

## ON-FARM TO ONLINE

E-Beef landholders step from the paddock to the internet to explore new and emerging tools for northern graziers

A newly formed Producer Group in north Queensland met online for the first time and were joined by top quality speakers from all around Australia. This online meeting was a first for all of the properties involved, and signifies a shift to the digital world in light of COVID-19.

John McLaughlin from the Northern Gulf Resource Management Group (NGRMG) works with groups of beef producers to improve the productivity and profitability of their grazing enterprises. Landholders normally meet together face-to-face to discuss the challenges and successes within their beef businesses. They usually learn about new innovations and products in the paddock or over a bite to eat, and solve problems together in a social and peer-supportive way. Prompted by COVID-19 restrictions, John is proactively using video conferencing technologies to connect with and assist local producers.

The E-Beef project is a partnership with local producers and four organisations; Southern Gulf NRM (lead), Desert Channels Queensland, NGRMG and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF). E-Beef focuses on implementing grazing and herd best management practices by demonstrating technologies to enhance pasture productivity, groundcover, land condition, profitability and business agility. E-Beef is funded through the National Landcare Program (NLP; Smart Farms Initiative) and the Queensland Drought and Climate Adaptation Program (DCAP).

### THE MEETING HAD TO CHANGE

John made the call to cancel the Almaden face-to-face meeting scheduled to be held in Almaden in late March. An online meeting forum was necessary for E-Beef Producer Group projects to proceed. John emailed and phoned producers from each of the 8 E-Beef properties to discuss the Zoom online meeting software.

“Yeh mate, sounds fine, but keep in mind that we have no history or ability in using these sorts of things” was the response from most producers. John emailed landholders Zoom instructions prior to the meeting. Most producers participated in a 5-minute practice session with John prior to the meeting to test connection and sound, and to feel comfortable with the online forum.

John emailed instructions on how to get into the meeting to each of the land holders.

To get into the meeting do the following:

1. Find this email.
2. Scroll down until you find the link that is highlighted in yellow.
3. Click the link
4. At the bottom of the page with ‘Launching...’ on it – click ‘join from browser’ (at the bottom of the page in blue writing’
5. Enter your name and click join
6. Click ‘Join Audio by Computer’
7. You are now in the meeting – say hello in the ‘chat’ box at the bottom of your screen.
8. Test your sound and microphone in the bottom left corner if you need to.

Emily Corbett (DAFBeef Extension Officer), also attended the meeting and noted: “Within these groups there are people who are up to speed with technology and are keen to be more involved. There are also those who haven’t been involved much before and are looking to improve their skills. For some the online meeting is breaking down those fears and concerns that people have by experimenting and building confidence.” This happens within a supportive group environment with NGRMG and DAF officers there to assist producers and build confidence in these meeting platforms.

Janelle Foote from Mt Cardwell Station attended the meeting. She said “it was quite scary, none of us had ever done this before. When we started and didn’t need to have our picture up on the screen and didn’t need to have our microphones on. If we did have any questions, we could type them as we had them. I found that was a lot easier for our first meeting.” Taking one or two steps at a time seemed to be the key for successful online meetings. Producer anxiety around online meetings was considerably eased by a practice session and use of the Zoom functions prior to the meeting. Producers are now more comfortable using the Zoom technology for future meetings.

## PRAISE FOR THE CHANGE

When changing from a face-to-face to online meetings it was important to rethink the events structure and purpose. The meeting was altered to include speakers that gave an in-depth overview of the services they offer producers, and the meeting was held in the early evening so as not to interrupt busy daytime work schedules. John noted there are “some negatives holding a face-to-face meeting in remote locations”. Having an online meeting means that “you can have access to anyone”. By having access to experts “you can deep dive into a topic and producers can have their questions answered,” John explained. During the meeting, landholders were joined by three Guest Speakers; **James Walker** from Agrihive (Farmecco financial software), **Rachael Dunn** from FarmBot Monitoring Solutions and **Chelsea Jarvis** from the Centre for Applied Climate Sciences at USQ.



“This was an efficient and cost-effective way of holding a meeting,” John Colless of Wetherby Station noted as he reflected on some benefits from the event. “You could do a day’s work, come in, not even have to shower, grab a cup of coffee and get into it. In these current circumstances most of us have a little more time, we’re not bored, there are always things to do, but you shouldn’t be going to town, you shouldn’t be going to cattle sales.”

## GIVING AN ONLINE MEETING A GO

Both John McLaughlin and Emily Corbett agreed that participants should allow enough time before the meeting to make sure they can log on, and that the event is not rushed or stressful. Having a supportive extension staff to assist with logging on and practice sessions prior to meeting will mean the difference between participants worrying about the technology versus looking forward to catching up with others in a new way.

Emily advises others running online meetings; “Don’t assume that you’re talking to a group of people that all have the same level of understanding.” It was clearly demonstrated through this event that planning and preparation made all the difference. Providing clear instructions and phone support to help people before the meeting meant people are willing to do it again. “Prior to the meeting provide producers with the background around each speaker” Emily suggests. “This way producers can do some research themselves and be ready for the session.”

## THE SKY IS THE LIMIT

Reflecting on the success of the meeting, Emily Corbett explained future sessions could even be held “at lunch time so producers can tune in, eat their sandwich and connect while in the house for the hour” or even “in that time just after they’ve knocked off they can just sit down with a cool drink and connect with others”.

**Total kilometres that would have been travelled for the 8 properties to attend a function in Almaden...  
1,010km**

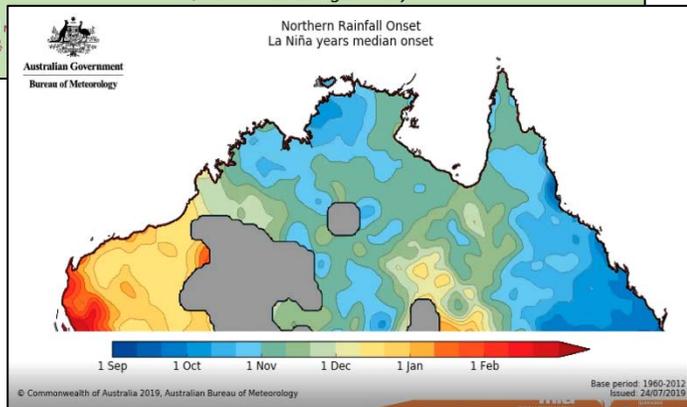
**Total kilometres that each of the 3 presenters were away from the Almaden...  
4,930km & 55 hours Driving**

Even after COVID-19, having a monthly reconnection including a theme for that month, where producers share something they have seen on their property or at a field day, is time efficient and allows producers to stay in touch with their peers. This would allow producers to share things they have trialed with a familiar audience without having to wait for a big field day or travel long distances.

By adopting these online-webinar style meetings, NGRMG and DAF officers can reach a wider audience, and not necessarily just the producers specifically involved with current projects. Learning can be open to anyone in the region who has access to the internet. This group of landholders, who are all relatively new to this technology, have shown that anybody can participate in the digital world!



Welcome to the...  
**NORTHERN GULF PRODUCER GROUP ONLINE MEETING**  
*Improving productivity and profitability in the North Queensland Grazing Industry*



**65,000 AUSTRALIAN FARMS**  
AND ALL FARMERS FACE THE CHALLENGE OF MANAGING WATER

- HIGH COST OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES
- THE LIMITATIONS OF AVAILABLE ALTERNATIVES
- REACTIVE NOT PROACTIVE

Sam, a preview of your report is ready! Click the thumbnail to see it



MY FAMILY

MY LIFESTYLE

MY FARM

MY FINANCIALS

PREVIEW YOUR FARMECCO REPORT



Queensland Government

