



REVIEW OF THE FOUR QUEENSLAND RESEARCH  
ADVISORY COMMITTEES FOR GRAINS RESEARCH  
FOUNDATION LTD

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COMPLETED 31 JULY 2012  
BY CHRIS BAZLEY

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## Review of the Queensland Grains Research Advisory Committees

**Background:** At the GRFL meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2012, a decision was made to conduct an external review of the 4 Queensland Grain Research Advisory Committees (RACs)

The RACs were established in 1992 upon agreement by QGGA, QDPIF, CSIRO, Uni Qld and GRDC for the purpose of providing a 'one stop' grain industry forum for determining 'priority issues' for grain production and communicating these to research agencies. A Charter of Operation for the RACs was drawn up setting out membership, selection and responsibilities.

The RACs were first established as sub-committees of the Grain Research Foundation and then transferred to the Grains Research Foundation Ltd on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007.

The RACs were first externally reviewed in 1995. Since then there has been no reviews except small internal reviews in 2005 and 2010.

### Terms of Reference for External Review

1. Review the effectiveness of the RAC consultative arrangement for determining RDE priorities in Queensland, and in particular review:
  - a. The performance of GRFL in managing and maintaining the 4 Qld RACs in accordance with their Charter
  - b. The performance of each RAC in meeting, determining and reporting RDE priority issues.
  - c. The appropriateness of the format of the present annual Priority Issues Paper
  - d. The extent to which research agencies (e.g. DAFF, CSIRO, UQ and QAAFI, GRDC receive, value and respond to the information received from the RACs.
  - e. The extent to which AgForce Grains supports the RACs in their role of determining and reporting 'priority issues'.
  - f. The extent to which the wider grain industry understand and supports the RACs and endorses their decisions
  - g. The importance and performance of a single coordinator in supporting the RACs.
2. Taking into account the rapidly changing grain industry RDE environment since the inception of the RACs, recommend any changes to the arrangement. Consider in particular:
  - a. The importance of a formal grain industry consultative arrangement for shaping RDE.
  - b. The objectives of the present grain industry consultation arrangement and the functions and composition of the RACs, as set out in the Charter of Operations.
  - c. The relationship of the RACs to other possible relevant agencies such as the Australian Mung Bean Assoc, Australian Sunflower Assoc, Maize Association Aust and Aust Soybean Assoc. Northern Grower Alliance and their LCCs.
  - d. The appropriateness of the present regional boundaries of RACs.
  - e. The relationship of the Queensland RACs to the NNSW RACs.
  - f. The extent to which grain growers participate in the consultative arrangement.
  - g. The effectiveness of the mechanisms used to communicate RACs decisions to the key research agencies.
  - h. The extent to which key research agencies demonstrate the importance of the RACs in shaping research investment.
  - i. The need for training of RAC members in areas such as consultation processes, communication strategies, meeting procedure, group participation and dynamics, needs assessment, elements of strategic planning and public speaking.
3. Also when undertaking the review, the following matters should be taken into account.
  - a. Independence – degree to which committees are able to speak without fear or favour

- b. Contestable - degree to which growers / industry people compete for committee membership
- c. Diversity – degree to which membership represents diversity in gender, age, location, cropping experience
- d. Professionalism – degree to which committees operate professionally
- e. Transparency – degree to which committees are transparent in their operations
- f. Commitment – degree to which members and nominees commit to the committees
- g. Acceptance– degree to which the general industry is aware of and support the committees
- h. Accountability – degree to which committees accounts to general industry on decisions
- i. Influence – degree to which the committees influence the shape of the RDE program
- j. Capacity Building – degree to which members learn from their committee experience
- k. Satisfaction – degree to which members enjoy committee participation

4. Report to the GRFL Board by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2012

## Schedule

CONTRACTOR: Chris Bazley

Name: Chris Bazley

Address: 226 Mt Molar Road, Nobby, Q 4360

A.B.N.: 96584145785

### PROJECT BRIEF and SCOPE OF WORKS:

The Contractor is to review the 4 Queensland Research Advisory Committees (RACs) as outlined in the attached Terms of Reference and report back to the Company by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2012 by both personal and written presentations.

It is envisaged that the Reviewer will interview at least the following:

1. Current Chairman of the GRFL.	1
2. Current Chairmen of the 4 RACs.	4
3. Current RAC Coordinator.	1
4. Dr Nicole Jensen as recent past RAC Coordinator.	1
5. At least 2 current grower members from each RAC.	8
6. At least 1 current non-grower member from each RAC.	4
7. At least 1 Nominee from each RAC.	4
8. Senior Representatives of each Research Provider (i.e. DAFF, CSIRO, UQ [QAAFI]).	3
9. Senior Representative of GRDC.	1
10. Possibly 2 current members of NP GRDC (egg V Green, R Taylor)	2
11. President AgForce Grains.	1
12. At least 4 other grain growers not members of RACs and disbursed throughout the Queensland grain region.	4
13. At least 4 younger grain growers not members of RACs.	4
14. Possibly Bob Freebairn as NNSW RAC Coordinator.	<u>1</u>
	TOTAL
	<u>39</u>
15. In addition to the above individual interviews, an electronic invitation will be sent to all current RAC members providing them the opportunity to send comments to the Reviewer on questions posed by the Reviewer.	

### Reference Material

1. Charter of Operations of RACs (Copy provided)
2. Minutes of RAC meetings (refer to Company Website)
3. Copies of Annual Priority Issues Papers (Copies provided)
4. RAC Memberships (refer Company Website)
5. 1995 Review of the RACs (Copy provided)
6. RAC Performance Report 2009 -12 (Copy Provided)
7. Background paper on the RACs. (Copy provided)

UNDERTAKING: The Company undertakes to immediately advise all current RAC members, key Research Agencies and AgForce Grains of the Review and the Reviewer.

MEETINGS: The Contractor is to report in person to the Company Board at date and place to be set but prior to the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2012

REPORTS: The Contractor to provide a Hard Copy of the Review Report.

FUNDING PROVIDERS: Grains Research Foundation Ltd.

## Interview List

\* denotes face to face meeting

<p>CQ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Colin Dunne</li> <li>▪ Graham Spackman</li> <li>▪ Shane Eden</li> <li>▪ David Jordan</li> <li>▪ Peter Durkin</li> </ul>	<p>SE Qld</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peter Enkelmann</li> <li>▪ Doug George *</li> <li>▪ Ian Crosthwaite</li> <li>▪ Colin Clark</li> <li>▪ Rob Taylor *</li> <li>▪ Neil Jorgensen</li> <li>▪ Trevor Rook</li> </ul>
<p>Darling Downs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lindsay Berry *</li> <li>▪ Ben Coleman</li> <li>▪ Chris Joseph</li> <li>▪ Wade Bidstrup</li> <li>▪ Bede O'Mara</li> <li>▪ Vicki Green *</li> <li>▪ Wayne Newton *</li> </ul>	<p>Western Downs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Damien Scanlan *</li> <li>▪ Jennifer Crocker</li> <li>▪ Paul McIntosh *</li> <li>▪ James Coleborne</li> <li>▪ Charles Nason</li> <li>▪ Vic French</li> <li>▪ Anne-Maree Bach</li> </ul>
<p>Industry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ John Harvey</li> <li>▪ John Obst *</li> <li>▪ Nicole Jensen *</li> <li>▪ Bob Freebairn</li> <li>▪ Richard Daniel</li> <li>▪ Pete Mailler</li> </ul>	<p>Non RAC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ John Brownlie</li> <li>▪ Col Cattell</li> <li>▪ Col Orr</li> <li>▪ John Coggan</li> </ul>
<p>Young Non RAC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Matt Kingston</li> <li>▪ Brad Cooke</li> <li>▪ Wayne Saal</li> <li>▪ Nigel Burnett</li> </ul> <p>▪ John Brownlie and Wayne Saal have two sons back on the farm, but all too busy to get involved in R&amp;D activities</p>	<p>R&amp;D Providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dr Robert Henry *</li> <li>▪ Garry Fullelove *</li> <li>▪ Zvi Hochman *</li> </ul>
<p>4 DAFF Science Leaders provided feedback for meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dr David Poulsen</li> <li>▪ Dr Emma Colson</li> <li>▪ Mark Hickman</li> <li>▪ Dr Rex Williams</li> </ul>	<p>Respondents to three email questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Liz Hill</li> <li>▪ Nigel Gregg</li> <li>▪ Brian Warren</li> <li>▪ Ian Crosthwaite</li> </ul>

## How the Job was done

As per the desired level of contacts to be interviewed as outlined in the schedule document, some people were a given that they had to be contacted and then the others were randomly selected from RACs.

A nominated group were to be interviewed face to face which occurred. A number of others also wished to be interviewed across the table and this occurred in most cases, but a few RAC members from afar were not able to achieve this as travel was prohibitive. This showed people were interested in being part of this review. Ten face to face interviews occurred and these have been marked accordingly with a \* in the contact list.

Phone calls mainly occurred early morning, lunch time or at night to work in with farmer workloads.

Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to over two hours. The questions posed in the review are enclosed at the back of this report.

Respondents gave feedback to all questions and offered a number of excellent comments about RACs in general discussion which was an added bonus to the information gathered.

All respondents gave of their time freely and were keen to be part of the process.

From the information received some clear trends have emerged which I have documented.

NO names will be mentioned beside comments in this report.

A number of respondents sent in reports and documents on a number of relevant topics including NABRAC which I have researched. NABRAC appears to be successful for two reasons, it asks for financial commitment from members so they are more interested in their investment and at the time they meet, a number of other groups whom the members are common to )Fire Wardens, other Government bodies etc) have meetings.

In general the people visited or phoned were pleased to be a part of this review process.

The completed documents have all been handed to GRF management to be destroyed.

## General Feedback on Three Questions to all RAC Members

Q1. Do RACs always get the priority issues on the table and clearly document the symptoms needing research?

Comments: Yes. Priority issues clearly defined and documented in the Northern Region Grains Research Priorities Issues Paper.

Q2. RACs outcomes should bring value to farming enterprises. Do they or don't they achieve this?

Comments: Growers attend RAC meeting as they see value. R&D is long term in many cases so flow down benefits to growers take time to be seen.

The extension component of RD&E is critical to growers in being able to see the outcomes of research which has originated from their priority issues list.

Q3. Will RACs as they are today still be in existence in five years time? Why or why not?

Comments: The need for RACs in the future is evident, but getting growers involved, especially younger ones is the issue.

The pool of farmers with a passion for R&D, who are innovative and have the time to commit, is limited. More effort needs to go into ensuring the farmer numbers on RACs remains adequate.

Other Comments:

Getting the priorities for R&D sorted based on their importance to the group is very important. The RAC chairs and the coordinator have a key role in keeping in the right areas and coming up with the desired outcomes.



## General Feedback on the Interviews with relation to Terms of Reference

- All respondents enjoyed being on their RAC and got value from it;
- 75% of RAC members said it would be hard for them to find a replacement for them if they left;
- Most RAC members felt at sea for the first few meetings until they worked out who was who and how all the R&D work etc fitted together with all the organisations involved;
- Everyone was time poor, especially the younger members of RACs and all young farmers are busy with young families, getting established and paying the bills and staff are impossible to find;
- Most mature age farmers not in RACs, had not heard of them before – use agronomists or read a lot;
- Young farmers had not heard of RACs and used agronomists and internet for their R&D information;
- Most farmers not directly involved in RACs did not get any feedback on what the RACs were doing, but did know of a lot of the R&D work supported by GRDC which ultimately could have started from RAC priority lists;
- RACs follow their charter except for the length of membership of the organisation which is never followed;
- RAC's acknowledged as having a quiet separate function as compared to Grower Solutions groups;
- All RACs did a good job in organising their priorities, some meetings do not have many farmers in attendance so others get more opportunity to promote their issues;
- Research agencies value the information, mainly to ensure it supports what R&D they are doing;
- GRF needs to work out with GRDC where RACs fit in the future;
- RACs keep doing R&D priorities, AgForce will manage political issues;
- Positive push for more secretarial support for RAC coordinator so they can spend more time getting new grower members, promoting the value of RACs and ensuring the R&D people see the PIP document and get a personal visit with it;
- RACs really stand alone as they are the medium and longer term R&D priority setters and are non political so even though everyone would like to see agencies amalgamate they believe there is little chance of it;
- The RAC boundaries are considered good in all areas except Western Downs which is considered too large but dividing it or joining part to a NSW RAC was not considered the answer either;

- NSW & Qld RACs appear to do their own thing, slightly differently but come together for the PIP document;
- RACs are a capacity building opportunity for people to develop and go on to bigger things;
- The effectiveness of how RAC decisions were communicated to key research agencies is considered to be too haphazard, some get a PIP book, some expected to get it off the website, delegates at the RAC meetings hopefully take back the information – you can't be 100% sure everyone gets the information;
- New members, chairman all need an induction process as young farmers in particular don't understand what is going on for a few meetings or they leave after one meeting and don't come back. Some chairmen need help in making sure they get the best out of their RAC commitment;
- Out of RD&E there is no E going on, this needs to change so RAC members hear more about the priorities they are putting forward;
- The last few PIP documents are very similar – the issues which are ongoing need to be documented, but a section needs to be set up for NEW R&D priorities where the work required is described more specifically – some instances have occurred where the wrong R&D work has been done because the priority issues was left too broad and the R&D agencies chose what they wanted to do;
- Feedback on the coordinators Nicole Jensen and John Obst was very positive in the way they managed the RAC meetings and communicated at all levels.
- Those who knew Jack Twyford mentioned he was the right person to get things started;
- In the recommendations I have made there are a number of points relevant to all coordinator positions which are aimed at increasing the value of the priorities list for both the RAC members and the RD&E providers. The outcomes from the coordinators role need to change for the future as the evolution of how growers do things and RD&E in agriculture is financially supported move with the times. The role changes for the coordinator are in no way a negative reflection of the work done, but are an indication of what the interviewed group feel is need to take RACs further into the future and to keep them strong.
- RACs obviously have a place in the R&D landscape of agriculture to provide priority issues which need to be researched to bring better profitability and reliability to farmers businesses. With good business relationships between RACs, GRDC, groups such as NGA and organised communication between them and the R&D providers would give the best return for farmers from the levies they pay out of their crops;

## Recommendations:

- 1) RAC coordinator role needs more secretarial support so they can spend more time on the following:
  - (a) Source new grower members, particularly young farmers;
  - (b) Deliver the PIP document personally to the key RD&E providers, GRDC (panel members and senior management) and other key stakeholders to ensure it is understood and its value is acknowledged.

- 2) An induction procedures need to be set up for new RAC members, especially young farmers. A small booklet produced for prospective RAC members on the charter, what happens at meetings and the value of the priority issues work and how they can be part of shaping R&D in their own industry of agriculture.

Depending on the experience of the chairperson, training in meeting procedure, communication protocol etc. may also be required;

- 3) The PIP document needs to:
  - (a) Expand the major current issues section and also include NEW R&D focus topics with specific targets nominated;
  - (b) Tighten the focus of issues which have appeared before in the document and include feedback from the RD&E providers by way of time lines on how their research is progressing and what they are actually working on.

- 4) Promotion:

The work of the RACs in the priority issues work they do and how they represent growers R&D needs has to be promoted to all the farmers. All forms of media need to be used to promote the outcomes/representation, industry good and the social responsibility of RD&E work that originates from RACs. RACs are not political, but stimulate so much good outcomes for farmers, industry and all members of the public that all industry people should value being a member.

- 5) Information for RD&E Providers:

This information needs to be prioritised strongly and now more specific in the request as R&D funds become less available. A stronger link with R&D providers needs to occur so the highest priority issues are taken on board.

Conversely more feedback and personalised communication on what research is being done needs to come back to the RAC membership and to the wider farming audience from research providers and GRDC, this acknowledges the value of RACs and their contribution to positive outcomes.