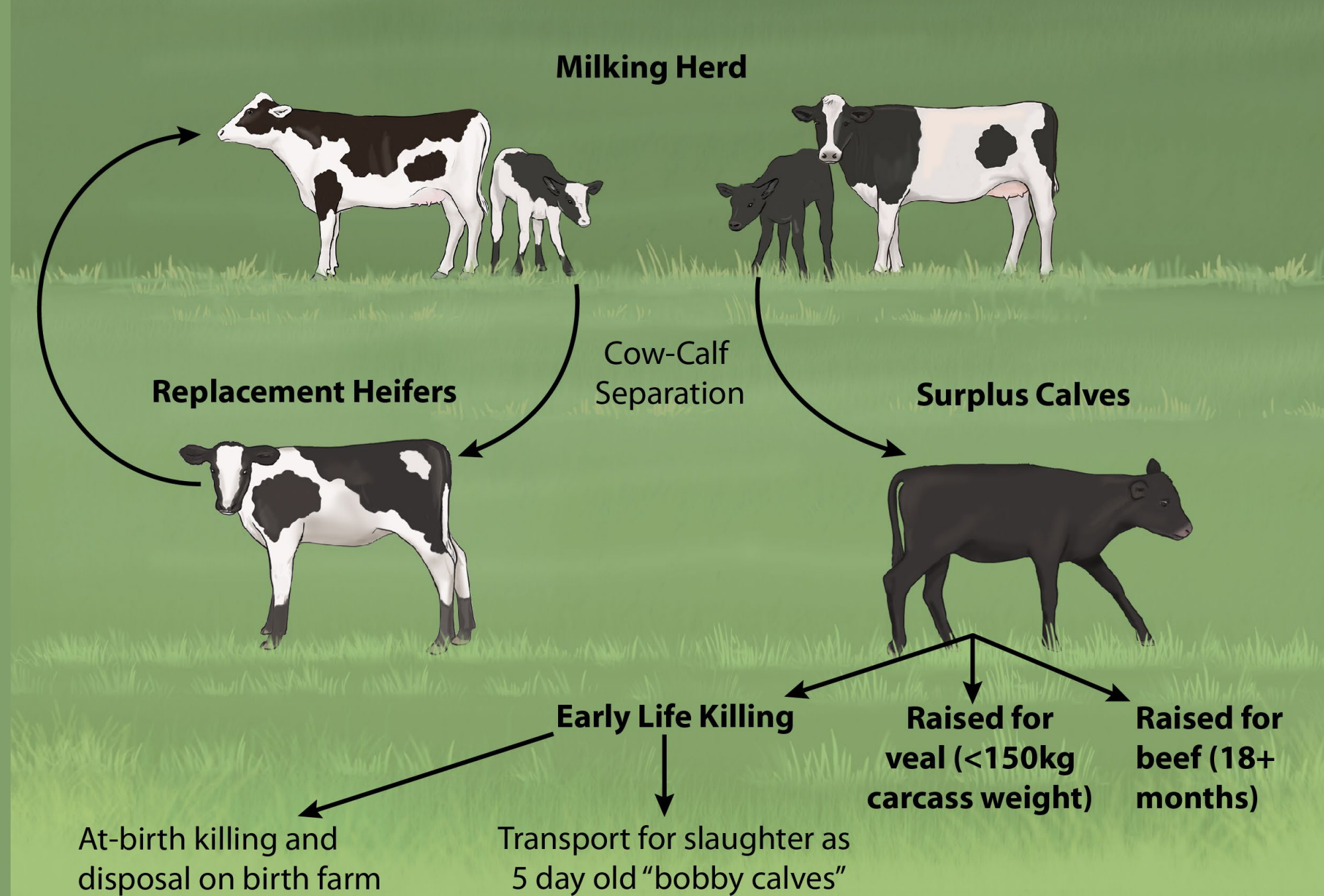
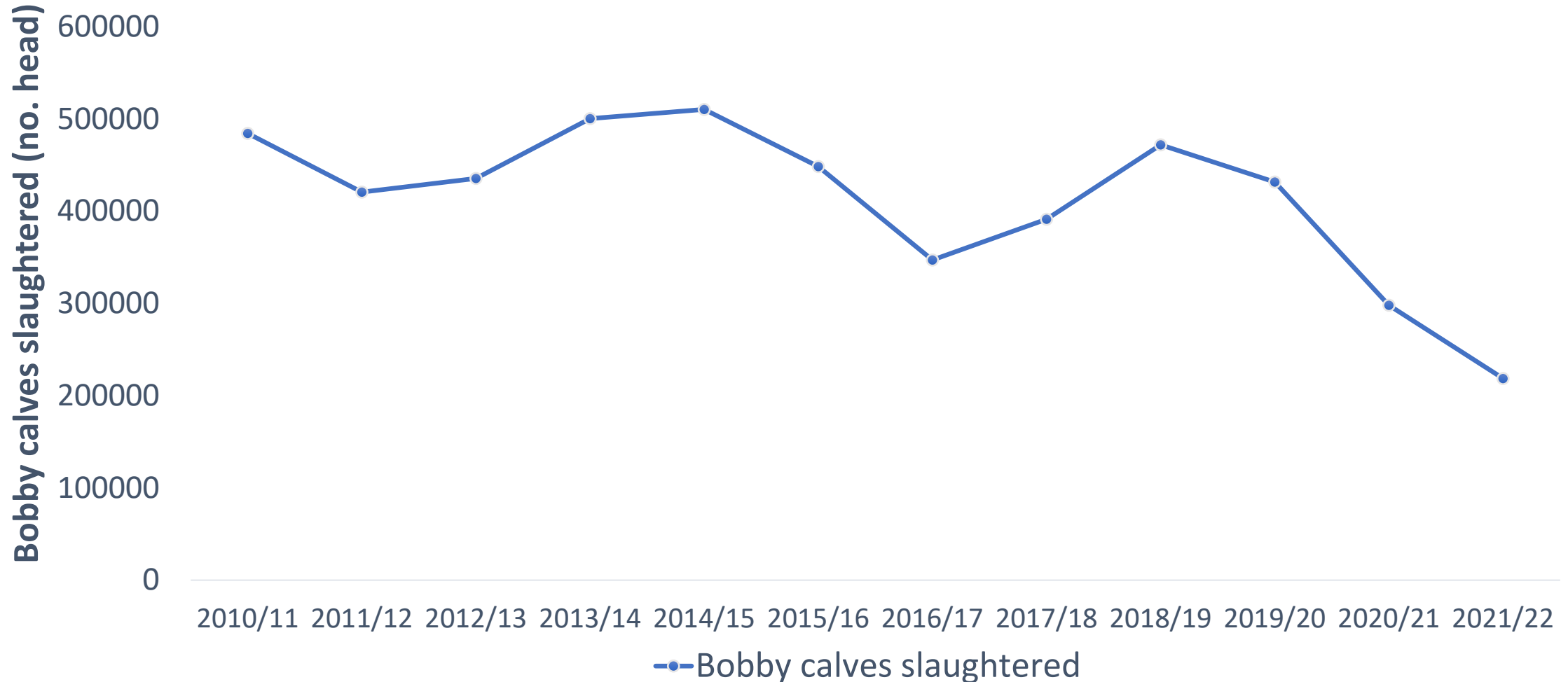


‘The advice? Think bigger’: Community perspectives on dairy farming, including surplus calves – an Australian focus group study

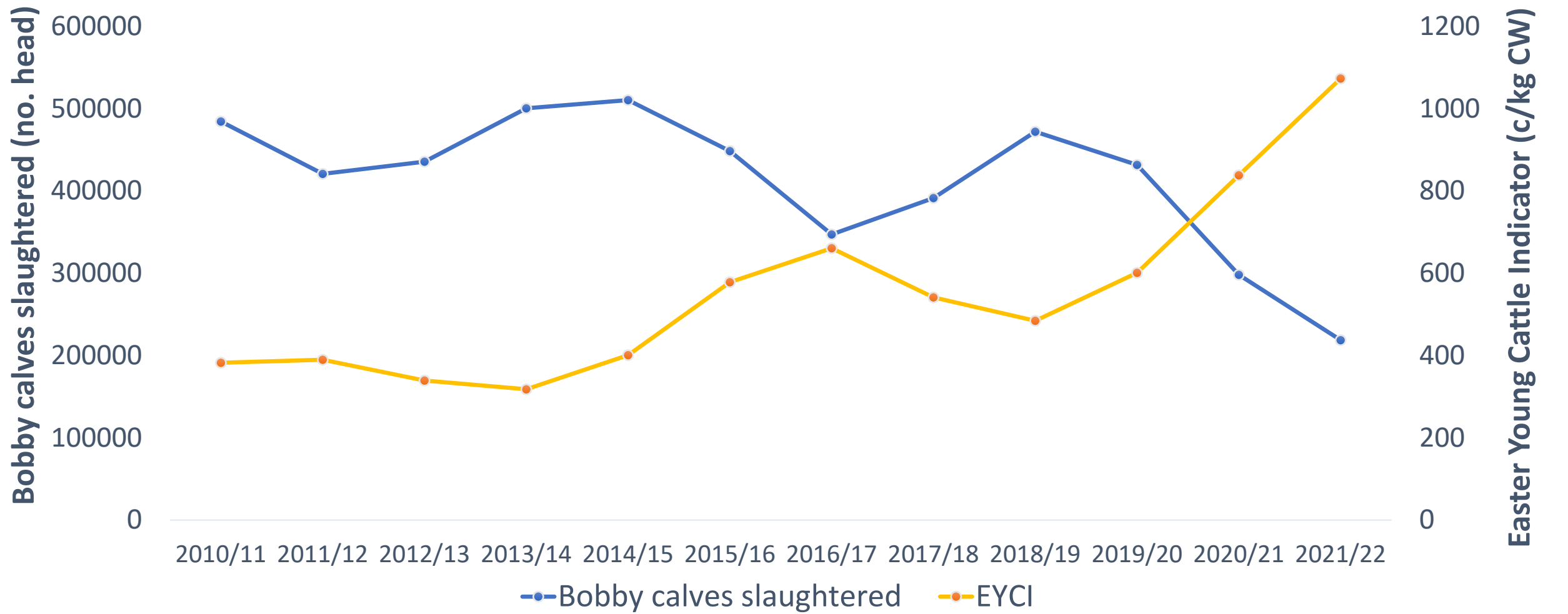
Sarah E. Bolton*, Bianca Vandresen, Marina A. G. von Keyserlingk



Bobby calf slaughter (AUS)



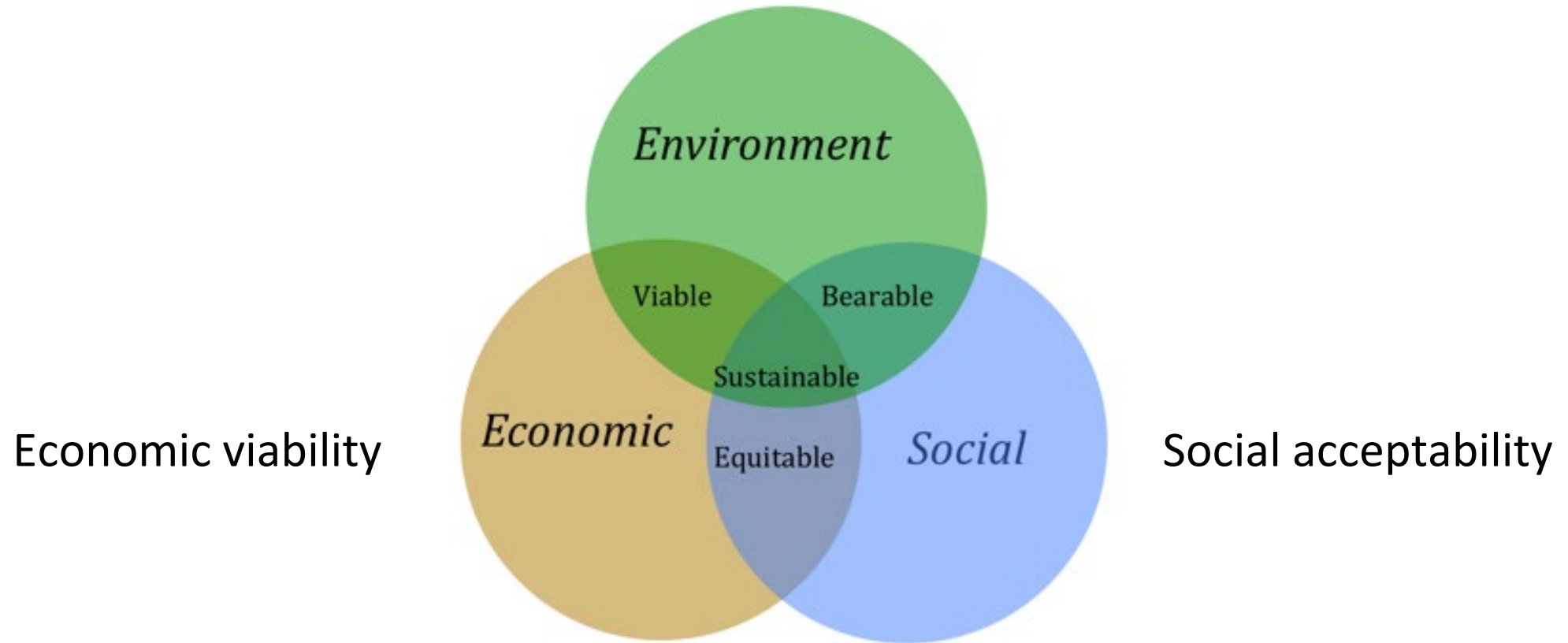
Bobby calf slaughter vs beef commodity price (AUS)



Sustainability – what does it mean?



Environmental impact



Complex or ‘wicked’ problems



Many stakeholders

Often with different versions of what the problem is → lack of ownership

Not stable, interconnected

Often multi-causal with evolving driving forces

Involve behaviour change

And/or gaining the commitment of individuals

Socially complex

Social complexity rather than technical complexity is what overwhelms traditional problem solving

Tackling complex or 'wicked' problems



Research that attempts to break the problem down into disciplinary parts is insufficient alone

Tackling complex or 'wicked' problems



Research that attempts to break the problem down into disciplinary parts is insufficient alone



Requires understanding and accounting for the needs of all stakeholders, including the public and the animals

Tackling complex or ‘wicked’ problems



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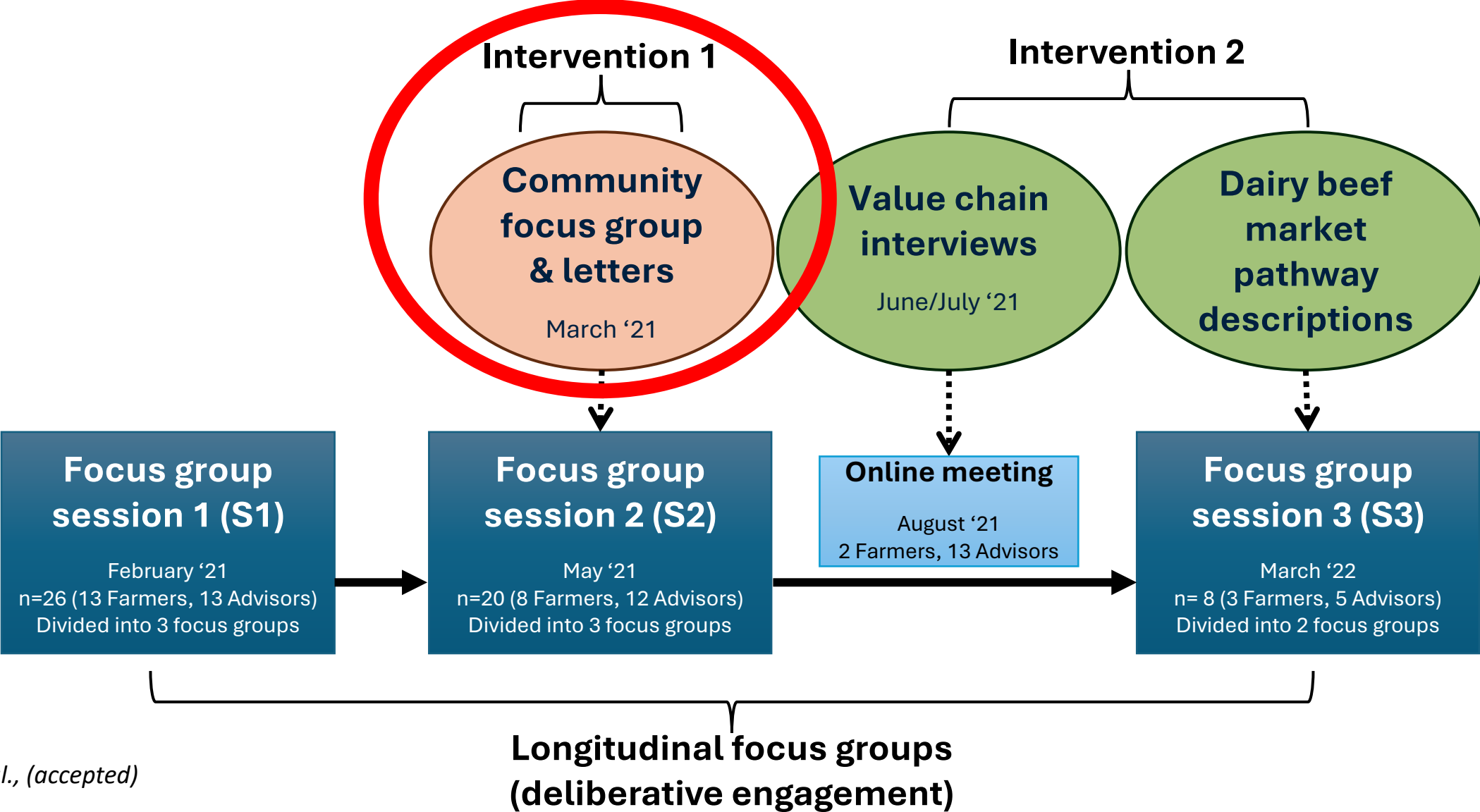


Requires understanding and accounting for the needs of all stakeholders, including the public and the animals



Participatory methodologies: involving different stakeholders in agenda-setting, decision making, or policy forming activities (e.g., deliberative engagement)

Using a participatory framework to address sustainable surplus calf management



Aim: To gain an in-depth understanding of Australian public attitudes towards early life killing of surplus calves



Methods:

- Recruited 24 participants, aiming for broad spread of demographics (age, gender identity, income), variation in attitudes to dairy, the environment, & social issues
- Included 4 vegans, 3 vegetarians, 3 with connection to dairy industry
- 3 x 3-hour focus groups (8 participants per group)
- Step-by-step approach: asked for perspectives on sustainability, animal welfare, then surplus calves
- Qualitative data submitted to inductive thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun 2017)

Results



Animal ag. Industry

- Sustainability
- Farming practices & animal welfare
- Farmers

Impacts & reflections as citizens

- Ethical considerations
- Consumer behaviours

Animal ag. industry

- Sustainability
- Farming practices & animal welfare
- Farmers

“I’m just oblivious in my own little world [...] the male, the little calves. I didn’t realise that they killed them.” (FG3)

“I hadn’t honestly ever thought about it, never thought about that aspect of tearing calves away from mothers [...].” (FG2)

“a farmer does care about his or her animals, I truly believe that, and I think that could they raise the male cows in the background if they only had the money” (FG2)



Animal ag. industry

- Sustainability
- Farming practices & animal welfare
- Farmers

“[...] dairy farmers...they work extremely hard for what they get [...] and [there is] a lot of risk [...]. All of that time and all of that money that they put into [the farm] ... is for nothing sometimes” (FG1).

“the dairy farmer [...] is so misunderstood [...]. The criticism that they [deal with] when it comes to [...] activism [...] is so harsh.” (FG1)



Impacts & reflections as citizens

- Ethical considerations
- Consumer behaviours

“I’m sort of rethinking why do I consume so much dairy? [...] It might be easier to go ‘oh well I like the taste of oat milk, I’ll just do that’ because now I hear more bad things about the dairy industry, [...] [learning about early life killing of surplus calves] might be the final push to not consume it anymore or consume a lot less of it.” (FG3)

“We know a lot of what goes on behind the scenes and I know for me, I do block it out and I just buy the product.” (FG1)

“We’re desensitised, everything is bad, everyone is out for money, the dairy industry is just one of many doing bad things. [...] to me it’s just another thing that is so complicated in life [...] and sometimes you just want to [...] ignore it which is a terrible thing.” (FG3)



Conclusions

- Low awareness of early life killing of surplus calves and cow-calf separation
- Once made aware, widespread rejection of these practices
- Acknowledgement that farmers have a hard life, they care about their animals, but must prioritize economics
- Relationship with dairy – a journey where a love of product and empathy for farmers often at odds with feelings of guilt, fatigue, and dissonance relating to impacts on animals and the environment.



Thank you

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