



## Changing Attitudes on the Land

Landcare has been a feature of rural Australia now for more than a decade. There are many reports of how Landcare has changed the attitudes of participants towards the environment. Others maintain that Australia's farmers have always had a strong land stewardship ethic, but find it difficult to put their beliefs into practice when they are having trouble making ends meet financially. The Institute for Rural Futures has recently received funding to repeat a national survey on farmers' attitudes towards environmental issues.

### The 1991 Survey

The survey that was being repeated was initially run in 1991 by Ian Reeve and Alan Black, then respectively Project Director with the Rural Development Centre and Professor in Sociology at the University of New England. This national mail survey aimed to measure farmers' attitudes towards economic and environmental issues. With the assistance of the State farmer organisations, 4000 questionnaires were mailed to their members. A response rate of 57 per cent was obtained.

The questionnaire included 75 attitude statements (see example, below), groups of which gauged attitudes on particular issues. Analysis of the questionnaire data showed how various attitudes were linked. For example, those who were

	External influence in decision-making
Conservation orientation	0.52
Seriousness of land degradation	0.39
<i>Correlations between several of the attitudinal scales in the 1991 survey</i>	

favourably disposed towards external influence in their decision-making (such as seeking outside advice), were more likely to have a favourable conservation orientation (see table, above).

The 1991 survey was repeated in 2000 and analysis of the data from both surveys provided an accurate and representative estimate of the extent to which attitudes have changed during the Decade of Landcare.

#### Example of an attitude statement

Farmers have a greater responsibility to produce food and fibre than they have to preserve the environment

Strongly agree    Mostly agree    Neutral    Mostly disagree    Strongly disagree

              

### Project Details

**Project Title:** "National Audit of changes in farmer's environmental attitudes since 1991"

**Supported by:** Land and Water Resources R & D Corporation

**Budget:** \$95,000

**Completion Date:** June 2001

### Contact

Dr Ian Reeve  
02 6773 5145  
ireeve@une.edu.au  
**Institute for Rural Futures**  
UNE, Armidale, NSW, 2351

