

# **South Australian Livestock Consultants (SALC) successfully supports independent, commercially-focused service providers as state-funded agricultural extension services transition to ‘user pays’ models**

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State Governments across Australia have reduced support for publicly funded extension services. These services are viewed as being ‘for private good’ and hence there is an increasing drive for producers to engage fee-for-service providers to translate the outcomes of research and development into on-farm productivity, efficiency, and profitability gains. In South Australia, as in other areas of the country, opportunities have since emerged for sole-traders and small to medium livestock consultancies that are independent of farm merchandise or livestock agency business models to deliver technical and business management advisory services for the State’s livestock producers. In 2010, a need to develop a professional support network for a growing cohort of independent livestock consultants in South Australia was identified and South Australian Livestock Consultants (SALC) was formed. SALC enables its members to maintain a high level of technical competence by implementing professional development activities for the group. These activities also support SALC members to further develop their skills to successfully run their small businesses, and to develop a network of complementary professional services that enhance their business offerings.

## **Membership and Services**

In 2020, SALC comprised 17 independent livestock and business consultant members representing 15 businesses, and one ex-officio member who is the Manager of the SA Sheep Industry and Beef Industry Blueprints. Members work with individual producers, grower groups and the broader livestock industry using a diverse range of skills including; livestock industry development and capacity building; group facilitation, adult education and participatory extension; animal husbandry and livestock production from pastures; livestock infrastructure planning and design; adoption of new technology; business management skills; family facilitation/mediation and succession planning; people management and labour employment; and research and management of both individual and collaborative projects.

## **Industry Networks and Collaborations**

SALC members have established influential networks across the state and national sheep and beef industries to facilitate strong linkages between the industry’s strategic planning policies and targets, and the on-farm delivery of the technical information, and skill and capacity building. Members currently represent the group’s interests on the SA Sheep and Beef Blueprint Committees, Livestock SA and Meat & Livestock Australia’s (MLA) Producer Adoption Reference Group. They also actively participate in national collaborative projects, programs and several other professional organisations. These networks have supported SALC’s ambition to grow its influence on livestock research, development and adoption in South Australia. The group has hosted three successful annual SA Livestock Advisors Updates for both its members and the wider livestock advisory network since 2017. SALC has attracted interest from numerous practitioners and industry funding bodies nationally as a template to support the growing privatisation of livestock consultancy and advisory services. The success of these professional development forums has encouraged MLA to launch a series of National Livestock Advisors Updates in 2019.

## **SALC’s Future**

A recently completed group strategic plan will see SALC adopt higher levels of governance and become an incorporated body in 2020 to support its desire to be more directly involved in collaborative project development and delivery. SALC has established strong links to the next generation of livestock science graduates through sponsorships and career advisory and mentoring engagements with students from the University of Adelaide’s Schools of Agriculture, Animal and Veterinary Sciences. It has also recently partnered with University of Adelaide to employ a MLA Livestock Consultant Intern to work with and be mentored by SALC member businesses.

SALC’s success is underpinned by several factors, including; i) the independence of its members, ii) the trust and respected relationships between members that support peer-to-peer learning, iii) the common interests to grow the skills and capabilities of their clients and the livestock sector generally, iv) a desire to expand the range and quality of services provided, and iv) a commitment to expand the capacity of the commercial consulting industry to support South Australian and interstate livestock producers.