

Minutes of CQ RAC Meeting – 23 March, 2010

Biloela Research Station, Biloela

meeting commenced at 9:30am

1. RAC introduction

The co-ordinator introduced the new three-year RAC term: 2010 to 2012.

2. Chairman's Welcome and Confirmation of Agenda

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed the members and guests.

3. Attendance

Members: G. Spackman (Chairman), A. Farquharson, M. Ballentine, P. Durkin, N. Gregg,
M. MacTaggart, D. Storey, D. Jordan, R. Sequeira

Nominees: A. Ward (DEEDI), J. Sheppard (GRDC), S. Chapman (CSIRO), D. Lund (GRFL)

Guests: D. Howard (grain grower), N. Becker (grain grower), L. Fairweather (grain grower)

Co-ordinator: N. Jensen

4. Apologies

C. Dunne, S. Eden, C. Douglas, P. McIntosh, D. Midmore

5. Election of Chairman

With the commencement of the new RAC term the existing Chairman, Graham Spackman, stood aside and nominations were called for the position of Chairman.

Graham Spackman was nominated (moved D. Lund, seconded M. MacTaggart) and elected unanimously and unopposed as Chairman for the coming year.

6. Confirmation of Minutes (20 August, 2009)

Confirmed

As a follow up from Minute 8.2 ("Fresh Approach" for grains – review of QDPI Grains Research Facilities), it was noted that the grains industry in Queensland needs DEEDI to talk openly and frankly about the planned role of each of the existing research stations, and to provide information about what services the Queensland Government will provide to industry.

7. Business

7.1. NVT

Dr Ward reported that DEEDI and GRDC are currently finalizing a contract which will see DEEDI run NVT for wheat, durum, barley and chickpea in Queensland. Peter Keys will co-ordinate NVT in Central Queensland (CQ), and Douglas Lush will co-ordinate the trials in Southern Queensland.

DEEDI have also been contracted by GRDC to provide a wheat disease screening service in conjunction with NVT – screening yellow spot, crown rot, root lesion nematodes and root rot. An agreement is in place for GRDC to fund the production of the hard copy of the Wheat Variety Guide for five years.

Mr Sheppard reported that GRDC are planning to form an NVT advisory committee in CQ – to help with trial locations and planting times. RAC grower and consultant members should be able to nominate to become members of the advisory committee. The advisory committee is expected to be in place for the 2010 season.

Action items:

- Regarding the NVT advisory committee, check with GRDC to see if the existing CQ Farming Systems advisory committee could also serve as the CQ NVT advisory committee.
- Request information from DEEDI about the number and locations of NVT trials in Queensland.

- Write to DEEDI in their capacity as the new NVT service provider to draw to their attention the points from Minute 5.1 of the 20 August 2009 CQ RAC meeting.

7.2. National RD&E Framework

Dr Ward gave some background information and an update on the National RD&E Framework. The underlying principle is that the State Ministers for agriculture have decided that all States can't afford to fund RD&E in all areas of agriculture, so the various agricultural industries have been prioritized by each State. Some projects have already moved to a National focus, with one State taking the lead (e.g. dairy/Victoria).

The National Framework committee for grains is being led by GRDC and DAFWA. There are grower representatives on the National Framework committee for grains (e.g. Wayne Newton for the Northern Region), but they are bound by confidentiality restrictions. The National Framework committee for grains is close to finalizing an RD&E capacity audit, and plan for the future. For the Northern Region, the GRDC Northern Panel has developed a plan which will be released as a Discussion Paper.

There was discussion about how the National Framework Plans are being developed without real input from, or consultation with, grain growers or other parts of the grains industry.

Action item: write to the Chairman of GRFL to ask how the RAC can be more effectively engaged as plans like the National RD&E Framework and the GRDC's Northern Panel vision for the Northern Region are developed.

Information provided by Prof. Peter Sharp about developments at the University of Sydney's IA Watson Grains Research Centre in Narrabri was tabled. A significant development at the Centre is the construction of a ~\$6million International Grains Research building.

7.3. Queensland Government initiatives

a) "Fresh Approach" for Grains – research stations and infrastructure (Grains 2020).

It was noted that the "Fresh Approach" for Grains has been re-branded by the State Government as "Grains 2020", and the "Grains 2020" document was tabled.

Dr Ward reported that a position has been developed in relation to the future of the research stations involved in grains-related research, and it is just awaiting a Ministerial announcement. Also, with the new State Government departmental structure (DPI being incorporated within DEEDI), agriculture is now competing with industries such as mining for funding within the DEEDI super-department.

The RAC expressed frustration at the lack of real information available from Government about the proposed changes to research stations, the expected savings from the sale of research facilities, projected changes to staffing and DEEDI's planned future investment in grains RD&E.

b) QAAFI – Queensland Alliance in Agriculture and Food Innovation.

Dr Ward provided an update on the QAAFI Institute at the University of Queensland. UQ and DEEDI are developing QAAFI in order to strengthen agricultural research in Queensland, attract additional funding, and increase student numbers. Once established, about 40 DEEDI staff will become UQ staff (QAAFI staff). QAAFI will focus on three main areas: plant science, animal science and food technology. Some DEEDI staff who currently work in the area of grains RD&E are expected to become part of QAAFI.

7.4. National issues

a) Grains Levy Payers' Association

Mr Lund provided an update on national grain grower representation and developments since the Grains Council of Australia announced its imminent closure. Grain growers require a national representative body to fulfil a number of non-legislated and legislated roles, including the accountability of GRDC to growers (levy payers) under the *PIERD Act*. Because there are important RD&E functions for a national grain grower representative group, GRFL put together a Discussion Paper on the topic (in 2009) and, then in February 2010, a Check List outlining some key components of a new national

model. A business plan for a group called Grain Producers' Australia has been developed by an independent committee and that document should be distributed by the committee shortly.

b) Productivity Commission Review

It was noted that the Productivity Commission are currently holding an inquiry into the Rural Research and Development Corporations, including GRDC. The RAC will consider making a submission to the inquiry.

7.5. Wheat breeding – correspondence from AGT

The correspondence between GRFL and AGT regarding wheat breeding for Queensland was tabled. There was discussion about the importance of talking to AGT about CQ priorities.

Action item: write to AGT to invite a member of the breeding staff to address the next RAC meeting, and to walk through an NVT site if possible.

7.6. Dichlorvos

There was discussion about Dichlorvos – in particular about its use in controlling stored grain insect pests in circumstances that aren't fumigation *per se*: *i.e.* knockdown. It was agreed that the treatment of on-farm grain storages is an issue that the industry needs to address.

Action items:

- Write to DEEDI asking about alternatives to Dichlorvos for knockdown and disinfesting grain, machinery and equipment in the event that Dichlorvos is withdrawn; and assuming that there isn't a suitable substitute, to indicate the gravity of any decision to withdraw its use.
- To ask Graincorp what insecticide options there are that don't put sellers at risk of residue detection, and assuming that there isn't a suitable substitute for Dichlorvos, to indicate the gravity of any decision to withdraw its use.

8. RAC members' reports

RAC members reported to the meeting.

Comments included:

- Feathertop Rhodes grass is a serious problem in the region, as is summer grass.
- Sorghum plantings in the region were down.
- Low protein in the last season's wheat crops was most likely caused by a lack of secondary roots rather than a decline in fertility/nutrition.
- The previous season's winter crop demonstrated the importance of being able to deep plant winter cereals: only early planted, deep sown wheat crops were successful.
- Declining soil fertility is a concern in terms of farm viability, especially as the fertility decline is occurring at a time when fertilizer costs are rising.
- Flooding in the region had caused significant problems including lost crops, lost nitrogen and the spread of weeds.
- Chickpea seed for planting had been unobtainable for the past few weeks, which is symptomatic of a wider problem: companies with seed supply rights not keeping seed supplies in stock. With the seed sales of most varieties now being covered by the *Plant Breeders Rights Act 1994*, the lack of availability of seed through the official Licensees leaves growers in an impossible position.
- Council roadside guide-post spraying was contributing to the Feathertop Rhodes grass problem in the region, there being Feathertop Rhodes grass (and therefore a seedbank) at the majority of guideposts.

Dr Sequeira reported that the CQ Farming Systems (CQFS) project is doing on-farm trial work on management options for Feathertop Rhodes grass. He also reported on the development of a replacement for the CQFS project: a GRDC-funded crop sequencing project (CSP).

According to the GRDC requirements, the CSP:

- must have a steering committee (4 consultants, 3 growers and 1 GRDC representative);
- must work with agribusiness to deliver outcomes;
- must align with the region's priorities;
- must deliver a measurable practice change within three years or the project will be terminated.

The initial focus of the project will likely be on the management of weeds and nutrition. Dr Douglas provided a written report to the RAC, and it was tabled at the meeting.

9. Guest Speakers

9.1. Dr D. Jordan (DEEDI)

Dr Jordan made a presentation to the meeting about the National sorghum program, investment in sorghum research and sorghum research priorities.

Following the presentation, there was discussion about investment in sorghum research, the importance of the sorghum midge testing scheme, ergot resistance and staygreen.

10. Review of priority issues for the Central Queensland region

10.1. Priority Issues Paper

The CQ priority issues were reviewed and updated.

Some additional points of discussion included:

- Now that the wheat breeding effort is remote from the CQ region, early generation selection and evaluation needs to be undertaken in the region if adapted varieties are to be developed.
- If Tobacco Streak Virus could be controlled, sunflower would likely play a key role in the CQ farming system, especially when it comes to the management of Feathertop Rhodes grass.
- The potential for high resolution imaging from un-manned helicopters to provide value to agronomists.
- The value of improved weather forecasting.
- The need for integrated weed management workshops in Central Queensland – like the ones John Cameron has run in Southern Queensland.

10.2. Top 3 issues for the CQ region

- I. Grass weeds – Feathertop Rhodes grass and sweet summer grass.
- II. Soil fertility.
- III. Sorghum breeding.

11. RAC nominees' reports

Mr Sheppard reported to the meeting on points including:

- changes in the way the GRDC sees the grains RD&E pathway
- how the GRDC Northern Panel sets priorities
- a number of follow-up items including: NVT, the National RD&E Framework, barley breeding in the Northern Region, the RDC Productivity Commission Review, the GRDC Investment Plan, the GRDC website and the recent Northern Panel meeting which focused on sorghum research investment.
- the new Farming Systems model for delivering RD&E (e.g. a GOA or NGA type of arrangement for Central Queensland).

Dr Ward reported on a number of DEEDI projects:

- the CQ Farming Systems project, being developed with GRDC.
- crop protection projects, being developed with GRDC.
- a maize project, being developed with GRDC.
- an irrigated grains and cotton project with CRDC.

Dr Chapman tabled a report compiled by the four Queensland RAC CSIRO nominees, and highlighted a number of areas of current activity at CSIRO:

- Irrigated grains research in CQ, which is aimed at maximizing yield while avoiding lodging.
- CSIRO are involved in negotiations with GRDC and other research partners about the new Farming Systems projects in Queensland.
- The Sustainable Ecosystems group is beginning a new project this year to add value to the National Variety Trials – in particular, looking at gaining a better understanding of genotype x management interaction.
- A national research program for climate-ready cereals - evaluating wheat and sorghum for adaptation to high temperatures and elevated CO₂
- In the area of crown rot research, 14 crown rot resistant lines have been released by CSIRO to commercial wheat breeding companies.
- The entomology group at CSIRO is still leading the National Invertebrate Pest Initiative, and working with other groups on a project looking at pest suppressive landscapes and how to link IPM and natural resource management.

Mr Lund reported on GRFL activities including:

- Correspondence with the Queensland Government regarding recognition of grower equity in the Leslie Research Centre.
- The exploration of a grower-investor model for barley breeding in the Northern Region.
- Involvement in discussions about a new National Representative organization for grain growers – Grain Producers' Australia.
- Co-hosting (with CFI) a Northern Region grains RD&E industry forum in Toowoomba on 22 April.
- The resignation of the GRFL Executive Officer, effective 16 April.

The upcoming Australian Summer Grains Conference was mentioned. The Conference will be held on the Gold Coast on 21st - 24th June 2010.

12. Next meeting

Date: 24 August, 2010

Venue: Emerald

Speakers: AGT wheat breeder, and visit an NVT site.

13. Closure

Meeting closed at 4:15pm