

National Primary Industries RD&E Strategy Project

Monitoring public attitudes

Development of a monitoring scheme to inform livestock animal welfare policy

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Aims:

- Determine attitudes towards livestock animal welfare
- Determine levels of knowledge of livestock practices in the community
- Explore levels of trust in the livestock industries
- Investigate the extent to which demographics, attitudes, trust and knowledge are related to community behaviours
- Identify opinion leaders and their characteristics in terms of demographics, attitudes, levels of trust and behaviours

Method:

- 479 participants (228 males, 251 females) interviewed by telephone
- 142 item questionnaire
 - Demographics
 - Questions about animal welfare
 - Knowledge of livestock animals and livestock animal welfare
 - Attitudes towards livestock practices
 - Attitudes towards the livestock industries' impact on the environment and towards specific livestock industry procedures and practices
 - The extent to which respondents have engaged in behaviours to express their dissatisfaction with the Australian livestock industries
 - Frequency with which they access or distribute livestock animal welfare information
 - The extent to which they trust various sources of livestock animal welfare information

Results:

- Distribution of attitudes to farm animal welfare
- Surprisingly strong relationship between attitudes and meat consumption (higher than had previously been reported)
- Limited knowledge of some husbandry procedures
- Poor correlation between perceived and actual knowledge
- Clear data on trusted sources of animal welfare information
- Low trust of some off-farm animal workers
- High prevalence of relevant community behaviours
- Identification of opinion leaders and their characteristics
- High perceived knowledge but low actual knowledge amongst opinion leaders

Conclusions:

- Need to improve some key areas of trust
- Need to do research on off-farm practices to determine the extent of any of the areas of concern so that appropriate responses can be determined
- Need to engage some of the agencies that are regarded as the most trusted sources by the community
- Need to develop strategies to target opinion leaders to make them better informed to reduce risk posed by uninformed pressure for change in livestock practices
- Need to review practices that are of community concern and that lead to community behaviours that pose risk to the livestock industries
- Need to use this to monitor changes over time