

Preface

There is a rich and extensive history of research into factors that encourage farmers to change their land management practices, or inhibit them from doing so. Many clear and important lessons have been learnt, but surprisingly, these are often apparently unknown or ignored by organisations that attempt to influence the decisions of farmers and other rural landholders.

The origin of this book was a meeting of Australian social researchers held in May 2001 to discuss their priorities for work within a new national research centre, the Cooperative Research Centre for Plant-Based Management of Dryland Salinity. Three of the contributors to this book (Pannell, Curtis and Barr) were present at the meeting, which agreed that the priority for the new centre was not to conduct new research into adoption, but to review synthesise and communicate existing knowledge in a way that would be useful to managers and biological scientists in the centre. The team was expanded to include Vancley, Marshall and Wilkinson, and proceeded over the next several years to prepare an interdisciplinary review paper, 'Understanding and promoting adoption of conservation practices by rural landholders', which ultimately appeared in the *Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture* in October 2006.

As well as being useful to the research centre, we found that the paper was of great interest to many others. It rapidly rose to the top of the journal's list of most downloaded papers and has since been cited over 80 times.

Given that there was little new in the paper, we were surprised at this level of interest. Clearly there was an unmet demand for this information. To respond further to this demand and to celebrate the success of the review paper, we organised a national workshop in Melbourne in November 2008 (with a sequel in Perth in July 2009). Again, we were surprised by the level of interest, finding that we had to move the event to a much larger venue to accommodate the number of delegates who registered for the Melbourne meeting (over 400).

Given the continuing intense interest, the broadened team, now including Kaine and Llewellyn, agreed that we would capture the event in a variety of ways: as audio recordings, video recordings and PowerPoint files, all of which were made available on the internet after the event (www.ruralpracticechange.org). In addition, we agreed to prepare a book, to allow each of the team to expand on their particular areas of interest and to present findings and insights from recent research.

Once again, the team was expanded to cover particular issues in more depth (Fulton and McGowan) and various co-authors (Bewsell, Cooksey, Mendham and Wright) were also involved. The result is this book.

Throughout, there are terms used that are common to this field of endeavor but which may be unfamiliar to some readers. In Chapter 1, we have provided a concise definition with the first instance of each such term.

We are grateful to many organisations and individuals for their support for the various elements of this campaign to improve knowledge about this research and its implications. The Cooperative Research Centre for Plant-Based Management of Dryland Salinity and its successor, the Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre, provided the impetus and