

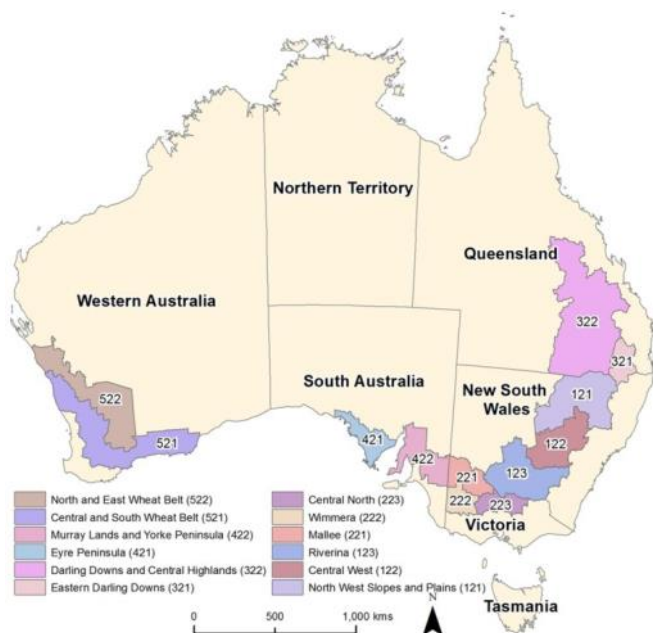
AUSTRALIAN WHEATBELT SURVEY UPDATE (30 November, 2016)

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Progress So Far

The *Australian Wheatbelt Survey on Agricultural Production and Ecological Principles* (online weblink: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WheatbeltSurvey>) is progressing well and being extended until at least 31 December to allow for varying harvest seasons due to our wet Spring conditions. This survey is for Australian Wheatbelt farmers and natural resource management professionals who live or work in the Australian Wheat-Sheep Zones (refer to Fig. 1). If you own or manage broadacre cropland or mixed cropland and livestock grazing areas, we need your opinions – please participate.

Figure 1 The ABARE Wheat-Sheep Zones of Australia



A sincere thank you goes out to those busy farmers and NRM professionals who have participated and assisted across Australia, from Queensland south to NSW and Victoria and west to South Australia and Western Australia (refer to Fig. 2).

We now have responses from 117 people, with those from Victoria and Western Australia leading the charge, as shown on the map here. Approximately 70% are farmers – primarily in cereal crops and sheep grazing – and 20% are NRM professionals. Those in the 41 to 60 year age bracket have had the highest participation level.

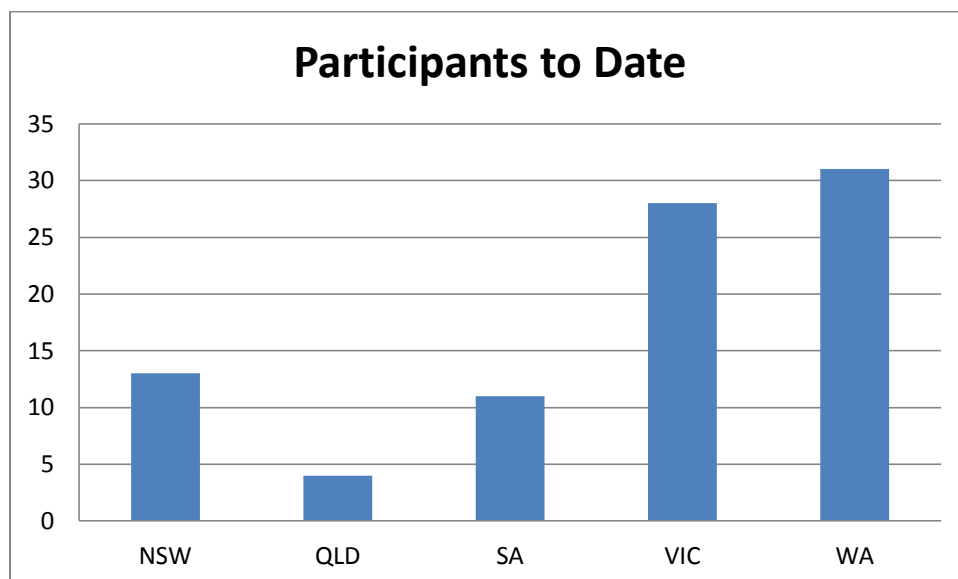
The number of participants by State of residence is shown in Figure 3. Victorian's got a jump on those from elsewhere as the survey was not made available Australia-wide until the end of August¹, this year. Western Australian's and Victorians have responded quite enthusiastically and hopefully more participants from the other States will even out the numbers.

¹ The initial survey was limited to the Mallee and Wimmera Wheatbelt Regions, but then expanded nationally in order to obtain a greater number of participants.

Figure 2 Localities of 117 Survey Participants (through 30 November 2016)



Figure 3 Participants by State (through 30 November, 2016)



More survey participants are needed between now and the end of 2016 to provide more robust results. We especially need more participants from Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales, but more in Victoria and Western Australia are very welcome. (We may keep the survey open during January, 2017 if needed.)

General Types of Findings

The survey is providing highly useful insights into farmers and NRM managers' thoughts regarding changing agricultural practices in response to climatic and weather patterns. Farmers have identified changes to no-till cultivation practices, the protection of wet swales, the use of native tree and mallee oil crop windrows, and changes in planting and harvest seasons and other practices in response to environmental conditions.

The survey is showing us what aspects of the natural environment are valued and considered to add benefits to agricultural production and rural lifestyles, including the enhancement of soil health, prevention of soil erosion, and maintenance of water quality and general ecosystem health. They have flagged their

interest in and concerns for the habitats of a range of native flora and fauna species, including quandongs, Buloke trees, grass trees and banksia's, as well as echidnas, wallabies, Mallee fowl, and various other bird and reptile species. Yes, some of this we already knew, but here we are also identifying differences between NRM management knowledge and concerns and those of farmers and other landholders who are more directly involved in land management in rural areas outside the National Parks and major conservation reserves.

Participants have indicated their level of agreement with and the practical application of specific ecological principles regarding overall land use mixes, protection of remnant bushlands, widths of stream corridor woodlands, minimum gaps between native woodland areas, the importance of wetlands and other environmental management issues. This is where much of the detailed results not usually found in less comprehensive survey research.

Potential Benefits of Survey Findings

The results should be of great benefit to understand how farmers and NRM managers are responding to current production and environmental challenges. The findings should also provide insight into the differences in attitudes between rural property owners and NRM managers regarding the practicality of certain environmental management objectives, potentially influencing future policies and funding programs. In addition, the results may well point to improved rapid responses to the potential loss of Australian native flora and fauna species that may also be more compatible with current farming practices.

Contribute 30 Minutes of Your Knowledge for Important Wheatbelt Outcomes

The survey takes about 30 minutes to complete – time which you may find hard to find in your busy schedule – but it's a time investment that allows us to dig deeper on issues important to agricultural production and environmental management. So please participate if you can, use it as an opportunity for a brief break, and give us your opinions – we are listening!

You can do in a single sitting or over more than one sitting if you are having difficulty squeezing it into your busy days given other demands. However, your participation would be greatly appreciated. To let us know what you think, just click on: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WheatbeltSurvey>.

Find Us on Facebook

You can also find promotional links on my new Facebook Page for the Australian Wheatbelt Agriculture and Ecology Group at <fb.me/auswheatbelt.agricultureecology>. Here a range of posts relevant to Wheatbelt farmers and NRM professionals are available, along with updates on the progress of the survey.

Thanks for your generous time and involvement. Hope the current harvest and other work is going well!

Regards,

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