



Working with Landholders – Keeping the Gate Open

With competing land use pressures, land access is increasingly challenging for explorers, and can rapidly halt the exploration program if not implemented with adequate thought and commitment. A culture of respect for landholders and the community is paramount in establishing and maintaining good relationships.



Background

Malachite Resources Limited has been exploring in Eastern Australia since 1997. During this time, the exploration team has built up expertise in land access and community engagement matters, based on a corporate culture of understanding and respect of the landholders and the local community. This strategy is based on initial one-on-one meetings with landholders (and sometimes their families), providing an opportunity for both parties to discuss the proposed exploration program and any impacts it will have on the farmer's land and agricultural business. Listening and responding to farmers' views and concerns is an important aspect of building a sustainable relationship with landholders. Explorers must recognise that fostering good relations with farmers is fundamental to the success of an exploration program.

Establishing Positive Relations with Landholders

Good landholder relations can take months or years to build, but only seconds to destroy, so they must be carefully handled with an ingrained culture of respect from the Board right down to the field technicians. Without this culture in place, there is a high risk that at some point in the exploration program the gate will be locked and access will be denied. Some key concepts for successfully dealing with landholders are:

- Recognise that farming is a business, and in most circumstances our exploration activities will disrupt that business to varying degrees
- The explorer's employees and those of its contractors must recognise that they are essentially 'guests' on the farmer's property, and should behave accordingly.

Before the first contact with a landholder:

- Read the local newspaper, 'The Land' newspaper and visit the NSW Farmers' website to become aware of local and national farming issues
- Familiarise yourself with local issues, particularly those that might affect the relevant farmer.

When making the first contact (usually a telephone call), be aware that:

- The main purpose of the call is to introduce yourself and your company, and to arrange a time and place to meet to discuss the exploration program and its potential impact on the farmer's land and business
- Remember the Golden Rule: You only get one chance to make a first impression, so make sure in your first phone call and first meeting that you do give a good impression of yourself and your company (e.g. "Have I called you at a bad time?")
- Farms are commonly run as partnerships and family businesses, so anyone who answers the phone at the farmer's property may be an owner in the business, so treat them with due respect
- By explaining any connection you personally have with farming, the farmer may be more relaxed about talking with you
- By listening to the farmer's views and concerns, you will place yourself in a better position to discuss these in an informed manner when you meet the farmer.



The first meeting with a farmer is critical to building a good and sustainable relationship, so keep in mind:

- The importance of arriving for the meeting on time – like you, most farmers are busy people and do not like to be kept waiting. First impressions continue, so dress neatly and behave with understanding and respect.
- Put yourself in his/her position – how would you respond if a stranger telephoned you and asked for access to your land to conduct activities which may impact on your family and business?
- Listen carefully to all that the farmer says, particularly any concerns he/she raises with you.
- A good way to start building an enduring one-on-one relationship with the farmer is to endeavour to find a common personal interest with the farmer (e.g. interest in a particular football team, cricket player etc.)
- It is important to establish how much (or how little) the farmer understands about the actual exploration process, and the physical impact it may have on his land. Use our Fact Sheets and an album of photographs of the different exploration techniques to inform the farmer.
- Explain the proposed exploration program and the need for a land access agreement and explain their rights.
- Leave the farmer with a letter of introduction from the company (including all relevant names and contact numbers), a copy of the draft *Land Access Arrangement for Mineral Exploration* and related documents. Ensure you explain the agreement and their rights.
- Learn as much as possible about the farmer's business plan in the area you wish to explore (e.g. timing of cropping activities, stock grazing and stock movements, lambing and shearing times etc.), and as far as possible try to schedule your exploration activities to cause the least disruption to farming activities.
- Find out how frequently that farmer wants to be contacted about your activities – should you call him/her before every time you enter the property or just at the start of each work program?

Maintaining Positive Relations with Landholders

- Most important is to continue to build on the level of trust and respect already established.
- Achieve this by always doing what you say you are going to do, and immediately advise the farmer if there are any changes to what you have already told him or her.
- Ensure that every employee and contractor who enters the property behaves and operates responsibly and is aware of all relevant components in the access agreement. Aim to have the person who makes the first contact with the farmer as the one to liaise with the farmer as the exploration program proceeds. This will greatly strengthen the working relationship between the company and the farmer for the future.
- Starting staged rehabilitation works as soon as possible is a visual demonstration of your company's commitment to putting the farmer's land back in good order.
- Paying compensation ahead of the due date (if possible) is another way to demonstrate your bona fides to the farmer.
- If practical, any form of 'in kind' assistance will be appreciated by the farmer (e.g. replace an old gate or grade a track).
- You, your employees and contractors should work to build a reputation with local landholders as a good neighbour in the district.
- Consider holding a community event (e.g. a BBQ or an open day) to meet your neighbours and listen to their comments and any concerns they may have.
- Exceeding the farmer's expectations is a good way to build trust, respect and understanding.

A positive and sustainable relationship with landholders can only be built on trust and respect. It is critical to get it right from the beginning.

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