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# Using the Framework to demonstrate and communicate on-farm practices

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The Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework gratefully acknowledges the contributions of Gulf Savannah NRM.

[www.aasf.org.au](http://www.aasf.org.au)

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Gulf Savannah Natural Resource Management (Gulf Savannah NRM) is a not-for-profit, working with people and communities to create opportunities for the Gulf region in Queensland’s north-west corner. Their projects help strengthen communities and industries, connecting science, technology and Landcare to improve productivity for farmers and graziers and address the challenges of life in our remote region.

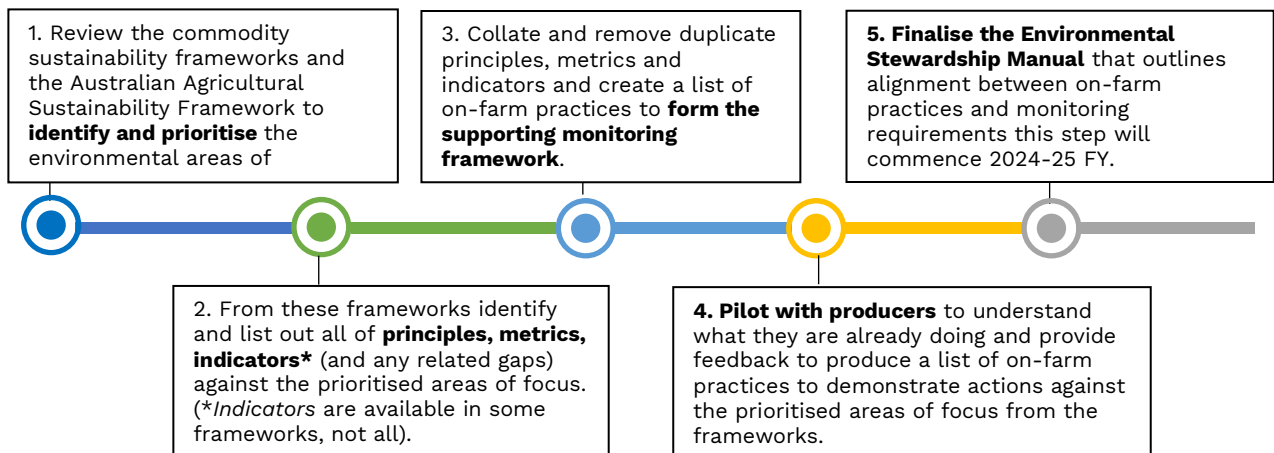
## Background:

To help realise clear environmental, economic and productivity benefits for northern Australia, Gulf Savannah NRM collaborates with like-minded organisations to support North Queensland primary producers. In early 2023 this included joining forces with University of Queensland, the Cotton and Grains Research Development Corporations, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Central Queensland University, Radicle Seeds Australia and Agrimix in the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA) North Queensland Cotton, Grain Cattle Mixed Farming Systems Program (CGC Program).

The CGC program is co-designing scalable diversification options and drought resilience practices for northern cotton, grain and cattle enterprises. The Framework has been used within this project to help inform the identification of environmental sustainability considerations that are relevant to the three industries. The most relevant environmental principles are being used in the development of an environmental stewardship manual to support producers to communicate and demonstrate their sustainable on-farm practices within these principles to increase their market access and meet consumer expectations. The AASF principles Soil (P3), Water (P6), Biodiversity (in some form) (P4 and P5), GHG emissions & carbon (P1), Chemical and waste (P7) and Biosecurity (P14) will all be explored in the environmental stewardship manual.

## Using the AASF and commodity sustainability frameworks to guide best management practices:

As part of the CGC Program, Gulf Savannah NRM is developing an environmental stewardship manual with a supporting self-assessment tool. The development of the manual is being informed by taking a combination of the most important priorities identified in the applicable commodity specific (cotton, grains, and beef) sustainability frameworks and the sector agnostic AASF (*Framework*). The below illustrates the process the Gulf Savannah NRM team are following and how they are using the AASF and industry frameworks to develop the manual:



Gulf Savannah NRM are using the Framework as a key input and alignment tool for three key reasons:

- The **Framework is commodity agnostic** and provides a consistent whole-of-agricultural reference point and coverage of sustainability considerations no matter what is produced on a property, and this can then be complemented by the commodity specific frameworks for more nuanced considerations to inform the monitoring requirements.
- The **Framework accelerates identifying the current and most relevant environmental considerations for** northern producers. In addition, the Framework criteria provided an informative next step guide in relation to measurement and data to support identifying related management practices or gaps.
- The Framework **enables producers to leverage a trusted external source** to align its environmental stewardship manual to. This provides producers with an external and continuous whole-of-sector reference point when they are demonstrating or communicating their current or future sustainable practices, creating trust, transparency and efficiency for producers.

### Drivers of improved environmental performance:

Gulf Savannah NRM is aware of several key drivers contributing to the increased focus on improving environmental performance and stewardship. As an NRM region, it's important that they're able to provide guidance aligned with best practice. The AASF is the most logical and consistent reference point to help support producers in translating market demands to on-farm practices.

### Lessons to share:

- **The Framework is a valuable starting point:** the Framework outlines the industry's sustainability considerations through its principles and criteria. It provides a helpful starting point for producers and users to better identify where to prioritise their on-farm efforts.
- **Leverage what's existing:** it is a key priority of Gulf Savannah NRM to not reinvent the wheel as they continue to respond to the region's challenges and support local producers to unlock opportunities.
- **Producers are not starting at zero:** to the majority, sustainable practice and good environmental stewardship is business-as-usual for Australian producers. The Gulf Savannah NRM environmental stewardship manual and monitoring framework put simply, is a 'stocktake' or 'checklist' of on-farm practices that relate to the Framework's principles and criteria. In developing the manual, the importance of testing, listening and refining it with producers to build on what's already being done on-farm is important, rather than assuming the starting point for manual users was 'zero'. For example, wet season spelling (resting) is commonly implemented to allow pasture to replenish root reserves, maximise seed production and fast track seedling establishment.

### Intended use of the Framework in the future:

In working through the CGC Program and engagement with producers it became clear that Gulf Savannah NRM can help normalise the use of and language within Frameworks such as the AASF to ultimately increase their use in the future.

In addition to the AASF being a trusted reference point, other important considerations for Gulf Savannah NRM in the CGC Program and in using the Framework in the future, will be:

- The frequency and severity of climate variability that is impacting all production systems and the resilience of primary production businesses is reinforcing the importance of cross commodity and collaborative RD&E and initiatives such as the CGC Program.
- Producers are seeking to understand and benchmark, in the local context, the cost trade-off between healthy natural capital ecosystems and productivity and profitability gains. The AASF doesn't currently dig into costs or benefits, although case studies are helping build this evidence base.
- Being able to demonstrate and communicate sustainable production practices to meet increasing reporting and consumer expectations (i.e through evidence based or trusted data sources) is going to be critical to producers in the CGC Program – now though, on-farm metrics aren't universally agreed or captured, so producers aren't able to measure performance and benchmark against their peers to compare production practices and outcomes.
- A need to keep abreast of potential ecosystem services and natural capital market opportunities that delivering sustainability outcomes may provide.

For additional information on the CGC program please visit – <https://crcna.com.au/>



The Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA) is leading and funding through government and industry funds to support science based research and development in northern Australia over 10 years: 2017 to 2027. Investments are developing new technologies, products and services which address industry issues unique to northern Australia.



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