



**Australian Government**  

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**Rural Industries Research and  
Development Corporation**

*EcoRange:*  
**Market-Oriented  
Environmental Certification for  
Rangeland Pastoral Industries**

**7. Perceptions from industry,  
conservation and consumer  
groups**

*Part of the EcoRange project report series*

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A report for the Rural Industries Research  
and Development Corporation

by Christine King and Lester Pahl

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***EcoRange: Development of market-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries: 7. Perceptions from industry, conservation and consumer groups***  
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# Foreword

The project entitled EcoRange: Development of Market-Oriented Environmental Certification for Rangeland Pastoral Industries arose out of a desire of government, industry and community for market forces to encourage the adoption of on-farm environmental management and certification schemes. It is a collaborative project between the Department of Primary Industries, Queensland, and CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems.

The EcoRange project provides marketing information and strategies for 'environment-friendly' food and fibre products, describes and contrasts a range of market-oriented environmental management and certification schemes that could be used on farms, and makes recommendations on the application of these to agricultural production.

As part of this project, an investigation of the perceptions of industry, conservation and consumer groups about environmental certification was carried out. This report presents the themes that emerged from these stakeholder interviews.

This project was funded from the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) Core Funds, which are provided by the Australian Government.

This report is a new addition to RIRDC's diverse range of over 1500 research publications. It forms part of our Rangeland and Wildlife Systems R&D sub-program, which aims to facilitate a more diverse rural sector, enhanced biodiversity and innovative industries based on non-traditional uses of the rangelands and their wildlife.

Most of our publications are available for viewing, downloading or purchasing online through our web site:

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# EcoRange reports

The findings of the EcoRange project are presented in seven reports. The first of these, the project overview, is a synthesis of the project findings and, as such, recommends outcomes and procedures for market-oriented environmental certification in the rangeland pastoral industries. These recommendations were informed by the results of extensive consultation. This included surveys of domestic consumers, rangeland pastoralists and members of environmental groups, interviews with companies in Australian and international meat and wool supply chains, interviews with representatives of agricultural industry, environmental and consumer organisations, and a review of on-farm standards that could be used to deliver the requirements of these stakeholders.

Full reports, as follows, can be accessed from the RIRDC website (<http://www.rirdc.gov.au/fullreports/>).

## Research reports

<i>EcoRange: Market-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries</i> 1. Project overview (Lester Pahl)
<i>EcoRange: Market-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries</i> 2. A review of on-farm standards (Lester Pahl)
<i>EcoRange: Market-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries</i> 3. Australian consumer survey (editors Kylie MacNamara and Lester Pahl)
<i>EcoRange: Market-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries</i> 4. Australian rangeland grazier survey (editor Lester Pahl)
<i>EcoRange: Market-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries</i> 5. Australian environment group survey (Jim Longworth and Craig James)
<i>EcoRange: Market-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries</i> 6. Market research report (Peter Twyford-Jones, Lester Pahl, Kerry Miles, Guy Newell and Kylie MacNamara)
<i>EcoRange: Market-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries</i> 7. Perceptions from industry, conservation and consumer groups (Christine King and Lester Pahl)

Other reports of the EcoRange project are available on request from Lester Pahl ([lester.pahl@dpi.qld.gov.au](mailto:lester.pahl@dpi.qld.gov.au)), or by phoning 07 4688 1302.

## Other project reports

Environmental marketing workshop for graziers 1, Cooladdi (Queensland), September 2000 (includes workshop proceedings)
Environmental marketing workshop for graziers 2, Cooladdi (Queensland), April 2001 (includes workshop proceedings)
'Consumer-oriented environmental certification for rangeland pastoral industries: a role for product labels': paper presented to National Conference on Environmental Management Systems in Agriculture, Ballina, November 2001
EcoRange stakeholder workshop, Brisbane, August 2002 (includes workshop proceedings)



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# Executive summary

The EcoRange project investigated and made recommendations on the types of environmental certification that could be applied to agriculture. The project recognised that supply chains, the end consumer and stakeholder groups all need to play important roles if environmental certification is to assist agriculture achieve significant environmental, economic and social outcomes. Therefore, it was important that their views were taken into account when developing environmental certification schemes for agriculture.

This report discusses the perceptions and expectations of industry, conservation and consumer groups with regard to the development and application of environmental certification in agriculture.

Perceptions of these three categories of stakeholders were explored using a qualitative research method known as convergent interviewing. In this way EcoRange interviewed representatives of 24 state or national organisations, eight from each category of stakeholder.

Industry, conservation and consumer groups all have a desire for agriculture to be profitable, ecologically sustainable and socially beneficial. These groups are generally in favour of the application of environmental certification to agriculture, providing it can contribute to these outcomes.

The following paragraphs outline the broad principles and processes that these stakeholders wish to see incorporated within agricultural environmental certification.

## Stakeholder expectations for environmental certification

### **Certification standards and performance criteria**

Industry groups preferred environmental certification to occur on a national industry-wide scale, and to be based on existing agricultural related standards such as quality assurance. It should contain regional performance measures, Australian industry best management practices, and be applied to the whole supply chain.

Conservation and consumer groups did not appear to have a preference for any particular type of standard. However, they did expect environmental certification to address the whole supply chain, and operate at regional, national and global scales.

Conservation groups emphasised three key criteria for environmental certification: ecosystem function, biodiversity conservation, and prices reflecting the true cost of production. In relation to the cost of production, both conservation and consumer groups felt that the current retail price of some products did not adequately reflect their full environmental and social costs.

Conservation and consumer groups believed that minimum environmental performance measures should be combined with existing best practice and continuous improvement processes. For these two groups it was important that environmental certification should question whether a land use should exist in the first place, rather than just apply a continuous improvement process to it.

Consumer groups also placed particular emphasis on food safety.

### **Uptake and expected outcomes**

Industry groups unanimously believed that environmental certification should be voluntary. While both conservation and consumer groups also displayed a general preference for environmental certification to be voluntary, they desired some form of regulatory back-up to ensure that standards were met.



All three categories of stakeholders expected environmental certification to be simple and easy to use, but not simplified at the expense of beneficial outcomes.

Also, all three categories of stakeholders expressed a preference for environmental certification to address triple-bottom line issues – social, financial, and environmental. Conservation and consumer groups emphasised the need for all three issues to have equal status.

### **Development**

Industry groups generally believed that they should play the major role in the development of environmental certification, but also saw significant roles for retailers and other members of supply chains. Consumer education regarding products and production practices was regarded as critical to the success of environmental certification.

Conservation and consumer groups had a preference for environmental certification to be developed through multi-stakeholder collaboration. They placed much importance on education, saying this was needed for primary producers, consumers and the wide community.

### **Operation**

Industry and conservation groups were generally in favour of product labelling, and indicated a preference for a single national label.

Consumer groups believed that a number of labels were required to satisfy the need for consumer choice. These labels must be trustworthy and informative, and should indicate certification of sustainability and food safety across the chain.

The industry groups held mixed views about auditing, varying from self-auditing to independent audits. Conservation groups placed importance on independent auditing, and highlighted the need for public transparency. Consumer groups generally did not address the topic of auditing, but their strong requirement for trust and credibility suggests that independent audits would be preferable.

## **Conclusions**

While there is much agreement amongst industry, conservation and consumer groups with regard to the broad principles and processes for agricultural environmental certification, many significant issues will need to be worked through before this can be successfully implemented. In particular, there is a need for agreement on a working definition for sustainability and sustainable practices, including environmental, economic and social performance targets.

The most contentious issue of all is likely to be the higher costs of food and fibre arising from environmental certification, and who will pay for these. Primary producers believe that their labour, inputs and capital are under-valued, conservation and community groups believe that many social and environmental costs are not fully accounted for, and consumers are either not able or not willing to pay more for food and fibre. Consumer-driven improvement in environmental, economic and social standards of agricultural communities is unlikely if they are unable or unwilling to pay more for these products.

Finally, it may be inequitable and unrealistic to expect supply chains and/or consumers to pay for a number of the wide community expectations of agriculture. Under these circumstances consideration could be given to the role of governments in bringing about the changes expected by stakeholder groups. Governments have at their disposal a range of policy instruments that can be brought together to achieve environmental, economic and social objectives. For example, the Integrated Product Policy of the European Commission draws on fiscal, legislative, market and a number of other policy instruments to address the environmental aspects associated with the life cycle of products.

## Recommendations

Industry, conservation and consumer groups have put forward the following principles and broad processes as requirements for environmental certification in agriculture.

Environmental certification should:

1. Be developed through multi-stakeholder collaboration, learning and negotiation, and provide for wide-community involvement.
2. Be based on or complement current industry-wide agricultural standards, such as standards currently used for quality assurance and food safety.
3. Be capable of application to entire supply chains, and able to differentiate product at every stage, right through to the consumer.
4. Be adopted at regional, national and international levels, and recognised globally.
5. Be underpinned by transparent, credible, and trustworthy processes and information bases.
6. Be verified by independent auditing along the entire supply chain.
7. Be voluntary, but contain some form of regulatory backup for people that do not abide by the rules.
8. Be simple and easy to implement, but not simplified at the expense of outcomes.
9. Contain minimum performance measures, incorporate industry best practice, and involve continuous improvement processes.
10. Certify sustainable use of natural resources, particularly with regard to ecosystem function and biodiversity conservation.
11. Certify food safety at all points along supply chains.
12. Address environmental, economic and social aspects, where each has equal status, and reflect the true cost of production.
13. Be underpinned by extensive communication and education programs, aimed at consumers, all sectors of the supply chain, and the wide-community.
14. Result in a number of labels, providing for sufficient consumer choice, backed up by informative and accessible data sets on claims associated with these labels.

# 1. Introduction

EcoRange is the name given to the project Development of Market-Oriented Environmental Certification for Rangeland Pastoral Industries. It is a collaborative project between the Department of Primary Industries, Queensland (DPI) and CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems that is funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), DPI and the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT).

Over the past decade, the global trend towards the goal of sustainability has urged Australia to supply and market more 'environment-friendly' agricultural products. This growing worldwide interest in 'environment-friendly' food and fibre has resulted in the development of supply-chain standards that provide consumers with some form of assurance that their expectations for the environment have been met. These standards can also be a vehicle for enabling consumers to recognise, trust and reward food products that comply with high standards of environmental care.

EcoRange investigated and made recommendations on the application of environmental assurance in agriculture. In this context, EcoRange reviewed environmental management systems (EMS), environmental labelling, food safety, quality assurance (QA) and organic certification. The main findings of EcoRange are provided in the project overview report (Pahl 2004). Other EcoRange reports (see page v) are available on the RIRDC website.

EcoRange recognised that all segments of the product chain, from producer to consumer, play important roles in achieving desirable environmental, economic and social outcomes. Therefore, it was important that the views of a wide range of stakeholders were taken into account when developing recommendations for environmental certification in agriculture.

This report records and discusses the perceptions and expectations of industry, conservation and consumer groups with regard to the application of environmental certification in agriculture.

# 2. Methodology

Three categories of stakeholders, industry organisations, consumer groups and environmental groups, were interviewed during this research. Eight organisations or groups were interviewed in each category of stakeholder (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Organisations represented by participants who took part in the research

Industry groups	Conservation groups	Consumer groups
Qld Fruit and Vegetable Growers	NSW Nature Conservation Council	Consumers Association of SA
Qld Farmers Federation	Greenpeace	University of Wollongong
Agforce	Brisbane Region Environment Council	Australian Consumers Association
Cattle Council of Australia	Qld Conservation Council	Australian Community Foods
Australian Meat Council	Wildlife Preservation Society	<i>Australian Women’s Weekly</i> and <i>Women’s Day</i>
Meat and Livestock Australia	Greening Australia	<i>Vogue</i>
Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia	World Wide Fund for Nature	Qld Consumers Association
Australian Wool Innovation	Victorian Catchment Management Council	Brisbane Consumers Association

A convergent interviewing methodology was used to explore stakeholder perceptions of environmental certification in agriculture. Convergent interviewing is a technique that is based on paired interviews that are conducted as structured dialogue (see Dick 1993). Two separate interviews, each with one or more representatives of the same stakeholder category (e.g. consumer groups), are conducted in close succession. This first pair of interviews begins with a very broad open question, being ‘What do you think the “ideal” environmental certification scheme might look like?’ Responses to this question and other comments and views expressed by the interviewees are recorded.

After this first pair of interviews, the similarities and differences between the two sets of data are identified to develop additional probing questions that are used in the next pair of interviews within the same stakeholder category. This is done to test convergent information and explore and explain divergence. In this way, four pairs of interviews were conducted with one stakeholder category.

Convergent interviewing differs from traditional interview techniques (e.g. a survey of ten questions) in that it does not assume that the interviewer knows the ‘right’ questions to ask, and therefore is well suited to exploring more complex topics. Dick (1993) notes that the later interviews are purposefully different from earlier interviews in that the interviewers may refine interview techniques and questions over time. The evolutionary nature of the process allows for deeper understandings to emerge as more people are interviewed.

This process was used for each of the three stakeholder categories. The interviews were conducted over one month, predominantly in person, with a few interviews conducted by phone when circumstances prevented face-to-face meetings. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half to two hours. The order in which group members were interviewed was based on their availability and convenience.

## 3. Results

The main themes that emerged from the industry, conservation and consumer group data are listed below. However, as expected with an emergent interview process, not all of these themes emerged from all three categories (e.g. the process of auditing did not emerge from the consumer group interviews as a main theme).

The ten main themes that emerged from interviews with industry, conservation and consumer groups were:

- Qualities of the 'ideal' environmental certification scheme;
- Scale of application;
- Voluntary and/or compulsory adoption;
- Simplicity or complexity;
- Desirable outcomes;
- Roles and drivers;
- Environmental labelling;
- Views of current ISO, QA and EMS schemes;
- Auditing; and
- The role of education.

To help illustrate these themes, a number of quotes from stakeholders interviewed are presented in the results below. While these are not the full list of quotes recorded during interviews, their purpose is to provide the reader with additional meaning, interpretation and context.

Before presenting the results it is important to note that although the broad question was based on the term 'environmental certification', each group (and individuals within groups) interpreted this differently. Industry group interviewees frequently equated this with EMS, although they sometimes used this term in the broad sense, covering a range of environmental standards and auditing processes.

Conservation groups also regularly used the term EMS when asked the broad question about environmental certification, although to a lesser extent than did industry groups. In contrast, consumer groups more consistently used the term environmental certification.

Therefore, mention of terms such as EMS, environmental labelling, certification and QA by stakeholder groups does not imply that these are their preferred option, as these and other terms were sometimes used interchangeably.

The results from stakeholder interviews below are organised under the ten main themes listed above.

### 3.1 The qualities of the 'ideal' environmental certification scheme

Each of the three categories of stakeholders provided an array of suggestions for the qualities of an 'ideal' environmental certification scheme.

Industry groups placed particular emphasis on developing a national industry-wide standard based on existing QA systems, and suggested establishing a national steering committee as a way of ensuring national consistency. Other qualities of the 'ideal' environmental certification scheme put forth by industry included the inclusion of regional performance standards, and the development of markets for 'environment-friendly' products. Industry felt that the benefits of environmental certification should outweigh the costs.

Conservation groups emphasised three key criteria for environmental assurance: ecosystem function, biodiversity conservation, and prices reflecting the true cost of production. In relation to the cost of production, both conservation and consumer groups believed that foreign labour and Australian natural resources such as fossil fuels, water and soil, were under-valued, and that the current retail price of some products did not adequately reflect their full costs.

Conservation groups also had the firm opinion that minimum environmental performance measures should be combined with existing best practice and other continuous improvement processes. They suggested using overarching principles and criteria that could be adapted for a catchment or regional context, and highlighted a need for change in on-ground practice and performance. Conservation groups believed that environmental certification should focus on units of land rather than on particular commodities. Also, trust and credibility were vital characteristics of their 'ideal' environmental certification scheme.

Consumer groups, like conservation groups, believed that an 'ideal' environmental certification scheme should reflect the true cost of production, incorporate communication, continuous evaluation and improvement, and offer consumer confidence. They placed particular emphasis on food safety. For the most part, they believed the process should be a simple standard with measurable criteria, based on the concept of sustainability.

### 3.1.1 Industry groups

Industry group participants provided a range of suggestions for what was required for an 'ideal' environmental certification scheme. There was particular emphasis on the development of an industry-wide standard based on core principles that could be used in conjunction with existing QA systems.

*EMS could be a module that is attached to existing QA systems . . . need to build on existing QA so you don't reinvent the wheel . . . but it can't be prescriptive either . . . and parts of it might slot into other modules too.*

*We need a structured process . . . constant principles across each of the commodity industry groups . . . although the process will be the same, the issues will be different . . . and most importantly . . . there is a need for a communication plan about these core principles . . . so to sum up: Core Building Block + Industry Specific. This is really important, rather than having 40 million EMSs.*

*Every industry has different ideas . . . EMS is a process, not a solution to environment . . . but I would really like to see some core principles (perhaps ISO 14001) that are consistent across all industries that are compatible with them . . . Core principles such as reporting, meeting legislative requirements, and tailoring those and adapting it and building on existing QA.*

To implement this, a national industry steering committee in combination with smaller scale groups of people on the ground was seen as a useful way to ensure national consistency while enabling action. This is illustrated by the following comments of industry organisations.

*It needs to be an iterative process through the supply chain . . . A national steering committee group will go some way to addressing this and producing some plan on how this might happen.*

*I don't want to see a whole range of EMSs and principles across Australia . . . but it will be difficult to have an accepted/useable approach for national and international use . . . there's a need for a national steering group to look at principles and how that might happen . . . need to take international standards and marry them with existing QA systems . . . and you need to be able to come into it at any part of the process . . . You will find*

*producers who will want to come in at a general level . . . or right at the top of the process . . . so you have to offer both.*

There was some suggestion that performance criteria should be included within process standards such as EMS. This would require primary producers to achieve some minimum level of environmental performance, as well as follow the management processes set out in the standard.

*Process standards need to be supplemented with performance standards.*

*A national framework can provide the brand and a process standard that is a good rigorous management system . . . but actual performance standards needs to be negotiated and localised at a regional level . . . Industry groups can help this process . . . they should be intermediaries and provide a support service . . . needs to be industry relevant and user-friendly . . . requires workbooks and training programs.*

Industry interviewees made a number of other suggestions for environmental management in agriculture. A common theme was for the development of markets for 'environment-friendly' products, and for the benefits of environmental certification to outweigh the costs.

*Clear financial benefits, clear demand for certified products (Australia and EU); should address that products are produced on lands that have been managed sustainably; that the animal (if animals involved) had been given optimum husbandry (from chemical and welfare perspective) and that the product meets any residue criteria.*

### **3.1.2 Conservation groups**

Conservation group participants also provided an array of suggestions for what was required for an 'ideal' environmental certification scheme. Three key criteria were emphasised: ecosystem function, biodiversity conservation, and prices reflecting the true cost of production.

*The ideal system would be to get ecosystem functions happening again and this is something we don't even understand (e.g. soil microflora - we don't even understand this) . . . it always comes back to what people can do—but the bar should be higher but we don't know how high and how to get there . . . Ecosystem function is a pipedream. But is ideal and would be good.*

*It's a good thing for people to get used to paying more...if we worked out the true cost of production we would see consumers paying more.*

They also require that minimum environmental performance measures be combined with existing best practice and other continuous improvement processes. Overarching principles and criteria are suggested which can then be adapted for a catchment or regional context.

*You need an EMS combined with (i) minimum performance requirements that need to be monitoring existing values, (ii) demonstration that you are contributing to a bigger picture, and (iii) meeting catchment or regional environmental targets . . . need to have mechanisms that on-ground performance practices are in place . . . that has mechanisms that are linked to the market place.*

*EMS serves a useful purpose as a process tool however perhaps it is not the most appropriate tool to demonstrate current or future states and we need to do this . . . Need something that is accompanied by best practice, not best practice on its own.*

Conservation groups also expected environmental certification to be more concerned with units of land or land type, rather than particular commodities or land uses. In this way certification was more

about identifying the best land use for a region, rather than improving practices of an existing industry sector.

*Certification looks at certifying units of land management—has to look across the board and ask what are the given impacts . . . need a voluntary initiative that is not sector-specific . . . regardless of commodity—you would not be degrading land and looking at biodiversity, water quality, soil integrity and agricultural practices to maintain and restore these . . . need to look at what’s appropriate in a regional context . . . need overarching principles and criteria . . . and picks up across the board non-selective issues in relation to production.*

Trust and credibility across the supply chain in an EMS were seen as essential components for conservation group participants.

*Ideally what we want is some kind of levels of recognition that transport/supply/along chain that there is recognition of environmental impacts (and social) in an EMS process . . . so that it’s something we can trust.*

*Trust of what is being reported and the trail (this is fundamental).*

*Can imagine a day when I would go and buy a fish and I know where it comes from and I can trust that.*

### **3.1.3 Consumer groups**

Consumer group participants also provided many suggestions for what was required of an ‘ideal’ environmental certification scheme. As with conservation groups, consumer groups believed that the true cost of production needed to be reflected in the process.

*An ideal system would be based on the notion of sustainability...this is about working out the true cost of production...on Radio National last night...there was a discussion about cotton growers who won a water conservation award and they said that 1000 litres of water went into producing 1 t-shirt...at the moment...the community is going to pay the costs 100 years from now...the organic grower pays the cost now.*

*The ideal system can include things like mileage . . . mapping fuel miles and seeing real cost of different foods . . . also occupational health and safety, for example the use of sweat shops . . . it’s not just about the farmer . . . but it’s everybody involved in producing a product.*

Other criteria were the involvement of consumers (and everybody) in the process, a feedback mechanism, continuous evaluation and improvement, consumer confidence, and the consideration of management, resources and product.

*The ideal scheme also has to take into account that things change and things should . . . everyone thought that Round-up was fine . . . but that changed . . . the criteria have to be re-evaluated over time and we keep learning.*

*There needs to be ongoing consumer feedback and involvement and initially this needs to be paid for . . . you won’t get this unless it is paid for . . . need view to international standards as well . . . If there was change in US legislation to agencies to let in GM foods . . . this would have a huge impact . . . consumer confidence is absolutely critical . . . you need to have a system that moves consumers’ understanding and change.*

There was also a preference for a simple scheme with measurable criteria.



*When scientists develop criteria, there is lots of consumer angst . . . people don't have the mental tools to sort out information . . . so need criteria of judgement and pay attention to basic level of information around the issue.*

*In terms of criteria, popular things would come to mind e.g. processing (e.g. fridge and star system) where food meets criteria in terms of maximum residue levels . . . may need rating system . . . but even when we know that it doesn't exceed the pesticide residue level, I want more choice . . . I want the choice to have no pesticides and no residues.*

*In terms of the ideal system, I'm struggling with what environmental certification means in first place . . . perhaps this is a good starting point . . . developing a common understanding of what environmental criteria you are looking at . . . and then how that might be connected . . . and then how do we ensure or know that these have been met.*

In contrast to the 'ideal' environmental certification, some consumer groups perceived that the 'ideal' scheme was one where this was not needed in the first place, or used only as a back up. That is, a paradigm shift would occur where being 'environment-friendly' was part of the mind-set of people in general as well as people in the agricultural sector.

*The ideal system would be the opposite to a cynical view . . . you would have environmental certification as convenience and everyone would be working toward it . . . the system would be an efficient exchange of information with certification schemes . . . this could be distorted negatively or positively and this is determined outside . . . so the ideal system . . . we don't really want environmental certification as it takes all these levels of indecision . . . but an ideal system would be an attitude of 'Well of course it is environmental!' It will be a transitional process . . . the experience itself has the potential to get outcomes if people use it as a process for change . . . I want mass awakening . . . A real QA scheme is one that's not really needed . . . but now . . . people have to use them . . . it raises awareness.*

An 'ideal' scheme based on the notion of sustainability was emphasised by the consumer groups interviewed. For example:

*An ideal system would be based on the notion of sustainability . . . this is about working out the true cost of production . . . on Radio National last night . . . there was a discussion about cotton growers who won a water conservation award and they said that 1000 litres of water went into producing 1 t-shirt . . . at the moment . . . the community is going to pay the costs 100 years from now . . . the organic grower pays the cost now.*

*Another criteria for the ideal system is sustainability . . . we've seen this done before with toilet paper. Need to have everyone involved along the chain and all agreeing . . . The hazard analysis critical control point is a good approach . . . it's an analysis process and at each critical point you identify hazards . . . from this you put in a plan which makes sure each can be dealt with if come up.*

There was also a particular emphasis placed on the need for food safety.

*Food is a real problem . . . food is an emotional issue—especially if they think someone can tamper with it . . . Food is something you have to trust inherently . . . food is one area where government has to look after safety and price . . . the ideal system has to take this seriously.*

*There's also a question of research in this ideal system . . . research is currently really poor . . . If government doesn't look after food safety—who does? Instead of looking at transport and manufacturing issues in more depth . . . they are looking for quick fixes . . .*

*they have this mind-set that if we irradiate food the pathogens die and the problem is solved . . . but some pathogens get even stronger . . . .*

## **3.2 Scale of application**

All three groups generally showed a preference for environmental certification to address the whole supply chain.

Industry groups were largely in favour of a whole supply chain approach. However, at least one industry respondent made a case for an on-farm focus, due to the high costs and training associated with supply chains.

The majority of the conservation groups preferred that environmental certification address the whole supply chain, but on-farm and broader approaches such as regional, national and global scales were also discussed.

Consumer groups had a strong preference for a whole supply chain approach.

### **3.2.1 Industry groups**

The data from industry groups suggested that industry preference was for environmental certification that would encompass the entire supply chain or value chain.

*Need to involve the whole supply chain . . . this is ultimately the way to go . . . this takes a lot longer to achieve . . . that's why you need the pull of consumers . . . not only grown in a sustainable way . . . but . . . the whole supply chain.*

*An EMS needs to include a full life cycle analysis rather than just on-farm.*

*It will be difficult, but at the end of the day, it's got to be the whole chain and all of industry has to be involved.*

There was, however, a case for environmental certification to be largely confined to on-farm because of high costs and training associated with a whole of supply chain approach.

*I have a preference for the system to be farm-based . . . then you don't need training really . . . but just a good package and assistance if required . . . in saying that I can see the value-chain argument as well, but you would have to start at the top of the system first leading down to farmers, and build different pieces along the way . . . but this type of system has huge start-up costs, you would need brand recognition, you would have to look at supply . . . and everyone in the chain would have to be competent . . . this would be difficult and you would have to work it down the chain.*

### **3.2.2 Conservation groups**

Conservation group data showed that most prefer environmental certification to cover the whole supply chain.

*EMS should be controlled across the chain . . . and don't want big producers bypassing the system . . . if they do bypass they get lower prices . . . not sure how it can be sustainable production as we can't measure this, but could say that these properties don't have major salinity, acid sulphate problems, erosion . . . meat or produce which is coming from properties with stated concern for biodiversity . . . not on expired leases, etc. etc.*

*Gets back to what you want the tool to do . . . in NRM the on-ground base is the main driver. . . EMS needs to go across life cycle analysis . . . probably have process tool but probably highly silent on environmental performance . . . you've got to back up claims across the chain . . . priority of performance-based management system and linking it to market place . . . to provide product integrity . . . on-farm to market place . . . but not making any environmental claims on the life cycle . . . it's difficult to have one size fits all EMS.*

*The ideal EMS would have a feedback loop throughout the whole supply chain.*

However, one interviewee was satisfied with on-farm certification that dealt with the natural resource management issues associated with the production of commodities, believing that it was too difficult to address natural resource management along the entire supply chain.

*If everyone along the chain wants to have EMS it's their business. In our view, the claims should be focused on the NRM of the commodity (i.e. we want environmental performance) . . . but it's great if they want EMS along chain . . . but making claims about this opens them up for criticism . . . might be Nirvana but a long way off . . . To the best of my knowledge, there is no credible label that does a full life cycle analysis...Need step-wise approach to address NRM issues first and then make link to market place.*

In addition to on-farm or across the supply chain, conservation groups also saw a need to distinguish EMS in terms of its application at a geographical scale. Some groups believed that EMS should operate on national and global scales.

*If EMS is only focused on the property level it's going to miss the point . . . need training, auditing and continuous improvement and application at regional, national and global scale.*

Others, however, felt that a regional scale could have some benefits.

*If market access—you have an area competitive advantage too. Need to bring in the region . . . where a region can see a benefit too . . . a market-driven regional approach . . . we need a system that can be compared across regions.*

### **3.2.3 Consumer groups**

The data from consumer groups suggested a preference for an environmental certification scheme that would encompass the entire supply chain.

*The ideal system would have to be a paddock-to-plate approach, every step in chain . . . for example . . . what's biodegradable would be used, waste would be dealt with, ideally packaging would be part of that, and grown in sustainable manner, it would also exclude GE foods.*

*Where do you start or stop— ideally it would take into account across the chain . . . the difficulty of sourcing where products of food come from...*

## **3.3 Voluntary and/or compulsory**

Industry groups unanimously believed that any environmental certification scheme should be voluntary. Both conservation and community groups showed a general preference for a voluntary scheme with regulatory back-up.

### 3.3.1 Industry groups

The data showed a unanimous preference by industry for environmental certification to be voluntary.

*I see EMS as something that should be voluntary.*

*Has to be cooperative and not regulatory . . . farmers will just walk away from it.*

*It has got to be voluntary—meeting legislative requirements. If it is compulsory, no one will do it and you would get a big backlash.*

### 3.3.2 Conservation groups

The general perception of conservation groups was that environmental certification should be voluntary, with a process in place for regulatory back-up. There was much to say about the issues associated with having compulsory or voluntary managed schemes but, basically, there were two types of approaches discussed: voluntary only, and voluntary with regulatory back-up. However, there were also some conservation respondents who expressed a desire for stronger regulations, but recognised that regulation on its own was neither practical or effective. These views are outlined below:

#### **Voluntary only:**

*It's important to be voluntary and landholders can choose whether to participate or not . . . sometimes EMS isn't the most appropriate tool to work it out . . . you see cases where people are setting up EMS that are not equipped to do this . . . I don't think EMS is a compulsory tool . . . laggards are for other tools to sort out . . . voluntary also means that it provides differentiation in the market place . . . retailers choosing to have environmentally sound products.*

*A voluntary initiative reflecting broad issues, providing entry point for participation and linkages to the market place.*

#### **Voluntary with regulatory back-up:**

*Whether it's voluntary or compulsory depends on the scope of the industry, e.g. sugar industry is bad given lots of externalities . . . lots of legislator problems and low fertility of lands . . . in terms of codes of practice—some industries develop their own and we don't see them until they come out the door—we don't like the term code . . . but a voluntary system won't work unless public scrutiny or community acceptance.*

*If a farmer really wants to destroy the environment there are plenty of ways to damage the environment legally . . . so we need something in between compulsory and voluntary . . . we know that all environmental indicators are going backwards . . . only in extreme cases are they not, for example the Brisbane River Catchment Healthy Rivers . . . so we need a mix of both . . . I won't be persuaded that a voluntary system on its own will work and won't wait around for time . . . but do need a carrot . . . we would be concerned that you would end up with something inadequate in terms of environment.*

*You would like to think that it would be voluntary and market place would determine it . . . a lot of it would come back to recognising market premiums . . . we want a big stick there for rednecks . . . we have a lot of fauna and flora legislation that hasn't been done . . . would want some sort of fall back regulatory system . . . this is hopefully reflected in market.*

### **Stronger regulatory:**

*We want to strengthen the rules— but we recognise that a transition is needed . . . whether it's voluntary or compulsory it depends what it is—you are not going to have everything in the supermarket environmentally certified. With our government, nothing is compulsory . . . want this to be part and parcel of production . . . In principle I support compulsory but don't know if the world is ready for this yet . . . need to look at clever ways of wanting to develop the sell—slip, slop, slap.*

*In Queensland, regulation is useless unless it is enacted and policed . . . so there has to be some community support for the idea . . . in reality it's a very hard thing to do . . . as soon as you bring in judicial system the proof falls on the state to show it has occurred . . . In court it's very hard to prove that individual has impact . . . all this says is that a straight up and down regulatory system is not going to work.*

*Voluntary codes don't work . . . No self-regulatory process has worked and there's lots of examples . . . communities should be involved in developing code and this should be almost accepted as law . . . a voluntary process in the beginning . . . probably can't have compulsory unless it was for pest control e.g. TB and foot and mouth . . . need compulsory certification . . . market pressure would make it so that everyone was in it in the end . . . if outsiders were large corporations that could really control market prices, they could really control things . . . need to watch for this.*

### **3.3.3 Consumer groups**

The general perception of consumer groups was that environmental certification would be a mix of voluntary and regulatory approaches.

*If we all go off and invent the wheel it's hard to have a common goal . . . We need a combination of both—can't stifle industry to a point where it can't be innovative and can't have hands-off approach . . . and government can ensure that community can interact in meaningful ways in different parts of the process.*

*Need a mix of regulatory and voluntary codes . . . I am in favour of co-regulation . . . I use to talk about regulatory bodies . . . but now I'm talking about dispute resolution.*

*Could have system that is a self-certifying system and then a big stick . . . or two-tiered system—if you are producing less than a certain amount you have self-regulating with fallback regulatory . . . or you have a sliding scale between these two.*

## **3.4 Simple and/or complex**

All three categories of stakeholders believed that environmental certification should be simple and easy to use. However, they all stressed that the scheme shouldn't be over-simplified to the extent that it was not meaningful. They were concerned that if the system was too simple, it may be ineffective and result in few significant outcomes.

### **3.4.1 Industry groups**

Industry people interviewed felt that it was important to keep the scheme simple, particularly with respect to keeping records, otherwise producers are unlikely to adopt it.

*What is a worry is that an environmental certification system could be so generic that it means very little . . . if you can get everyone to sign off on something, it is probably really bland.*

*From a producer point of view . . . they need something that is easy to work with, one document that is electronic and easy to update, one auditor comes and checks it, and allows people to meet the different requirements of different markets . . . if you didn't want to do environment you wouldn't do it.*

*The QA system needs to be simplified—won't get people to go through a two-year process . . . but groups might be the way to do it . . . and need secretarial support . . . I know people that have been through the existing process and have seen no benefit . . . they've been really dissatisfied . . . so need to address this somehow.*

However, this was often qualified by saying that it is important not to over-simplify the scheme to the extent where little is achieved in the way of significant outcomes.

*I agree that a system has to be user-friendly . . . but if it's too simple you might not be meeting the legislative requirements and may be defeating the whole purpose . . . record keeping has to be simple and not pages and pages . . . but you run the risk of making it too simple and issues won't be addressed . . . need a process to adopt and deal with and address complex issues . . . which is simple for people to understand.*

### **3.4.2 Conservation groups**

As with industry groups, conservation groups also showed a general preference for environmental certification to be simple, practical and fine-tuned.

*I think that wherever you are along the chain, ideally you need something practical and affordable.*

*We need to fine-tune the system so that it is simpler but more effective.*

*Keep it simple—if we are going to get some sort of market advantage we need something that the rest of the world will identify with . . . if we can keep it simple and keep it along acceptable landcare lines—an ordinary farmer can do it . . . has to come from bottom up . . . need to question 'Whose vehicle for what purpose?' If it's market-driven it won't be flavour of the month.*

However, they felt that the system shouldn't be so simple that it is ineffective. As ecosystems are complex, environmental certification needs to be able to cope with this complexity.

*An ideal EMS would be really practical and simple, but it has to also hold the complexity of the system we are dealing with . . . ecosystems are complex . . . so it's a challenge.*

*Simplicity issue is a big risk . . . a tick or no tick for the consumer has to be questioned . . . in environmental issues this is a big risk . . . we have seen that some products with the tick are not safe for other reasons . . . the question is 'Can you do eco-labelling effectively?' What it comes down to is a more aware community.*

### **3.4.3 Consumer groups**

Consumer groups also wanted environmental certification that was simple enough to make informed judgements, but emphasised a need for measurable criteria that have real meaning.

*My advice is to get a common understanding; simple criteria, can't be too ambiguous; measurable and have real meaning to people . . . a good 5–10 years work ahead of us in terms of education and having people give educative input into this process.*

### **3.5 Desirable outcomes**

All three categories of stakeholders showed a preference for environmental certification to incorporate triple-bottom line issues – social, financial, and environmental. However, conservation groups and consumer groups expressed a desire for each of these elements to have equal weighting.

Consumer groups particularly, and to some extent industry groups, also made reference to the need for this to operate at a global scale. These respondents appeared to believe that triple-bottom line outcomes could only be achieved if related supply chains in other countries operated under the same standards.

#### **3.5.1 Industry groups**

There was a general preference by industry groups for environmental certification to cover environmental, social and financial aspects, believing that it was not sustainable to separate these components.

*The direction is to have environmental, social, financial and biophysical together . . . Need a holistic system . . . it should be looked at as part of that system.*

*I think these days . . . we know that environment and social have to be linked to production and finance . . . an ideal system would include all.*

*Well . . . people have different values . . . I don't believe that an EMS just needs to address environment . . . people get hung up on EMS just addressing environment . . . but EMS is just a process . . . Like to think that EMS is a business plan for the environment . . . so this would include other aspects such as social . . . It just depends on what you want to put into an EMS . . . production and environment are inextricably linked . . . What I get from an EMS (e.g. market access) might be different to you (e.g. dealing with soil).*

This was not seen as an easy task, as huge market forces may prevent producers from achieving environmental outcomes if environmental certification was not profitable.

*At present the system 'sucks' to be honest . . . A global economy does affect EMS . . . it limits peoples' capacity to tackle issues because at the end of the day you need to make a profit and you are competing against some huge market forces.*

There was, however, some argument for environmental certification to cover only environmental issues. This was due to a concern that the inclusion of social and economic aspects may result in a level of complexity that makes EMS too onerous for primary producers.

*EMS might have to be stand alone . . . to lump them all together . . . would be too much . . . would be good to set up modules e.g. land degradation. And these can complement the system that is already there.*

*At a national level . . . not sure how it would address social or financial . . . and complicating it even further in terms of reasonable labour . . . we have other systems to deal with those issues.*

### 3.5.2 Conservation groups

The data showed that conservation groups preferred environmental certification to address social, financial and environmental issues, with an equal emphasis on all three components.

*Need to protect environmental, social and economic interests . . . need to incorporate all three . . . but in enacting, need to segregate these three initially and work out standards . . . it's a three-legged stool . . . all three . . . a standard would look at environmental issues, it might look at things like labour rights, and economic issues might look at what are the appropriate practices to reach maximum economic gain while meeting social and environmental requirements . . . and stakeholder input should reflect all three . . . for agriculture you would have to test it—we would like to evaluate whether such a system is feasible.*

*In relation to financial, environmental and social . . . it usually means trade-offs in one or the other . . . they say that they are not going to recommend biodiversity unless dollars are on the table—that's not integrated (as in a perfect world)—but it's saying one is supreme over the other . . . so has to be done with environmental constraints . . . in some places agricultural industry isn't appropriate . . . we see an important role for stewardship and recognition . . . we have a modified landscape as it is.*

### 3.5.3 Consumer groups

One theme that emerged from the consumer group data was the need for a global approach when developing environmental certification. This was to emphasise that the approach needed was more than just putting social, financial and environmental together, or working at a national level. A global approach was a major criterion of this scheme.

*We need to take a real look at ourselves . . . it's a social responsibility . . . and its global . . . look at fishing . . . in some areas we've overfished . . . look at scallops and prawns . . . and then we're exporting them to France . . . and then we're importing prawns from Thailand . . . the local people in Thailand . . . are they getting any prawns? I spoke to one woman [an exporter] and all she could say is 'But they're getting money'.*

*At the moment . . . it is paddock to plate where consumers really don't have a choice . . . It has to include social and financial to be successful . . . it also needs to include questions like 'Who is going to be the target market?' 'Is it only urban yuppies?' Has to be a global movement.*

*The ideal system applies across all . . . we need to look at the whole system . . . and that means globally not just in Australia . . .*

## 3.6 Roles and drivers

Industry groups generally believed that they should play major roles and/or lead the development of environmental certification. However, a number of industry respondents strongly believed that it should be market-driven. Industry looked to government to provide training, legislation and international relationships.

Conservation groups and consumer groups emphasised the need for the scheme to be multi-stakeholder led. They said that major changes were required if environmental certification was to be successful, and that this would require an intensive community-wide effort.



### 3.6.1 Industry groups

Industry representatives interviewed voiced different roles for industry in the development and operation of environmental certification. However, the predominant industry group perception was that it should be industry-led, but developed to meet the needs of markets.

*Industry has a major role in the development of the system . . . look at the development of the environmental footprint . . . how do we minimise this . . . we have a lot of projects trying to do this already.*

*Industry's role could be in bringing customers from overseas . . . so a market access role.*

*Industry groups would play a negotiation role in an environmental strategy.*

*I like the idea of different industries having different systems . . . have to enforce clear market demand and market signal . . . it's up to industry to implement it but strongly take input from customers.*

*Most in industry would like to see industry take the lead role because of ownership . . . people in the bush see too much government control and think they are too prescriptive . . . need industry led and industry developed and to involve people in the supply chain . . . other people in the supply chain can be involved through some consultative process.*

However, there were also a number of industry respondents that believed that environmental certification should only be market driven.

*Preference is for market drivers . . . government may be a facilitator but certainly not driving . . . agri-growers are supporters of the process...need a broker system to be there...at the international level we need to know what our customers want.*

*The retailers would have to drive it . . . If they can see a profit margin coming from a certain product—need pull rather than push . . . and it will run down through the system. If retailers come back to suppliers and say this is what they want . . . then others could act on it . . . so driven by profit margin and volume.*

*It has to come from the demand end . . . the market is driven by consumers, and retailers are just part of that.*

As suggested by some of the comments by industry interviewees above, the perception of the role of government is varied. Some see the government's role as being passive, where they work in partnership with industry.

*Government should be a passenger in the whole thing . . . they have to work in partnership . . . their role can be in training and also in making sure there is consistency with international programs.*

*Government's role is probably to make legislation . . . don't see a role for them elsewhere as it will come down to market forces.*

### 3.6.2 Conservation groups

The preference of conservation groups was for a system that was multi-stakeholder led, with consumers and markets playing significant roles.

*We are coming from a global perspective, so the drivers for it are environmental groups, industry, government . . . and those that acknowledge that we have a hell of a problem . . . commercial drivers are varied . . . It is unlikely with an EMS that markets will welcome you with open arms—largely because of what does it mean . . . basically in many cases markets make the decisions.*

*Industry will say they have all the answers—fallacy . . . We can all contribute . . . Tiny contributions all over the place can make a difference . . . we need a constant large scale change . . . but we are talking large-scale consumer preference change . . . so we would need industry in . . . we've already seen massive changes in last ten years in terms of government as well as consumer preference and willingness to pay (e.g. organics) . . . we need cultural change.*

*The question is not who would be involved but 'Who wouldn't be?' . . . Eco-system function isn't an easy issue . . . and people are part of that too . . . so we need as many people as we can . . . from all over . . . lots of different skills and backgrounds . . . it won't work with just industry . . . it needs to be a social process.*

### **3.6.3 Consumer groups**

Consumer groups also preferred a multi-stakeholder based approach to the development of environmental certification.

*Everyone needs to be involved . . . a big change is needed . . . and again . . . it's about mass awakening.*

*Need some pushing from industry about products . . . there are a range of ways of getting information out . . . there's no best way . . . and it's got to be for everyone by everyone.*

*Well everyone . . . industry obviously has to be involved . . . especially on export issues . . . identifying of export markets, environmental groups, a round table of all of those key stakeholders, farmer groups too and regional groups.*

*Community groups can address other groups besides schools . . . need to get people organised . . . sense of community . . . who is resourced . . . bring in everybody . . . needs to be multi-stakeholder approach . . .*

## **3.7 Environmental labelling**

Industry groups and conservation groups had very little to say about the issue of labelling, but were generally in favour of the practice and indicated a preference for a single-label approach.

Consumer groups, on the other hand, perceived labelling as a vital part of environmental certification and discussed the issue in depth. Unlike the other two groups, the consumers had a preference for a multiple-label approach, believing that consumers needed more than one label to have sufficient choice. They also emphasised that product labels should be trustworthy and informative, and should indicate certification of sustainability and food safety across the chain.

### **3.7.1 Industry groups**

There was limited comment about labelling from industry groups compared with consumer groups. However, labelling was preferred by some respondents.

*From an exporter point of view, the more we can say about a product the better in an ideal world . . . so a label is OK.*

*We want to say ‘Yes, that box there is environmentally certified and this is the proof’ . . . we can prove it by record keeping . . . this is about ensuring consumer confidence in what they buy . . . that’s what it’s about . . . if you are going to put something on it then you need to be able to prove it.*

*A label has to mean something . . . it’s an interesting issue . . . may need to consider eco-labelling . . . labelling depends on the philosophy of what EMS is about . . . have to have a reason for putting a label on a product and person buying has to identify with that . . . eco-labelling to me is a bit of a ‘greenie’ thing.*

*We can learn a lot from the Heart Foundation—build brand up and then sell . . . if we could do the same thing with a label . . . that would be great.*

There was also a preference for one label with minimal information content.

*One label . . . just like the Heart Foundation . . . with phone number . . . and this connects to a tracking system . . . let’s not complicate the process more than it needs to be.*

*Trace product right through . . . need one national label and it needs to be recognised internationally.*

### **3.7.2 Conservation groups**

Conservation groups believed that labelling was a useful mechanism for consumer decision-making and awareness. However, little was mentioned about labelling in general.

*The ideal EMS would have a clearly recognised brand mark and community would recognise this and be prepared to pay more.*

*Ideally . . . we can draw on the Heart Foundation . . . produce one label and with that the consumer knows what it is.*

*A simple image with a tick.*

*A ‘one-stop shop’ . . . so a product doesn’t have ten different stamps on it.*

### **3.7.3 Consumer groups**

Consumer groups mentioned labelling in detail. Labelling was seen as an important part of environmental certification but it had to be clear and trustworthy. There was also an emphasis placed on labels that indicated certification of sustainability and food safety across the supply chain.

*Labels have to be honest, eye catching and easy to read . . . for the elderly etc . . . a logo that is easily recognised and that you are easily drawn to too . . . Getting back to chain idea . . . [interviewee draws chain and marks in symbols below each part of the chain] . . . with a label like this you can show that the product as been sustainably produced from paddock to plate . . . The stumbling block is that sustainability means different things to different people.*

*My concern is that people have no idea how their food is made . . . this needs to be addressed . . . and if labelling helps in this process . . . all the better . . . but labelling is insufficient at present . . . and not just with GM food . . . I think people are playing games*

*with food codes . . . if the system could contribute to a greater awareness of people and show how that fits into the food chain and that would be great . . . but labelling is truthful at present . . . one example is the debacle recently about some brand of corn chips . . . they found out later that with the corn chips the corn was GM free but the oil used was imported GM...*

*Trust is a big thing for consumers . . . consumers need to trust products . . . the labelling thing is more about what it's not rather than what it is . . . this isn't good enough.*

*I don't think something should be labelled organic if the resources used to produce organic products aren't used in a sustainable way . . . the two have to be linked . . . that's the beauty of agriculture . . . what you use comes out in product generally.*

*I think I am in favour of a logo . . . consumers don't really understand the difference between organic and certified organic . . . but need more exposure to that sort of labelling . . . more understanding of consumers is needed . . . but labelling is only one way.*

There was a preference for multiple environmental labels to provide sufficient choice for consumers, but not a plethora of labels.

*You want some agreement across industries . . . we don't want a plethora of labels . . . you want as few labels as possible so the consumer doesn't get confused, but need enough labels so that the consumer can make a choice with information . . . would need a fairly big campaign to do this . . . In the long term we would want some authority to check these—not with vested interest (with consumers and industry) and make sure it meets criteria that is set down.*

### **3.8 Views of current ISO, QA and EMS schemes**

Industry groups were generally dissatisfied with current schemes. Although 14001's core principles were seen as valuable in terms of providing an international standard, its complexity, lack of performance measures and Australian industry best management practices, and its inability to track through the value chain were seen as major disadvantages. While current QA systems were seen as useful frameworks, the fact that most had been formed around food safety, rather than environmental management, was an issue.

The main problem perceived by the conservation groups and consumer groups was two-fold. Firstly, existing forms of environmental certification assume that the current land use is sustainable and appropriate, and secondly, that this is not challenged. They felt that there is a need to question whether a land use should exist in the first place, rather than just improving on it, and they expressed a desire to replace unsustainable industries with alternative suitable industries.

#### **3.8.1 Industry groups**

From an industry group perspective, ISO 14000 was mentioned as having some advantages as a framework for environmental certification. ISO 14000 was also seen as having core principles that would be useful as it provides an existing international standard for EMS. However, it lacks context for Australian and/or industry conditions, and this needs to be addressed through the addition of industry best practice.

*ISO holds the core of what any EMS should do, but has additional components that make it more rigorous.*

*For an individual enterprise an EMS such as ISO 14000 is great, but for an industry-wide situation, we need best management practice or some way of demonstrating compliance . . . it's difficult . . . but would be the pinnacle.*

*Why do something on our own if ISO 14000 already exists? . . . but you might want an Australian system that recognised agriculture in Australia.*

The main disadvantages mentioned about an EMS were its perceived or actual complexity, its inappropriateness for farmers, and its inability to track through the value chain.

*The main disadvantage is that people perceive it to be very complex and it doesn't have to be . . . there are plenty of farmers that have used it simply, and only sometimes they might need help.*

*The process outlined in ISO is quite useful . . . but there is an argument for simplification.*

*It's a long way removed from 'typical farmers'. . . their knowledge is in their heads and not written down.*

*If a producer is using ISO on farm, there's no way of tracing it . . . I'm concerned that you can't follow it right through the value chain . . . we desperately need a tracking system.*

The perceived advantage of ISO was that it provided a systematic management process for people to follow, allowing them to demonstrate and improve on what they are doing

*It covers you . . . if you've done it properly . . . if you've really set targets, put in a monitoring program and management review.*

*You can tell people what you are doing and you can back it up.*

*It enables certification and it can be demonstrated through a workbook approach.*

QA systems were also seen as useful frameworks. However, it was acknowledged that most had been formed around food safety rather than environmental management. The data also suggested that food safety as an issue had already been addressed.

*From an overseas perspective, the ISO is more concerned about food safety. Things like foot and mouth and BSE have made government and consumers sensitive about imports . . . but it's more to do with food safety, not environmental issues.*

*I see an advantage with EMS . . . while most QA has been formed on food safety . . . this can introduce environmental issues too, such as catchment benefits.*

*This (QA) is happening already to some extent . . . what they're [consumers] eating isn't a health risk— this has been there for a number of years . . . Not possible to elucidate one concern—everyone will have different views . . . General view is that food safety is overarching . . . consumers want to see different thing in the process . . . QA in the past has focused on food safety and this has been a message loud and clear . . . now we have to incorporate sustainable growth.*

There was a general dissatisfaction with current systems because they do not have performance measures.

*ISO 14000 doesn't deliver outcomes . . . it just sets up a framework which doesn't correspond with the delivery of multiple environmental beneficial outcomes . . . there's*

*other layers of process that ISO doesn't link into—issues of national/state/regional issues that link to any project . . . and ISO doesn't link to these . . .*

*There are pitfalls in ISO . . . any individual can implement an EMS . . . we have a concern that it might be a communication tool . . . there are no minimum performance requirements (i.e. process tool not performance tool) . . . an ISO management system without performance is unlikely to derive market requirements that industry is seeking . . . it's time consuming and requires a lot of paper work . . . need to augment ISO with something that has performance requirements too . . . list of benefits are benefits when you demonstrate performance—in market and with stakeholders . . . in summary . . . want minimum performance requirements coupled with EMS (process tool).*

### **3.8.2 Conservation groups**

A main problem perceived by the conservation groups was that current forms of environmental certification assume that existing agricultural production systems are the appropriate land uses for a particular agro-ecosystem, and that this is not challenged. They felt that current environmental certification schemes assume that a particular land use is appropriate and then seek to improve on this, instead of addressing whether it should be there in the first place. They believed that environmental certification of the future will address the sustainability of a particular land use.

*The assumption that the existing state is the best state . . . this reflects the limitations of EMS . . . helps to identify inputs and outputs, and how and if you have improved . . . but doesn't necessarily say what the minimum requirements should be . . . EMS is a voluntary pathway, but if EMS is in place, landholders are more likely to understand and support minimum performance requirements . . . it gets back to whether EMS is the best tool for working out resource allocation, land use etc. need other tools like policy regulation.*

*In the ideal system we would question the appropriateness of land use . . . for example, kangaroo harvesting is the only legitimate harvesting we approve of . . . properties with pest management programs are just as important as vegetation management programs . . . we need to query if the original use of land may not be the best use of land . . . we don't want people to walk off lands as a result of certification . . . but we do want inefficient farms off lands . . . the assumption that the existing use is the best is not the best . . . vegetation management is not addressing whether land is being used for best purpose or most appropriate use.*

*Well . . . you might be using continuous improvement . . . but if you are doing something which is an inappropriate land use . . . then you might just be exploiting the land even better . . . an EMS of the future will question the feasibility of the current system . . . I think people use continuous improvement and best prac to cover themselves.*

*Any EMS should consider whether an industry should be there in the first place.*

*We really should be questioning whether a certain practice is appropriate in the first place . . . but it's easy to see why people would avoid it . . . it's probably too difficult for people to address.*

### **3.8.3 Consumer groups**

As with conservation groups, the main problem perceived by consumer groups was that current environmental certification schemes assume that the existing land use is the most appropriate one, and its viability is often not challenged. Consumer groups expressed a desire for unsustainable industries to be replaced with alternative more sustainable industries, using practices suited to particular landscapes.

*The best prac model is flawed if you want a sustainable future . . . they talk about continuous improvement . . . but they don't question whether the existing system should be there in the first place . . . there's no chance of moving to an industry that's more sustainable . . . all that best prac does is make the existing system a stronger silo . . . and people within it know . . . that's why they get in early!*

*For example, the Body Shop model . . . I used to support it . . . but I've changed and people have changed . . . we're realising and questioning the underlying assumptions . . . do we need make-up in the first place?*

*Environmentally friendly is more than organic . . . it's water conservation, soil conservation, land clearing and the percentage of land set aside, recycling, waste management . . . these are on-farm perspectives . . . and it's about whether the product is targeted at a condition or whether you are changing conditions to suit the product . . . this is something we need to really question . . . targeting the product for condition, not changing condition for the product is what I think needs to happen.*

## **3.9 Auditing**

The topic of auditing environmental certification only emerged during interviews with industry and conservation group members. The industry groups held mixed views about how auditing should be done—some preferred self-auditing, while others preferred independent auditing. Conservation groups had a lot to say about this issue, and placed particular emphasis on independent auditing. They also highlighted the need for transparency so that the public can access information related to environmental certification.

### **3.9.1 Industry groups**

There was variation within industry groups on how an EMS would be audited. Some industry groups preferred self-auditing (first-party), while others supported independent auditing (third-party).

*You would need an independent organisation to test and audit the tracking . . . having independency . . . giving credibility.*

*With the specific auditing process . . . you need a self-regulatory process . . . it is amazing how honest people are.*

### **3.9.2 Conservation groups**

Conservation groups had much to say about the process of auditing and how it would need to operate. The emphasis was on independent auditing and public access to provide rigour and credibility. Transparency was seen as important so that consumers and community can access and review information associated with environmental certification.

*The ideal EMS would be available to everyone to see . . . independent auditing and independently monitored by people in the community (for people who won't play by the rules).*

*Need third-party auditing . . . it provides rigour . . . not self-auditing . . . need to look at who owns the scheme . . . and have accredited certifiers to actually do this . . . an independent audit is very important . . . professionalism is on the line.*

*Public access for any voluntary initiative is needed . . . we need sufficient confidence that you are making sufficient long-term and short-term changes on the ground . . . in terms of information . . . we have been of the view that audits remain public . . . the faith in the system becomes the faith in the standard.*

### **3.10 The role of education**

Industry groups did not talk at length about the role of education in environmental certification, except for saying that consumer education regarding products and production practices was critical to success.

Conservation groups and consumer groups saw education playing a major role in environmental certification. Both groups believed everyone should be educated, and not just producers or consumers. Conservation groups placed particular emphasis on educating primary producers about biodiversity.

Consumer groups viewed education as a primary strategy for the success of environmental certification, but recognised that this was a large and long-term process involving many different audiences.

#### **3.10.1 Industry groups**

The only mention by industry groups of the role of education in environmental certification was education focused on consumers.

*Consumers need to be educated . . . otherwise we will never get our message across.*

*Consumer education is a really critical role . . . how can you distinguish that and that? . . . how do people know? . . . we need awareness about old wives' tales and myth . . . for example . . . hormones haven't been used in chickens since the 1950s.*

#### **3.10.2 Conservation groups**

Education was seen by conservation groups as playing a major part if environmental certification was to function coherently.

*Education has a major part . . . if we go and buy fish from the supermarket, we have no idea if it is trawled or farmed and the impact on ecology around it . . . also chemical and toxic levels . . . impacts on local marine system . . . we need education so that consumers know when they're buying these products what the impacts are.*

*The ideal EMS must have a number of elements . . . education is one of them . . . if a fish product has been caught in an ecologically sustainable way . . . we need to build education around what that means . . . also education about what is organic . . . or if water is managed in a sustainable way.*

*Education has to be part of an ideal EMS . . . and not just for consumers.*

An emphasis was placed on education about both content (e.g. biodiversity) and process (i.e. all stakeholders across the supply chain).

*Our main push is education around biodiversity . . . if an EMS is going to be useful it needs to have education around biodiversity.*



*We need to understand the politics around water efficiency—this is a top priority followed by biodiversity issues . . . there has been a real failure of agricultural practices to recognise biodiversity . . .*

### **3.10.3 Consumer groups**

The role of education in environmental certification was emphasised by consumer groups. Of the three groups, education was mentioned most by consumer groups.

*In the food area of supermarkets for example . . . we need areas of information where people can make informed decisions about their own health risk.*

*In terms of education we need to provide a context in which people can make an assessment of the link between food and the environment . . . and the production cycle also . . . at the moment people do not have a reasonable framework on which to judge.*

In general, consumer groups saw a role for education for everyone in the supply chain, and not just producers or farmers. Education was regarded as a long-term process that should tailor messages for all parts of the supply chain, and for consumers.

*Education is a two-way street; it's about industry becoming more educated about what consumers want and recognising diversity in markets and needs . . . also recognising issues of environment such as degradation. Most people think it's consumers that need to be educated . . . but it should be everyone across the chain.*

*More education of people and particularly more education in schools is needed.*

*Education for who depends on the issues . . . in terms of on-farm, education has to be directed towards workers, e.g. introducing protocols and knowing how to monitor levels . . . we need rules and regulations of local harvesting taking into account cultural aspects. We also need to target particular management groups . . . for local providers that don't locally package foods, there is a requirement for that information to be made available to consumers . . . from consumers' perspective they want this information.*

*Education is a long-term goal and labelling things can help facilitate that . . . Education needs to include consumer reps and consumers themselves.*

*Who or how? Educating is needed with such a wide spectrum and these have different needs . . . The question is—how do you design this to account for full spectrum? It's been fascinating to watch the emergence of farmers markets and scope and possibility for that to emerge.*

## 4. Discussion

The three categories of stakeholders (industry, conservation and consumer groups) have expressed their views and expectations on the broad topic of environmental certification in agriculture. Representatives of groups were not constrained by a specific definition of environmental certification, and instead were able to speak broadly on a range of related topics. While some respondents referred to third-party certification against a formal environmental standard, this was just one interpretation of the term environmental certification. In this report environmental certification encompasses a range of standards including EMS, eco-labelling, quality assurance and food safety, different types of auditing (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> party), and combinations of regulatory and voluntary processes.

The expectations for environmental certification of the three categories of stakeholders interviewed by EcoRange are summarised below.

### 4.1 Certification standards and criteria

Industry groups preferred environmental certification to occur on a national industry-wide scale, and to be based on existing agricultural related standards. Current quality assurance standards were a possible basis for environmental certification, but industry groups were generally dissatisfied with these. They also suggested the need for a national steering committee as a way of further ensuring national consistency.

Industry believed that ISO 14001's core principles were valuable in terms of providing an international standard, but its lack of regional performance measures and Australian industry best management practices were seen as disadvantages. The inability of ISO 14001 to track through the value chain was also perceived as a weakness, as industry groups had a strong preference for the application of environmental certification to the whole supply chain.

Industry groups believed that that the benefits of environmental certification should outweigh the costs. Primary producers are concerned about production costs, pointing out that in many cases the prices paid for food and fibre is often less than their capital investment, labour, inputs and other costs.

Conservation and consumer groups did not appear to have a preference for any particular type of standard as the basis for environmental certification. However, they did expect that environmental certification should address the whole supply chain, and operate at regional, national and global scales.

A major difference of opinion exists between industry groups and conservation and consumer groups with regard to the main focus of environmental certification. Industry groups prefer environmental certification to focus on particular commodities or land uses, such as broad-acre livestock production. In contrast, conservation and community groups believe that the focus should be on units of land, regions, or ecosystem types. They are concerned that existing forms of environmental certification assume that the current land use is sustainable and appropriate, and do not challenge this. They believe that there is a need to first question whether a land use should exist, rather than just apply a continuous improvement process to it. These groups desire unsustainable industries or businesses to be replaced with those that are better suited to a region's natural resource base.

Conservation groups emphasised three key criteria for environmental certification: ecosystem function, biodiversity conservation, and prices reflecting the true cost of production. In relation to the cost of production, both conservation and consumer groups believed that the current retail price of some products did not adequately reflect the full cost of production. In these instances they believe that natural resources used during production, such as fossil fuels, water and soil, are under-valued.

Conservation groups also believe that minimum environmental performance measures should be combined with existing best practice and continuous improvement processes, and suggested using overarching principles and criteria that could be adapted for a catchment or regional context. Conservation groups perceived trust and credibility as vital characteristics of environmental certification.

Consumer groups, like conservation groups, believed that environmental certification should reflect the true cost of production, incorporate continuous evaluation and improvement, and offer consumer confidence. They placed particular emphasis on food safety. For the most part, they believed the process should be a simple standard with measurable criteria, based on the concept of sustainability.

## **4.2 Uptake and expected outcomes**

Industry groups unanimously believed that environmental certification should be voluntary.

While both conservation and consumer groups displayed a general preference for environmental certification to be voluntary, they desired some form of regulatory back-up for people that did not abide by the rules of the voluntary scheme.

All three categories of stakeholders expected that environmental certification be simple and easy to use. However, they stated that it should not be simplified at the expense of beneficial outcomes.

Also, all three categories of stakeholders expressed a preference for environmental certification to address triple-bottom line issues – social, financial, and environmental. Consumer groups, and to some extent industry groups, made reference to the need for this to operate at a global scale. It was suggested that triple-bottom line outcomes could only be achieved in Australia if similar supply chains in other countries operated under similar standards.

However, conservation and consumer groups both appeared to have the view that primary producers placed economic outcomes above environmental and social, and believed that all three issues should have equal status.

## **4.3 Development**

Industry groups generally believed that they should play the major role in the development of environmental certification, but also saw significant roles for retailers and other members of supply chains. However, a number of industry respondents strongly believed that it should be market-driven. In this respect they felt that extensive consumer education regarding products and production practices was critical for the success of environmental certification.

Conservation and consumer groups expressed the need for environmental certification to be developed through multi-stakeholder collaboration. They said that major changes were required if environmental certification was to be successful, and that this would require a community-wide effort.

To this end, conservation and consumer groups saw education playing a major role in environmental certification, from primary producers through to consumers. They viewed education as a primary strategy for success, but recognised that this was a large and long-term process involving many different audiences. Conservation groups also placed some emphasis on educating primary producers about biodiversity.

## 4.4 Operation

Industry and conservation groups had little to say about the issue of labelling, but were generally in favour of the practice and indicated a preference for a single-label approach.

Consumer groups, on the other hand, perceived labelling as a vital part of environmental certification and discussed this issue in depth. Unlike the other two groups, consumer groups had a preference for a multiple-label approach, believing that consumers needed more than one label to have sufficient choice. They also emphasised that product labels should be trustworthy and informative, and should indicate certification of sustainability and food safety across the chain.

The industry groups held mixed views about how auditing should be done—some preferred self-auditing, while others preferred independent auditing.

Conservation groups had a lot to say about the issue of auditing, and placed importance on independent auditing. They also highlighted the need for transparency so that the public can access information related to environmental certification.

While consumer groups generally did not address the topic of auditing, their strong requirement for trustworthy labels and claims suggests that independent audits would be preferable.

# 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations below are based on the information provided by industry, conservation and consumer groups during interviews conducted by EcoRange. The views expressed by these groups contributed to EcoRange's final recommendations for environmental certification in agriculture (see Pahl 2004), taking into account the requirements and expectations expressed by rangeland primary producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, consumers, and members of environmental groups. The EcoRange project reports listed on page v of this report contain the results of surveys and interviews with these sectors.

## 5.1 Conclusions

Industry, conservation and consumer groups all appeared to have a desire for agriculture to be successful – profitable, ecologically sustainable, and socially beneficial. Also, they seemed in favour of the application of environmental certification to agriculture, and saw this as a tool that could assist agriculture achieve desired outcomes. While there is general agreement at the level of broad principles and processes, this could become unhinged when the detail of environmental certification is determined. Much still needs to be worked out with regard to the standards which will form the basis of environmental certification, the role of legislation, working definitions of sustainability and sustainable practices, environmental performance criteria, and methods of development and operation. In many ways, environmental certification for agriculture is still in its infancy, both in Australia and overseas.

There are also a number of international issues that also need to be worked through before agricultural environmental certification can be successfully implemented in Australia. Some of these issues include:

- International legislation, trade agreements and regulations;
- Varying levels of financial and other support provided to producers across the world;
- Varying levels of capacity of producers from different countries to comply with the requirements of environmental certification;
- Variation in environmental characteristics and production practices that occur across the world;
- Equivalency with national and international standards; and
- Consumer understanding and support for environmental and other certifications.

While consideration of each of the points above is important to the success of environmental certification, there are two other closely related issues that are even more critical:

1. The higher costs of certified food and fibre; and
2. Who will pay for this?

Primary producers often believe that the prices they receive for food and fibre do not cover their production costs, such as inputs, labour and capital. On top of this, conservation and community groups maintain that natural resources such as fossil fuels, water, soil and biodiversity, and social aspects such as labour are not adequately reflected in the retail price of products.

If these production costs are accounted for to the satisfaction of all stakeholders, and the additional costs of registration and auditing are added to this, then the total cost of production will rise. Primary producers also need reasonable profit margins, because without these rural and regional communities will further decline. If the triple-bottom line objectives of agriculture are to be realised, then the prices paid for certified food and fibre will also need to increase.

Critical questions arising from this are:

- Do consumers have the capacity and desire to pay for this price increase?
- If not, will the additional costs need to be absorbed by producers?

It seems unlikely that improvements in environmental, economic and social standards of agricultural communities can be achieved if primary producers are forced to absorb the additional costs of production. In many cases, they do not have the capacity to absorb further costs.

Similarly, it could be argued that many consumers also do not have a capacity to pay higher prices for food and fibre, and this probably applies to processors, wholesalers and retailers. While there may be some consumer niches in Australia and overseas who are able and willing to pay higher prices, it is unlikely that this will bring about the improvements in environmental, social and economic standards desired by stakeholders for agriculture.

As a final conclusion, it is probably unrealistic and inequitable to expect supply chains and/or consumers to pay for all of the improvements in agricultural environmental, economic and social standards that are considered necessary by these stakeholders. Perhaps the whole community, and not just one or two sections of it, should contribute to this.

Under these circumstances consideration could be given to the role that governments play in meeting broad stakeholder or wide community expectations for agriculture. Do they have the mandate and capacity to use public funds to pay for improvements in the triple-bottom line outcomes of agriculture? While this is a contentious issue worldwide, national governments do use a range of policy instruments to achieve wide community objectives. For example, the Integrated Product Policy of the European Commission (2004) draws on a variety of tools, both voluntary and mandatory, to target environmental and social impacts associated with all parts of a products life cycle. Policy instruments include differential taxes, subsidies, public green procurement programs, eco-labelling, public funding of natural resource management, legislation and assistance with the development of eco-designs and eco-practices. In this way the costs of addressing a range of impacts associated with product life cycles are spread across the whole community.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations, based on the views of industry, conservation and consumer groups, are put forward for consideration when developing environmental certification for agriculture.

Environmental certification should:

1. Be developed through multi-stakeholder collaboration, learning and negotiation, and provide for wide-community involvement.
2. Be based on or complement current industry-wide agricultural standards, such as standards currently used for quality assurance and food safety.
3. Be capable of application to entire supply chains, and able to differentiate product at every stage, right through to the consumer.
4. Be adopted at regional, national and international levels, and recognised globally.
5. Be underpinned by transparent, credible, and trustworthy processes and information bases.
6. Be verified by independent auditing along the entire supply chain.

7. Be voluntary, but contain some form of regulatory backup for people that do not abide by the rules.
8. Be simple and easy to implement, but not simplified at the expense of outcomes.
9. Contain minimum performance measures, incorporate industry best practice, and involve continuous improvement processes.
10. Certify sustainable use of natural resources, particularly with regard to ecosystem function and biodiversity conservation.
11. Certify food safety at all points along supply chains.
12. Address environmental, economic and social aspects, where each has equal status, and reflect the true cost of production.
13. Be underpinned by extensive communication and education programs, aimed at consumers, all sectors of the supply chain, and the wide-community.
14. Result in a number of labels, providing for sufficient consumer choice, backed up by informative and accessible data sets on claims associated with these labels.

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