

Evaluation of the Sustainable Farming Fund

Summary Report

31 January 2014

Prepared for: Ministry for Primary Industries

Prepared by: Judy Oakden, Judy Oakden Consultancy
Julian King, Julian King & Associates
Dr Will Allen, Learning for Sustainability

Published by: Kinnect Group
P.O. Box 2590 Wellington 6410
New Zealand
email: judy@kinnect.co.nz

ISBN 978-0-473-27325



Kinnect
group

Judy Oakden Consultancy • Research Evaluation Consultancy
The Knowledge Institute • Julian King & Associates

Oakden, J., King, J., Allen, W. (2014) *Evaluation of the Sustainable Farming Fund: Summary Report*. Kinnect Group: Wellington

Published by: Kinnect Group
P.O. Box 2590 Wellington 6410
New Zealand
email: judy@kinnect.co.nz

ISBN 978-0-473-27325

Contents

1 Executive summary	4
2 Introduction	5
Terms of reference for the evaluation	5
3 Key findings.....	7
The unique value proposition of the SFF	7
The extent, and ways, SFF has been worth the investment to date... 8	8
Increased capability.....	8
Enhanced relationships	9
Behaviour change with positive environmental benefits.....	9
Development and adoption of new technology	10
Protecting or growing economic value.....	10
Unanticipated outcomes	11
Cumulative impacts of successive projects	11
Building capacity of SFF Project Managers – which is currently untapped	12
Enablers and barriers to the success of the SFF.....	13
Maximising value for money from SFF.....	16
Investment in MPI Advisers	16
Administrative support for grantees.....	16
Harnessing the existing capacity of SFF Project Managers	16
Communications and extension strategy and support.....	17
Reframing eligibility criteria	17
In summary.....	18

Tables

Table 1: Summary of enablers and barriers to the success of the SFF.....	13
--	----

Figures

Figure 1: Overview of the key people involved in SFF projects	5
Figure 2: Focus of SFF and other funding programmes with similar aims.....	7

Fileref: 140131 SFF Exec Summary vxx
Last saved: 3-Feb-14

Disclaimer: The information in this report is presented in good faith using the information available to us at the time of preparation. It is provided on the basis that the authors of the report are not liable to any person or organisation for any damage or loss which may occur in relation to taking or not taking action in respect of any information or advice within this report.

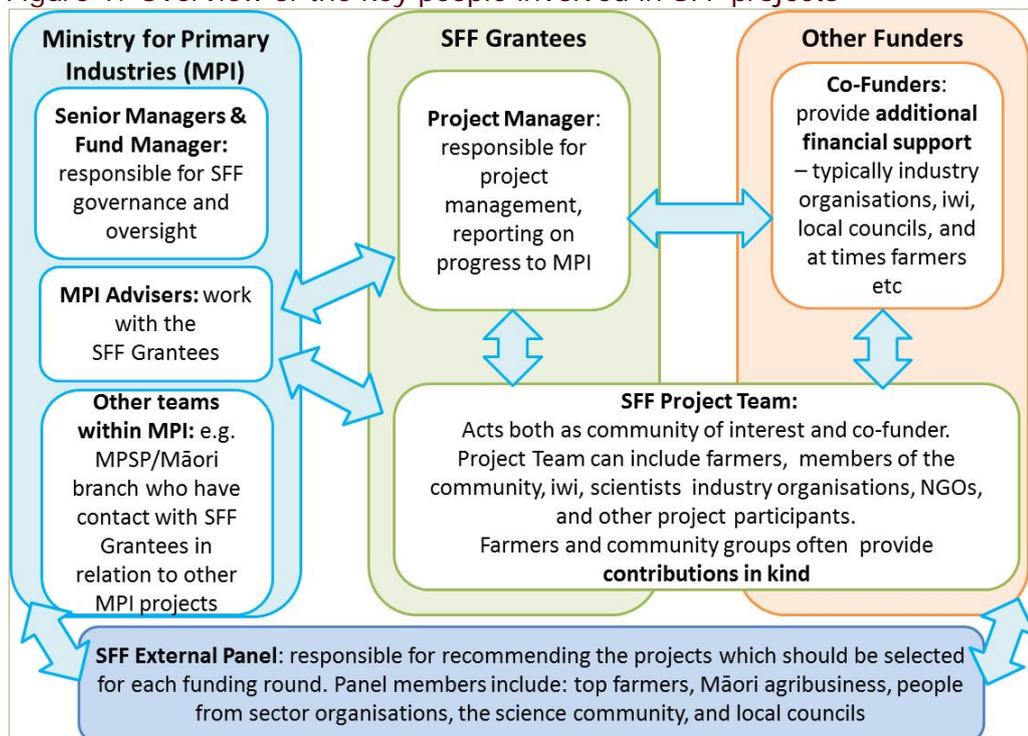
1 Executive summary

1. The Sustainable Farming Fund (SFF) invests in grass-roots projects with the aim of delivering economic, environmental and social benefits. The SFF was evaluated in 2013 to assess outcomes, value for money and possible adaptations to ensure the Fund remains effective and fit for purpose.
2. **The evaluation found that the SFF is good value for money and makes a worthwhile and valuable contribution to primary industries and rural communities.** It supports the interests of science, the environment, agribusiness and the community in ways not replicated by other funding programmes.
3. Available evidence indicates that SFF funds are being allocated and used in accordance with the intended purpose and strategic priorities of the SFF, and that the SFF has a track record of investing in successful projects. Furthermore, the SFF has contributed to encouraging significant partner co-investment in these projects.
4. Among the key benefits of the SFF are its contribution to:
 - increased capability for problem solving at individual, community and sector levels
 - enhanced relationships and networks between farmers, rural communities, scientists, local government and industry bodies
 - behaviour change that supports sustainable farming, including farmer engagement and emergence of leaders to champion ongoing change
 - development and adoption of new technology and environmentally sustainable practice
 - protecting and growing the economic value of primary industries, including export opportunities.
5. In addition to achieving its stated aims, the SFF has contributed to unanticipated benefits, including:
 - cumulative impacts from a number of related SFF projects over time, with later projects building on learnings from earlier ones
 - development of skilled Project Managers who help broker relationships, support individual and group change, and facilitate project management
 - supporting Māori self-determination.
6. Enablers and barriers to the success of the SFF have been identified to guide future programme development. Opportunities to gain further value for money from the SFF include investment in MPI Advisers, administrative support for grantees, harnessing the capacity of Project Managers, a communications strategy, and reframing eligibility criteria.

2 Introduction

7. The Sustainable Farming Fund (SFF) invests in farmer¹-led projects that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits to New Zealand's primary industries and rural communities. The Fund was set up in 2000 and so has now been in existence for 13 years. Aquaculture was added in 2011.
8. Its operation is based around annual funding rounds, which are run by Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) staff. Projects typically run for three to five years, and the Fund invests up to \$200,000 per annum per project. The following diagram provides an overview of the key people involved in the operation of SFF projects.

Figure 1: Overview of the key people involved in SFF projects



Terms of reference for the evaluation

9. MPI commissioned this evaluation of SFF in 2013 to provide assurance of the outcomes and value for money from the SFF portfolio to date (2000–13). MPI also sought an evidence base for possible adaptations to the SFF portfolio design, to ensure it is fit for purpose in the current and future funding landscape. In addition, MPI wished to learn how it could improve SFF implementation and the Ministry's collaborative partnering with related funding Programme Managers. (Although the findings below are expressed in the past tense, the SFF continues to operate.)

¹ When we talk about "farmers" we are referring to farmers, growers, fishers, foresters and aquaculturalists.

10. The evaluation draws together evidence from a range of sources including:
 - a review of the SFF project database
 - a survey of 136 SFF Project Managers, (with experience of approximately 400 projects)
 - case studies of three clusters of SFF projects
 - workshops with MPI staff and Fund Managers of MPI Funds and other relevant funding programmes
 - a review of past evaluations² and other SFF documentation.
11. The evaluation was undertaken between March and October 2013.

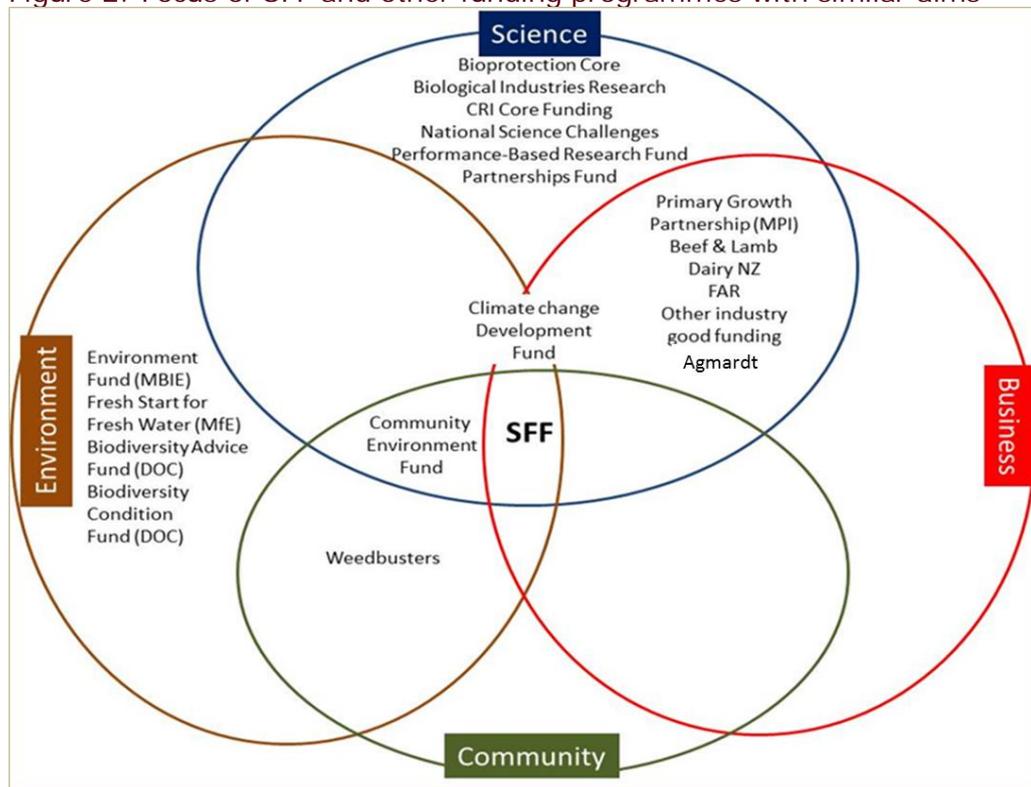
² BERL (2004), Barton (2002); MPI (2010) Ten Years of Grassroots Action.

3 Key findings

The unique value proposition of the SFF

12. The SFF is unique as it supports the interests of science, the environment, business and the community in ways that are not replicated by other funding programmes. The unique value proposition of the SFF relative to other funding programmes is that it *supports grass-roots, science-based initiatives to protect and grow primary production businesses and rural community resilience.*
13. The evaluation found the SFF remains fit for purpose and makes a worthwhile and valuable contribution to primary industries and rural communities³. The following diagram illustrates the unique position of SFF compared to other funding programmes with similar aims.

Figure 2: Focus of SFF and other funding programmes with similar aims



³ Data which informs this aspect of the evaluation for comes from:

- a focus group with six participants comprising Senior Managers and Fund Managers from a range of Funds, held at MPI in September 2013
- documents related to the Natural Resources Sector Review including: NRS Non-Departmental Funds Duplication and Overlap: A report completed for Stage II of the NRS Non-Departmental Funds Review (Ministry for the Environment and Ministry for Primary Industries, 2013), Natural Resources Sector: Stage 2 Funds Analysis Review: Opportunities for efficiency and effectiveness and reprioritisation of NRS Non-Departmental Funds (Deloitte, 2013)
- review of the websites for some of the key funds.

The extent, and ways, SFF has been worth the investment to date

14. Overall, the evaluators found SFF provides good value for money, taking into account the range of social, environmental, cultural and economic benefits to grantees and their communities.
15. MPI spent \$122.8 million on 906 SFF projects across 14 fiscal years (2000–01 to 2013–14). Case studies, survey feedback from SFF Project Managers and other available information including past evaluations⁴ indicate that the SFF has a track record of investing in worthwhile and successful projects.
16. The SFF has contributed to encouraging significant co-investment from partners in *industry innovation and adoption*. For example, partners contributed \$1.27 of financial resources for every \$1 of SFF funding as well as further contributions in kind.
17. SFF also contributed to encouraging farmer, grower, forester and aquaculturalist-led projects to partner innovative approaches to *environmental challenges*, as identified in the case studies.
18. Among the key benefits of the SFF are its contribution to:
 - increased capability for problem solving and project management
 - enhanced relationships and networks that support innovation
 - behaviour change with positive environmental benefits
 - development and adoption of new technology
 - protecting or growing economic value.

Increased capability

19. The survey of SFF Project Managers, the case studies and feedback from MPI Advisers and a range of Fund Managers provides good evidence of the SFF contributing to social and organisational capacity and capability-building at individual, community and sector levels. The majority of Project Managers (91%) said the SFF built the project teams' knowledge and skills, and the teams then used new skills to share new knowledge and technologies with others. Three quarters of Project Managers surveyed (77%) said this increased capacity went on to influence a wider audience at a national level.
20. According to Project Managers, SFF Advisers and Fund Managers, SFF grants help communities to build capability by supporting them to identify and solve their own challenges and opportunities. The evaluation found that support from the SFF projects also contributed to the development of a number of community groups, which have continued beyond the life of the projects.

⁴ Including past evaluations of the SFF: BERL 2004, Barton 2002; and the 2010 MPI publication *Ten Years of Grassroots Action*.

21. During SFF projects, farming communities became aware of feasible approaches to farming practice that harness resources for optimal production whilst protecting the environment, in collaboration with scientists and other experts. Communities learned to accommodate the needs of other stakeholders and regulators, and to safeguard their industries in the longer-term.
22. Feedback from the survey and case studies indicates the SFF is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of Māori but has been under-utilised by Māori. Māori have significant assets such as land that can be used for primary production but do not always have access to the skills, services or technologies to develop them. In 2012 MPI organised an out-of-cycle funding round specifically for Māori agribusiness projects, including support to develop and implement successful projects. This was successful in attracting targeted applications. There is scope to further support Māori agribusiness needs and aspirations.

Enhanced relationships

23. SFF Project Managers, MPI Advisers and the Fund Managers all commented that a particular strength of the Fund was in supporting SFF project teams to build relationships and networks between the farming community, science and industry. Ninety one percent of SFF Project Managers surveyed considered they had developed close working relationships with other stakeholders such as scientists, Council staff and industry body representatives.
24. Almost all (91%) Project Managers believed the SFF projects assisted farmers to develop close working relationships with stakeholders, e.g., scientists, Council staff and representatives of industry-good organisations.
25. The majority of Project Managers (89%) also reflected that many grantees had developed networks with other farmers and growers, scientists, industry and Councils. The case studies also illustrated the depth of relationships built in different sectors, and at the local, regional and national levels.

Behaviour change with positive environmental benefits

26. Behaviour change is notoriously difficult to achieve, particularly amongst farmers, as they may have to prioritise spending (of at times very significant amounts) to trial new ideas. An important achievement from SFF grants is the level of active engagement of farmers in making changes, with support from others. SFF grants have enabled farmers to develop solutions alongside scientists and industry.
27. The SFF has helped to achieve behaviour change on a number of levels. SFF projects have provided farmers with the readiness to change, helped them develop solutions that worked at a farm level, and helped embed these solutions into their farm systems. Furthermore, change is likely to be sustained, as leaders have emerged from projects who are prepared to

continue to champion ongoing change within the sector and across regions.

Development and adoption of new technology

28. There is evidence that SFF projects are contributing to increased development and adoption of new technology. SFF Project Managers believed participants are now better informed about successful farming or growing techniques (88%) and better able to apply them (81%). SFF Project Managers also believed that the SFF project assisted in implementation and use of effective on-farm management practices and systems (80%).
29. Both MPI Advisers and SFF Project Managers provided many examples of technology transfer amongst the farming community and maintained the SFF grants supported communities to embrace change. Adoption or technology transfer is a socio-cultural process and hence more complex than just providing new knowledge. This is particularly true for projects with predominantly environmental outcomes that are not adequately recognised in the marketplace, and for outcomes that might be contentious amongst local stakeholders. A good example of such a project is the *Top of the South case study: Setting an example for sustainable water quality*.

Top of the South case study: Setting an example for sustainable water quality

Water quality issues are usually complex and technical, so an approach that would address them over an extended period was needed. Three SFF projects in the Top of the South (Island) have together developed an effective model of collaborative action to improve fresh water quality in a catchment. These projects in the Sherry, Rai and Aorere catchments each featured significant participation by dairy and aquaculture farmers.

These projects highlight the multi-level and complex challenges that communities face as they manage water quality issues. At the farm level, solutions are complex and multi-faceted. Fully understanding problems in their local context and developing an appropriate set of interlinked social, management and technical solutions takes time. Often technical solutions take some years to eventuate (for example, riparian plantings take some time to grow and mature). These projects also highlight the importance of community-level approaches to catchment management, and the need to develop partnerships with Councils, neighbouring communities and industry.

The SFF projects in the Top of the South left their farming communities with working plans for ongoing activities to improve water quality that provide a pathway forward over the next few years. Farmers have been encouraged as leaders of positive change. The projects also leave the community with greater connectedness or social capital through partnerships between land managers and a wide range of other stakeholders including scientists, central and local government, and community and industry champions.

Protecting or growing economic value

30. Case studies and results from the survey of SFF Project Managers provide a consistent story of SFF grants protecting and growing economic value, including some projects contributing to export opportunities. One quarter of Project Managers surveyed considered their projects contributed to

actual export earnings (25%) while nearly three in five considered there was potential for their projects to contribute to future earnings (59%). Furthermore, around half those surveyed maintained their SFF projects helped protect, safeguard or maintain productivity (52%), and that the projects contribute to increased profitability at the project level (49%).

31. There were also clear signs that primary producers and agribusiness were able to leverage off environmental credentials to respond to market threats and opportunities as shown by the wine industry case study, and the response to water quality by catchment farming communities.
32. While it was beyond the scope of the study and available data sources to directly measure economic impacts of the SFF, evidence from case studies, survey feedback and past evaluations suggests there is a credible prospect of the SFF breaking even – that is, returning at least \$122.8 million worth of economic benefits to a sector with current annual gross revenues of over \$26 billion (2013) – given the aims and success rates of the projects funded. However, it needs to be emphasised that this impression cannot be directly substantiated with available data.

Unanticipated outcomes

33. In addition to achieving its aims, the SFF has brought other, or unanticipated benefits, including:
 - realising the cumulative impacts of successive projects
 - building capacity of SFF Project Managers – which is currently relatively untapped
 - supporting Māori self-determination.

Cumulative impacts of successive projects

34. This evaluation identified many examples of grant applicants working strategically to develop an integrated programme of work by applying for SFF grants for a number of related projects. These projects have incremental and cumulative impacts, with later projects building on the learnings from earlier ones. Previous evaluations have only viewed projects as individual entities and have not considered their collective impact. The three case studies undertaken for this evaluation all revealed the collective benefits of successive projects delivering added value to primary industries and rural communities.
35. The following case study is one example of how a cumulative group of projects in the wine industry helped to establish a premium market positioning for New Zealand Wines.

Protecting the sustainability of New Zealand vineyards

Ten SFF projects over the past 12 years (2001–current) contributed to the wine industry establishing a premium market positioning through addressing a range of opportunities and challenges. *New Zealand Winegrowers* acted as the primary conduit for these SFF projects. The project focuses included a disease challenge, managing vine yield, energy efficiency in winemaking, residue-free wine production and a sustainability accreditation programme. Later projects purposefully built on the work of earlier projects, enabling further development or up-scaling of activity.

A number of the early projects directly supported the development of certified environmental programmes for New Zealand vineyards, which together have since become known as Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand (SWNZ). It is estimated that today more than 94% of the producing vineyard area is participating in SWNZ, with a further 3-5% under certified organic programmes. More recent projects involve the wider industry in developing best-management practices to support quality vineyard production.

Collectively these ten projects created strong linkages between research and industry, supported high levels of innovation and uptake, and supported the development of industry best practice.

Building capacity of SFF Project Managers – which is currently untapped

36. The SFF has supported the development of a number of skilled SFF Project Managers who assist farmers broker with scientists and industry sectors and also help with project management and facilitation. Nearly a quarter of those who completed the online survey about SFF projects were Project Managers who had been involved with six or more SFF projects, and the evaluators estimate that this group of respondents may have been involved in around 400 projects overall.
37. Experienced Project Managers can ensure that projects are realistically scoped, well-planned and well-executed. They understand that time needs to be invested at the start to bring the right people together and ensure there is on-the-ground farmer leadership. They work in between projects to develop the climate and skills for new projects. They also often continue to champion projects beyond the scope of the direct SFF funding. Currently there is no recognition or accreditation of their skills and value to the SFF or the wider primary industry supported.
38. SFF's flexibility and bottom-up approach means it has the potential to improve the productivity of Māori agricultural assets and support Māori self-determination. The evaluation found some instances where SFF specifically fostered opportunities to support agribusiness aspirations of Māori in culturally meaningful ways, as illustrated in the following case study.

Sustainable development and podocarp restoration on Tuawhenua lands

Three SFF projects, one that was completed in 2010 and two that are ongoing, have helped the Tūhoe Tuawhenua Trust to develop a holistic and natural approach to the utilisation and restoration of native forest blocks. The projects have supported the local community to gain valuable understandings of forest dynamics, suitable planting and husbandry techniques, and potential marketing strategies, from which to build a sustainable economic base. The SFF projects are underpinned by Māori principles to ensure the outcomes meet local people’s aspirations. The projects have also provided the opportunity for the Trust to build wider partnerships and networks that will support future management initiatives.

The development of the sustainable management approach illustrates the importance of taking the time to engage people and think through the elements needed to underpin sustainable and culturally appropriate management. These efforts have left the community with a plan that suits their people and their lands. The plan highlights the efforts of Trust members as leaders of positive change within the wider community.

Enablers and barriers to the success of the SFF

39. Key enablers and barriers to the success of the SFF are summarised in the following table.

Table 1: Summary of enablers and barriers to the success of the SFF

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project origination is bottom-up • Leveraging of sector resources • Effective MPI Advisers • Flexible approach to contract management • Skilled SFF Project Managers • Building and utilising relationships • Links to experts • Fostering innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucracy (process rules over effective outcomes) • Technology transfer not working optimally (stays within sectors or regions; limited timeframes) • Under-investment in MPI Advisers and those who might support them • Equity of access • New on-line grants management system will exclude people with limited resources

Enablers

40. Key enablers that support the success of the SFF are:
- *Project origination from the bottom up:* SFF is a popular Fund that is oversubscribed each year⁵. It is seen as a fund that originates from the grass roots and motivates farmers to ‘get things done’. Fund Managers of SFF and similar funding programmes, MPI Advisers and SFF Project Managers believe this helps build community cohesion. Grants require people to work in groups for a common cause.
 - *Leverages sector resources:* The SFF acts as a kind of seed funding that attracts other funding and involvement of the community, industry sector or from regional organisations such as Councils.
 - *Effective MPI Advisers:* The high quality of service from the MPI Advisers was frequently mentioned by SFF Project Managers as a reason for the high level of project success. MPI Advisers build relationships that help attract the right people; help people develop

⁵ For the most recent funding round latest round there were \$21m worth of applications for \$7m of funding – the Fund was oversubscribed by three times.

projects in ways that improve the likelihood of success; and help people maximise outcomes by maintaining flexibility without losing focus on agreed outcomes without necessarily adopting the sector's priorities.

- *Flexible approach to contract management:* One of the unique features of the SFF is that it allows latitude for change during the life of a project. There is provision within the SFF approach to allow for the impact of weather and other unexpected events as well as to build on new learnings, and this maximises the potential for the projects to be successful.
- *Skilled SFF Project Managers:* The evaluation identified a pool of experienced Project Managers working in research institutions, academia and in consultancy businesses who have each managed more than six SFF projects. These Project Managers are a valuable resource, working at the community level to help the SFF achieve success. They are skilled in navigating both political, social and project management challenges.
- *Relationships:* A stand-out feature of the SFF is that it supports the building of effective relationships and networks. The SFF supports the farming community to work collaboratively with industry sectors, scientists and other key stakeholders to address problems or opportunities in a holistic manner. Building trust is a key factor in the success of the projects, as is good leadership. In addition, it is evident that MPI senior managers engage with sectors to understand industry priorities, which helps with the overall sense of strategic direction.
- *Links to experts:* SFF Project Managers say farmers appreciate the opportunity to work with people with scientific knowledge who understand practical ways to improve environmental sustainability, and on-farm productivity or performance. The collaboration of experts and farmers supports the use of systems approaches to problem solving and solutions based on science.
- *Fosters innovation:* The Fund's role in supporting both innovation and sustainability is clearly evident. Furthermore, the SFF is cognisant of sector interests, while ensuring that the interests of communities are prioritised.

Barriers

41. There are a number of barriers that need to be addressed to ensure SFF remains fit for purpose in the future.

- *Bureaucracy (process rules over effective outcomes):* Experienced SFF Project Managers advised that at times SFF processes and rules do not support the aims of the Fund. While SFF was complimented for being a well-run fund, there are some administrative challenges. For

instance, the financial years for the SFF do not align with the farming calendar and this has impacts on budgeting for projects.

Further, Project Managers believe the focus on set-up and funding of new projects reduced the opportunities for scaling out an existing SFF project idea from one locality to other regions in follow-up SFF projects. For example, an application for a new project that has similarities to a previous project might be considered “same old idea to another region”. Thus some scaling-out opportunities were possibly precluded under current rules. Project Managers believe the process of engagement during a project helps drive behaviour change, and that this is novel for each community involved.

- *Technology transfer not working optimally (stays within sectors or regions, limited timeframes):* Technology transfer needs to occur at a number of different levels. While there is an imperative for the projects to disseminate learnings, the evaluators identified there is also an opportunity for MPI to assist by using its natural position as a centralised point to proactively ensure the learnings flow further across projects and sectors.
- *Equity of access:* A wide range of projects across a broad section of the primary industries have received SFF funding. One area that is underdeveloped is support for Māori. Treaty obligations require equitable access for Māori.

There are just 33 SFF projects identified by MPI’s Māori Primary Sector Partnerships (MPSP) branch as being specifically for Māori interests, out of 906 projects over the past 13 years of the Fund’s existence. This may indicate systems and processes are not generating equitable outcomes currently. There are a number of Treaty settlements being made and additional support may be genuinely required as part of self-determination regarding land use into the future. At times Māori require more resource and support to get to the same outcome, and this may be one of those times.

Feedback from MPI Advisers and MPSP staff indicated that Māori need additional support to make competitive SFF funding applications. Further, at times Māori require longer time-frames to undertake negotiations at the start of the project to get the right people in the room. Additional mechanisms may be needed to support Māori within the existing process.

- *New online system will exclude people with limited resources:* The evaluators understand that SFF funding applications will now only be managed on-line. We suggest there needs to be some provision for those who want to apply but do not have internet access, to ensure they are not excluded.
- *Under-investment in MPI Advisers and those who might support them:* MPI Advisers themselves believe the support they are

providing is “stretched”, and this has also been noticed by SFF Project Managers responding to the online survey.

Maximising value for money from SFF

42. This section addresses the third key evaluation question: *What are the opportunities to maximise the value derived from the SFF?*
43. Greater value for money may be obtained from the SFF through:
- investment in MPI Advisers
 - administrative support for grantees
 - harnessing existing capacity of SFF Project Managers
 - a communications strategy and support
 - re-framing eligibility criteria.

Investment in MPI Advisers

44. As with any investment, the SFF needs to be well managed and nurtured to maximise outcomes. It is clear that MPI Advisers’ support of SFF project teams is a key enabler that has contributed to the success of the SFF to date. Maintaining appropriate staffing levels within the team is thus a necessary ingredient to maximise value for money from the SFF.
45. As part of their work, MPI Advisers build key relationships that help MPI maintain positive links with key stakeholders and be responsive to emerging sector issues and trends. It is vital to have a good system for sharing information between MPI management and the MPI Advisers to maximise the work of SFF across the different relational levels.

Administrative support for grantees

46. Projects with inexperienced SFF Project Managers can at times require substantial project management support. Even highly experienced and capable Project Managers indicated that they sometimes struggled to undertake the activities required to effectively coordinate their SFF project.
47. One possible way to provide additional project management support would be to hire internal project managers to work alongside MPI Advisers. This would free up MPI Advisers to focus on more strategic aspects of their roles, while providing necessary support to maximise equity of access to the SFF and successful project outcomes.

Harnessing the existing capacity of SFF Project Managers

48. Over time, some SFF Project Managers have developed considerable experience and strategic networks. These Project Managers are a valuable resource to SFF and could be identified, potentially accredited and

encouraged to support further SFF projects where there is a natural connection (e.g. in location or existing relationships). This could reduce the need for support from MPI's Project Advisers.

Communications and extension strategy and support

49. Currently best-practice information and results of SFF projects is only available on a project-by-project basis, which can be hard to locate and does not tell the cumulative SFF story of capacity and capability-building. While projects may communicate their learnings to the wider community, the evaluators believe there is also an opportunity for MPI to aggregate the learnings and promulgate them in a more cohesive manner. A communications and extension strategy could address:
- telling the success stories of SFF in a more integrated way, based on cumulative impacts of successive projects in a similar topic area
 - communicating best practice findings from SFF projects, to maximise technology transfer to a wider audience
 - recognising the contribution of the SFF to social capital and the flow-on benefits of this for successive projects
 - promoting the benefits of working in collaborative partnerships
 - demonstrating how learnings at a local level can be scaled to influence environmental policy or practice at regional and policy level.

Reframing eligibility criteria

50. There is an inherent tension between supporting innovation – which involves taking calculated risks – and selecting projects that have a high likelihood of success – which may encourage risk averse behaviour. Given the stated intent of the SFF to support grass-roots innovation, and the high success rate of projects to date, MPI might want to consider whether its application process or risk assessment criteria are resulting in the SFF playing it too safe and excluding some promising but more risky projects.
51. MPI might also consider:
- continuing the recent emphasis on Māori agribusiness as a sector with significant potential to benefit from SFF but one that has been under-served by SFF in the past. It may be necessary to provide additional project management support to some of the applicants to support their access to the Fund
 - including projects that scale out to other regions rather than discounting them as “same approach to another region”
 - extending the timeframes for specific stages of some projects, particularly those which require negotiations at the start to establish necessary relationships – particularly projects with Māori.

In summary

52. The SFF remains fit for purpose and makes a worthwhile and valuable contribution to primary industries and rural communities. It supports the interests of science, the environment, agribusiness and the community in ways that are not replicated by other funding programmes.
53. Available evidence indicates that SFF funds are being allocated and used in accordance with the intended purpose and strategic priorities of the SFF, and that the SFF has a track record of investing in worthwhile and successful projects. Furthermore, the SFF has contributed to encouraging significant partner co-investment in these projects.
54. Key benefits of the SFF include contributions to increased capability, enhanced relationships, behaviour change, and development and adoption of new technology. SFF projects often contribute to protecting and growing the economic value of primary industries.
55. To gain further value for money from the SFF, opportunities for consideration include investment in MPI Advisers, administrative support for grantees, harnessing the capacity of SFF Project Managers, developing a communications strategy, and re-framing eligibility criteria.