Performance Audit

Local Land Services
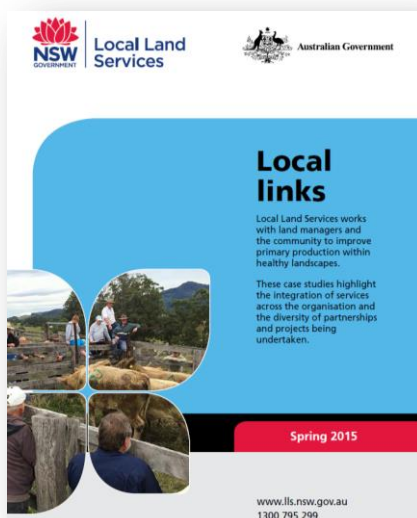
Communications

Local links

Local Land Services works with land managers and the community to improve primary production within healthy landscapes.

These case studies highlight the integration of services across the organisation and the diversity of partnerships and projects being undertaken.

Spring 2015

www.lls.nsw.gov.au
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April 2016

Enquiries

List of acronyms

LLS	Local Land Services
LLS Act	*Local Land Services Act 2013*
ESU	Executive Support Unit (of LLS)
DPI	Department of Primary Industries
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
LHPA	Livestock Health and Pest Authority
KPI	Key performance indicator

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Executive Summary

The Natural Resources Commission (the Commission) conducted an independent performance audit of Local Land Services' (LLS) communications at the request of the Minister for Primary Industries. The Commission established a risk-based audit framework and analysed evidence to assess the overall maturity of LLS communications. This evidence included interviews with staff, board members and external stakeholders; online surveys of customers and staff; and a review of relevant documents.

Effective communications are integral to a customer service business culture. The audit identified good operational communications practices including comprehensive policies and protocols, effective media monitoring, and improving engagement with external stakeholders. LLS has also conducted detailed land manager surveys to better understand customer needs in order to drive more targeted communications activities in the future. The Commission found professional and diligent communications staff across LLS as well as committed staff in frontline service roles. Their commitment has been reflected in many well-delivered communications activities including successful field days and events, consistent local media coverage of LLS programs, and professional quality communications materials.

While many examples of sound on-ground communications practices were identified, the audit also highlighted insufficient valuing and prioritising of communications as a core business function. This has prevented LLS from maximising customer service and stakeholder engagement efforts because:

▪ a structured, strategic approach to putting in place the necessary communications skills, organisational accountabilities, and funding has not occurred

▪ a clear brand profile that would enable everyone in LLS to clearly articulate 'who we are and what we do', is not there

▪ stakeholder analysis and associated segmentation of target audiences and their different needs has not been conducted at the state scale, and only to varying degrees of sophistication at the regional scale

▪ communications strategies, while in place, vary in quality and have not been valued or implemented consistently across LLS.

As a young organisation, LLS is still maturing and it is to be expected that some aspects of communications are still evolving. However, to resolve the fundamental leadership issues identified in this audit, a significant change in LLS' approach to communications as a core business enabler will be required. The Commission recognises there have been recent changes in LLS leadership and there is a renewed focus on LLS business processes.

The Commission recommends the appointment of a full-time Senior Communications Manager to the Executive Support Unit to drive many of the necessary changes. A dedicated leadership role with clear responsibilities would provide a more strategic approach to communications and facilitate a wide range of improvements such as:

▪ identifying organisation-wide requirements for communications skills and resources, and rectifying gaps where they exist

▪ setting clear expectations and accountabilities for all communications staff, and establishing measurable performance indicators

▪ leading the development of a clear brand profile that resonates internally and externally

- developing a state-wide stakeholder engagement strategy which identifies key stakeholders, prioritises those that are critical to LLS' success, and determines how they will be engaged meaningfully for mutual benefit

- revising ministerial liaison processes to better meet the Minister's needs and educating all relevant staff about their role in responding to the unique needs of the Minister's Office

- enhancing the state-wide communications strategic plan so that key messages, target audiences and priority programs are tangible and adaptable to the regional context

- guiding the development or revision of regional communications plans so they are aligned where required and implementable on the ground

- developing guidance materials for regional officers (for example key messages, possible media channels, media release templates and positive story ideas) which complement the state-wide and regional communications plans.

A number of recommendations relate to communications culture more broadly and highlight that it needs to be a shared responsibility across the organisation. The Commission recommends LLS enhances communications culture by:

- supporting local board members to be more visible in their communities and more proactive as communicators

- embracing Local Community Advisory Groups more strongly as a forum for community consultation and engagement, leveraging their local knowledge

- improving how customer queries and complaints are managed within LLS and with partner organisations who deal with similar land management issues

- continuing to build on internal feedback loops and sharing of organisational knowledge and resources.

On-ground communications practices, while currently effective in many ways, could be further improved by placing greater focus on:

- producing media releases to a consistently high standard; templates and guidance prepared centrally would assist

- improving functionality of the external website and internal intranet

- tailoring communications materials and methods to more closely match the practical needs of land managers (for example recognise internet limitations and low uptake of social media in rural areas)

- enhancing the quality of monitoring, evaluating and reporting of communications activities so that it drives continuous improvement.

Detailed recommendations are presented at the end of each findings section in chapters 4 and 5, and are collated in Chapter 6. Supplementary guidance material and key points for consideration have also been provided to assist with the implementation of these recommendations. LLS' response to the audit recommendations is presented in Chapter 7.

1   Introduction

1.1   Audit objective and scope

In May 2015, the Minister for Primary Industries (the Minister) appointed the Natural Resources Commission (the Commission) as independent auditor[1] of Local Land Services (LLS) for two priority performance audits. The first audit requested by the Minister was an audit of LLS governance which was completed in October 2015. This report presents the findings and recommendations of the second audit - LLS communications.

The objective of this audit was to assess the maturity of current communications, to determine what is working well and what might be improved in order to meet the strategic goals of LLS. The Commission audited external and internal communications at both state-wide and regional scales to ascertain overall communications maturity and make recommendations for the organisation as a whole. The audit had a greater focus on external communications, given that key aspects of internal communications were assessed in the Commission's previous audit of LLS governance.

This report presents audit findings and recommendations (Chapters 3-5), a collated list of recommendations (Chapter 6) and LLS' response to each of the recommendations (Chapter 7). Evidence to support findings is discussed in the body of the report, with references to more detailed evidence sources provided in footnotes.

1.2   Audit approach and methodology

A risk-based approach was adopted for the audit. This involved designing an audit framework to examine aspects of communications that had been previously identified as key risks to the success of LLS.[2] The framework comprised three broad lines of inquiry from which specific audit criteria, investigative questions, and evidence sources were identified. The lines of inquiry are outlined below.

- **Strategic communications**: To what extent do key stakeholders have a clear and consistent understanding of LLS and its activities? Is the LLS brand and reputation proactively managed?

- **Service delivery**: Does LLS understand its stakeholders' communication needs? To what extent do stakeholders report satisfaction with LLS' two-way communications? To what extent are LLS' communications events and activities achieving the desired outcomes, for example awareness building, education, behaviour change?

- **Organisational support and alignment**: Are communications practices coordinated and aligned? To what extent are the communications functions clearly defined, integrated within the organisational hierarchy, and contributing to the organisation's service culture?

The audit criteria incorporated communications requirements and expectations contained in the *Local Land Services Act 2013* (LLS Act), the Performance Standard for Local Land Services, communications literature and professional practice guidance (see Appendix 1 for a summary of communication requirements from these sources).

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[1] Section 24 of the *Local Land Services Act 2013*
[2] The Commission conducted a risk assessment of LLS to identify key audit areas in March-April 2015.

Audit evidence was collected at the state scale and from a sample of three LLS regions – North Coast, Riverina and Western. The evidence assessed in this audit included:

- 230 responses to an online survey of LLS staff

- 137 responses to an online survey of LLS customers in the three sample regions

- 33 interviews with LLS staff and board members

- 31 interviews with external partners and investors

- review of 105 communications documents, approximately half of which were reviewed by a professional communications consultant.

About 65 hours were spent conducting interviews over a total of 12 days in LLS offices across NSW. The Commission provided informal feedback on audit findings to senior representatives from each LLS region involved in the audit. Preliminary audit findings were also presented to the Board of Chairs in February 2016.

The Commission used a maturity scale as a way of describing the observed performance of communications in LLS. The maturity scale is a continuum of improving communications practices in a wide range of aspects such as planning, coordination, resourcing, quality, targeting, consistency, monitoring and evaluation. Audit findings were assessed against this framework, and recommendations for improvement made where practices were at a lower level of maturity. Given that LLS has only been operating for two years, it is reasonable to expect that aspects of communications are still maturing. More information about the characteristics of each level of maturity is provided in Appendix 1 (Table A2).

2 Organisational context

2.1 Overview of LLS

LLS is a NSW Government agency that provides a range of biosecurity, agricultural advisory, natural resource management, and emergency management services to land managers across the state. It began operating on 1 January 2014 through the merging of former Catchment Management Authorities, Livestock Health and Pest Authorities and some agricultural advisory services of the Department of Primary Industries.

Under the LLS Act, LLS was established to be a devolved, customer-focused organisation with 11 regions that are responsible for providing front line services in biosecurity, agricultural advice, natural resource management and on-ground emergency management. Each region has its own local board with governance, planning, communications and oversight responsibilities[3]. At the state scale, LLS is governed by the Board of Chairs, which consists of an independent chair and the chairs of the 11 local boards. The Board of Chairs sets the strategy for the organisation and has other governance and direct ministerial reporting responsibilities[4].

LLS was established by the NSW government amid high expectations for improved client service at the same time as having reduced funding for two of its core service areas. The Executive Support Unit (ESU), created to support the Board of Chairs, was not given clear oversight or accountabilities for state-wide functions and was not directly funded on an ongoing basis. LLS regions made their own decisions on the nature, structure and funding of communications and other business functions.

2.2 Communications context

Communications is central to LLS achieving its mission 'to be a customer-focused business that enables improved primary production and better management of natural resources'. The importance of communications can also been seen in the organisational purpose stated in LLS' State Strategic Plan[5]. This purpose statement, 'What we do', is replicated below, with key processes that rely on effective communications underlined.

'Local Land Services works with our customers, stakeholders and investors to:

- enable. We provide resources, incentives, training, information and advice to build the capacity of our customers and stakeholders.

- provide assurance. We actively work to protect NSW from invasive animal and plant species, and livestock and plant diseases that may damage landscapes and production.

- manage natural resources. We work with communities to better manage our water, land, soil, vegetation, biodiversity and cultural heritage. This includes managing travelling stock reserves and areas of significance to Aboriginal communities.

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[3] LLS Act, s.29(1)
[4] LLS Act, s.26(1), s.14(1)
[5] Local Land Services (2016) State Strategic Plan 2016-2026, State of New South Wales through Local Land Services, February 2016

- broker relationships. We are a bridging organisation, <u>connecting people</u>, <u>organisations</u>, funding and <u>information</u> and <u>facilitating productive collaborations and partnerships</u>.

- <u>share knowledge</u>. We provide a <u>hub</u> for the latest <u>scientific and other forms of knowledge</u> about fully functioning and productive landscapes in NSW.

- play our part. We <u>work with other agencies</u> to achieve whole of government results for the landscapes and people of NSW.'

During its first 18 months of operation, LLS was primarily internally focused while it established business objectives, organisational structures and systems. In the most recent six months, communications have been more outward-looking. Recommendations from an independent review of communications during LLS' first year of operation were also in various stages of implementation. At the time of the Commission's audit, LLS had established a communications function with central and regional communications officers plus a range of strategies, policies, processes and practices for internal and external communications.

A final note on context is that the Commission's audit of LLS governance (completed in October 2015) identified a number of issues affecting communications which have not yet been fully addressed by LLS. This communications audit report will note where that is the case to minimise replication of findings or recommendations from the governance audit report. References to the governance audit are footnoted in the collated list of recommendations presented in Chapter 6.

3   Audit findings – overview

LLS' communications function consists of a state scale communications team in the ESU and regional communications staff spread across the 11 regions (Table 1). The ESU team is responsible for state scale communications such as policies, procedures, state-wide campaigns, and coordination of the LLS regions when their involvement in state-wide matters is required. The regional communications staff are responsible for local communications as well as supporting the ESU team on whole-of-state communications activities. LLS has also established a Communications Officer Network, an internal network for all communications staff to collaborate and share information.

The audit identified a number of good communications practices at both state and regional scales. At the state scale these include clear and comprehensive policies and protocols, good media monitoring practices, and improving engagement with investor agencies. At the regional scale there have been successful field days and events, effective engagement with Aboriginal land managers and some other partner agencies, and production of professional quality newsletters and other communications materials. Staff across the organisation have a broad appreciation of the importance of communications to LLS.[6]

The Commission also identified a number of factors that have limited the effectiveness of LLS communications. There has been insufficient valuing and prioritisation of communications as a core business function by state and regional organisational leaders and this is reflected across a number of key areas (Figure 1). Most notably, there has been a lack of:

- strategic analysis and agreement at the senior leadership level on the structure, continuity of staff funding and professional skills required to establish strong, customer-focused communications. In interviews, concerns were raised about the current variability of communications skills and the adequacy of accountability mechanisms (refer to Sections 4.1 and 4.2).

- leadership for developing a brand profile which simply articulates 'this is who we are and what we do'. Staff have been expected to communicate the LLS brand to customers despite it not being made clear within LLS (refer to Section 4.3).

- a structured and proactive approach to key stakeholder analysis and engagement at all stakeholder levels - land managers, partner and investor agencies, and the Minister for Primary Industries' Office. While there were elements of good practice, the lack of a strategic approach to stakeholder analysis and engagement has reduced the overall effectiveness of LLS' communications (refer to Sections 5.1 - 5.6).

- implementation of communications strategic plans. While communications strategies have been developed at both state and regional scales, they vary in quality and have not been used to guide daily communications practices (refer to Section 4.4).

The strategic-level issues outlined above have made communications difficult, reducing the overall efficacy and return on investment. These issues are explored in more detail in the next chapter (Chapter 4), and findings regarding on-ground communications practices are discussed in Chapter 5.

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[6] Based on an audit survey of LLS staff, 87% of all staff believe the quantity and quality of LLS communications influences how external stakeholders perceive the organisation.
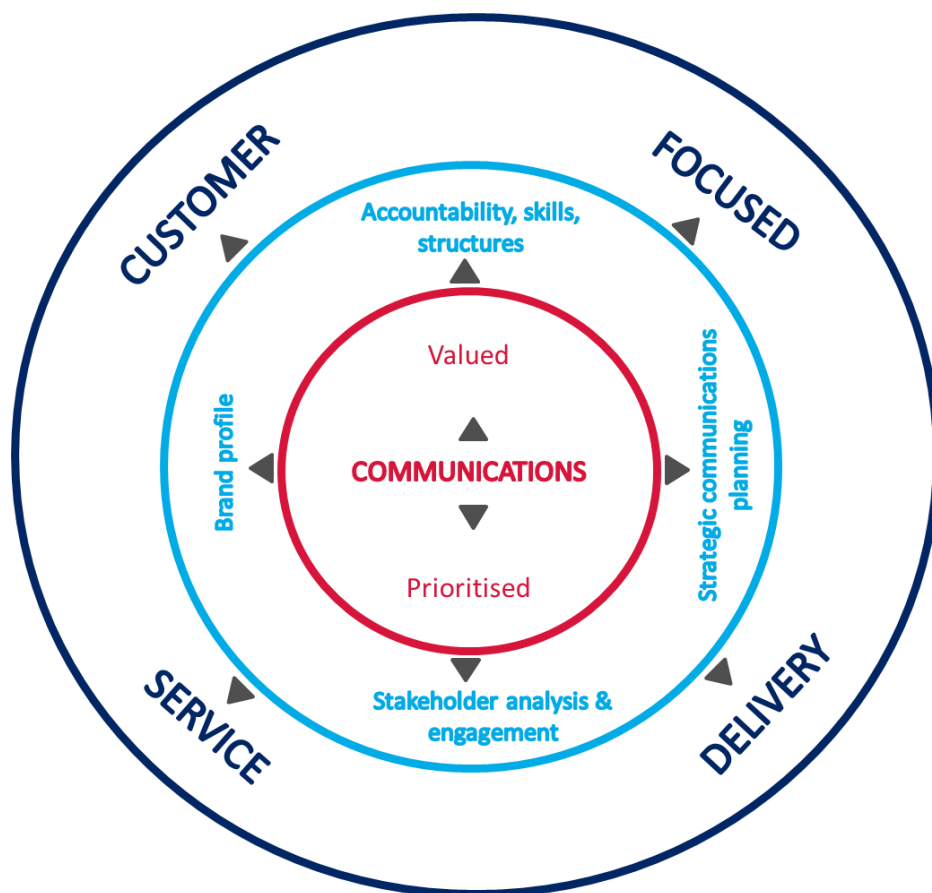
Figure 1: Key opportunities to improve the effectiveness of LLS communications

4   Audit findings – strategy and leadership

4.1   Resources, capacity and skills

Insufficient prioritisation of the communications function has led to the current situation where communications leadership, professional skills and resources are not robust enough to meet the needs of a customer-focused organisation such as LLS.

4.1.1   Communications leadership

The ESU communications team is directed by the Manager of Policy, Relationships and Strategy. This is a temporary, full-time role with broad responsibilities for communications, planning, business relationships and policy development across LLS' service areas. Only 30% of the role has been formally allocated to communications activities[7], which has been insufficient to establish a proactive and strategic communications function for LLS. Further, the formal role description for the Manager position does not prioritise communications skills in the essential job requirements.[8] Interview feedback was that LLS has placed unrealistic expectations on this position which is spread too thinly across policy and communications responsibilities. Internal and external stakeholders agreed that LLS is currently lacking a dedicated senior communications position to drive communications success across the whole organisation.

4.1.2   Communications skills

> **"[Region name withheld]** *was lucky to appoint a high calibre person* **[to the Communications Officer role]. [Officer name withheld]** *has all the skills, knowledge and experience necessary... [and] has formal qualifications in communications and is a brilliant operator."*
>
> **Staff member**

Regionally, LLS has adopted a variable approach to recruitment of communications staff, resulting in mixed levels of skills and experience. Although some general managers viewed their communications staff as critical appointments and recruited highly skilled professionals, other communications staff have transitioned into these roles from other backgrounds.

> *"Not all general managers or boards understand that communications is a professional practice."*
>
> **Staff member**

The formal role description for communications staff is inadequate and does not emphasise communications skills. The list of 'essential requirements' does not mention important capabilities including brand building, developing relationships with local media, or qualifications in communications or marketing.[9] For comparison, the Commission reviewed two descriptions for communications roles in a comparable NSW Government agency.[10] These positions required

> *"The communications officer job description is pretty poor, and may be part of the reason why some regions appointed more administrative-type staff."*
>
> **Staff member**

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[7] The communications component of the Manager of Policy, Relationships and Strategy position is 0.3 full-time equivalent (FTE).

[8] The 'essential requirements' listed in the role description focus on: policy; planning; briefing; research and analytical skills; understanding the workings of Government; and tertiary qualifications in public administration, economics or business disciplines.

[9] The Communications Officer role is a grade 6 position. The 'essential requirements' listed in the role description include: current drivers licence; willingness to travel; social media skills; and publication and event preparation.

[10] Role descriptions were for a NSW Government agency with regional service capacity in the Industry, Skills and Regional Development Cluster (job classification 7-8)

tertiary qualifications in communications, proven experience working with the media, delivery of quality written material, and experience in developing and implementing communications plans as essential job requirements.

Some identified skill deficiencies have been addressed through capacity development by the Communications Officer Network, an internal network for all communications staff to collaborate, share information and undertake training. The network has regular teleconferences and meets every six months for training and development.[11] The ESU also offers assistance and informal induction[12] for regional communications staff.

Communications training has been offered to other staff in LLS. Approximately 50% of staff have received specific training or advice for communicating with external stakeholders,[13] and some LLS regions provided media training for staff and board members.[14] However, the Board of Chairs did not undertake any communications or media training in the 12 months prior to commencement of this audit. Further, LLS has not reassessed communications skills requirements now the organisation is better established, or developed a process to address skills gaps.

4.1.3 Continuity of staff funding

Seven LLS regions have 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) communications officer each, however one region has 0.8, two regions have 1.2 and one region has 2.0 FTEs. LLS relies on non-recurrent funding sources, including grants, for a large proportion of its communications staff and many are employed on a temporary basis (Table 1). Using grants to fund communications staff reflects LLS' current financial position however, it also signifies a lack of prioritisation of communications staff as core, strategic professionals who are vital to overall organisational success.

Table 1: Communications staff in LLS

Staff	FTE[*]	Tenure breakdown (FTE)		Funding breakdown (FTE)			
		Ongoing	*Temporary*	*Recurrent*	*Grant*	*Unfunded~*	*Mixed*
Manager of Policy, Relationships and Strategy	0.3	-	0.3	-	-	0.3	-
ESU^ Communications Officers	2.2	0.6	1.6	-	1.0	1.2	-
Regional Communications Officers	12.2	3.2	9.0	5.4	4.0	-	2.8
Total	**14.7**	**3.8**	**10.9**	**5.4**	**5.0**	**1.5**	**2.8**

[*] Full-time equivalent positions

~ Internal terminology used by LLS to denote that the ESU does not currently have a discreet funding allocation

^ Executive Support Unit

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[11] Training undertaken at the May 2015 meeting included: emergency management communications; implementing Facebook campaigns; maximising Twitter effectiveness; and writing for the Minister for Primary Industries.
[12] For example, informal induction covering key areas of LLS operations was provided was provided to a regional Communications Officer in September 2015. An online tutorial was also provided to another new regional Communications Officer in November 2015.
[13] Based on the Commission's online survey of LLS staff.
[14] Two of the three sample regions provided media training.

Recommendation 1 - Appoint a full time Senior Communications Manager to the Executive Support Unit

The focus of this position should be on:

- strategic-level communications planning and engagement
- strategic media engagement
- reputation management
- providing public relations advice to the Board of Chairs and Executive Manager
- overseeing the quality of communications outputs across the organisation
- co-ordinating with the regions to deliver high quality and timely Ministerial services
- ensuring consistent key messages are delivered across the state
- promoting cultural change to guide and support communications across the whole organisation

Recommendation 2 - Review the structure and roles of current communications staff in the Executive Support Unit

Key point for consideration:

- these roles should support the needs of the Senior Communications Manager and deliver strategic outcomes

Recommendation 3 - Identify skills gaps and build capacity for communications across the organisation

Key points for consideration:

- revise the standard role description for the Communications Officer to reflect the required skills and qualifications of a communications professional[15]
- conduct a state-wide gap analysis of critical communications capability against the new role descriptions, including a skills review of existing communications staff
- develop a capacity building program for communications staff, including capacity development for Ministerial services [refer to Recommendation 9]
- set key performance indicators and expectations for the development of communications staff to track improvement in organisational communications capacity
- ensure future recruitment of communications staff addresses skill shortages and brings in complementary skills
- involve the new Senior Communications Manager in recruitment and appointment of all new communications staff and in the potential re-appointment of current temporary communications staff at the end of their contracts

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[15] The role description should also reflect the specific roles of regional communications officers and the specific roles of state scale communications officers in the Executive Support Unit

4.2   Accountability mechanisms for a devolved organisation

Reflecting its devolved nature, LLS needs to strike the right balance between regionally-relevant communications and central oversight from the ESU, to minimise duplication of effort and promote consistency of state-wide messages when situations demand it. Regional communications staff are located within regional management structures, and have an informal working relationship with the ESU communications team and each other via the Communications Officer Network. A consequence of this arrangement is that there are no accountability mechanisms to facilitate quality assurance, consistency of messages and alignment of communications activities. Similarly, general managers are not responsible for state-wide communications, which means their regional communications staff may focus on regional activities in isolation from state priorities. Further, general managers are often not communications professionals and would benefit from ESU guidance and leadership on communications matters.

> *"Communications officers should report to the line manager in the region for performance, but functional reporting to Executive Support Unit communications function for the 'greater good'."*
>
> **Staff member**

In recognition of this issue, the Board of Chairs made a decision in December 2015 to establish 'functional' reporting lines between the ESU Manager of Policy, Relationships and Strategy and regional communications staff.[16] It was also decided that 'solid' reporting lines would remain in place between regional communications staff and their general managers. In interviews, LLS board members and management stated they were generally happy with this new approach. However, three months after this decision was made, there were still no clear details available to explain how functional reporting will work in practice or when it will be formally implemented.

There has been inconsistent use of key performance indicators (KPIs) to drive improvements in the quality, consistency and alignment of communications across the whole organisation. LLS has recently acknowledged the importance of engaging with political representatives, and set KPIs for all regional chairs and general managers to meet with and hold media events with federal members of parliament. [17] This is an example of an effective initiative for improving relationships with the Australian Government. KPIs are also included in development plans for regional communications staff,[18] as well as regular communications reports prepared for boards and management. However most of these KPIs relate to regional communications activities and performance, and have not helped to drive quality, consistency and alignment of communications across the organisation (refer to Section 5.8 for further discussion on monitoring and reporting).

There are also inconsistent reporting lines for individual communications staff across the 11 LLS regions. Six regional communications staff (5.0 FTEs) report to their general manager, two (2.0 FTEs) report to managers of strategic business units[19] and six (5.2 FTEs) report to team leaders or coordinators of strategic teams. While regional flexibility is part of the LLS model, communications staff who either report directly to their general manager or have open access to that person, report close working relationships and feel supported in their roles. They are also

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[16] Board of Chairs meeting 27, 10 December 2015.

[17] Decision was made by the Board of Chairs on 10 December 2015.

[18] The Commission sighted personal development plans for individual communications officers in all three sample regions. Only one plan included commitments to respond to Executive Support Unit requests and participate in the Communications Officer Network.

[19] One of these units includes also includes business and finance.

privy to high-level, strategic information about their regions, particularly if they regularly attend local board meetings. This improves the overall communications approach by providing communications staff with timely access to information on organisational initiatives and emerging risks.

Recommendation 4 - Clarify communications functions that require central oversight versus functions devolved to the regions, and establish reporting lines and accountability mechanisms to effectively implement those functions

Key points for consideration:

- establish clear reporting arrangements for regional communications staff with:

    - direct reporting lines between regional communications staff and their regional managers[20]

    - clearly defined and mutually understood functional reporting lines between regional communications staff and the new Senior Communications Manager in the Executive Support Unit

- establish strong accountability mechanisms to facilitate adherence to the functional reporting lines, including:

    - key performance indicators set by the ESU for regional communications staff and general managers to reflect state-wide communications responsibilities. These must be endorsed by local boards

    - the new Senior Communications Manager contributes to performance reviews for regional communications staff

Recommendation 5 - Provide regional communications staff with ongoing, regular and open access to their senior management team, general managers and local boards

4.3   LLS brand

Two years in, LLS still does not have a brand profile that resonates with stakeholders. When interviewed, staff and external stakeholders provided a clear indication that LLS has work to do in establishing a brand profile that enables people to simply articulate 'this is who we are and what we do'. There has been an absence of leadership on this issue, however some regions have been proactive in developing and implementing their own brand-building strategies. While these efforts demonstrate a higher level of communications maturity in certain regions, there is a lack of maturity across the organisation. Unclear vision and direction from the Board of Chairs was raised in the Commission's previous audit of LLS governance.

Boards and senior executive team members have a role as 'brand ambassadors' for their LLS regions and need

"I asked a couple of farmers this morning what they know about LLS; they say it's a follow on from pasture protection but they just pay the rates and don't know what it means."
External stakeholder

"They communicate their goals very poorly with all stakeholders. They've spoken to people and chosen their words differently so each person's take is always something different about what LLS is about. And there are still people in the organisation who aren't clear what LLS does."
External stakeholder

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[20] This suggestion is consistent with the Board of Chairs' decision made on 10 December 2015.

to 'walk the talk' in their community, industry and workplace, sharing the vision and success stories of their LLS. They should be proactive and engage the community with what their LLS stands for (refer to Section 5.5 for further discussion on board member visibility).


Recommendation 6 - Clearly articulate and market the LLS brand, deciding which core LLS branding and messages will be adopted across the state

Key points for consideration:

- develop clear, concise and consistent messages using 'plain English' to reflect LLS' goals, priorities and services

- ensure state-wide messages are used consistently across the organisation and incorporated into all communications materials

- ensure messages are relevant to the specific regions where they are disseminated - they must resonate with the audience to promote engagement

- ensure adequate signage for regional offices[21]

4.4 Communications strategies

LLS has developed sound state scale communications strategic planning documents,[22] which link the organisation's communications function to the State Strategic Plan.[23] They also articulate the goals, strategies and tactics for LLS communications.[24] However, these documents are relatively complex and are not clearly linked to each other, which may create a challenge for communications personnel who need to implement them. Although these planning documents are comprehensive, they have so far been of limited benefit to regional communications staff. Some regions developed their own communications strategies in isolation, largely in response to the absence of a state scale communications strategy until well into LLS' second year (Figure 2). In some instances, regional communications staff did not consider the state communications strategy to be relevant or useful to their regions.
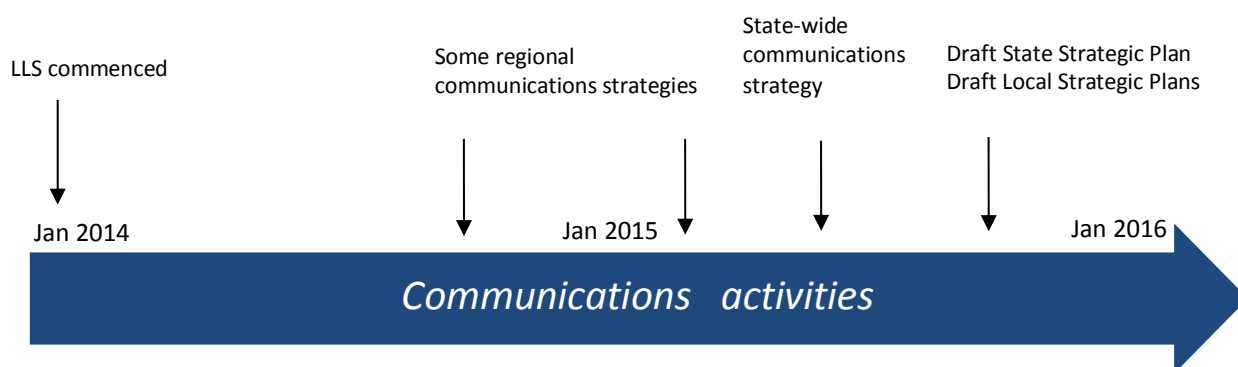
Figure 2: Timeline of communications strategic plans

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[21] Budget allowing, LLS could also consider using strategically placed roadside signage to inform and educate landholders and stakeholders on what they can do to contribute to the wellbeing of their land. This would enable LLS to subtly communicate their messaging around 'everyone's responsibility / LLS partnership'.

[22] *Local Land Services Communications Strategic Plan 2015-2017* and *Local Land Services Communications Implementation Plan 2015-2017*

[23] *State Strategic Plan: 2016-2026*

[24] The *Local Land Services Communications Implementation Plan 2015-2017* also lists organisational key performance indicators for communications. Key performance indicators are discussed in Section 5.8.

The Commission reviewed a sample of three regional communications strategies[25] and found that the quality of these documents was highly variable. For example, one regional strategy was a sound and high quality document, whereas another was out-dated, did not reflect LLS' mandate to be customer-focused, and was not used to guide actual communications. Further, the regional strategies were not sufficiently aligned with the more recently released state scale communications strategic plan (Figure 2). They were also developed prior to the finalisation and release of the state and local draft strategic plans (Figure 2). Although on-ground communications activities have generally been effective, the absence of a defined communications strategy creates an organisational risk (refer to Chapter 5 for further details on on-ground communications activities).

Recommendation 7 - Review and effectively implement state-wide and regional communications strategies, clearly defining the relationships between both scales and how state-wide approaches should be reflected in the regional strategies

Key points for consideration:

- the state-wide communications strategy should reflect:

  - the new organisational branding [see Recommendation 6],

  - the results of the detailed stakeholder analysis [see Recommendation 10]

  - the guidance material provided in Appendix 4

- the regional communications strategies should be:

  - customer-centric

  - be useful operational tools rather than reference manuals which are only occasionally referred to

  - aligned with the revised state scale document as appropriate

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4.5 Policies and procedures

At the state scale, LLS has produced a number of clear and comprehensive policies and protocols for communications.[26] The Commission acknowledges the strength of these documents and the significant time invested in establishing systems for LLS as a new organisation. At the regional scale, the development of policies and their alignment with the state scale documents has been variable. Some regions rely more heavily on interpersonal communications within and across teams rather than on documented processes. While this is working in practice, it presents a risk to consistent service delivery if policies and procedures are not formalised, accessible, and communicated across the organisation.

The Commission reviewed the following state scale documents:

- *Media Policy and Protocol*, which covers authorised spokespeople, formatting, approvals and distributions. All sampled regions had their own regional media policies in place, however these did not fully align with the state scale media policy (refer to Section 5.6 for further details)

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[25] Or equivalent documents

[26] LLS also uses other NSW Government communications policies and guidelines, including the Department of Primary Industries' *Media and Communications Procedure: Emergency Animal/Plan Disease* and the Department of Industry's *Social Media Policy*.

- *Ministerial Liaison Protocol*, which outlines the procedures for different types of liaison between LLS and the Minister's Office, including media management, Ministerial delegations, and Ministerial visits (refer to Section 5.1 for further details)

- *Information Products Development Protocol*, which includes protocols for the publication of fliers, factsheets, videos, newsletters and other communications materials

- *Brand Book*, which specifies requirements for logos, colours and fonts in all LLS publications

- *Editorial Style Guide*, which outlines the editorial style to be used in LLS publications[27].

The Commission reviewed a range of LLS publications[28] against the *Brand Book* and *Editorial Style Guide* and found minor inconsistencies in their use[29].

Recommendation 8 - Review and update communication policies and procedures, ensuring appropriate levels of state and regional alignment (see Recommendation 4)
Key points for consideration: • update regional media policies to align with the state scale policy   • improve and redistribute the Editorial Style Guide to regional communications staff[30]   • ensure policies and procedures are adequate for each LLS region. To streamline this process and reduce duplication, there should be cross-regional sharing of existing policies (refer to Recommendation 19, which address sharing of information and resources)

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[27] This document contains limited details relative to the other state-wide policies and procedures reviewed.

[28] For Example, media releases, e-newsletters, reports and strategic planning documents.

[29] Minor inconsistencies included things like incorrect naming conventions for LLS and inappropriate capitalisation and inappropriate resizing of the LLS logo. LLS communications staff had graphic design training scheduled for November 2015, which may result in improvements in some of these areas.

[30] The new Senior Communications Manager should be responsible for overseeing the quality and consistency of communications outputs across the organisation [refer to Recommendation **1**].

5 Audit findings – operational communications

Over the last six months, LLS has undertaken a significant amount of external communications activities. While many of these activities have been successful, the audit revealed that LLS has not placed sufficient emphasis on understanding and prioritising their wide range of stakeholders, and therefore has not maximised the benefits from these efforts. This chapter presents the Commission's audit findings on the operational aspects of LLS' communications, including communicating with external stakeholders[31], working with advisory groups, the roles of board members, and internal communications.

5.1 The Minister's Office

The Minister for Primary Industries is responsible for administering the LLS Act and is a key stakeholder of the organisation. The Commission found that LLS has not prioritised the Minister's Office as a critical stakeholder. The Minister's Office requires a single point of contact in LLS to coordinate ministerial requests in a timely manner. Currently, this responsibility rests with the Manager of Policy, Relationships and Strategy, located in the ESU. Ministerial responses are required to be high quality, timely and often involve input from multiple LLS regions. However, LLS' current approach to responding to Ministerial requests is inconsistent across the organisation. Internal procedures for responding to ministerial requests are discussed below.

> *"The process for ministerial requests is a bit ad hoc…normally a request comes via ESU but one time we got a phone call directly from the Minister's office asking where the response is"*
>
> **Staff member**

LLS has developed a Draft Ministerial Liaison Protocol that outlines the principles and procedures for four types of ministerial liaison: (i) media management, (ii) ministerial visits, (iii) contentious issues, and (iv) parliamentary requirements (including ministerial correspondence and briefs). While this protocol describes processes to follow for the first three liaison types, for the fourth – parliamentary requirements – it only lists examples of tasks[32] and states that "they usually have a very tight timeframe". Further information on the fourth type was provided to the Commission via a one-page memorandum which describes the management system for ministerial requests[33], however this is not a formal internal procedure.

A reporting tool that tracks correspondence, briefs, and parliamentary questions is generated weekly by the Department of Industry's Ministerial Liaison Office and is available to the ESU. However, this tool simply reports the status of these activities and does not replace the need for a defined chain of accountability within LLS to manage the process, including obtaining regional input and closing out requests within required timeframes.

This documentary evidence indicates there is not a clear protocol for responding to urgent requests from the Minister's Office. This is evident in practice and the Commission found an inconsistent, organisation-wide understanding of procedures and responsibilities. These findings indicate a culture that does not sufficiently recognise or value the unique needs of the

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[31] The Commission has adopted a broad definition of 'stakeholders' which includes anyone who has contributed funds, or is affected by or concerned with LLS. Stakeholder categories include customers/land managers, investors, and partners.

[32] Parliamentary requirements listed (without procedures) are: House folder notes – updated before each parliamentary session; questions on/without notice; speeches; ministerial correspondence; and ministerial briefs.

[33] Types of ministerial requests listed in the memorandum are: briefs, correspondence, questions on notice, contentious issues briefs, budget estimates briefs, house folder notes, and dixers; which are coordinated by a Senior Policy Officer in the ESU.

Minister's office. Some interviewees suggested this culture is a legacy of some of the organisations that formed LLS. These organisations had a substantial level of autonomy and did not report directly to a minister.

Recommendation 9 - Build an organisational culture where the Minister's office is viewed as a primary stakeholder

Key points for consideration:

- clarify the expectations of the Minister's Office for communications with LLS

- provide clear organisation-wide procedures for communicating with the Minister's Office and for responding to ministerial requests in a prompt and appropriately detailed manner

- make the new Senior Communications Manager responsible for liaison with the Minister's Office, as well as co-ordination and oversight of regional input

- identify a key point of contact within each LLS regional office to be responsible for supplying the Senior Communications Manager with the supporting information for ministerial liaison

- develop a strategy to improve staff understanding of ministerial responsibilities, such as through joint training opportunities with other government agencies, temporary Department Liaison Officer opportunities for LLS staff and shadowing

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5.2   Investors and key partners

Investors and key partners comprise organisations which fund[34] LLS programs, either wholly or jointly, or which support and collaborate in other ways to deliver improved land management outcomes. As they are important stakeholders, the Commission assessed the way LLS caters for their communications needs, and obtained insights on investor and partner perceptions of communications effectiveness.

A multi-levelled, structured and proactive approach to key stakeholder analysis and engagement is not yet evident in LLS. At the state scale, the ESU maintains a simple contact list of key external stakeholders[35] which lacks prioritisation and analysis of stakeholder needs. The ESU made a conscious decision to only conduct detailed stakeholder analysis for individual communications campaigns[36] rather than for the organisation as a whole. In practice, stakeholder engagement has been variable. Investor organisations report reasonably positive communications with LLS, while noting that some aspects could be improved. However, key partner organisations feel that LLS has not prioritised strategic partner relationships and that its reputation has suffered as a result.

5.2.1   Investors

Representatives of investor agencies interviewed for the audit reported generally strong communications in relation to administering funding programs. Good working relationships

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[34] Although ratepayers provide about 19% of LLS' funding, they are considered land managers (Section 5.3) in this report.
[35] ESU prepared this list at the request of the Independent Pricing and Review Tribunal, and it is not routinely used.
[36] Examples of campaigns include: Travelling Stock Reserve Reforms, and Draft State Strategic Plan consultation

including open lines of communication exist with the ESU, and at the local level where individual projects are delivered.

Three areas for improvement were noted by investment agencies:

- communications concerning project reporting by both ESU and regions could be more timely and responsive

- in some regions, LLS provides inadequate notice when funding rounds or successful grantees are being publicised (this impacts the ability of elected representatives to participate in promotional activities)

- recognition of funders in promotional material is inconsistent, for example co-branding sometimes does not occur.

> *"...(LLS staff) called in and walked us through the* **[name withheld]** *plan... I was really impressed, we had the opportunity to ask questions... having the opportunity to just talk to these guys brought more clarity..."*
> **Investor representative**

> *"As a funder, we want to see more celebration of good outcomes from our money."*
> **Investor representative**

5.2.2   Partners

Touch points for communications with other government agencies are many and varied. Communications have been effective with senior executives across government at the state scale, but in need of improvement at both managerial and operational levels in the LLS regions. Factors underpinning communication issues in the regions, include:

- unclear role definitions and boundaries between LLS and other state government land management agencies in agricultural advisory and some other service areas

- unclear role definitions and boundaries, leading to customer confusion – they don't know who to go to for different services

> *"LLS could improve their communication by being proactive and having a relationship with us. Even a couple of times a year with long term goals to encourage cooperation, and to help us to manage our customers' expectations."*
> **External stakeholder**

- lack of proactive communication between senior managers in LLS and partner agencies

- lost opportunities to work together on areas of common interest and to better communicate with shared stakeholders

- lost opportunities for LLS to leverage the communications experience of other agencies, established networks, activities and materials.

The Commission noted significantly improved communications at both state and regional scales with natural resource management partners of LLS. For example, formalisation of a partnership between LLS and Landcare NSW to deliver the NSW Government's Local Landcare Coordinator Initiative has been a major catalyst for improved working relationships and achievement of shared outcomes.

> *"Great to work with on the whole, we have a good working relationship. They work hard to do their best but they have limitations around resourcing. However, they're happy to give advice."*
> **External stakeholder**

With regard to LLS communications in general, there remains scope to collaborate more closely with local natural resource management groups to leverage their extensive networks of land managers.

There was very mixed feedback from local government and industry associations at both state and regional scales on LLS communications. Some reported mature working relationships while others were highly critical that LLS had not engaged proactively[37]. While some partners praised LLS' proactive communications, others suggested that given the resource-constrained environment in which rural communities operate today, LLS could make better use of partnerships, influential individuals and networks that already exist in other organisations[38].

"Their planning and promotion has been very good, and their partnership approach has been very good."
External stakeholder

Consultation on the Draft State Strategic Plan was cited by several stakeholders as a lost opportunity for meaningful engagement[39]. Some organisations who view themselves as key partners expressed disappointment that LLS did not approach them either during the submission phase or after they had made submissions.

Recommendation 10 - Adopt a more strategic approach to stakeholder engagement at both the state and regional scales
Key points for consideration: • conduct detailed stakeholder analysis at both the state and regional scales[40]   • develop and implement a state-wide stakeholder engagement strategy which includes initiating regular and ongoing multi-level engagement with key partner agencies, investors and elected representatives in government   • assign responsibility for managing priority relationships to individuals on the Board of Chairs, local boards or in management, and implement mechanisms to hold them to account   • ensure investor expectations are understood and consistently met   • strengthen two-way communication with other government agencies at the state and regional scales to: (i) clarify role boundaries internally; (ii) better communicate roles to customers; and (iii) leverage communications opportunities   • leverage existing communications networks (e.g. natural resource management groups, local councils, industry organisations) to strengthen LLS' information delivery at both state and regional scales

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[37] The Performance Standard for Local Land Services states that: "Local government, communities and industry report respectful relationships where diversity and the needs for others are valued and incorporated into local planning and service delivery".

[38] Organisations in the social services, Indigenous community support and other sectors provide such opportunities, including timing events for mutual benefit. This is especially relevant in remote areas.

[39] Strategic planning processes were addressed in the Commission's previous audit of LLS governance.

[40] Stakeholder analysis should cover categorisation, key contact people, level of interest, suitable methods of engagement and an engagement action plan to tailor communications. This process will require ongoing research and analysis of LLS' target audiences. LLS should consider what information stakeholders want to receive, what they already know, what they do not know, how they would prefer to receive information, and when the best time to deliver information is.

5.3   Land managers

Land managers are LLS' primary customers[41], and as such, a strategic approach to understanding their needs and how to reach them would be expected. LLS has recently conducted an extensive 'state-wide customer focus survey' of private and public land managers[42], with some very encouraging findings. The survey revealed that almost all respondents had heard of LLS and reported high levels of satisfaction. Some regions have also collected their own benchmarking data which will help tailor communications to land managers. These surveys are worthy initiatives and will help LLS to better understand its customer needs and deliver more targeted communications activities in the future.

> *"We don't use social media because we are not resourced to feed it. There's nothing worse than a dead Facebook page. Social media is a two-way conversation, so there is no point in just putting up the same information that is on our website."*
>
> **Staff member**

To date, there has been inadequate analysis and segmentation of land managers and other stakeholders, and consequently, engagement strategies to align communications with their needs are lacking[43]. Segmentation enables better targeting of communications methods, content and timing, among other factors.

> *"There's still a percentage of farmers and graziers that don't have the internet. I don't think LLS is getting to the older generation. We do get a little bit through the post. I'd say 30% would prefer a print copy."*
>
> **External stakeholder**

While some LLS regions have tried to target their communications, these efforts have not always been well informed. For example, regional communications strategies advocate social media (for example, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) as a tool to communicate with customers[44]. However, many land managers do not use social media, and in practice, the regions are not resourced to maintain an active online presence. An audit survey of LLS customers revealed only 7% ranked social media as their preferred communication method, while over 50% ranked it as their least preferred. In interviews, external stakeholders also reported that many land managers rarely use digital communications, owing to age and poor internet connections in regional areas. The aging demographic of rural communities was also cited as a reason for LLS to consider a wide range of communications tools and channels that include traditional methods such as printed materials sent by post and greater use of ABC radio.

> *"From our perspective, face to face is still the best and gets the best feedback from customers. Relies on staff and how they communicate with customers, some associate better with people. It can be a challenge to communicate and have it understood"*
>
> **Staff member**

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[41] LLS Customer Charter defines customers as 'any land manager within the state, irrespective of whether they are private or public land managers, ratepayers or non-ratepayers. Source: http://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/about-lls/what-we-do/customer-charter

[42] Findings of the LLS-commissioned survey were presented to the Board of Chairs in February 2016.

[43] Section 5.1 discusses further findings about state and regional communications plans and strategies.

[44] Sample of statements from various regional communications strategies: "Many use email, internet and social media regularly."; "Online engagement is an emerging and effective communication tool. It is particularly relevant in the ... region where there has been a high uptake of internet use and social media involvement."; "The most successful method of achieving objectives in this [brand awareness] phase is the much more personal channels such as events and online (social media) channels."

There is growing internal awareness that communications is 'everyone's responsibility' and is critical to organisational success[45]. Interviewees expressed a consistent view that LLS' reputation is being driven by each individual phone call, face-to-face conversation, meeting and event. Individual experiences are being relayed to others, thus driving the 'bush telegraph' and LLS' image in the community. Some LLS staff discussed the importance of working with local champions and influencers to encourage greater community participation in regional projects.

> "Great over the counter service in the [location removed] Office!!!"
> **External stakeholder**

> "A workshop on lamb losses was held near [location removed] and was the best event I've been to."
> **External stakeholder**

Engagement with Aboriginal land managers and their representative organisations was consistently a positive story, mainly a result of the efforts of staff members in Aboriginal service roles. However, the level of Aboriginal cultural awareness among the broader staff body was viewed as needing enhancement in order to better integrate land management services[46].

While the organisation is maturing in this way, a key factor that has hindered greater progress has been the lack of a clear brand profile (refer to Section 4.3 on LLS brand). Staff reported difficulties in being able to articulate, 'this is who we are and what we do'. Land managers and other stakeholders also expressed frustration that their understanding of what LLS does and does not do, is unclear. When surveyed about the clarity of LLS communications in relation to their services, a higher percentage of customers[47] were unclear than clear about seven of eight LLS services (Figure 3).

> "Some staff are great and communicate well, so there is a range of maturity across the organisation, It's a mixed bag like any organisation."
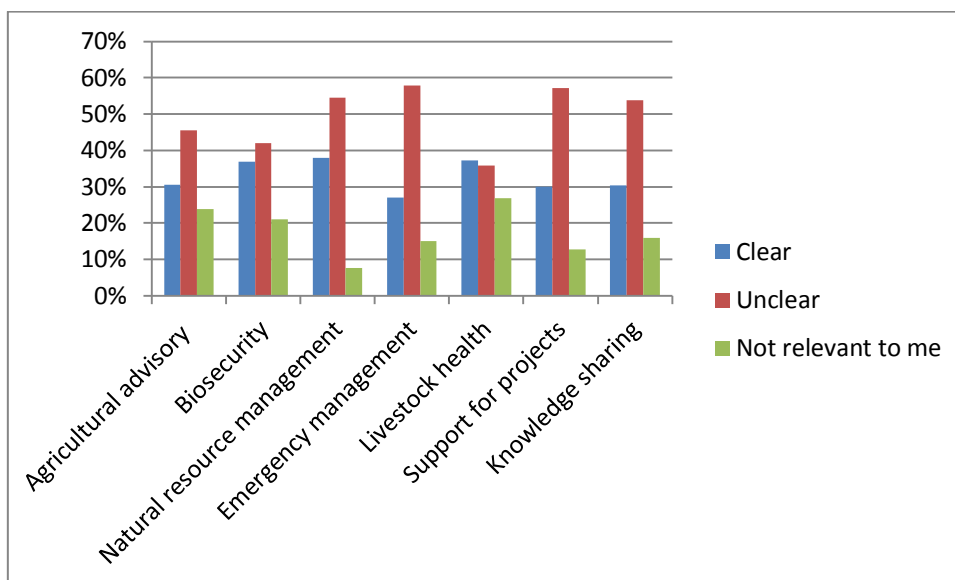> **External stakeholder**

Figure 3: Customer survey responses to how clearly LLS communicates its services[48]

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[45] Concurs with LLS' customer focus survey that satisfaction is driven by staff being credible, knowledgeable, accountable and keep their promises.

[46] The Performance Standard for Local Land Services states that "Aboriginal communities are engaged in a culturally sensitive manner to collaboratively design solutions to landscape management issues." (p.18)

[47] Results represent the responses of 134 land managers.

[48] Appendix 2 provides more information on the survey question and how the service areas were described.

LLS employs a broad range of materials, tools and channels for communicating with land managers. Table 2 lists these together with findings on their quality and effectiveness.

Table 2: Findings on materials, tools and channels used to communicate with land managers

Material/tool	Channels used	Findings
LLS website	Whole of LLS website plus 11 regional websites	- Overall the website is not meeting the needs of land managers or other stakeholders[49] - Layout and core content, developed before LLS commenced operation, reflect an outdated view of the organisation and should be updated (this also links to brand issues in Section 4.3) - Customers are asking for the website to provide contact names and phone numbers for specific LLS services - Internet constraints in many rural areas must be considered in any redesign of the website
e-newsletter	Placed on website and e-mailed to subscribers usually monthly Some regions have sector-specific editions which are produced quarterly	- Professional in quality - Generally viewed as informative but could be more tailored to suit different interest areas across the state - Story titles listed at the top with hyperlink to each story would enhance useability - Reach could be improved; customer survey revealed an average of 30% receive e-newsletters[#] - Of the survey respondents who receive it, around 35% agree that it meets their needs in four aspects (see Figure 4)
Advertising events and programs	LLS website, e-newsletters, flyers, word-of-mouth, some use of other organisations' channels, and limited paid advertising	- Very positive feedback received on quality of the actual events; attendance could be higher in some cases - Publicising events and programs to attract more participants could be improved by broadening the channels used (especially leveraging the networks of partner organisations) and disseminating information much earlier to give land managers more time to plan
Factsheets, brochures	Hard copies available in LLS reception areas Electronic copies are on the 'publications' page of website	Variable quality across the organisation; some are highly effective in terms of content and layout, others are very basic and lack professionalism
Visibility of regional offices	Office signage	Variable signage at some regional LLS offices[50]

#There was noticeable regional variation in the percentage of respondents who receive the e-newsletter (ranged from 70% to 13%).

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[49] Quote from an external stakeholder: *"Website looks good but it goes down rabbit holes."*

[50] Internal stakeholders commented about the importance of office signage and that landholders express frustration if they have difficulty finding an LLS office.

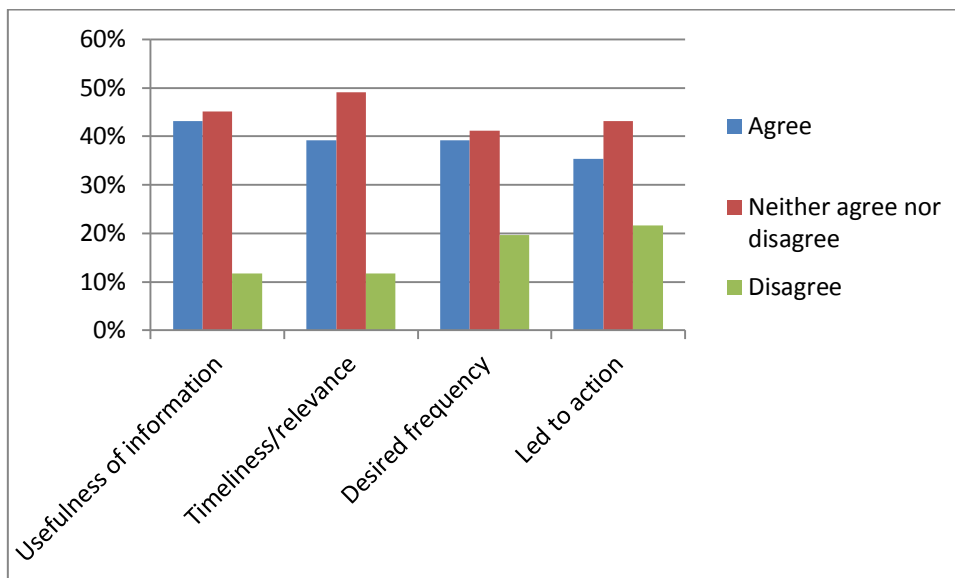**Figure 4: Customer survey responses regarding e-newsletters[51]**

With regard to the frequency of communications (as a whole), customers expressed the highest preference for monthly (43%) or quarterly (22%) intervals (Figure 5).
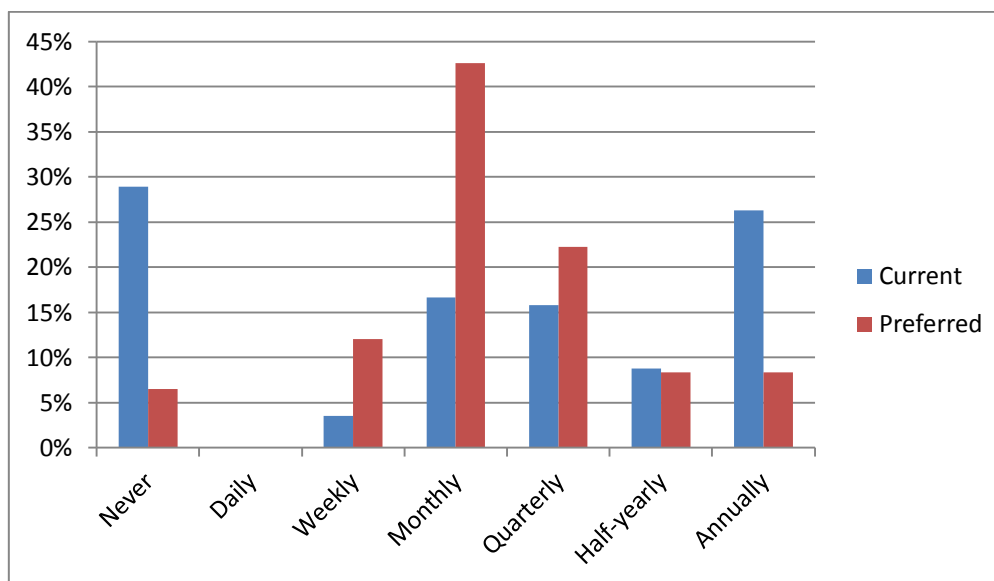

Figure 5: Current and preferred frequency of communications

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[51] Appendix 2 provides the actual survey statements posed to customers regarding the e-newsletter.

Recommendation 11 - Build staff capacity for communicating with land managers
Key points for consideration:

- articulate the messaging around 'who is LLS and what does it do' so that staff have a simple and consistent message to communicate (refer to Recommendation **6**)

- continue to encourage an organisational culture where communications is viewed as 'everyone's responsibility' and that LLS' brand is only as good as its last customer interaction

- continue to encourage the collaboration between communications staff, project managers and frontline staff in LLS regions (refer to Recommendation 19, which addresses the sharing of information and resources)

- provide Aboriginal cultural awareness training for staff and board members

Recommendation 12 - Improve the quality, consistency and delivery of communications materials and key messages to land managers
Key points for consideration:

- implement customer survey findings in relation to customer preferences for communications and tailoring content and methods (tools, channels, frequency, etc.)

- select the right communications technique for its purpose (for example to inform or to call to action)

- increase tailoring of the content of communications materials to the target audience

- develop a network of 'credible messengers' or 'advocates' by working with influential land managers to encourage community participation in regional projects

- revise the design of regional websites to accommodate slow download speeds common in regional areas

5.4 Local Community Advisory Groups

Under the LLS Act, local boards are required to establish one or more Local Community Advisory Groups (LCAGs)[52]. LCAGs are developing well in some regions, whereas there have been delays in establishing and operating some of these groups in other regions[53]. These groups consist of suitably qualified community members who provide advice and feedback to the local boards. Local boards have established different types and numbers of LCAGs to suit their regions' needs. In this audit, all sampled regions had established one or more LCAGs however, in some cases, these groups had only recently become operational and had only met once or twice. Some LCAG members also felt that the local boards are not yet fully leveraging the expertise of the LCAGs.

"We've only had a couple of (LCAG) meetings. I don't feel it is working that well. We're not feeling like we're contributing."
External stakeholder

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[52] LLS Act, s.33.

[53] Of the 3 sampled regions, there were two cases where an Aboriginal Advisory Group had been established, and one case where this had not yet occurred. Although Aboriginal Advisory Groups are not specifically required under the LLS Act, the local boards have a legislated requirement to develop a strategy to engage with the Aboriginal community [LLS Act, s.29(1)(f)], and these boards have planned to do so through an Aboriginal Advisory Group.

Formalised feedback systems between the LCAGs and the local boards have not yet fully matured. LCAGs meet several times a year to discuss regional land management issues and provide advice to the local boards. In interviews, the Commission was informed of some success stories, where LCAGs provided valuable advice to local boards which was subsequently implemented. Some LCAG members also said their local board is listening to them however, others commented that they are unaware of how the board considers and acts on LCAG advice. There are insufficient reporting structures and feedback loops for the local boards to update LCAGs on how their advice is considered and used. As a result, LCAG members sometimes felt their advice was not taken seriously and that the LCAG consultation process is focused on fulfilling a legislative requirement only. However, local boards and management did express a legitimate concern that LCAGS should become fully functional and they recognised the potential these groups hold for LLS.

"I think we're being listened to as CAG members. We were asked about communications ideas and what would work…"
External stakeholder

"They shouldn't just inform us what they're going to do then tick the box to say that they're consulting with us (the LCAG)."
External stakeholder

There has been limited involvement of local board members in LCAG meetings. In the sampled regions, LCAG meetings are attended and chaired by a mix of LLS staff, board members and local chairs. However, in interviews, LCAG members commented that they would appreciate stronger attendance by board members at LCAG meetings. They would like to know who the local board members are, what they stand for, and have the opportunity to develop interpersonal relationships with them.

Recommendation 13 - Embrace Local Community Advisory Groups as a key forum for community consultation and engagement

Key points for consideration:

- establish, or finalise establishment of, any advisory groups including Aboriginal advisory groups

- establish formal protocols to improve functionality of advisory groups – these should be mutually agreed by LCAG members and LLS

- involve local board members in advisory groups meetings

- ensure local boards provide feedback to advisory groups about how their advice was considered and actioned by the board

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5.5 Board member visibility

Under the LLS Act, one function of local boards is to communicate, consult and engage with the community[54]. The Board of Chairs and ESU also have a formal objective in the *Communications Strategic Plan 2015-2017* to build the capacity of boards to be reputation and communications ambassadors for LLS[55]. However, a lack of clear guidelines describing how and when board members should engage with external stakeholders is evident.

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[54] LLS Act, s.29(1)(e)
[55] Local Land Services Communications Strategic Plan 2015-2017, p.5.

While there is an opportunity for board members to be ambassadors for LLS, they have not been consistently fulfilling this role. At the Board of Chairs level, the board has not completed detailed stakeholder analysis or assigned responsibility for managing key relationships to individual board members. At the local board level, some regions encourage board members to meet with external stakeholders and to use their personal networks to promote LLS. However, in other regions, a risk-averse approach has been adopted which has limited, rather than encouraged or built capacity for board member ambassadorship.

> *"You don't see many local directors at the field days waving the flag. They need to be flag wavers."*
> **External stakeholder**

External stakeholders want board members to be ambassadors for LLS. In interviews, external stakeholders consistently said they want to know who their local chair and board members are. They want board members to have a presence at field days, community and industry group meetings, in newspapers, and on the radio. There are 80 board members in LLS and many are recognised as successful and influential community members, but LLS is yet to capitalise on these credentials to promote the organisation.

Recommendation 14 - Support local board members to become more visible and proactive communicators

Key points for consideration:

- define how and when local board members should communicate, consult and engage with the community[56]

- develop a community engagement and consultation schedule for local board members based on their areas of expertise, interests and professional networks

- include a standing item in board meeting agendas to discuss members' recent community engagement activities

- provide key messages, talking points and relevant training to local board members to support their engagement and encourage them to be consistent representatives for LLS

5.6 The media

5.6.1 Media relationships

Across the state, LLS' utilisation of media in its many forms is highly variable. Some regions are capitalising on the publicity afforded by strong local media relationships, and have regular ABC radio spots[57] or provide media releases to local newspapers which are keen to print positive stories about LLS' achievements. Other regions are less proactive and have scope to increase their media presence and promote more good news stories about local achievements[58].

At the state scale, LLS has not cultivated relationships with key media outlets such as The Land newspaper and ABC Radio (for example the Country Hour program), and has instead taken a risk-averse approach to dealing with negative press, that is, not to respond. The apparent lack

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[56] This should be reflected in revised communications strategic plans (refer to Recommendation **7**)

[57] One sampled region has a fortnightly spot on ABC Radio where different technical specialists are rostered to speak. This radio spot is shared with another LLS region and is highly valued.

[58] Some stakeholders mentioned they were aware of good LLS work, for example wild dog management, but have not seen any media coverage that promotes it.

of proactivity in cultivating media relationships was mentioned by key stakeholders interviewed for this audit as harmful to LLS' reputation and should be addressed urgently.

LLS regions have taken variable approaches to who can speak to the media on the organisation's behalf. In some regions, media communications are restricted to the local chair, general manager and communications officer. In other regions, technical staff who have long-standing reputations in their communities, for example district veterinarians and biosecurity officers, are authorised to speak freely about their specialist areas. These different approaches reflect the variable risk appetites of local boards and executives, but comply with a state-wide Media Policy and Protocol[59] which allows nominated officers to speak to the media provided they are authorised to do so by appropriately delegated personnel.

5.6.2   Media releases

The quality and effectiveness of media releases was found to be variable; although on the whole, they are mainly of professional standard. The Commission conducted a detailed review of 36 LLS media releases[60] and identified inconsistencies in style, approach, structure and formatting across the organisation. While some regions distributed excellent media releases, other written materials were more reflective of a newsletter article than of a media release. There is some use of media release templates, including 'shell' releases developed for the regions by ESU. One sampled region also has a general template. However, there is a lack of general guidance materials, templates and oversight to improve consistency and quality of releases.

Recommendation 15 - Build collaborative relationships with key rural media outlets to improve balance in media coverage
Key points for consideration: ▪ be more proactive in cultivating relationships with key journalists, for example through hosting media visitations and media attendance at LLS events   ▪ consider developing a state-wide media relations calendar which details opportunities for positive engagement with the media at a regional scale   ▪ share successes between regions and encourage greater communications between regions as well as between regions and the State Communications Manager
Recommendation 16 - Improve the quality and consistency of media releases. A coordinated, state-wide approach is recommended in the first instance to drive rapid quality improvements
Key points for consideration: ▪ develop general media release templates and guidance documents to support regional communications staff[61] [guidance for preparing media releases is provided in Appendix 3]

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[59] The Protocol applies to all board members and staff (including temporary and consultants) except in emergency situations.

[60] Technical advice was provided by a specialist public relations and communications consultant.

[61] ESU to develop a general LLS media release template and guidance material that regional communications officers can refer to when drafting their own media releases. The template should include formatting preferences, the types of things to be included in each paragraph, when to introduce quotes, and how to conclude the release. A communications plan template should also be developed to guide planning of specific communications events and initiatives.

> ▪ implement quality assurance processes at the Executive Support Unit level for regional
> media releases until a consistently high standard is evident for each region

5.7   Events and campaigns

LLS has developed a number of communications planning documents for state scale events and campaigns[62]. These documents demonstrate strategic thinking and sound judgement around identification of key audiences, timing for implementation and allocation of resources. However, there were inconsistencies between each planning document, and variation in their approach, content and level of detail[63]. LLS does not have an agreed communications planning template for events and campaigns to ensure consistency of communications planning processes[64].

Although these planning documents are in place, outcomes from campaigns have been variable. For example, the *Communications Plan for the LLS State Strategic Plan* contained clear objectives, identified key stakeholders, and clearly articulated the consultation approach. Despite containing these key elements, the campaign did not generate a high level of public interest in LLS' Draft State Strategic Plan. In interviews, some external stakeholders provided very positive feedback on LLS' engagement and consultation during this campaign. However, other stakeholders felt under-consulted, including partner agencies listed as Tier 1 and Tier 2 stakeholders in the communications plan (refer to Section 5.2 for further details on LLS' communication with partner agencies).

Recommendation 17 - Develop a state scale communications plan template to improve consistency of planning for events and campaigns
Key points for consideration: ▪ refer to the guidance material provided in Appendix 5   ▪ this template can be shared with the regions and adapted as needed

5.8   Monitoring and reporting

LLS has a solid media monitoring framework in place which includes *Isentia* press clips, Google Alerts, and liaison between the ESU and the regions on key media issues. The ESU also provides the Board of Chairs and the Senior Executive Team with monthly reports on media activity. However, LLS could be capturing more detailed data to proactively manage emerging issues in the media. For example, LLS does not record information about journalists, spokespeople, and the related LLS programs and regions.

LLS monitors and reports against a range of organisational KPIs for communications. These KPIs are listed in a number of documents, including the *Local Land Services Communications*

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[62] The Commission reviewed a sample of three communications plans for state-wide campaigns: (1) LLS State Strategic Plan consultation; (2) NAIDOC Week; and (3) Travelling Stock Reserve Reforms.

[63] Two plans were comprehensive documents, whereas the other was a memo which outlined the communications 'thinking' for a particular campaign.

[64] Although LLS does not have an agreed communications planning template, some regions have developed their own event guidelines and engagement plan toolkits to assist staff with planning engagement activities.

Implementation Plan 2015-2017[65]. Performance against KPIs is reported through various avenues including in reports to the Board of Chairs and Senior Executive Team. However, KPIs are process-driven rather than outcomes-focused, and do not help gauge if LLS' strategic objectives are being met[66].

The communications reports provided to boards and management are also process-driven. At the state scale reports are provided to the Board of Chairs and Senior Executive Team. At the regional scale reports are provided to local boards and general managers[67]. These reports provide a summary of overall communications activities that have taken place, however they do not provide a strategic analysis of communications issues[68]. In state scale interviews, internal stakeholders felt that communications reports were not being used to inform decision-making.

> *"The quarterly media report to the Board of Chairs on communications KPIs is process driven not outcomes driven. The report isn't used for anything. It gives the number of media releases, number of negative and positive reports; but what does that mean?"*
> **Staff member**

LLS has conducted comprehensive customer surveys at both state and regional scales[69]. Findings from a recent state-wide survey indicate that a high percentage of land managers have heard of LLS and were satisfied with their last contact with LLS, which is an encouraging result. These surveys are a good initiative by LLS and the survey data should be used to inform future communications strategies and activities.

Recommendation 18 - Improve the quality of monitoring, evaluation and reporting on communications

Key points for consideration:

- develop state-wide, outcomes-focused KPIs that can be monitored by the Board of Chairs and local boards to assess the return on investment in communications and the achievement of strategic goals

- develop a state-wide database to capture more detailed media monitoring information, which would enable LLS to draw more detailed conclusions from the media monitoring[70]

- provide quarterly reporting on the results of this monitoring to the Board of Chairs, Senior Executive Team and, where relevant, local boards to enable LLS to draw more insights from the media monitoring

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[65] KPIs are included throughout the document and in a table located at the end of the plan titled *Key Performance Indicators: January – June 2015*. Communications staff also have personal KPIs in their staff development plans.
[66] KPIs include producing: a corporate brochure; an annual calendar of events; and information products. They also include the number of: Twitter followers; training sessions; Ministerial requests; articles in newsletters; media releases distributed; and press clippings generated.
[67] In the three sampled regions, one local board receives communications reports, whereas the other two boards requested not to receive these reports. In these regions, communications updates are provided to general managers.
[68] For example, there is no in-depth analysis of the key messages in negative media coverage, LLS' response and whether LLS has been successful at steering issues in the media onto a preferred path. Similarly, there is no analysis of which stakeholders are engaged with LLS online, what is being said, or what tactics are being used to manage them.
[69] Two of the three sampled regions had conducted stakeholder surveys.
[70] Conclusions can be drawn on the following: key journalists to focus on; the length of time a topic has been covered; and whether there are any key stakeholder groups that LLS should be communicating with.

5.9   Internal communications

While this audit had a greater focus on external communications (refer to Section 1.1), internal communications were also assessed for their effectiveness in enabling improved external communications and overall service delivery. This section discusses the Commission's findings on the following aspects of internal communications:

- Board and staff two-way communications
- access to key messages for campaigns
- collaborating for improved outcomes
- handling customer feedback
- general sharing of information.

5.9.1   Board and staff two-way communications

Local chairs have not been consistently relaying state-wide decisions made by the Board of Chairs to their local boards, which has led to varying interpretations and subsequent implementation across the 11 regions. The Board of Chairs has started using a 'Board of Chairs directive' to inform local board members and staff of key meeting outcomes. While information sharing has been improving, some local board members and staff are still not satisfied with the way information is relayed[71].

With regard to staff providing feedback to management and boards, survey results indicate fewer than half of all LLS staff felt there is a culture where the insights and feedback from everyday dealings with external stakeholders are shared. Only 35% of staff felt that feedback is taken into account when revising LLS communications strategies and key messages, which would impact on organisational effectiveness.

5.9.2   Access to key messages for campaigns

To assess internal communications of a specific campaign, the Commission included questions about the 2015 Rates Program in the staff survey. Staff responded that information about the program was communicated to them using a range of methods[72]. Most staff felt these methods were good for conveying information, and only 13% of staff felt they were not informed about the program. However, survey results indicate that only about half of all staff felt that LLS provided adequate materials to assist them in handling customer enquiries, and only 35% felt adequately prepared to deal with customer complaints[73]. For key issues such as the ratings process, staff stressed the importance of continuing the multipronged approach to internal communications, and emphasised the need for 'plain English' emails and factsheets supported by face-to-face discussions[74].

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[71] Communication of Board of Chairs decisions was addressed in the Commission's audit of LLS governance and was not assessed in detail in this current audit. It is also noted that the Board of Chairs has recommended that a performance agreement be implemented between the local chair and local board members, which should help set expectations for sharing information.

[72] Methods included: emails; face-to-face meetings; intranet; video tutorials; FAQs; and staff e-newsletters.

[73] Almost half of all staff felt that LLS did not clearly communicate the process for determining whether a property would be rated; the process for calculating rates; and the services that customers receive for their rates.

[74] Only about 20% of staff received information about the rating process via face-to-face discussion, whereas 70% received emails and 40% received a FAQ sheet.

5.9.3   Collaborating for improved outcomes

Regional communications staff are starting to work more closely with service delivery teams. Based on survey results, nearly all staff felt that managers, at least sometimes, encourage them to consult with communications staff on projects that involve external stakeholders. Service delivery staff and communications staff collaborate when producing communications materials, such as media releases and newsletters. Approximately 80% of staff felt that they were either likely or very likely to liaise with communications

> *"Communications staff are now part of team meetings. Before this it was hard for staff to recognise the role communication plays."*
>
> **Staff member**

staff when producing these materials. Further, approximately 55% of staff felt that they were either likely or very likely to liaise with communications staff when developing project plans.

The Commission also observed technical staff are increasingly recognising land manager needs in LLS service areas outside their own. These behaviours are demonstrating LLS values such as collaboration, service and trust.

Cross-regional communication is occurring through the Senior Executive Team, Cross-Regional Teams, the Communications Officer Network, and other informal networks. However, there still appears to be limited cross-regional exchange of useful communications documents, key learnings and success stories. All three sampled regions provided examples of sound communications practices, including producing field day evaluation sheets, employee engagement plans, scheduling ongoing radio segments and tailoring e-newsletters to meet target audience needs. However, these appear to have been done in relative isolation and have not been shared with or adopted by the other sample regions.

5.9.4   Handling customer feedback

Staff do not feel that the internal process for handling customer feedback and complaints is working well[75]. Over 40% of staff expressed the view that feedback mechanisms for customers and stakeholders are not effective (Figure 6). LLS receives customer feedback and complaints via its Customer Service Officers, face-to-face contact with field staff, online

> *"The customers don't know who they need to get to sometimes* [e.g. LLS, DPI, local councils]. *There's been feedback that people have made so many phone calls and they still haven't reached who they need."*
>
> **Staff member**

feedback forms and customers dropping in to regional offices. Some internal systems are in place to track and resolve customer issues[76], however some staff noted that they want more up up-to-date and accessible organisational information, including staff contact details with work area descriptions to help respond to customer enquiries. They would also like the current customer management systems to be used more consistently, with staff recording when an enquiry or complaint has been resolved and closed. Some staff also raised concerns about customers being referred between different government agencies, including LLS, Crown Lands, Department of Primary Industries and local councils, and not being put in contact with the right person.

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[75] LLS' own state-wide survey also identified issues with complaints-handling processes.
[76] Systems used in the sampled regions include complaints registers and staff directories to locate the most appropriate LLS contact person.
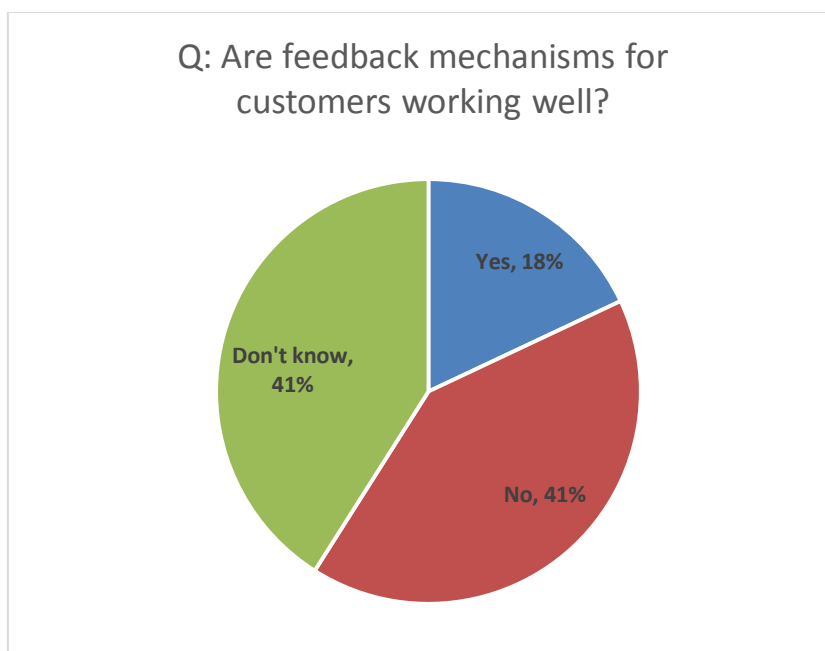
Figure 6: LLS staff survey results on customer feedback mechanisms

5.9.5   General sharing of information

LLS is using a variety of methods for day-to-day internal communications with staff and board members. Many staff commented that face-to-face conversations are their preferred communications method, despite the drive towards digital tools. General managers share internal information with staff via emails and staff e-newsletters. Staff e-newsletters are produced at both the state and regional scales, and staff have generally found these to be effective means of conveying information about LLS. However, some staff said they would like increased sharing of external publications such as media releases and external e-newsletters.

LLS has multiple intranets, including a state scale and individual regional intranets. Initially, the state-wide intranet did not provide enough functionality, resulting in regions developing their own sites for information sharing, and board members were not able to access the state-wide intranet. The Commission understands that LLS has been developing an improved state-wide intranet to address these issues.

Communications staff raised concerns around delays in uploading regional website content through the central DPI Web Team. In one sampled region, concerns were also raised about the lack of strong document control procedures including saving correspondence and records of decisions. The Commission recognises that RM8, a records management system, is being rolled out and will assist with document control.

Recommendation 19 - Improve internal feedback loops, and sharing of information and resources
Key points for consideration: ▪ develop a culture that encourages the provision and consideration of staff feedback   ▪ consistently and thoroughly communicate Board of Chairs decisions   ▪ ensure adequate face-to-face meetings to discuss important organisational information, including the ratings program

- share press clips, LCAG meeting outcomes, media releases, e-newsletters and all other external publications with staff in a timely manner
- improve cross-regional exchange of useful communications documents (for example policies), success stories (for example ongoing radio segments) and key learnings (for example tailoring of e-newsletters to specific audiences)
- continue to develop strong document control procedures

Recommendation 20 - Improve handling of customer feedback and complaints

Key points for consideration:

- record, track and respond to all customer enquiries and complaints
- educate customer service staff about the roles, responsibilities and relevant contacts in related government agencies
- develop KPIs for customer service measures, including for general managers
- develop and maintain an easily accessible reference point for information about all services, query types, and primary and secondary contact people

Recommendation 21 - Improve website and intranet functionality

Key points for consideration:

- seek opportunities to streamline uploading of regional website content through the DPI Web Team
- seek opportunities to consolidate state-wide and regional intranet sites to reduce duplication

6   Summary of recommendations

The full list of audit recommendations (from Chapters 4 & 5) is provided below (Table 3). A priority has been assigned to each recommendation where '1' is the highest priority and '3' is the lowest. The highest priority recommendations require immediate attention and offer the greatest opportunities to achieve multiple benefits and accelerate the maturity of communications as a core function. Supplementary guidance material and points for consideration have also been provided to assist with the implementation of these recommendations. While the Commission encourages LLS to follow these steps, it acknowledges the need for a flexible approach and supports LLS in adopting different steps if they achieve the same outcomes while better reflecting resource availability and current business processes.

Table 3: Collated audit recommendations with responsibilities, priority ratings and points for consideration

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
1	**Appoint a full time Senior Communications Manager to the Executive Support Unit**	Board of Chairs	1	▪ The focus of this position should be on: ▪ strategic-level communications planning and engagement ▪ strategic media engagement ▪ reputation management ▪ providing public relations advice to the Board of Chairs and Executive Manager ▪ overseeing the quality of communications outputs across the organisation ▪ co-ordinating with the regions to deliver high quality and timely Ministerial services ▪ ensuring consistent key messages are delivered across the state ▪ promoting cultural change to guide and support communications across the whole organisation
2	**Review the structure and roles of current communications staff in the Executive Support Unit**	Board of Chairs	1	▪ these roles should support the needs of the Senior Communications Manager and deliver strategic outcomes

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
3	**Identify skills gaps and build capacity for communications across the organisation**	Executive Support Unit	1	▪ revise the standard role description for the Communications Officer to reflect the required skills and qualifications of a communications professional[77] ▪ conduct a state-wide gap analysis of critical communications capability against the new role descriptions, including a skills review of existing communications staff ▪ develop a capacity building program for communications staff, including capacity development for Ministerial services [refer to Recommendation 9] ▪ set key performance indicators and expectations for the development of communications staff to track improvement in organisational communications capacity ▪ ensure future recruitment of communications staff addresses skill shortages and brings in complementary skills ▪ involve the new Senior Communications Manager in recruitment and appointment of all new communications staff and in the potential re-appointment of current temporary communications staff at the end of their contracts

4	**Clarify communications functions that require central oversight versus functions devolved to the regions[78], and establish reporting lines and accountability mechanisms to effectively implement those functions**	Board of Chairs	1	▪ establish clear reporting arrangements for regional communications staff with:
				
				  - direct reporting lines between regional communications staff and their regional managers[79]
				
				  - clearly defined and mutually understood functional reporting lines between regional communications staff and

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[77] The role description should also reflect the specific roles of regional communications officers and the specific roles of state scale communications officers in the Executive Support Unit

[78] The recommendation relates to broader recommendation made in the audit of LLS governance about clarifying which policy and process issues require a state-wide approach (see Governance Audit Over-arching Recommendation 2).

[79] This suggestion is consistent with the Board of Chairs' decision made on 10 December 2015.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
				the new Senior Communications Manager in the Executive Support Unit
				▪ establish strong accountability mechanisms to facilitate adherence to the functional reporting lines, including:
				- key performance indicators set by the ESU for regional communications staff and general managers to reflect state-wide communications responsibilities. These must be endorsed by local boards.
				- the new Senior Communications Manager contributes to performance reviews for regional communications staff
5	**Provide regional communications staff with ongoing, regular and open access to their senior management team, general managers and local boards**	Local boards & general managers	3	Nil
6	**Clearly articulate and market the LLS brand[80], deciding which core LLS branding and messages will be adopted across the state**	Board of Chairs	1	▪ develop clear, concise and consistent messages using 'plain English' to reflect LLS' goals, priorities and services
				▪ ensure state-wide messages are used consistently across the organisation and incorporated into all communications materials
				▪ ensure messages are relevant to the specific regions where they are disseminated - they must resonate with the audience to promote engagement
				▪ ensure adequate signage for regional offices[81]
7	**Review and effectively implement state-wide and**	Board of Chairs	2	▪ the state-wide communications strategy should reflect:

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[80] The recommendation relates to broader recommendation made in the audit of LLS governance about articulating a clear organisational purpose that is adopted by all members of LLS and is accessible to stakeholders (see Governance Audit Recommendation 1). The governance audit also recommended that LLS lead a consolidation phase, devising standardised communications policies and systems where there is a cost benefit and/or a compliance requirement for standardisation (see Governance Audit Recommendation 2b)

[81] Budget allowing, LLS could also consider using strategically placed roadside signage to inform and educate landholders and stakeholders on what they can do to contribute to the wellbeing of their land. This would enable LLS to subtly communicate their messaging around 'everyone's responsibility / LLS partnership'.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration

	regional communications strategies, clearly defining the relationships between both scales and how state-wide approaches should be reflected in the regional strategies	& local boards		- the new organisational branding [see Recommendation 6],
				- the results of the detailed stakeholder analysis [see Recommendation 10]
				- the guidance material provided in Appendix 4
				▪ the regional communications strategies should be:
				    - customer-centric
				    - be useful operational tools rather than reference manuals which are only occasionally referred to
				    - aligned with the revised state scale document as appropriate

8	**Review and update communication policies and procedures, ensuring appropriate levels of state and regional alignment (see Recommendation 4)[82]**	Communications officers	3	▪ update regional media policies to align with the state scale policy ▪ improve and redistribute the Editorial Style Guide to regional communications staff[83] • ensure policies and procedures are adequate for each LLS region. To streamline this process and reduce duplication, there should be cross-regional sharing of existing policies [refer to Recommendation 19, which address sharing of information and resources]
9	**Build an organisational culture where the Minister's Office is viewed as a primary stakeholder**	Chair of the Board of Chairs	1	▪ clarify the expectations of the Minister's Office for communications with LLS ▪ provide clear organisation-wide procedures for communicating

[82] The recommendation relates to a recommendation made in the audit of LLS governance about leading a consolidation phase devising standardised communications policies and systems where there is a cost benefit and/or a compliance requirement for standardisation (see Governance Audit Recommendation 2b). It also relates to a recommendation about monitoring and enforcing regional implementation of priority policies, process and systems that have been mandated by the Board of Chairs (see Governance Audit Recommendation 12).
[83] The new Senior Communications Manager should be responsible for overseeing the quality and consistency of communications outputs across the organisation [refer to Recommendation 1].

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
				with the Minister's Office and for responding to ministerial requests in a prompt and appropriately detailed manner
				▪ make the new Senior Communications Manager responsible for liaison with the Minister's Office, as well as co-ordination and oversight of regional input
				▪ identify a key point of contact within each LLS regional office to be responsible for supplying the Senior Communications Manager with the supporting information for ministerial liaison
				▪ develop a strategy to improve staff understanding of ministerial responsibilities, such as through joint training opportunities with other government agencies, temporary Department Liaison Officer opportunities for LLS staff and shadowing
10	**Adopt a more strategic approach to stakeholder engagement at both the state and regional scales**[84]	Executive Support Unit	1	▪ conduct detailed stakeholder analysis at both the state and regional scales[85]
				▪ develop and implement a state-wide stakeholder engagement strategy which includes initiating regular and ongoing multilevel engagement with key partner agencies, investors and elected representatives in government
				▪ assign responsibility for managing priority relationships to individuals on the Board of Chairs, local boards or in management, and implementing mechanisms to hold them to account
				▪ ensure investor expectations are understood and consistently met
				▪ strengthen two-way communication with other government agencies at the state and regional scales to: (i) clarify role

[84] The recommendation relates to a recommendation made in the audit of LLS governance about meaningfully engaging with external stakeholders on LLS' strategic direction on an ongoing basis (see Governance Audit Recommendation 22).
[85] Stakeholder analysis should cover categorisation, key contact people, level of interest, suitable methods of engagement and an engagement action plan to tailor communications. This process will require ongoing research and analysis of LLS' target audiences. LLS should consider what information stakeholders want to receive, what they already know, what they do not know, how they would prefer to receive information, and when the best time to deliver information is.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
				boundaries internally; (ii) better communicate roles to customers; and (iii) leverage communications opportunities
				▪ leverage existing communications networks (e.g. natural resource management groups, local councils, industry organisations) to strengthen LLS' information delivery at both state and regional scales
11	**Build staff capacity for communicating with land managers**	Board of Chairs & local boards	2	▪ articulate the messaging around 'who is LLS and what does it do' so that staff have a simple and consistent message to communicate (refer to Recommendation 6)
				▪ continue to encourage an organisational culture where communications is viewed as 'everyone's responsibility' and that LLS' brand is only as good as its last customer interaction
				▪ continue to encourage the collaboration between communications staff, project managers and frontline staff in LLS regions (refer to Recommendation 19, which address sharing of information and resources)
				▪ provide Aboriginal cultural awareness training for staff and board members
12	**Improve the quality, consistency and delivery of communications materials and key messages to land managers**	Executive Support Unit, general managers & communications officers	2	▪ implement customer survey findings in relation to customer preferences for communications and tailoring content and methods (tools, channels, frequency etc.)
				▪ select the right communications technique for the purpose (for example to inform or to call to action)
				▪ increase tailoring of the content of communications materials to the target audience
				▪ develop a network of 'credible messengers' or 'advocates' by working with influential land managers to encourage community participation in regional projects

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
				▪ revise the design of regional websites to accommodate slow download speeds common in regional areas
13	**Embrace Local Community Advisory Groups as a key forum for community consultation and engagement**	Local boards	1	▪ establish, or finalise establishment of, any advisory groups including Aboriginal advisory groups ▪ establish formal protocols to improve functionality of advisory groups – these should be mutually agreed by LCAG members and LLS ▪ involve local board members in advisory groups meetings ▪ ensure local boards provide feedback to advisory groups about how their advice was considered and actioned by the board
14	**Support local board members to become more visible and proactive communicators**	Board of Chairs and local boards	2	▪ define how and when local board members should communicate, consult and engage with the community[86] ▪ develop a community engagement and consultation schedule for local board members based on their areas of expertise, interests and professional networks ▪ include a standing item in board meeting agendas to discuss members' recent community engagement activities ▪ provide key messages, talking points and relevant training to local board members to support their engagement and encourage them to be consistent representatives for LLS
15	**Build collaborative relationships with key rural media outlets to improve balance in media coverage**	Executive Support Unit, communications officers	2	▪ be more proactive in cultivating relationships with key journalists, for example through hosting media visitations and media attendance at LLS events ▪ consider developing a state-wide media relations calendar which details opportunities for positive engagement with the media at a

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[86] This should be reflected in revised communications strategic plans (refer to Recommendation **7**)

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
				regional scale
				▪ share successes between regions and encourage greater communications between regions as well as between regions and the State Communications Manager
16	**Improve the quality and consistency of media releases. A coordinated, state-wide approach is recommended in the first instance to drive rapid quality improvements**[87]	Executive Support Unit	2	▪ develop general media release templates and guidance documents to support regional communications staff[88] [guidance for preparing media releases is provided in Appendix 3] ▪ implement quality assurance processes at the Executive Support Unit level for regional media releases until a consistently high standard is evident for each region
17	**Develop a state scale communications plan template to improve consistency of planning for events and campaigns**	Executive Support Unit	3	▪ refer to the guidance material provided in Appendix 5. ▪ this template can be shared with the regions and adapted as needed
18	**Improve the quality of monitoring, evaluation and reporting on communications**	Executive Support Unit	3	▪ develop state-wide, outcomes-focused KPIs that can be monitored by the Board of Chairs and local boards to assess the return on investment in communications and the achievement of strategic goals ▪ develop a state-wide database to capture more detailed media monitoring information, which would enable LLS to draw more detailed conclusions from the media monitoring ▪ report quarterly on the results of this monitoring to the Board of Chairs, Senior Executive Team and, where relevant, local boards to

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[87] The recommendation is consistent with Governance Audit Recommendation 2b, which relates to leading a consolidation phase devising standardised communications policies and systems where there is a cost benefit and/or a compliance requirement for standardisation.

[88] ESU to develop a general LLS media release template and guidance material that regional Communications Officers can refer to when drafting their own media releases. The template should include formatting preferences, the types of things to be included in each paragraph, when to introduce quotes, and how to conclude the release. A communications plan template should also be developed to guide planning of specific communications events and initiatives.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
				enable LLS to draw more insights from the media monitoring
19	**Improve internal feedback loops, and sharing of information and resources**	Board of Chairs & local boards	2	▪ develop a culture that encourages the provision and consideration of staff feedback
				▪ consistently and thoroughly communicate Board of Chairs decisions[89]
				▪ ensure adequate face-to-face meetings to discuss important organisational information, including the ratings program
				▪ share press clips, LCAG meeting outcomes, media releases, e-newsletters and all other external publications with staff in a timely manner
				▪ improve cross-regional exchange of useful communications documents (for example policies), success stories (for example ongoing radio segments) and key learnings (for example tailoring of e-newsletters to specific audiences)
				▪ continue to develop strong document control procedures
20	**Improve handling of customer feedback and complaints**	General managers	2	▪ record, track and respond to all customer enquiries and complaints
				▪ educate customer service staff about the roles, responsibilities and relevant contacts in related government agencies
				▪ develop KPIs for customer service measures, including for general managers
				▪ develop and maintain an easily accessible reference point for information about all services, query types, and primary and secondary contact people

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[89] The suggestion is consistent with Governance Audit Recommendation 15, which relates to implementing improved processes for communicating Chair and Board of Chairs discussions and decisions to local boards and staff.

No.	Recommendation	Responsibility	Priority (1-3)	Key points for consideration
21	**Improve website and intranet functionality**	Executive Support Unit	3	▪ seek opportunities to streamline uploading of regional website content through the DPI Web Team ▪ seek opportunities to consolidate state-wide and regional intranet sites to reduce duplication

7   LLS' response to recommendations

The following three pages contain LLS' response to each of the 21 recommendations.

Audit recommendations and LLS response

Short term: within 3-12 months (LLS priority 1)
Medium term: 12-18 months (LLS priority 2-3)
Long term: 18 months plus (LLS priority 4)

Note, the recommendations deemed priority by LLS are those which can be done in the short term, which make sense to do in the short term (i.e. based on the logical order of activities), those which align with LLS' strategic and organisational objectives and those which resources are available for. Some activities which are important should not be progressed in the short term because it does not make sense to do so. For example working with local boards on their communication and profile – this will not be progressed until local board members are in place post the next round of appointments and elections.

	Recommendations	Local Land Services acceptance of recommendation and comments	Timeline for completion
1	Appoint a full time Senior Communications Manager to the Executive Support Unit	**Supported**: A temporary Communications Manager has been appointed to manage the ESU communications function until a permanent Corporate Affairs Director can be recruited.	Short term
2	Review the structure and roles of current communications staff in the Executive Support Unit	**Supported**: A new structure for the Executive Support Unit (ESU) is being finalised based on a review undertaken by Ernst and Young (EY). The structure and roles of communications staff within the ESU and Local Regions will be considered as part of this project.	Short term
3	Identify skills gaps and build capacity for communications across the organisation	**Supported**: This will be progressed by the Corporate Affairs Director as a priority/foundational activity.	Short term
4	Clarify communications functions that require central oversight versus functions devolved to the regions, and establish reporting lines and accountability mechanisms to effectively implement those functions	**Supported**: This will be progressed by the Corporate Affairs Director as a priority/foundational activity.	Short term
5	Provide regional communications staff with ongoing, regular and open access to their senior management team, general managers and local boards	**Supported**: The Corporate Affairs Director in collaboration with regional General Managers, will develop regionally appropriate strategies to support this recommendation. 2016/17 Senior Executive Performance Agreements will include a focus in this area.	Short term
6	Clearly articulate and market the LLS brand, deciding which core LLS branding and messages will be adopted across the state	**Supported**: LLS brand awareness will be the first of two main focus areas for the Communications Manager. A branding review has been undertaken. Further work in this area will be led by the Corporate Affairs Director.	Short to medium term

7	Review and effectively implement state-wide and regional communications strategies, clearly defining the relationships between both scales and how state-wide approaches should be reflected in the regional strategies	**Supported**: This will be progressed by the Corporate Affairs Director as an activity to strengthen the communications function within LLS. Existing LLS state-wide communications strategy documents, templates and guides will be reviewed and, where possible, updated (or revised). Regional strategies will be developed consistent with these documents. Regular reporting will occur via scorecards (internal and external).	Short to medium term
8	Review and update communication policies and procedures, ensuring appropriate levels of state and regional alignment (see Recommendation 4)	**Supported:** As per the response to recommendation 7.	Short to medium term
9	Build an organisational culture where the Minister's Office is viewed as a primary stakeholder	**Supported**: This will be considered as part of the LLS culture change project. LLS will work with the Minister's Office to identify opportunities for Communications Officers to have exposure to Minister's Office staff.	Medium term
10	Adopt a more strategic approach to stakeholder engagement at both the state and regional scales	**Supported**: Stakeholder engagement will also be a key focus area for the Corporate Affairs Director and is a priority of the Chair of Chairs. A stakeholder engagement strategy will be developed to guide all work in this area. This strategy is linked to the implementation of the performance framework for LLS which will occur over the coming 24 months.	Short to medium term
11	Build staff capacity for communicating with land managers	**Supported**: As per response to recommendation 6. This will also be considered as part of the culture change project.	Medium to long term
12	Improve the quality, consistency and delivery of communications materials and key messages to land managers	**Supported**: This will be part of a project to release results and implement findings from the LLS customer survey. This is a joint project involving the ESU and the Customer Focus Cross Regional Team (CRT).	Short term
13	Embrace Local Community Advisory Groups as a key forum for community consultation and engagement	**Supported**: Part of the state and regional communications strategies (recommendation 7), as well as work on LLS branding (recommendation 6). The proposed performance agreements between the Chair of Chairs and Local Chairs and 2016/17 Senior Executive Performance Agreements will include a focus in this area.	Short term
14	Support local board members to become more visible and proactive communicators	**Supported**: As per response to recommendation 6. This will also be considered as part of responding to recommendation 7. The proposed performance agreements between the Chair of Chairs and Local Chairs will include a focus in this area.	Long term
15	Build collaborative relationships with key rural media outlets to improve balance in media coverage	**Supported**: This will be incorporated into communications strategies (recommendation 7), work on LLS branding (recommendation 7) and the stakeholder engagement strategy (recommendation 10). 2016/17 Senior Executive Performance Agreements will include a focus in this area.	Short term
16	Improve the quality and consistency of media releases. A coordinated,	**Supported:** As per the response to recommendation 7. Templates, a style	Short term

	state-wide approach is recommended in the first instance to drive rapid quality improvements	guide and best practice media releases have already been posted to the intranet and a checklist provided to General Managers to assist in approvals processes.	
17	Develop a state scale communications plan template to improve consistency of planning for events and campaigns	**Supported:** As per the response to recommendation 7.	Short term
18	Improve the quality of monitoring, evaluation and reporting on communications	**Supported:** As per the response to recommendation 7.	Short to medium term
19	Improve internal feedback loops, and sharing of information and resources	**Supported**: This will be considered as part of the LLS culture change project. 2016/17 Senior Executive Performance Agreements will include a focus in this area.	Short to medium term
20	Improve handling of customer feedback and complaints	**Supported**: An implementation plan for this action will be developed by the LLS Customer Focus Cross Regional Team.	Medium term
21	Improve website and intranet functionality	**Supported**: This will be progressed as part of the LLS ICT roadmap which is contingent on additional funding being available.	Medium to Long term

Appendix 1   Inputs to audit criteria

Local Land Services Act 2013

Communications obligations in the LLS Act include:

- Section 11 – Ministerial control. The Board of Chairs must keep the Minister informed of LLS activities, and provide documentation of any significant decisions.

- Section 14 - Functions generally. LLS has the following functions:

  - communicate, consult and engage with the community (including Aboriginal community) to encourage participation in the delivery of services

  - provide advice on matters referred to LLS by the Minister

- Section 29 - Functions of local boards. Local boards have the following functions:

  - communicate, consult and engage with the community in developing regional plans with respect to the delivery of programs and services

  - develop a strategy to engage the Aboriginal community with respect to provision of services

  - provide advice to the Minister

- Section 32 – Keeping Board of Chairs informed. Local boards must keep the Board of Chairs informed of the activities of the local board and provide reports and information as required.

- Sections 36, 37, 39 & 42 – State strategic plan.

  - The plan is to set the vision, priorities and overarching strategy for LLS in the state, focusing on appropriate economic, social and environmental outcomes.

  - LLS must prepare, and consult on, the draft State strategic plan with regard to community (including Aboriginal) engagement and public exhibition.

  - The plan must be readily accessible to the public and be available on the LLS website.

- Sections 47, 48, 49, 52 – Local strategic plans.

  - Local boards must prepare, consult and review the local strategic plans with regard to community (including Aboriginal community) engagement and public exhibition

  - After approval from the Minister, the plan must be available on the LLS website. The local board may make the plan readily accessible to the public through other means

Performance Standard for Local Land Services

The Performance Standard for Local Land Services[90] (the Standard) is relevant to this audit because it establishes principles and expectations for organisational performance to support LLS in delivering quality outcomes for investors, customers and partners. Communication

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[90] Natural Resources Commission (2015) Performance Standard for Local Land Services, Natural Resources Commission, February 2015, Sydney.

plays an important role in many of the organisational performance components of the Standard, for example[91]:

- effective open communication between the Board of Chairs, local boards and management is needed for good **governance**

- **leadership** is required to clearly communicate strategic directions and build confidence and trust among investors and customers

- **customer satisfaction** relies on engaging with customers to deliver the services they need in a convenient and accessible way

- respectful relationships with stakeholders, where their needs are valued, foster **community ownership**

- **collaborations** to improve outcomes are based on trust, transparency and mutual benefit, and recognise cultural diversity

- monitoring and controlling **risks** to the organisation require clear accountabilities allocated to appropriately skilled and resourced individuals.

Published literature on strategic communications

Table A1[92] lists 16 strategic communications practices that are considered essential for organisational performance. The practices are grouped into the following categories:

- Strategy – the core tasks of developing strategies and planning communications

- Implementation – common practices for <u>active</u> communications

- Support and integration – whole-of-organisation practices that enable successful communications.

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[91] The Performance Standard for Local Land Services is available on the Commission's website http://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/publications
[92] Adapted from Coffman, J (2004) Strategic Communications Audits, Communications Consortium Media Center, http://www.ccmc.org/sites/default/files/WorkingPaper1.pdf

Table A1: Essential strategic communications practices

		Strategic communications practices	Quality criteria
Strategy	i	Identify the vision	The communications vision is aligned with, but distinct from, the organisation's overall mission
	ii	Choose goals and outcomes	Goals and outcomes are well defined, measurable, and help guide a defined plan of action
	iii	Select target audiences	Audiences are specific and include key decision makers or individuals with influence on the issue
	iv	Develop messages	Messages are specific, clear, persuasive, reflect audience values, and include a solution or course of action
	v	Identify credible messengers	Messengers are seen as credible by the target audiences, and can be recruited and available to the cause
	vi	Choose communications mechanisms	Outlets (e.g. both in the air (media) and on the ground) are chosen for their access and availability to target audiences
	vii	Scan the context and competition	Risks and contextual variables that can affect communications success are identified and factored into planning when possible
Implementation	viii	Develop effective materials	Materials are developed in attractive, accessible and varied formats for maximum exposure and visibility
	ix	Build valuable partnerships	Linkages exist with internal and external stakeholders who can help align with and carry the message
	x	Train messengers	Internal and external messengers are trained in key messages and are consistent in their delivery
	xi	Conduct steady outreach	Outreach and dissemination to audiences through multiple outlets is regular and sustained
	xii	Monitor and evaluate	Activities and outcomes are regularly monitored and evaluated for purposes of accountability and continuous improvement
Support and integration	xiii	Support communications at the leadership level	Management understands and supports communications as an integral part of organisational viability and success
	xiv	Earmark sufficient resources	Dedicated resources are allocated for communications practice
	xv	Integrate communications throughout the organisation	Communications is seen as an integral part of every organisational project or strategy
	xvi	Involve staff at all levels	Communications is not seen as an isolated function; most if not all staff members have some knowledge and/or participation in communication efforts

Table A2: Description of maturity scale[93]

Communications maturity level	Characteristics
1	Uncoordinated, ad hoc, inconsistent messages/forms etc., unclear roles and responsibilities, success is dependent on one or two 'heroic' individuals, inefficient, quality is variable, reactive to stakeholder and media, budgets and timelines are improvised/makeshift.
2	Planned and deliberate, purposeful and proactive, clear roles and responsibilities, resources are allocated, some templates are developed and used, some practice/implementation is still inconsistent. Budgets and timelines are present. Context, content and clarity of communications is well considered.
3	Clear strategic approach to communications. Communications activities are working towards achievement of outcomes. Communications are routine, support achievement of organisational goals, there is consistent implementation and practice, communications proficiency is evident across organisation, best practice tools and channels are identified and used; budgets and timelines are in place and monitored. Continuity and consistency of communication content and delivery is well considered. Communications add to organisational credibility.
4	Performance and effectiveness of communications is measured, supports organisational culture; success of communications is known and tracked. All work is on time, on budget and to strategy and plan specifications.
5	Continuous reflection and improvement of communications practices over time, outcome evaluation leads to confidence in achieving future outcomes.

Professional practice guidance

The Commission engaged regional marketing communications consultancy firm, Sefton & Associates, to provide independent professional advice during various stages of the audit. They provided feedback on the audit framework, communications maturity scale, and design of the staff and customer surveys. They provided professional review and comments on key LLS documents such as communications strategies and plans, media releases, media coverage and communications activity reports. Sefton and Associates also conducted a technical review of the full draft audit report.

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[93] Adapted from Coffman, J (2004) Strategic Communications Audits, Communications Consortium Media Center, http://www.ccmc.org/sites/default/files/WorkingPaper1.pdf

Appendix 2   Survey information

The full online survey questions in relation to findings presented in Figures 3 and 4 (Section 5.3 of the report) are provided below.

Customer survey question about clarity of communication about services (Figure 3)

How clearly has LLS communicated its services to you, for example, via newsletters, website, advertisements, press releases? For each service listed below please rank your experience with communication materials and interactions as 'clear', 'unclear', or 'not relevant to me'.

- Agricultural advice and advisory services supporting sustainable agricultural production

- Biosecurity measures: for example the control of animal diseases or the management of locust plagues

- Natural resource management activities: including services related to native vegetation, water and land management

- Emergency preparedness and support. This may include situations where agriculture and animals are impacted such as bushfires, floods, disease breakout, etc.

- Livestock health programs (like saleyard inspections, livestock identification, footrot control)

- Support for Landcare, industry and community groups to undertake projects

- Information and skills training for land managers (e.g. field days, seminars, training courses).

Customer survey question about e-newsletters (Figure 4)

With regard to the LLS e-newsletter, please rate whether you agree with the following statements:

- Usefulness of information – I find the information useful to my specific needs and the content is relevant to my operation.

- Timeliness/relevance – the newsletter is delivered in a timely manner that ensures information is still relevant, for example, warning of an upcoming locust swarm.

- Desired frequency – the number of newsletters that I receive is of an appropriate frequency.

- Led to action – I took action based on the information presented in the newsletter (e.g. made contact with LLS, requested further information, told a friend about a specific service, attended a field day, applied for grant funding).

Appendix 3   Guidance to improve media releases

Sefton & Associates, NSW regional marketing and communications consultants, provided the following guidance for LLS on preparing effective media releases.

Minimum requirements

As a minimum, a media release must contain the following:

- Heading: attention grabbing and relevant to the story but not too difficult or cryptic to understand

- Strong lead: the first paragraph should summarise the entire story, conveying the key message and context

- Quotes: these should build on the release's content rather than repeat it. The spokesperson should add insights, observations and recommendations in relation to the broader discussion/issue.

- Images and facts & figures: where possible, releases should contain good images - particularly when intended for regional media - as well as facts and figures to support the intended point of view. For example, if there is a plague, provide figures that indicate its scale/enormity.

- Brevity: the release should average one page in length, use concise, factual language and avoid terms that are lofty or too descriptive.

Media release checklist for LLS

Consider supplying each LLS regional office with an LLS media release checklist which can be used when drafting media releases. The checklist could ask the following questions:

- Is there are a heading and does it relate to the story?

- If journalists only read the first paragraph, would they have all the information they needed about the story?

- Does it quote both an LLS spokesperson and a third party representative related to the media release topic?

- Are there facts and figures to support the statements made by LLS, if so are these included and referenced in the media release?

- Do the quotes enhance the media release or just repeat the content of the media release?

- Can an image be sourced or taken to accompany the media release?

- If so, is the image captioned, left to right, back row to front row?

- Can the image be cropped to ensure it provides a clear, close-up shot of the subject?

- Are contact details included, as well as links to any supporting information, application forms or web pages?

- When is the best time to distribute this? [morning is best, preferably early in the week such as a Monday or Tuesday, to ensure media deadlines are met].

Template structure

It is assumed that on occasion there is generic media release topic that every LLS office will need to draft and distribute to their local media. An example of this was the new weeds committees being formed. Each relevant LLS office drafted their own version of the media release and distributed it to media – some more effectively than others. Sefton & Associates recommends providing a template version of the media release that LLS offices can then tailor for their region and distribute to media.

By providing template structures, LLS is ensuring consistency of message across the regions on any given topic. It will also be more efficient for LLS regional offices, rather than each having to 're-create the wheel'. In fact, as part of any future media release training, Sefton & Associates recommends developing a general LLS media release template that regional offices can refer to when drafting their own media releases. The template will not only include formatting preferences but also the types of things to be included in the lead paragraph, subsequent paragraphs, when to introduce quotes, what the quotes should address, how the media release should conclude, etc.

Facts and figures

Media are very receptive to facts and figures as they help to tell the story and put in to context the messages being communicated. Sefton & Associates observed there were very few facts and figures included in LLS media releases. Examples of the types of statistics media like include: X in Y people, % of crops affected, $X million allocated to combat an issue, etc.

LLS strategy

The purpose of the media releases is not only to draw attention to a specific issue or topic but to highlight the positive work of LLS in general. As such, media releases should be viewed by LLS offices as another way to tell the LLS story. Therefore, an agreed set of key messages or one-line statements should be drafted and distributed to each LLS office for possible use in future media releases. Such statements could include:

- This activity builds on LLS' broader commitment to…..

- This initiative is another example of LLS' focus to…..

- This program brings to life LLS's strategy of….

- This is a tangible example of LLS's commitment to X, Y and Z.

Through repetition, the LLS narrative will start to be told and reinforced in all media articles, helping to shape positive perceptions of LLS within regional communities.

Photography

Sefton & Associates noted very little photography accompanied the media releases, and when it was featured it was often quite weak. The notion of a 'picture can tell a thousand words' should be considered each time a media release is distributed by LLS. Consider questions such as:

- Does the photograph reflect the story?

- Is it a high-quality photograph? (both in terms of the subject and the photograph's digital resolution)

- Could the photograph be cropped to avoid unnecessary objects?

- Could LLS branding be included in the photograph?

Media likes and dislikes

From the documents provided to Sefton & Associates to review, the process LLS offices were following in relation to distribution of media materials was not evident. Sefton & Associates was unsure what day and time they were being distributed, what format they were distributed in (email, PDF attachment, etc.) and whether a 'pitch-in' email accompanied the media release. As such, Sefton & Associates has provided a few recommendations in relation to this:

- It is best to distribute media releases early in the morning, first thing is best to ensure you are ahead of any morning news meetings.

- Monday and Tuesday are preferred days for distributing media releases, any later in the week and it is too close to media deadlines, particularly those of regional weekly newspapers.

- When liaising with radio, do not call or contact them on the half hour or hour, when they are most likely reading the news headlines. News rooms are short staffed and usually the person who reads the news, collates the news.

- Ensure spokespeople quoted in the media release are available for interview at the time of distribution.

- Ensure distribution is timely in relation to the story; don't leave it too long after the announcement before notifying media otherwise it will be considered 'old news'.

- Copying the media release into the body of the email is preferred, rather than attachments. This goes for images too. High resolution images can be made available on request.

- Ensure the heading of the email is appropriate. Often 'Media Release: <release heading> will suffice.

- If you are sending to multiple contacts, ensure they are blind copied (bcc'd) in the email – do not include all addressees in the 'To' section.

- Personalised emails are better, i.e. Dear <name>.

Appendix 4   Guidance for communications strategic planning

The Commission reviewed the *Local Land Services Communications Strategic Plan 2015-2017* and the *Communications Implementation Plan 2015-2017*. Overall, these are effective documents that clearly articulate the goals, strategies and tactics for LLS communications. However, there are opportunities to improve the usability of these documents for communications staff. A series of specific recommendations is provided below to assist with the next iterations of these documents.

Communications Strategic Plan 2015-2017

Objectives

- Goals should be written first and be clearly identifiable in the strategy document, then the objectives should be re-written to support the intended goals.

- Objectives should be written in a manner that allows them to be measureable.

Target Audience

- Consider whether there may be times that segmenting ratepayers and non-ratepayers will be important.

- Ideally, LLS target audiences should be prioritised for every strategy and its associated tactics.

- Every time a communication strategy or tactic is created, it should be developed with the target audience in mind.

SWOT Analysis

- Provide an explanation as well as tips on how communication staff can interpret, better understand and use the SWOT analysis to their advantage.

- Senior managers should review the SWOT annually not just from a communications perspective but from a strategic level and operational perspective.

- After the SWOT has been reviewed and updated, key learnings and issues associated from the SWOT should be considered when designing future LLS customer surveys - questions should be formulated to help address or seek explanations for the issues and benefits featured in the SWOT.

Communication Principles

- Ensure a number of communication principles are considered in the strategy, including:

  - Credibility: is your messenger credible – is the information source trusted and respected with your audience?

  - Context: is your message in context with reality and the environment in which your audience is located?

  - Content: is your message relevant to the audience? Are they interested?

  - Clarity: is your message simple and straightforward? How far will it travel and how long will it last?

- Continuity and consistency: repeat your message for audience penetration.

- Channels: what communications channels or tools are you using? What value are they to your audience?

- Customer benefits: consider the question, 'what's in it for me?'

- Caring, compassion and concern: does your audience know that you care?

- Capability of audience: is your audience capable of understanding the message? Will they take the time to listen, read and/or watch it?

- Call to action: what is your audience supposed to do now?

Communication Priorities

- Communication priorities should be developed and considered before implementing the first steps of the organisational and communications strategies so that the critical thinking is done before implementation.

- The outcomes from the annual review of the SWOT are considered within the communication priorities framework – are there any new priorities or areas of focus that should be considered? Are there any additional risks or opportunities that should be considered?

- The wheel should be updated to provide more information for better decision making.

Key Messages

- Key messages should be reviewed and updated annually.

- LLS customer surveys should test some of these messages on a rotational basis so they are checked for credibility, relevance and timeliness.

- All communications materials should include key messages (oral, written, visual, all forms of media – traditional and social, etc.)

Communication Channels

- Communications staff should implement a simple internal analysis of the channels that are relevant and available in the local area to see which are best to use for getting specific messages to particular LLS audiences.

- Once the channels have been reviewed, the communications staff can begin to construct a tailored communications plan, linking audiences, key messages, strategies, tactics and channels.

- In the review stage, costings, timings, impact and resources required should be considered.

Communication Outcomes

- Outcomes should be developed for every strategy.

- Outputs and outcomes should be measured at the end of every project, campaign, etc. They then should be assessed for the following project or campaign and deemed relevant or not for inclusion. Ideally these need to be integrated into the measurement and evaluation process.

Measurement and Evaluation

- Measurement is the preferred way to demonstrate the value of the LLS communications activity.

- Be realistic – on budget, on time, on scope

- Set SMART objectives in advance to allow improved communications planning in the future.

- Consider the model: Activity, Output, Outcome, Return on Investment.

- Measure the communications results against the organisation's goals, priorities and key messages and ensure alignment between the two.

- Design communication programs from the outset to drive behavioural change, do not just measure media clippings.

- Tailor the measurement to different audiences for maximum analysis and insight.

- Strive for outcome metrics, not output metrics.

- Ensure all project briefs are clear and measurable.

- A clear 'call to action' is vital, it makes the strategy effective but also allows LLS communications staff to know exactly what is required and what is being evaluated.

Communications Implementation Plan 2015-2017

- The organisational strategies should be prioritised and provide key timings and budget for each to be implemented.

- Expectations about what can and cannot be achieved need to be clarified (i.e. 12 organisational strategies is a lot to implement).

- For each communications strategy, provide a simple example of what is required so the reader understands it and has the necessary context to move to the next section (Communication Actions).

- Ensure every communication strategy articulates the desired outcome.

- Ensure the communication actions are indeed actions – many of them are communication tactics. Many of the key performance indicators (KPIs) are also tactics.

- Ensure KPIs that are 'desired outcomes' are measured

- Where possible make KPIs measureable and timely for each of the LLS regions (i.e. Annual Calendar of Events to be completed by November ready for the new calendar year. Ensure key attributes are included – event type, date, location, budget, number of people aiming to attend events, behavioural change indicators, etc.)

- Where possible provide templates for all processes within the plan (reports, google analytics tools, case study content templates, etc.).

- The objectives, key messages and target audiences need to integrate with each organisational strategy. They will differ between each strategy. Each should also have a budget and a timeline allocated to it.

- The table located at the end of the plan titled Key Performance Indicators: January – June 2015 is very process-focussed. It doesn't demonstrate measurable change or outcomes. This type of reporting will not meet the goals recommended in this report.

- Research should become part of the monitoring and evaluation for communications. Surveys are already being conducted by LLS and senior communications team members must be involved in the scope of the research so changes and shifts in attitudes and reputations can be captured annually, with further planning then able to take place following analysis of results.

Appendix 5 Guidance for planning event and campaign communications

Planning documents are already in place for LLS state scale events and campaigns[94], however, these documents vary in their level of detail, approach and content. As such, the Commission recommends that LLS develop and use a template to improve consistency of planning processes at both the state and regional scales (see **Recommendation 14**). This template should include the key elements already included in LLS' existing plans, as well the elements below (these elements were lacking in one or more of the communications plans reviewed during the audit):

- Key messages (including for each stakeholder Tier, if relevant)

- Target audiences

- Possible spokespeople

- Media relations angles and supporting facts

- Strategies and tactics (in addition to Media relations)

- Photo opportunities

- Measurement and evaluation criteria

- Detailed information about how the plan will be implemented

- Clear outcomes for the communication event that can be used for monitoring the effectiveness of the communication

- Analysis of the messages that need to be communicated and the channels for communicating these messages

- Actions that need to occur if issues arise during the engagement

- Follow-up communication, including follow-up communications materials

- Public consultation activities, including details around how stakeholders will be encouraged to use engagement platforms (e.g. LLS Open)

Consistency and uniformity is critical to assist with high levels of quality for planning, implementation and evaluation. By including the above details in the communications plan template, it will help ensure staff within LLS, whether at a state or regional scale, can review a plan and have a detailed understanding around what is being said and how it should be delivered. This will help ensure consistency in communication throughout the organisation. Where all components of the plan are not required, these areas of the template can be left blank.

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[94] The Commission reviewed a sample of three communications plans for state-wide campaigns: (1) LLS State Strategic Plan consultation; (2) NAIDOC Week; and (3) Travelling Stock Reserve Reforms.