

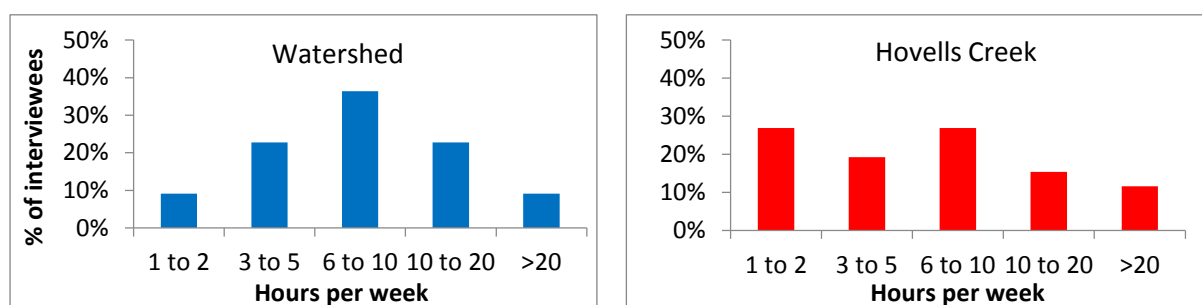
## Landholder Collab Project: Online tool survey results

### *Summary of results from NSW Central Tablelands: September/October 2016*

Two Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) were undertaken for the Landholder Collaboration project in the Watershed Landcare area (around Mudgee/Rylstone) and the Hovells Creek area (near Cowra) in September and October 2016. A key focus of these PRAs was the development of an online tool that could assist landholders in collaborating with one another on conservation and sustainable production activities. The general response to the idea of an online tool was positive, with landholders seeing its value for monitoring and benchmarking their activities (e.g. on weed and pest management, revegetation, soil health), as well as engaging hard-to-reach landholders and supporting grant applications. Landholders were asked to complete a survey about their existing internet use, key features they would value in an online tool and how such a tool should be designed. Overall, 45 landholders completed the survey (22 at Watershed and 23 at Hovells Creek). There was a mix of large commercial farmers and smaller non-commercial landholders at each site.

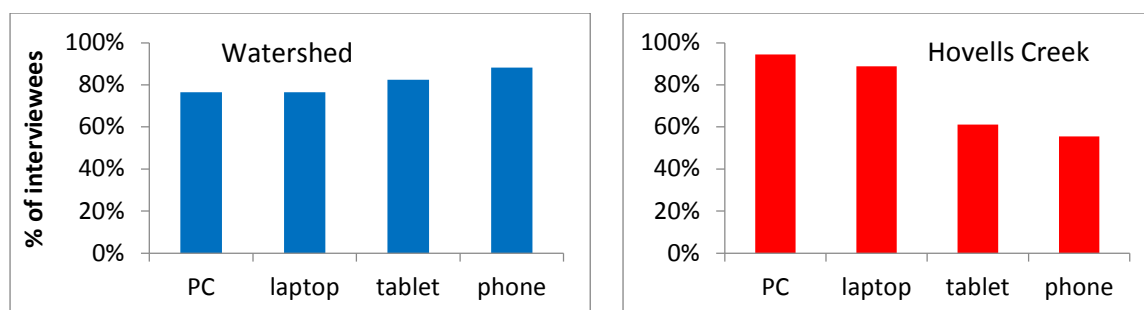
### Internet usage

Internet usage varied amongst respondents. The median level of usage in both areas was 6-10 hours/week, although the Hovells Creek area had a larger cluster of landholders who reported very low levels of internet usage (see Figure 1). When asked how many hours they would use an online tool for each week if it helped them connect with other landholders and issues, the average amount of time nominated was around 2 hours per week (2.1 for Watershed and 1.8 for Hovells Creek)<sup>1</sup>.



**Figure 1: Hours per week of current internet use**

There was also a difference in the devices used to access the internet at each location, with PC and laptop more common at Hovells Creek and phone and tablet more common at Watershed (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Devices used to access the internet (respondents could choose more than one)**

<sup>1</sup> Note that for these two questions, three landholders who chose not to complete the survey in the Hovells Creek area were added to the results for the 23 landholders who did. These three landholders stated that their current internet usage was too low to warrant undertaking the survey and that they would not use an online tool. Their results were recorded as 1-2 hrs/wk for current internet use and zero for use of a tool. These three landholders were not included in the survey results for any other questions.

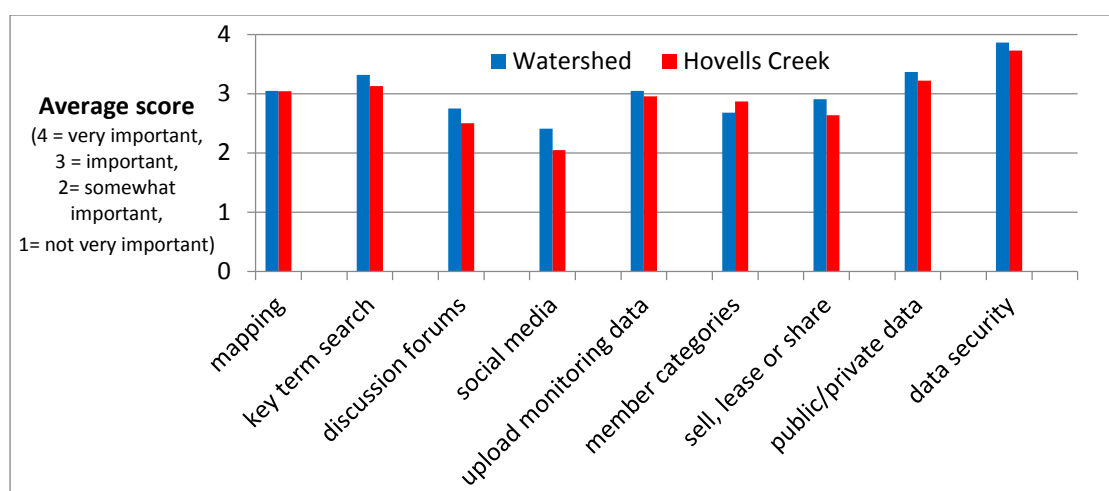
One possible explanation for the lower internet use at Hovells Creek (as well as the greater reliance on PCs) may be the poorer quality internet and mobile phone access reported for that area. Landholders surveyed at Hovells Creek were more like to describe their internet access as poor/very poor/terrible or similar terms (67%) than those in the Watershed area (53%). The opposite pattern was found for those describing internet access as good or reliable (29% for Watershed, 17% for Hovells Creek). At both sites there was a divide between landholders who were close to major towns and had reasonable internet access and those in more remote areas with poorer access.

### Functionality

Respondents were asked to rate different functions in terms of their importance for inclusion in any online tool. To assist with this, a mock-up of different features was shown to each landholder before they answered this question. The results were very similar for both sites, with the following functions emerging as most important:

1. Data security (e.g. for personal details, property location etc)
2. The ability to select whether data was shared publicly or privately (i.e. amongst a select group)
3. The ability to search for land management issues or other landholders using search terms (e.g. “weeds”)
4. The ability to search for land management issues or other landholders using a map (e.g. Google Map with groups/issues shown as points or polygons)
5. The ability to share monitoring data (e.g. on weeds, soils, revegetation etc.)

Notably, links to social media were rated lowest at both sites, followed by discussion forums that could be used to discuss issues and share knowledge.



**Figure 3: Average ratings for different potential functions of an online tool**

Respondents were also asked what types of information they would be willing to share and with who (Figure 4). Monitoring results and photos rated highest at both sites. Landholders at Hovells Creek were also interested in being able to post reviews/ratings (e.g. star-rating of a commercial supplier), while most landholders at Watershed were unwilling to share their contact details.

Landholders were also asked who they would share information with (i.e. publicly with everyone or only amongst a select group). The question was not well answered due to being open-ended and poorly worded, but the most common answer was “it depends”. Respondents were often willing to share monitoring results and photos publically, but wanted to restrict data to a select group if it could be linked to their property, included their contact details or related to commercial matters.

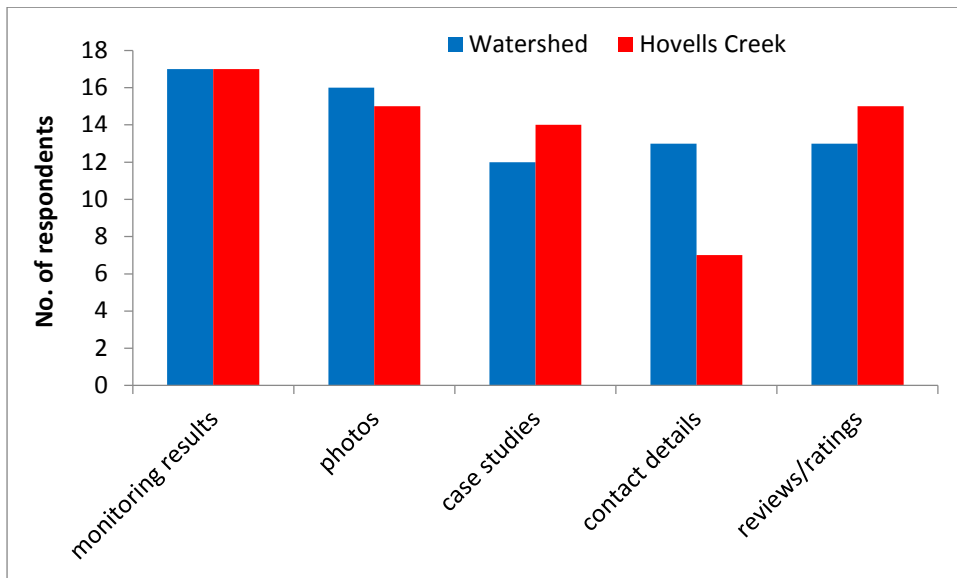


Figure 4: Types of data respondents would be willing to share

### User-friendliness

Respondents were asked which features (from a list provided) they considered most important for making an online tool user-friendly (Figure 5). Simple menu options rated highest at both sites, followed by phone/tablet compatibility and fast loading speed. Interestingly, fast loading speed was actually less important at Hovells Creek despite the poorer internet quality. Hovells Creek respondents placed greater value on large clear text and being accessible to people with vision or hearing impairments.

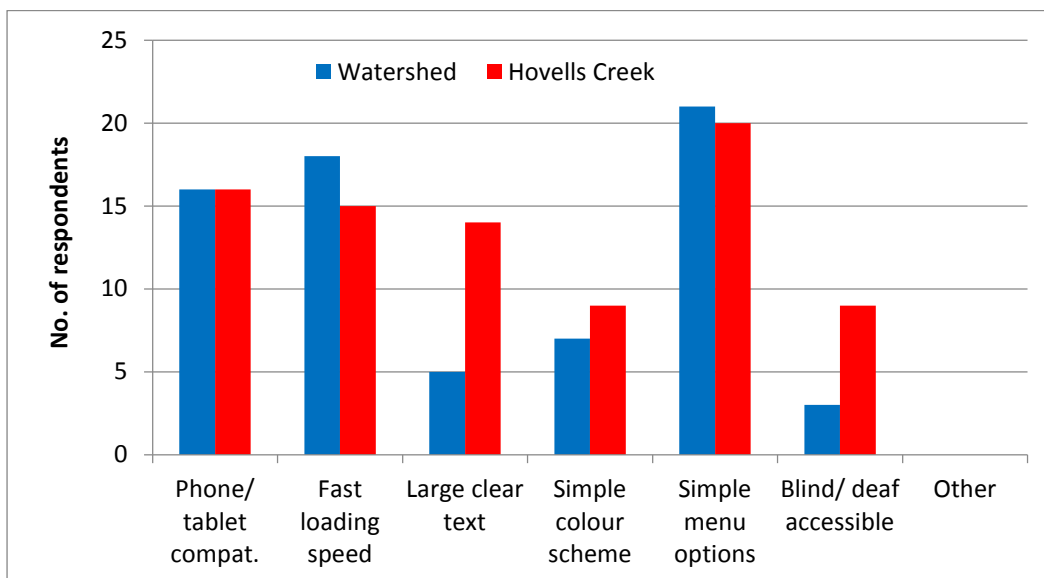


Figure 5: User-friendly features selected by respondents

### Cost

Around a third of respondents at each site indicated that they would only use an online site if it were free, but most respondents were willing to pay for membership. Several respondents noted that value would need to be demonstrated to them before they would be prepared to pay. The acceptable fee range that was most commonly nominated was \$21-50 per year (same at both sites).

## Implications

The online tool is planned to be developed in early-mid 2017 before being tested through a pilot phase in the second half of 2017. The results of the surveys in the NSW Central Tablelands provide useful information on how such a tool could be designed. The key implications are:

- Any tool needs to be able to be used on PCs, phones and tablets, as landholders appear to have differing levels of reliance on these devices. If an app is developed for phones and tablets, a corresponding website is also likely to be needed for PC users. Conversely, if a website is developed, an app or mobile version of the website will also need to be developed for phone users.
- The prevalence of slow and unreliable internet access needs to be taken into account when designing the tool. Large complex graphics should be avoided. The use of a mapping function to search for potential collaborations was valued by many respondents, but this should be included as an optional feature rather than being the only way to access the site. Searching by key terms was preferred over map searches overall and would be more accessible for landholders with slow internet speeds. The ability to upload photos was rated highly, but should also be an optional feature that can be avoided by those with poor internet access.
- Apart from phone/tablet compatibility and fast access speeds, the key feature associated with user-friendliness by respondents was simple menu options. As such, the number of menu options should be kept to a minimum, with clear descriptions provided.
- There was strong interest in a tool with differing levels of access, such as the use of private group spaces to share sensitive data. Data security was highly valued and would need to be ensured for contact details and anything that can be linked to an individual property. It may be desirable for some monitoring data to be reported at a general level to the broader public (e.g. shown as a result from a broader Landcare group rather than a result from an individual property), with more details visible to those within the select group (e.g. Landcare group).
- Links to social media and discussion forums were not rated highly so if they are included they should be extra features rather than core functions.
- Landholders appear more willing to upload simple monitoring data or photos rather than detailed case studies. Such case studies may still be of value, but are likely to require the assistance of Landcare facilitators, LLS staff and/or researchers in order to compile and upload them.
- Landholders may be willing to pay a fee, but the value of the site would need to be demonstrated first. As much if the site's value depends on its use by landholders, there is a need to build up a critical mass of users before any fee is imposed. There was a moderate amount of interest in features that would allow the buying and selling of goods and services and/or reviews of service providers, which could be developed into sources of revenue in the future (e.g. specific charges for those wishing to advertise goods or services).