Program; experience with pilot program graduates if employed post program; opportunity for direct co-funding; future staff needs.
- b) Current graduates: Journey points; gains/downsides; intentions and future expectations; opportunities for future improvement.
- c) Pilot Program Graduates: what has happened since completing the program; career opportunities; salary levels; intentions; barriers encountered; with/without scenario.
- d) Graduate program committee members, program manager and funder representatives: Observations and insights relevant to key questions; factors that could influence future funding; changes that might be needed.
- e) Industry informed persons, including mentors: What they see as the value of the program and investment priority; with and without scenarios; willingness of industry to contribute to costs; future need.
- f) Leaders of similar training initiatives: What is the value of the current training program compared to other programs? What synergies exist?
- g) Investor programs or funding streams external to QRWQP: What would be drivers and values for wider investment or leveraging of placement programs?

It is expected that these interviews would be undertaken through semi-structured interviews and questions may be added to further explore relevant threads emerging through the process.

Analysis and reporting: A transparent and continual process of feeding findings and emerging frameworks to the committee will occur on a three-monthly basis through the evaluation process. A draft final report will be circulated for feedback before finalising.

It is requested that in the final report attention be given to making findings and key messages clear for three different groups of stakeholders: graduates, participating organisations and investors (industry and government).

This will impact on the way the report summary is constructed and the report itself is structured. It may be that a short brochure or infographic of the findings might be useful.

Timing

The final report is due at the end of July 2022, with preliminary findings provided by 15 June 2022. The project will commence as soon as the committee signs off on the approach.

Cost

The maximum project budget is a total and inclusive (budget is expected to be between \$35,000 + GST to \$40,000+GST)

Deliverables

The expected deliverables are:

- Three-monthly short updates (2 pages) on progress, emerging findings and issues to address
- A draft document on the results of the review addressing the terms of reference for review by the Steering Group
- A revised final written final report addressing feedback provided

A project steering committee that includes representatives from government bodies (EHP, DAF) a consultant and representatives from the Reef Alliance and the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance working group (representing the industry) has been set up to provide oversight of the project. This steering committee will provide input to development of the strategy and framework and the review. It is expected that the successful tenderer meets with the steering committee at the start of the project to seek advice and refine objectives and methodology of the review and at the end of the project to present findings and seek feedback on the final report.

Form and Conditions of Contract

The successful tenderer will be required to sign an agreement containing the terms and conditions agreed between QFF and the consultancy.

Tender submissions

Your submission should address:

- Understanding of the task
- Relevant consultancy expertise/ experience
- Proposed approach/methodology
- Proposed timeline
- Proposed budget breakdown.

Please submit your tender to QFF, no later than close of business, 31 August, 2021. The preferred delivery method is via email to diana@qff.org.au

Tenderers who would like a debriefing should contact Diana Saunders (07) 38374726.