

Improving the market orientation of weeds information

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Summary Market orientation refers to the business function of understanding client needs and wants and providing a product to satisfy these needs and wants. This, however, is not always easy to achieve when there is a multitude of client groups, a diverse range of products required, and access mechanisms are changing at a rapid pace.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries has a strong client focus. It plays a key role in providing high quality, relevant and timely weeds information to the community of New South Wales (NSW), ensuring land managers are skilled in weed identification and management. It also has the same challenges of any organisation operating in a competitive environment, including:

- remaining relevant as a credible provider of useful products;
- achieving departmental performance indicators;
- focusing resources more effectively to achieve measurable outcomes with greater accountability; and
- understanding its competitors.

For any large organisation to remain client focused, both the internal and external environments need to be regularly analysed and adapted. This initiative uses the basic principles of market research and community engagement to critically evaluate the Department's current performance and propose clear directions for the future.

Keywords NSW Department of Primary Industries, weed information, client needs, market research.

THE PROCESS

Using a combination of survey, group facilitation and validation, the process aims to focus not only on the current and future needs of the NSW Department of Primary Industries' wide range of clients, but the institutional barriers that may potentially prevent the Department satisfying these needs.

A range of Department staff and external stakeholders were invited to participate in the process as a

reference group. They represent both producers and users of weed publications across NSW. They provide direction for the project but more importantly validate the findings.

A survey was developed in the first stage of the project for Departmental staff and local government weeds officers. This had clear objectives and expert input to ensure that the information was comprehensive and robust. It was trialed with a small group of 'end-users' to ensure it was simple and unambiguous for respondents to complete. The information collected will identify the Department's client groups and any limitations in the current system for producing and accessing weed information.

The second stage of the project will use this information to establish focus groups in key agricultural zones throughout NSW. Facilitation of these groups will engage relevant stakeholders in providing direction for the Department's future publications function, and allow a mechanism for review of their changing needs over time.

Validation, regular communication and documentation throughout the process are also key components of the project.

OUTCOMES

Depending on the findings, considerations for improving the market orientation of the Department's weeds information could include:

- modifying existing institutional arrangements;
- providing specific staff training;
- implementing improved stock control systems;
- improved tracking of the website;
- implementing regular market research programs; and
- improving internal and external networking.

Generating credible information to identify client needs will assist the NSW Department of Primary Industries to provide innovative, efficient and accessible weed information exchange systems.