

Final Report

Australian Turf Industry Study Tour 2018

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Australian Turf Industry Study Tour 2018 – TU17007

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Summary

The objective of the Australian Turf Industry Study Tour was to assist growth and development for the Australian turf industry providing turf producers the opportunity to connect with the wider turf industry both nationally and internationally, gain valuable industry knowledge and experience on-farm production in New Zealand.

The tour included attending the Australasian Turfgrass Conference in Wellington, New Zealand encompassing a comprehensive learning platform with Australian and international presenters covering a variety of topics on turf management, new techniques, technologies and best management practices.

The tour also included visiting and connecting with turf producers in New Zealand and a site inspection of Westpac Stadium.

The tour provided an opportunity to expand grower's knowledge of turfgrass management and initiate both Australian and international networks and market opportunities as well as identify future research investments.

Keywords

Turf, Study Tour, collaboration, turf management practices.

Introduction

The Turf Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) 2017-2021 identifies key outcomes to be achieved for the industry and the Australian Turf Industry Study Tour 2018 meets at least 2 of these outcomes:

- Improved strategic decision making by turf growers from increased knowledge of industry data and consumer insights
- Improved farm practices and profitability from increased awareness and adoption of turf R&D

In addition, the Turf Study Tour worked towards key strategies set in two other industry projects that are managed by Turf Australia:

National Turf Market Development project (TU16002)

- Targeted liaison and engagement with specifier organisations
- Opportunities for industry participants to identify emerging industry issues, information and service gaps and therefore, identify potential R&D priorities
- Tailoring engagement and extension activities so they are directly relevant to and attractive to the various needs of growers, industry stakeholders and key influencers
- Engage with key industry stakeholders/specifiers.

Australian Turf Industries Communications program (TU16004)

- Gather relevant R&D information then produce and tailor information ensuring its suitability for various uses within the industry.
- Increase turf grower and industry stakeholder professionalism and improved economic understanding of their business

Methodology

The management of the Australian Turf Industry Study Tour 2018 was targeted directly at Australian turf producers with an interest in expanding their knowledge of the wider turf industry in both Australia and New Zealand as well as looking for opportunities to increase their networking within the industry.

The process involved in developing the study tour included:

Tour Itinerary

Development of a program that provided a quality event that will have an impact and benefit to growers and industry. The programming took into consideration the key targets of the tour such as, developing networks within the wider turf industry, educational opportunities with presentations from Australian and international industry experts and understanding the New Zealand turf production industry. In addition, the tour would have an ongoing, long term impact for the industry through the creation of at least 3 R&D concepts into the Hort Innovation concept funnel, and R&D articles for the Turf Industry Communications project (TU16004). The Itinerary is shown at Appendix 1.

Budget

The Australian Turf Industry Study Tour provided funding for up to seven people within the project including two Turf Australia staff (Market Development Manager & Communications Project Manager).

Delegates were responsible for the cost of their flights and transfers to and from New Zealand and any incidental costs while on tour.

A budget was developed for the event and consultation made with AGCSA, organisers of the Australasian Turfgrass Conference, Hotel management and bus companies to determine expected expenses and to ensure the most suitable and economical options were selected.

Delegate Selection Process:

An application for expressions of interest was developed requesting applicants to provide information on what they hoped to gain from the tour and how they will use the experience of the tour to benefit their workplace and the turf industry. In addition, applicants were advised that they would be required to share the information with their state industry group, Turf Australia and Hort Innovation.

The criteria set for the selection process included a total of 5 growers who must be levy payers or employees of a levy payer and preferably new to the Australasian Turfgrass Conference. Where possible, one person from each major turf producing state would be chosen to attend. The Application Form is shown in Appendix 2.

The Study Tour was launched and promoted to turf growers through eNewsletters, discussion at the NxGen Forum and through direct contact with growers. Expressions of interest were received, and the applications were reviewed and candidates selected.

Tour Management:

A strong focus was put on the process of ensuring the tour was managed professionally and would live up to the expectations of delegates and achieve the project outcomes.

Turf Australia staff regularly liaised with conference co-ordinators, industry contacts both Australian and New Zealand who provided good information to manage the group while on tour. This process created a clear plan and schedule for delegates while on tour as to the conference program, presentations and workshops, farm and stadium tour and social networking opportunities.

Delegates were contacted regularly providing details of the tour, conference and accommodation as well as the tour schedule details. Delegates also had access to the Australasian Turfgrass Conference App allowing for easy access to presentation scheduling and presenter information.

To meet the outcomes of preparing articles for the Communications project, the Turf Australian Communications Manager reviewed the conference and tour scheduling to co-ordinate preparation of material and interviews with presenters.

Outputs

Tour Itinerary – Appendix 1

Application Form for Study Tour – Appendix 2

Risk Management Plan prepared as reported in Milestone 102

Development of articles for Turf Australia's Communication program including eNewsletter and Magazine.

eNews – July 2018: <https://www.turfaustralia.com.au/newsletters/id/252>

Winter edition: <https://www.turfaustralia.com.au/documents/item/410> Appendix 3

Spring edition: Four articles are in production at time of report. Access via www.turfaustralia.com.au/news

Turf Australia also promoted the tour via social media. <https://www.facebook.com/turfaustralia/>

Articles will also be provided to Hort Innovation for inclusion in Hortlink.

Outcomes

Turf Australia provided a study tour that met the intended outcomes of the project including, providing opportunities for growers to network with the wide turf industry, gain valuable industry knowledge and experience on-farm production in New Zealand.

The Tour included:

- Registration to the Australasian Turfgrass Conference on 25- 27th June 2018.
- Accommodation in Wellington for up to 4 nights
- Networking events with NZ Turf Producers and Industry representatives.
- Bus Tour of a Turf Farm and site tour of Westpac Stadium 28th June 2018.

Attendees were required to cover the costs of their flights and transfers.

The Study tour funding was attended offered to 5 growers and 2 Turf Australia staff members. Applications were received and the following people were accepted.

- Anthony Heilig, Go Turf (Queensland)
- Adam Dunstone, Strathayr (Victoria/Tasmania)
- Helen Tramacchi, Sunset Turf (Queensland)
- Paul Saliba, Qualturf (New South Wales)
- Justin Burstall, Turfbiz (Queensland)
- Jenny Zadro, Market Development Manager, Turf Australia
- Liz Mecham, Communications Manager, Turf Australia

In addition to the people listed above, other Turf growers chose to join the group at their expense creating a total number of 12 attending the tour.

The goal of the project was to try and have one person from each turf producing state in Australia represented in the Tour. As no applications were received from Western Australia, South Australia, Northern Territory or ACT the tour was made up of growers from Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

The goal of attracting applicants that had not previously attended the Australasian Turfgrass Conference was achieved. This goal provided the delegates with a new experience and good opportunities to develop new industry contacts.

The tour commenced with the Australasian turfgrass conference welcome dinner which was attended by over 300 people from the Australian and New Zealand turf industry, providing a great start to the networking process for delegates.

Day 2 and Day 3 of the conference saw the delegates experience a variety of presentations at the Australasian turfgrass conference including:

- Scott McElroy- Deciphering opinion, data, and marketing to make the best decision
- Jamie Scott & Dr Karen Faisandier- Rethinking men's mental Health
- John Neylan - Turfgrass and climate change
- Carmen Margo - Soil moisture sensors
- Craig Haldane - Fine turf management with poor water quality
- Scott McElroy - Weed Management
- John Neylan - Comparing sand based and soil based sportsfield performance
- NZSTI - Recognising and rectifying drainage problems on sportsfields
- Guy Chapple - Career Benchmarking: Planning and progressing your career
- Bruce Macphee, Chris Burgess, NZSTI - A practical approach to project management
- Sports Turf and Grounds Forum - State of Play, Chris Deppeler, Jenny Zadro, Ian McKendry, Damian Hough

Over the 2 days of the conference, delegates had access to over 70 exhibitors offering a wide range of machinery, equipment, products and services. The exhibitor hall was also the location for a lot of networking with other delegates and industry representatives.

During the tour, delegates had the opportunity to meet with presenters and industry representatives including Scott McElroy, Agronomist from Auburn University USA, Peter Garvey, owner of Ready Lawn , Eco-maintenance and Turfgass specialists based in number of locations across New Zealand and Prof Peter McMaugh, Australian Turf Industry expert.

Day 4 of the tour was a bus tour to a turf farm in Palmerston North, approximately two and a half hours north of Wellington. Turf Production is a small industry in New Zealand with very few farms located in the Wellington area. The tour group had the opportunity to meet Gary Teague from Turflands turf farm. Gary provided details on turf production in New Zealand and the group toured the farm.

The group then had the opportunity to get a behind the scenes tour of Westpac Stadium in Wellington with Curator Hagan Faith. This was a great opportunity to see the turf that is grown at Turflands on the Stadium and learn from Hagan the management practices at the venue based on the conditions and challenges of a multi-purpose stadium.

The conference and tour concluded with a final social event held at Te Wharewaka o Poneke - Wellington Waterfront and was another great opportunity to network with conference delegates.

A project deliverable required at least 3 research and development concepts be put into the Hort Innovation funnel as well as articles prepared for the Turf Australia Communication magazine and eNews. At the time of preparing this report, an article has been presented in the Winter edition (Appendix 3) as well as an eNews articles and several articles were in production for the Winter edition.

In respect to the research and development concepts, preparation is underway to the following concepts to be included in the funnel for consideration by Hort Innovation:

- Mentor Program. Throughout the tour it was apparent that there is a good opportunity for a mentor type program with in turf production industry. This project would connect younger growers with more experienced, senior turf production members who would be keen to support and offer experience, direction and motivation for young growers.
- Australian Turf Industry Collaboration project. This would see funding of a proposed national industry collaboration of the various associations and groups that represent the turf industry. The concept would include a clear structure for the purpose of the group and funding for the first 2 years initiation. The tour confirmed the need for a stronger industry working together and this project would bring the various industry groups together to review the needs of the industry.
- Resistance of Herbicides and controls for Poa annua in turf. The issue of herbicide resistance weeds such as Poa annua is having a significant issue on the golf and sports turf industry. A full study of resistance and control options, including review of practices at all levels of turf, including turf production level.
- 2020 turf industry study tour. A proposed study tour of Europe/UK offering turf growers an opportunity to review innovative and best practices of turf production and other agricultural production farms. The success of the New Zealand Study Tour highlighted the value of sharing information and seeking new opportunities.

The Study Tour Group



Dinner with Scott McElroy, Auburn University USA



Delegates learning from Prof Peter McMaugh



Growers learning about the turf and sports turf market in New Zealand from Peter Garvey, Ready Lawn



Conference Exhibitors



Visit to Turflands Turf Farm, Palmerston North



Behind the Scenes Tour of Westpac Stadium, Wellington NZ



Monitoring and evaluation

The goals and objectives of the project were to provide opportunities for turf growers to gain knowledge, network and develop connections in the wider Australian and New Zealand turf industry. To provide growers with a new experience and potentially new options for the operation and productivity of their business.

The Australasian Turfgrass Conference is Australia’s largest industry run event designed specifically for turf and is attended by professional practitioners of the golf and sports turf industry, researchers, educators and organisations associate with the Australian Turf Industry. The Study Tour achieved the targeted goals of offering new experiences as all delegates were attending this conference for the first time and it provided great networking opportunities with over 600 people attending.

Delegates were provided with opportunities to connect with conference presenters and industry experts to discuss their turf production operations and gather expert knowledge.

Study Tour delegates provided feedback on a variety of aspects of the tour allowing for the monitoring and evaluation of the project.

The below table and feedback provide information on the delegates evaluation of the Tour.

| Question | Poor | Fair | Good | Very Good |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------------|-------------|
| Sufficient information provided by TA in the planning of the event (eg. itinerary, email contact etc) | | | 20% | 80% |
| Quality of presentations at the Australasian Turfgrass Conference | | | 60% | 40% |
| Quality of Exhibitors Area, including range of exhibitors and opportunity to engage with trade | | | 20% | 80% |
| Networking opportunities throughout the tour | | | 20% | 80% |
| Farm Tour to Turflands Turf Farm | | | 20% | 80% |
| Venue tour of Westpac Stadium | | | | 100% |
| Conference Dinner | | | 40% | 60% |
| Conference Farewell Event | | | 40% | 60% |
| Farewell Bash | | | 33% | 67% |
| Dinner with US presenter, Scott McElroy | | | 40% | 60% |
| Overall satisfaction of the Study tour as a learning and networking opportunity. | | | | 100% |

Delegates were asked for feedback on the following questions:

What benefits did you gain from the tour that could impact your business operations?

Staff management - general discussions relating to staff retention, behaviour, discipline and knowledge. It was helpful to get some insight to other workplace staffing and how other owners resolve issues.

Turf management. Understanding different methods of growing, including harvesting, weed control, delivery, costings and reworking paddocks.

Planting process. The costs, procedures and the pros and cons of various methods of planting.

Better end to end understanding of what role each supplier/contractor plays within the Turf Industry.

Good exposure to a lot of Technical advice, from fertilising to weed control etc. Seminars were educational and relatable.

Networking experiences shared from those that have been in the industry for many years, was great to engage and understand some of the challenges over the last few years and how they have dealt with them.

Being able to network and talk directly to potential customers that work in areas such as golf course, local parks and big stadiums. I was able to build a new understanding of some of the products and expectations that they are after looking for and share the products that we have locally that they didn't know of.

I'm interested in investigating if dethatching will help with the production of turf, and in the older turf that is too weak it just breaks up when harvesting. Interested to see if at that stage or just before to dethatching will help encourage new growth that will hold it together to get it ready for harvesting which will increase the profit and minimize wastage.

What knowledge did you gain that could benefit the turf industry?

Turf education / training. Until I undertook the study tour I wasn't aware how bad, or lack thereof suitable / relevant training there was available to people wanting to have a career in this industry.

Tradeshaw. Even though the tradeshow was aimed at mainly the golf and sports sector I believe it also would have benefits for our industry. There were many pieces of equipment which would be useful. A similar type of tradeshow targeted to the turf producing industry would be great.

Emerging advances in technology - It may not be for everyone but things like this engage the farmer and make them think of better ways of producing.

Rethinking Men's Mental Health. Our industry has a high percentage of male workers and the speakers were challenging the existing ways that mental health issues are dealt with.

Understanding the large group network experiences, we all collectively have and how we go about sharing that knowledge for our own learnings.

The importance of hearing about technical industry learnings would help and educate us going forward.

It was interesting to hear of new products such as nano bubble technologies that puts oxygen in the water for turf health. While it might be too expensive for turf farming, more research and discussions are needed, major stadiums would benefit and have the budget to implement this.

Other general feedback and comments

Overall, I found the NZ Study Tour to be a very positive and worthwhile experience. It was very well organised with a jam-packed program to get the most benefit from the short time away.

Networking with existing turf producers, other turf related fields (greenkeepers and sport field managers) and sales representatives. I can't state the importance of this and for general knowledge and growth as a business and individual.

Farm tour, always one of my favourite parts of any conference / study tour. It is great to hear their business history and their passion for turf production.

Well-constructed event, very enjoyable and educational for someone new to the industry. Thank you.

The networking in the group that went on the study tour was amazing. I was the youngest on the tour but was treated the same and the others were passing some of their experience and knowledge to me which I'm grateful for.

Recommendation

The option of a study tour was one that was received well by turf producers, in a short turn around period of the project. The tour focused on an existing industry conference that provided a new experience for the delegates with lots of opportunities to learn and network.

It is recommended that a similar structure, of an existing event/conference, in the future would be beneficial and could include tours to other horticulture or agricultural farming visits to review new innovative technologies.

Refereed scientific publications

None to report


Intellectual property, commercialisation and confidentiality

No project IP, project outputs, commercialisation or confidentiality issues to report.

Appendices

| | |
|------------|------------------------------------|
| Appendix 1 | Tour Itinerary |
| Appendix 2 | Tour Application Form |
| Appendix 3 | Study Tour Article, Winter Edition |

Appendix 1

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>2018 Turf Australia Study Tour Monday 25th – Friday 29th June Australasian Turfgrass Conference & Trade Exhibition Wellington New Zealand</p> | |
| Monday 25th June | |
| Flights | Delegates arrive in Wellington |
| Accommodation | Check into Hotel: Rydges Wellington 75 Featherston St, Pipitea, Wellington 6011, New Zealand |
| Conference Registration | TSB Bank Arena, Wellington. Register at conference desk and collect conference material. |
| 6.30pm-10.30pm | President's Dinner Te Papa, Amokura Gallery |
| Tuesday 26th June | |
| 8.30am – 4.00pm | Conference commences with plenary sessions. |
| 4.00pm – 5.30pm | VIP Trade Exhibition Opening |
| 7.00pm | Tour Group Dinner with industry representatives |
| Wednesday 27th June | |
| 8.30am – 3.00pm | Conference continues with both Sportsfield and Golf streams offering different presentations for delegates to choose from. |
| 3.00pm-4.00pm | Tour Group meeting to discuss conference content. |
| 5.00pm | Conference Social Networking Event |
| Thursday 28th June | |
| 8.30am – 4.00pm | Bus Tour Field day visiting Turflands Turf Farm in Palmerston North and private inspection of Westpac Stadium by Stadium Curator. |
| 6.00pm – 8.00pm | Conference Farewell Function at Te Wharewaka o Poneke - Wellington Waterfront |
| Friday 29th June | |
| Return Flights | Conclusion of Tour and delegates return home. |

Appendix 2



Australian Turf Industry Study Tour 2018 APPLICATION FORM



APPLICANT QUESTIONS:

Please explain what you hope to gain by attending the Australian Turf Industry Study Tour 2018:

Please explain how will you use the experience of being part of this study tour to benefit your workplace and/or the turf industry:

Will you make yourself available to provide feedback on the experience to Turf Australia, Hort Innovation and the wider turf industry? (this may be written, verbal or as a presentation to other growers at an industry event. Please identify if you have a preference for feedback):

Successful applicants for the study tour will have the costs of the following covered under the funding arrangement:

- Registration to the Australasian Turfgrass Conference, Wellington, New Zealand, being held June 25-28, 2018.
- Accommodation for the duration of the AGSCA conference (4 nights)
- Attending the President's Dinner on Monday, June 25.
- Bus tour of New Zealand turfgrass farming operations on June 28, 2018

NOTE: Successful study tour applicants will be responsible for the cost of their own flights between Australia and New Zealand and any transfers to the accommodation venue on arrival and all other personal/incidental costs.

Please tick the box to acknowledge you understand that you are personally responsible for these costs outside of the funding offered as part of the Australian Turf Industry Study Tour 2018 project (TU17007).



This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the turf research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au

Appendix 3

INDUSTRY NEWS



New Zealand study tour success

(Above, left to right): Delegates Ross Boyle, Rachel Collier, Adam Dunstone, Emma Burstall, Paul Saliba, Jenny Zadro, Justin Burstall, Liz Mecham, Anthony Heilig and Helen Tramacchi.

A small group of turf growers have taken part in the Australian Turf Industry Study Tour to New Zealand, from June 25-28, 2018.

It was the first time that Turf Australia has facilitated such a tour, but the feedback from the growers who attended has been overwhelmingly positive.

The *Australian Turf Industry Study Tour 2018 (TU17007)* was a strategic levy investment with the aim of assisting the growth and development of the Australian turf industry by providing the opportunity for growers to connect with the wider turf industry, both nationally and internationally, gain valuable industry knowledge and experience on-farm turf production in New Zealand.

The tour program included attending the Australasian Turfgrass Conference in Wellington, which had comprehensive program of Australian and international presenters covering a variety of topics on turf management, maintenance techniques, technologies and best management practices. The annual conference and trade exhibition event is the largest turf trade exhibition in Australasia, showcasing the latest in turf management machinery, equipment, technology and products.

A full report on the tour will be included in upcoming Turf Australia eNewsletters and the spring edition of the industry magazine. Opportunities for strategic research and development projects to benefit the Australian industry will also be put forward from information gathered from the study tour.



(Above): Scott McElroy from Auburn University presented on weed control and other management issues at the conference.



(Left and below): Jenny Zadro updated delegates on Turf Australia.