



Australian Government

Cotton Research and
Development Corporation

FINAL REPORT

Part 1 - Summary Details

Please use your TAB key to complete Parts 1 & 2.

CRDC Project Number: CA1803

Project Title: Grower RDE Advisory Panels – R&D Consultation

Project Commencement Date: 1/07/2017 Project Completion Date: 30/06/2018

Part 2 – Contact Details

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Part 3 – Final Report

Background

1. Outline the background to the project.

The Cotton Australia grower RD&E Advisory Panels provide a critical role within the cotton industry by providing practical advice on research, development and extension needs and priorities. This advice is important guidance to CRDC in its formation of five-year Strategic R&D Plans, Annual Operational Plans, Expressions of Interest for RD&E and resultant CRDC decisions as to project investments.

Cotton Australia facilitates advisory panels that are aligned with the CRDC strategic plan priorities. The panels consist of up to 40 grower, consultant and ginners members from every cotton growing region in Australia.

Objectives

2. List the project objectives (from the application) and the extent to which these have been achieved.

Objective 1. The project facilitates engagement with stakeholders for prioritising and capturing advice on RD&E issues.

Stakeholders engagement has centred around preparation for, implementation of, and provision of advice within the;

- 2017 November meeting - provision of advice to CRDC regarding project investment within the 2018/19 investment cycle; and
- 2018 Research Priority forum - provision of advice to CRDC regarding identification of key strategic industry RDE priorities and subsequent development of expressions of interest for the 2019/20 investment cycle.
- 2019-2023 CRDC Strategic Plan – provision of advice regarding the draft 2019-2023 CRDC strategic plan.

The processes around stakeholder engagement continue to undergo review by the CRDC Program Managers, in consultation with the Cotton Australia Policy Team. This review process has allowed identification of opportunities to ensure continuous improvement of the process for stakeholder engagement, and has also facilitated implementation of initiatives to capitalise on these opportunities.

Objective 2. The project provides for the travel and meeting expenses reasonably incurred by Cotton Australia in connection with RD&E Advisory Panel consultations with CRDC.

All travel and meeting expenses reasonably incurred by Cotton Australia in connection with the RDE Advisory Panel consultations in November 2017 and May 2018 were provided under this project.

Methods

3. Detail the methodology and justify the methodology used. Include any discoveries in methods that may benefit other related projects.

November meeting 2017, Sydney

Cotton Australia Member Representatives (through the Advisory Panels) provided advice to CRDC on project proposals received in response to the 2018/19 Expressions of Interest (EOIs). The meeting location and agenda were organised by Cotton Australia in consultation with CRDC.

The November meeting focused more strongly on grower engagement and panel governance during the in-person discussions. This was implemented in response to feedback indicating that pre-meeting teleconferences were not sufficiently engaging.

Additional time was afforded for in-person panel discussions during the 2017 November meeting to address feedback indicating that insufficient time was provided on the agenda to allow each Panel to deliver effective advice, particularly for the Farmers and Industry panel.

CGA priority workshops and survey

The 2018 Cotton strategic R&D Forum was preceded by a series of local CGA RDE prioritisation workshops & surveys facilitated by Cotton Australia. The aims of these workshops were to;

- Ensure all growers have a say on investment of statutory research levies across the Farmers, Industry, Customers and People panel themes
- Provide all Member Representatives with a list of CGA research priorities to inform discussion for the CRDC strategy forum
- Provide all CGA members with feedback on CRDC investments against CGA RD&E priorities identified in Feb-May 2017
- Ensure CRDC investment in relevant and practicable research opportunities

These research priorities were collated and formed the basis of discussions at the Research priority forum.

CRDC R&D Forum, June 2018, Sydney

Cotton Australia Member Representatives (through the Advisory Panels) identified and prioritise key strategic RDE gaps for investment consideration across the life of the 2018-2023 CRDC strategic plan, and for the development of 2019/20 EOIs.

A revised process was developed for the 2018 Research Priority Forum, based on informal feedback obtained following the 2017 Strategy Forum and needs identified by the CRDC Program Managers and Cotton Australia Policy Team. Importantly, appointment of an independent facilitator delivered significant improvements for the strategic forum:

- Improved engagement of Member Reps.
- Improved clarity for agenda development in true partnership between CRDC and Cotton Australia.
- Clear advice regarding strategic research investments over the life of the 2018-2023 CRDC strategic plan.
- Clear advice regarding CRDC investments for the 2019/20 procurement round.
- Positive feedback from meeting participants that their concerns and suggestions had been heard and acknowledged.
- Improved integration into discussion of research priorities collected previously from various industry forums including CGA workshops, industry Committees, science-to-policy priorities, and discipline-based research reviews.

Meeting timing, location and agenda were organised by CRDC in consultation with Cotton Australia.

Outcomes

4. Describe how the project's outputs will contribute to the planned outcomes identified in the project application. Describe the planned outcomes achieved to date.

The project has delivered on strengthening connections between stakeholder RD&E priorities and industry investment for improved profitability, sustainability and competitiveness.

Advice on stakeholder RDE needs and priorities

Stakeholder RD&E needs and priorities were preliminarily identified through a series of CGA RDE priority workshops and an online survey. These priorities were reported against existing CRDC projects and then presented to the Cotton Australia Member Representatives for consideration and discussion at the 2018 Research Priority Forum.

This revised process for identification of stakeholder RDE emerging/new priorities has enabled representation of industry wide, as well as geographically specific RDE priorities across the entire CRDC investment portfolio. This has also delivered a framework to ensure that every cotton grower has the opportunity to identify research priorities for investment consideration.

Feedback has been obtained to identify opportunities to improve the process for the next investment round:

- Efficiency gains are anticipated once an engaging and effective process is developed for delivery of the Research Priority Forum in partnership between Cotton Australia and CRDC.
- Strategic in-person engagement of CGAs, and utilisation of existing industry mechanisms (such as field days) to build a more efficient and effective stakeholder engagement plan for provision of research advice and reporting against prior investments.
- Engagement challenges will be addressed through enhanced facilitation, communication and further consideration of workshop timings.

Advice on RDE project proposals

Member Representatives provided advice on RDE project proposals through FRP deliberation at the 2017 November meeting. Advice was not provided for RDE project proposals that sat outside of the FRP process, such as projects that were directly negotiated, or funded through the Rural R&D for Profit Programme.

Written report

This final written report was provided to CRDC in June 2017.

5. Please report on any:-

- Feedback forms used and what the results were
- The highlights for participants or key learnings achieved
- The number of people participating and any comments on level of participation

November Meeting 2017

Formal feedback was gathered regarding the R&D Panel engagement process, at a teleconference of Panel Chairs, CRDC Program Managers, Industry Panel representatives, and Cotton Australia Policy Staff (Table 1). Unfortunately, the process for formal feedback was inadvertently omitted from the Cotton Australia general meeting, as previously planned.

Table 1. Feedback regarding the 2017 November meeting.

CRDC	CA	Chairs	Industry Panel
Overall impressions			
- Increased time = more in-depth discussions. Energy level on Wednesday morning was good. Feedback was helpful. - Time was good. Good briefing.		- Good briefing for Chairs. Felt more prepared and armed. - Discussion was more of an industry view as a result of good briefing.	
Provision of background materials & briefings			
- Preparation & briefing helpful. Good understanding of expectations on the day. Clear understanding of what we wanted to achieve. - Dossier of information useful. Was information sufficient or too much? Some panel members hadn't been through all material.	- Talk through the panel so they know to read the materials, know how it works. Ensure everyone is coming, making sure the proxy has the background material. Short teleconference two weeks out. - Deal with proxies. Tricky to manage late proxies. Difficult to give one-on-one attention. Resources. An option to dial into a teleconference?	- Extra preparation for briefing docs – RMs and chairs. Chairs better prepared to lead a discussion. - A lot more discussion – industry view rather than business view. Improvement.	- Summary document good right info, CRDC comments useful) - Summary FRP to indicate whether a continuing project/capacity
Time allocation & process for Panel discussions (FRP evaluation & relevant updates)			
Increased time = more discussion. Wed morning energy was better. Good understanding. FRP feedback level of detail good. - Increased time. Chairs had a good sense of what was supposed to be happening.		- Panel Chairs ran through overview in opening remarks. - Customers Panel needed the extra time at breakfast. Got it done in the time allocated.	- Time allocation was appropriate for most panels. - Farmers finished slightly early on Wednesday but otherwise good timing.

- Have some of the regional managers involved in the process to help carry some of the load. Right people in the right place at the right time – help facilitate.			- Increase fluidity for MR to move between panels (particularly where a lot of FRPs)
Ability to participate meaningfully & governance			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where are we up to the investment process, what does the investment portfolio look like? Need a good understanding of what research projects are looking at what aspects? MR to know what we're looking to achieve – focus of new strategic plan. Better understanding & positioning of portfolio and how each FRP fits into the portfolio. - Strong supporter of governance. Aware of what's expected of them. How do you implement that on the day? – for the Chairs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reps provided with a good briefing pack. Check over briefing pack. Different CGAs operate different ways. Members Memo important to get out. - Strategic review earlier in the year – Need to represent the CGA but it's a collegiate approach as growers. - regional needs belong in the May forum. - Are the terms of reference important for the Member Organisations to understand, as well as the Member Representatives? - Customer Panel – need ASHA representation, especially where LD, Namoi, QC don't show up. - Targeted engagement with ginning reps. Need to help them feedback to ACSA - Adam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MR need to be briefed better, context framed up better. Customers starting to understand the portfolio now (similar feedback for People Panel). - Panel needs stronger corporate governance (TOR, briefing, MR representing industry not business or region, succession planning) - CGA perspective: brief MR when they are appointed. Representing your region at the general meeting, participating in the panels (which is a different role to the regional rep role.). - Governance important for sustainability/NRM portfolio - Difficult to participate and chair and take notes – can we use Cotton Australia Regional Managers to be note takers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preferred face to face than telecon - Knowledge base is building, adding value to industry - Need better connections with researchers (discipline reviews?) - Panel intro: clearer where we are in the process & role of panel
Provision of feedback to General Meeting			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can we electronically capture feedback and present back to the audience? - Needs to be one response per EOI. - Discipline reviews are a good opportunity to bring the regional grower/consultant perspective into the strategic research priorities – with the researcher x panel interaction. - Need to focus on regional research questions through the discipline review. Strategic forum can lose regional concerns in the overall context. Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback used to be done when every grower got every FRP, but used to only make decisions on Panel FRPs. Growers switched off. Can we fill out the spreadsheet on the day and print it off? Give everyone an opportunity to look over it at lunch. Do we need a chance to have a final say and if so, how do we do it better? - CGA needs input into all the panels through the strategic session - Improve process for getting CGA feedback into 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficult reading through the FRPs for the Panel Chair Report, is that of value? Can we do it in a better way? Get's a bit drawn out. Still need feedback because MR can't be across all 4 panels – cover all bases. 	

conducted would have greater application to regional areas. - Explore discipline reviews & strategic forum for regional issues.	the EOI process.		
Provision of final Panel advice to CRDC			
- Time for discussion did help with the advice that was given. The direction as well as the how and why. - Advice was clear. Pdf summary document was useful but also liked the spreadsheet for the detailed advice – to determine the specific advice.	- Missed the survey on the day - Background for FRP makes it easier, rather than trying to draw it out on the day – provides context, saves on time. - Comments before-hand are not as valuable as discussion. May not need to provide comments before-hand. - Having input of CRDC Program Manager is great.	- Panel reps to provide comment beforehand? Might be too much work.	
Other			
	- Work with CRDC to keep the Panel informed of commissioned work. Send a note through to the Panel. - Nicola to work with Ian to provide continued feedback.		

Strategic R&D Forum 2018

Formal feedback regarding the 2018 Cotton strategic research form was collected by CRDC and Cotton Australia at the conclusion of the Forum. This feedback was not available at the time of submitting this final report.

Ongoing grower engagement

Feedback was received from Cotton Growers' Association via the 2018 online R&D priority survey, calling for a more engaging process for obtaining broader research priorities, as well as using existing forums (e.g. field days) to capture research priorities.

The following responses were provided when CGA members were asked *"What could be done to improve the process for providing feedback on research priorities?"*

- I am of the view that more research should be done at the local level with local issues identified, discussed, prioritized, researched and extended locally with locally based researchers, extension officers and growers.
- Emails that are broken down and more one pagers that highlight the really important stuff. Catch ups at the CGA meetings are also very good.
- I am happy with everything currently but if anything, more face to face contact would be beneficial.
- Yearly survey and updates on Project status from CRDC.
- Need to get in front of the people e.g. workshops &/or meetings. The CGA meetings are not capturing the wider cotton growing community. Some of the bigger consultants and growers are not engaged in the CGAs.
- We are constantly providing feedback. If things are not implemented for various, valid reasons then people can think that they are not being heard. Maybe if we ask for feedback

and it is not accepted we need to feedback to people why it wasn't a priority or explain that it is already funded or doesn't meet guidelines.

- Summary research priority document forwarded to CGAs following initial meeting
- Ask farmers directly and field days.
- Annual post-season roadshow around the various areas where CRDC quickly presents what is being done now and then its put back on the group to provide priorities. This survey is OK also Local Cotton Australia Research Committee members to gauge priorities from locals.
- It's hard to offer ideas where one doesn't know where we've been, what's happening now and the vast array of world research which may shape a view of options for improvement. Part of the onus is up to me to understand where we have come from and what CRDC and all of the other industry organizations are doing, but support for growers to see how other countries develop priorities can be an eye opener into opportunities/priorities that are worthy of discussion in AU. That is, grower panels being financially supported to meet with industry players around the world with the express purpose of participating domestically in developing our industry. It's hard to know what you don't know.
- Needs to be gathered at a quieter time in the season. As well as surveys could be more one on one or small group discussion groups run jointly by CottonInfo REO and CA Regional Manager.
- Connect researchers and growers at AWM meetings etc.
- At a standing valley meeting i.e., field days it should be included in the structure of that day - whether that is a survey handed out on the day, it just seems that timing each year is the reason it is so hard to gather this information.
- Working well with great adoption rates Keep consultants in the loop.
- Conduct & provide support for local case studies.

Budget

6. Describe how the project's budget was spent in comparison with the application budget. Outline any changes and provide justification.

The project budget was spent in accordance with the application budget. No changes are required.

Conclusion

7. Provide an assessment of the likely impact of the results and conclusions of the research project for the cotton industry. What are the take home messages?

The project enabled effective stakeholder engagement for provision of advice to CRDC on industry RD&E priorities for investment.

The majority of stakeholders engaged in the process saw extremely high value in consultation around investment priorities for statutory research levies, and industry ownership of RDE processes and outcomes.

Implementation of a review process for activities undertaken in the project has allowed identification of opportunities to deliver continuous improvement for stakeholder engagement.

Improvements for strategic research investment advice could be achieved by focusing engagement of the growing, consulting, research & development, extension, policy, and advocacy sectors of the Australian cotton industry as well as external influencers on a range of long-term industry challenges. Existing industry meetings, reviews and field days could be better utilised to provide scientific and practical advice to CRDC that delivers on strategic outcomes.