

# Peter Andrews NSF Workshop Evaluation Results

# Feedback received from NSF Workshops held in 2012

## Background

A series of three field days was hosted in the WA rangelands in August and September 2012 to interested landholders in the Murchison (Kirkalocka Station), the Pilbara (Yarrie Station homestead), and the Kimberley (Liveringa Station). At each of these field days agricultural pioneer Peter Andrews presented his theories on sustainable agricultural systems and how he had converted his degraded high-salinity land at Tarwyn Park in NSW into a fertile, drought-resistant estate.

The process implemented by Peter Andrews, known as the Natural Sequence Farming method, is based on the principle of reintroducing natural landscape patterns and processes that increase fertility and drought resistance as they would have existed in Australia prior to European settlement. The model restores the natural flow patterns of water across the landscape, reconnecting the stream to its flood plain, which would reintroduce a more natural hydrological and fertility cycle to that landscape. Through a managed succession of the vegetation, the natural fluvial pattern could be 'redeveloped', so that nutrients and biomass remain in place throughout the property. The methods have generated considerable debate in the research field over the past years and his studies have had greater focus on high-rainfall areas of Australia. These workshops gave landholders the opportunity to hear his theories, ask questions, and openly debate specific issues and challenges faced in the WA rangelands.

An evaluation form was provided in an effort to obtain an understanding of the effectiveness of the workshop in meeting the needs of those attending. 29 responses were received - seven from Liveringa (27.59%), and 22 from Kirkalocka (75.86%). Forms were not collected from those attending the Yarrie Station field day.

Of the responses received, 19 were from land managers (65.25%); one from an Indigenous land holder (3.45%); two (6.90%) were received from Rangelands NRM staff who attended; one (3.45%) from an attendee who worked in the private sector; two (6.90%) from the mining sector; one (3.45%) from the Government sector; and three (10.34%) from other areas.

## Results

Question 1 asked whether there were components of Natural Sequence Farming (NSF) that appealed to attendees. The question was two-pronged with a 'yes' or 'no' response required together with an open ended comment.

28 respondents answered the question, and of those, all answered 'Yes' (100%). One respondent did not provide a response. Interestingly, three of the respondents indicated that they had used concepts of NSF or a similar system previously. One of whom had "applied aspects of NSF on other properties and have had amazing results". Another indicated that they didn't "necessarily agree with 100% that was said but like the principle."

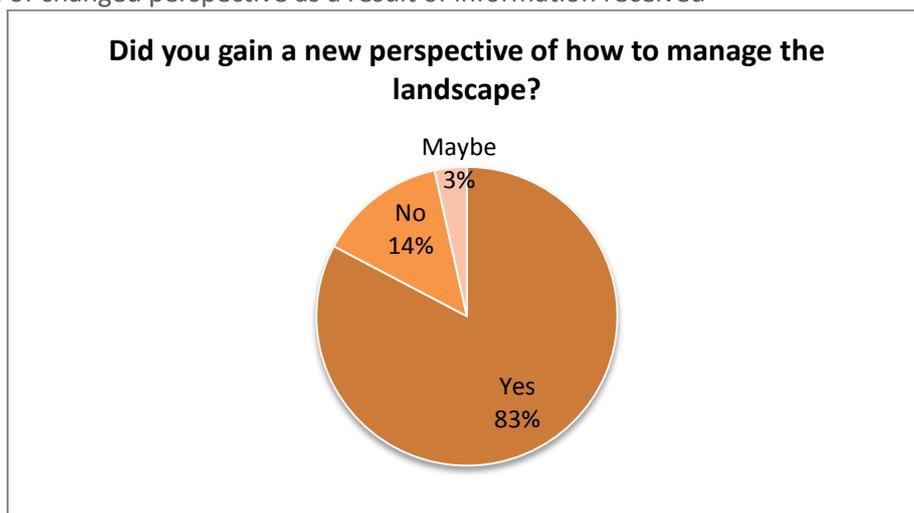
The respondents' open ended comments about the components of Natural Sequence Farming (NSF) that appealed to them were concentrated on two key themes:

- learning how to better control water flow and dispersment, reduce run-off and erosion, and protect soils; and
- the ability to view the landscape as a total system and return it to its former capacity and quality through natural methodology through implementing solutions that are in tune with how nature functions.

Question 2 asked respondents whether the information had provided them with a new perspective of how to manage the landscape. The question was two-pronged with a 'yes' or 'no' response required together with an open ended comment.

All respondents provided a response to the Yes/No component of the question with 24 (82.76%) indicating that they had gained a new perspective, 4 (13.79%) indicating they hadn't, and 1 feeling unsure ("maybe", 3.45%).

Figure 1: The level of changed perspective as a result of information received



The respondents' comments about gaining a new perspective on land highlighted the following.

- Reinforcement of information received previously and practical examples assist in deeper understanding, provide sufficient confidence to take the next step, and foster uptake of the 'call for action'. Implementation of a demonstration site would further assist uptake.
- Perceived barriers to uptake include the current political climate, "not every pastoralist wants (or is able) to become a farmer", factors outside one's control such as climatic conditions, and time and financial constraints.

Question 3 queried whether respondents felt that they had learnt something that they could take home and apply to their land management activities. The question was two-pronged with a 'yes' or 'no' response required together with an open ended comment.

All 29 respondents answered with 96.55% (n=28) indicating that they had learnt something that they could apply and 1 respondent (3.45%) indicating that they hadn't. Open ended responses focussed on respondents outlining individual strategies that they were motivated to put into action such as:

- managing water flow, dispersion, and run-off and undertaking key repairs;
- reconsidering the overuse of fire;
- undertaking or continuing with planning for activities;
- comparing and sharing information with others in order to be more effective; and
- passing the information received onto other land holders.

Question 4 asked respondents to identify what they liked most about the field day. This required an open ended response only. All respondents except 3 provided a response (89.66%). Responses centred on benefits gained from:

- hearing from someone with land management experience and practical, rather than theoretical knowledge, and the ability to exchange ideas with someone from a different landscape;
- having an informal field-based event and the use of visible, simple, and practical demonstrations that involved the attendees; and
- landowners coming together and having an opportunity to share information amongst themselves.

A notation was made of the appreciation towards Rangelands NRM for funding the event.

Question 5 asked respondents if they had any suggestions for how the field day process could be improved. The key suggested improvements were:

- providing a précis of the presentation or additional information as a take-away reminder;
- increasing the time available for a presentation such as this and incorporating active practice and more than 1 speaker/topic;
- providing follow up to maintain or build on the day's activities; and
- providing access to speakers with an understanding of the local system as there was some concern that Peter Andrews was not fully aware of the particular issues affecting the region.

Question 6 asked respondents if they felt that there is value in field days that bring high profile speakers to the region. The question was two-pronged with a 'yes' or 'no' response required together with an open ended comment.

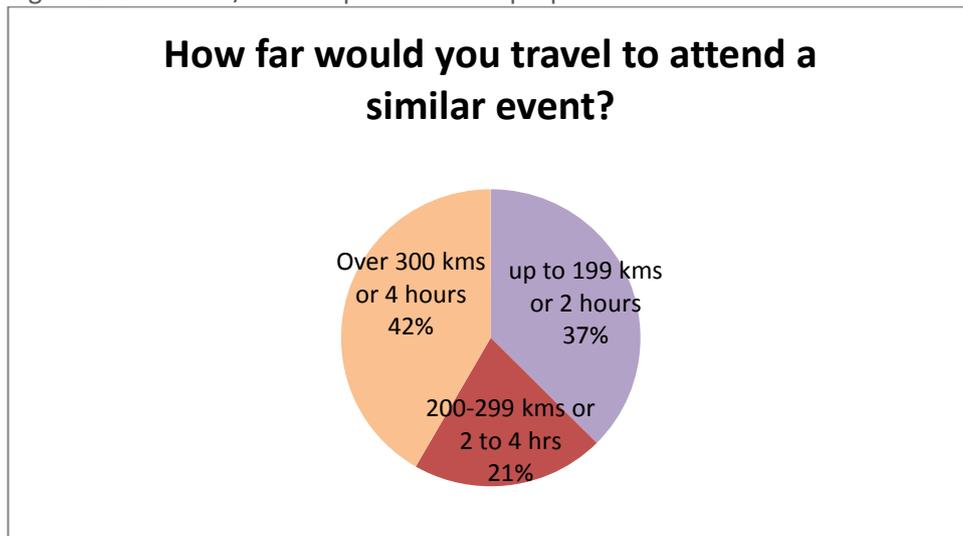
Twenty eight of the respondents answered. Of these, all responded that there was value (100%). The open ended questions indicated that the key areas of value lay in continuing to promote ideas and innovation by accessing "achievers and those with strong views" that can assist in challenging "our own thinking" from specialised speakers with first-hand experience. Care needs to be taken however, to ensure that the speaker understands the local environmental, economic, and social conditions.

Question 7 was a two part question. The first component asked if respondents would attend a similar field day. The second component asked how far they would be prepared to travel to attend.

There were 28 respondents; 27 (96.43%) of whom indicated that they would attend a similar event. The remaining respondent noted that they may be interested in attendance.

Twenty-four respondents indicated the distances or time period that they would be prepared to travel to attend another field day. 37% (n=9) noted they would travel for up to 199 kms or 2 hours. A further 5 would travel up to 299 kms or 2 to 4 hours and 10 (41.67%) would travel over 300 kms or 4 hours. Several respondents indicated that they would travel as far as necessary to attend.

Figure 2: Distances/time respondents are prepared to travel to attend a similar field day/event



Question 8 asked respondents to outline topics/speakers that would be of interest for future events. The list of suggested topics centred on:

Land management

- How to manage scrub/woody weeds/useless grasses when they become dominant
- Techniques to assist in improving pastures, improving productivity, rehabilitation, and erosion control (Suggested speaker Arthur Cameron (NT))
- Fire management for improved rangeland condition and biodiversity (positive use of fire) and understanding its role in northern land systems (Suggested speaker Jim Addison DAFWA)

• Dam construction

Animal management

- Grazing management and animal teaching selective grazing and improving sustainability while intensifying grazing and grazing for profit
- The role of herbivores in the building of soils - Elaine Ingham’s soil food web principles
- Use of animal impact and spelling to improve poor land condition (Suggested speaker Allan Savoury)

Improved economic viability

- Economic skills, social building, diversification
- Commercial pastoral applications of carbon farming
- How to access to funding to off-set costs involved in pastoral management

## Analysis

Analysis of the results indicates that the workshop was successful and respondents felt that their attendance had been worthwhile and they were motivated to implement some of the techniques on their own properties. The key benefits to the event were the increased level of confidence and an enhanced desire to question the ‘status quo’, although there was a level of concern that the techniques presented didn’t fully take the specific rangelands conditions into account.

The use of a field day format with demonstrations and participant involvement was deemed very beneficial to the level of learning achieved. It was suggested that the inclusion of a greater length of time and more practical activities, and follow up sessions would further enhance the benefits of similar events. Once again, the

opportunity to come together with peers and learn from each other was highly valued. Pastoralists are keen to continue to have field day based information and education sessions made available with a key focus given to land and animal management techniques and commercial upskilling.