



2013 Sustaining Rural Communities Conference

Final Report





Introduction

The 2013 Sustaining Rural Communities Conference was held on the 5th and 6th June 2013. In this, its fourth consecutive year it was hosted by the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) in partnership with Namoi Catchment Management Authority. Gold Sponsorship was received from Fairfax Agricultural Media, Silver Sponsors included Santos and Agrifood skills Australia, Bronze sponsors were Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation and Datamars.

This Final Report seeks to provide an overview of the outcomes of the event and feedback from participants based on survey data collected.

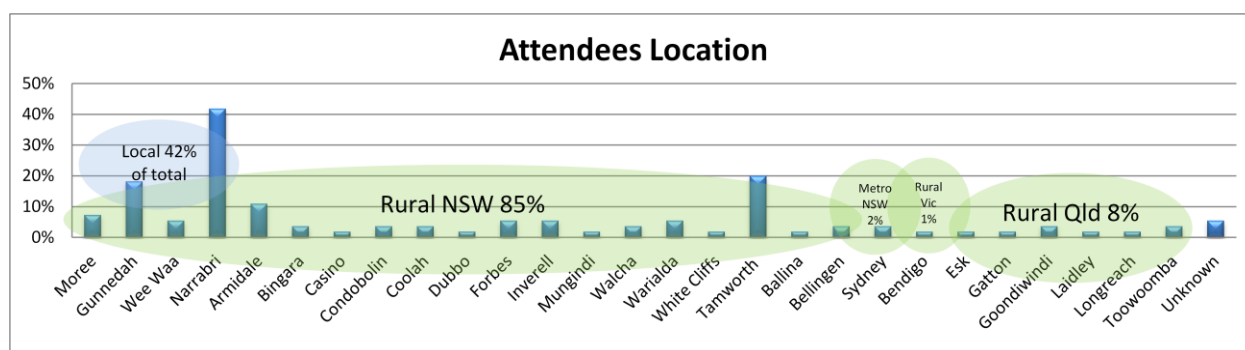
Overview of Attendances



Attendees to 2013 Sustaining Rural Communities Conference overwhelming reported a highly productive, enjoyable and stimulating event. Their comments are throughout this report in the orange text boxes.

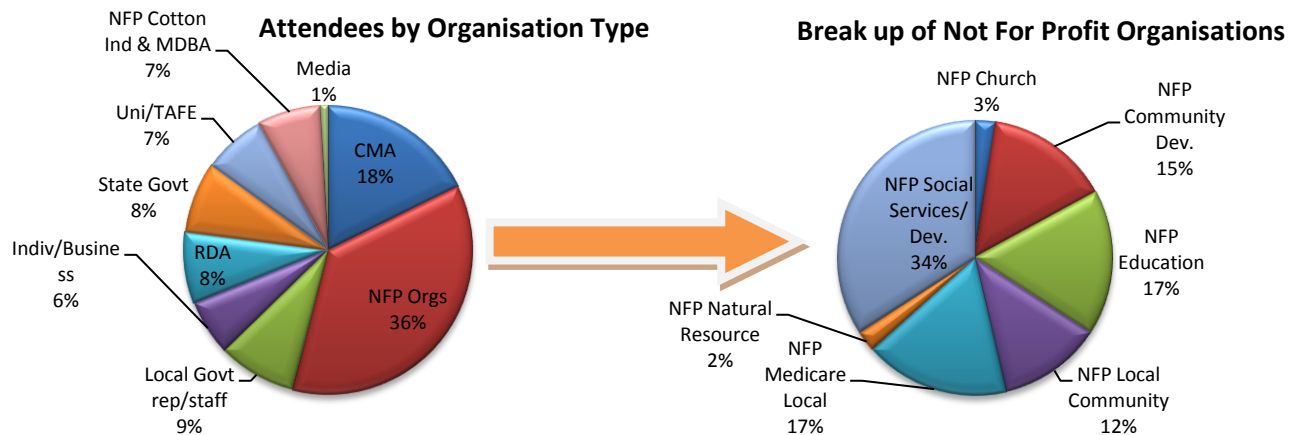
'Exceeded expectations with content. Very worthwhile, the speakers were confident, inspiring and very professional, their topics well developed and executed.'

The Conference targeted people in rural communities who are active in their community from across eastern Australian and it attracted 158 delegates over the two days, with more than 270 attendances in total. More than 85% of these came from Rural NSW, with 8% attracted from rural Qld and 2% from metro NSW.



As was the intention, the Conference appealed to those working and volunteering in the not-for-profit (NFP) sector, as demonstrated by the 36% attendance by NFPs. Further investigation of the NFP sector attendees demonstrates a fairly equitable breakup across the sector. The following graphs indicate the range of organisations represented at the conference.

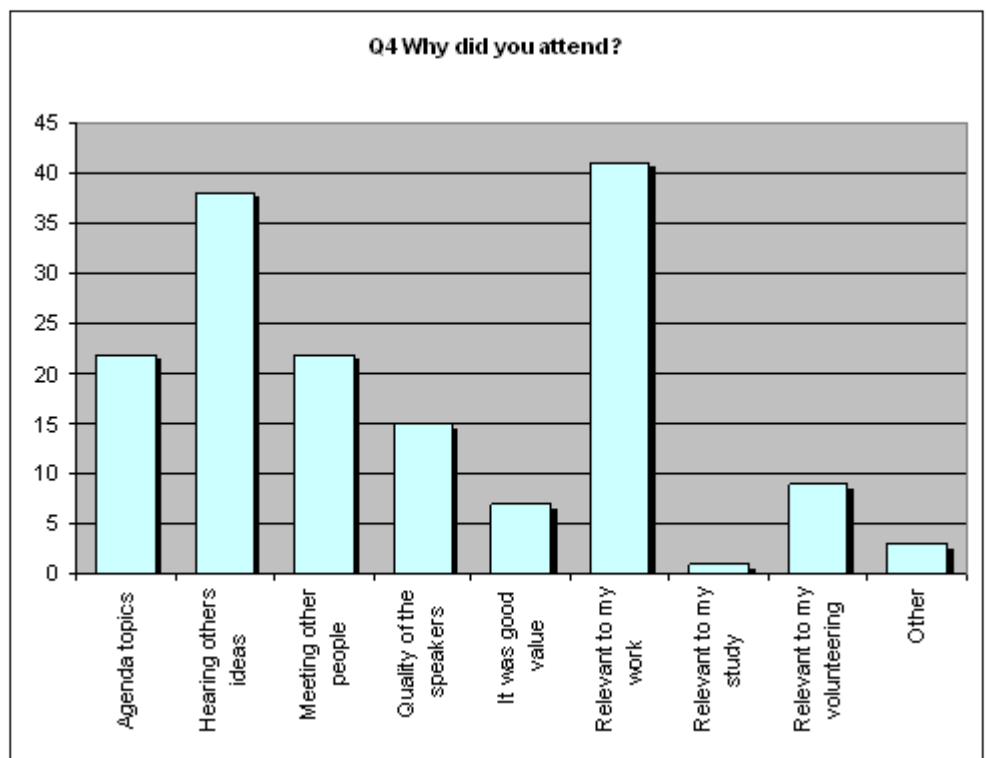
'Smooth organisation, nicely facilitated, interesting diverse participants.'



Motivation for Attendance

The primary reasons given by participants were that attendance was relevant to their work, that they had an interest in the agenda topics or speakers and that there were good networking opportunities.

'Well done - good mix of sessions, good flow and really good final sessions. Great facilitation!!'



"Cultivating YOUR Resilient Community"

The 2013 theme was around the concept of resilience which was seen as highly topical and extremely important to rural communities. Both presenters and delegates appreciated a concrete topic to focus on and build their ideas around.

'I thoroughly enjoyed the day. I was reluctant to attend but am glad I did. I can apply this to my work environment. I am a little bit frustrated that Narrabri does not do resilience very well.'



Conference Features

The conference is designed to be highly interactive which continues to be the feature most enjoyed about the event. This year, whole-of-group facilitated sessions were held, including a session allowing participants to rate the resilience levels of their own community and make comment as to why they believed they rated well or poorly, with some surprising outcomes.



Another session was held to stimulate participants to generate a “Wall of Thought” of all the great ideas that they felt needed reiterating. This content will help inform future conference topics.

The Conference Dinner provided an opportunity for the 2012 bursary winners to report back on the practical and outcome driven projects that they have achieved since the previous Conference, demonstrating to others that they can take action themselves.

The conference is deliberately designed with ample time for networking and good quality food. Positive feedback continues to be generated from this aspect of the conference.

‘The Conference had a warm vibe – everyone I met was friendly, open to talk to and happy to share contact details.’

This year two speakers ran “Breakfast Workshops” which was extremely well received by participants. The sessions were designed to deliver practical skills to participants such as understanding group dynamics and knowing how best to put yourself forward.



Another new innovation in 2013 was the “Poster Session” where people who have achieved success in their communities were invited to input content into their own Poster. These were erected during the conference and featured during a “wine and nibbles” session prior to the Conference Dinner. Participants chatted with Poster people, sharing their successes and their learnings.

*‘The Poster Session was a great icebreaker. It gave people something to talk about over a glass of wine’.
‘Sometimes people do not feel comfortable to “mingle” but this was a great way of connecting people together.’*

The Outcomes

Of the conference attendees that responded to the survey 97% said that their expectations of the event were met or exceeded. The positive feedback that was received during and after the conference has been overwhelming. Overall, the conference received a very high satisfaction rating. Delegates expressed particular satisfaction with the speakers, the organisation of the conference, the opportunities to network and the ideas to take back to their own communities.

Each year attendees are encouraged to apply for a bursary to the value of \$2,000 to help support some local on the ground action in their own community. This year bursaries were provided by CRDC, Best Employment and Brindabella Airlines.





These bursaries leave a lasting and significant impact in their communities. Some such projects include the establishment of a new support group for business women, a new project to provide aboriginal artists with the skills to work as professionals, the development of new sporting facilities, the establishment of a community website and many more.

'I haven't been before, but will be back!! It was such a productive few days. I've come away with some personal actions, a collaborative project idea with people from NSW and Qld. I hope that I was able to contribute some ideas to others, I thoroughly enjoyed the two days, thanks so much!!!'



The future

Having run for four years, the Sustaining Rural Communities Conference has developed a highly successful template for the leading think-tank into issues facing our rural and regional communities. Its primary charter is "knowledge, networks and skills" and it manages to neatly blend learning content with an enjoyable people-based experience. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive to the 2013 conference and without our sponsors, partners and speakers this would not be possible. We hope that this experience has also been positive for you and we look forward to further developing our working relationship with you in the future.

'This remains the best conference on rural issues – keep doing it.'

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