

Media Release

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The future of grains research will come under the microscope this week with several key organisations holding meetings to discuss the implications of the National Research Development and Extension (RD&E) Framework.

An initiative of Australia's Primary Industries Ministers, the National RD&E Framework has seen each of the States nominate specific areas of RD&E to specialise in.

Over the next few days, the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI), the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and Barley Breeding Australia will host separate discussions relating to the National Framework.

Grains Research Foundation Limited (GRFL) Chairman Damien Scanlan said it is hoped the meetings will give growers and industry a better understanding of the fallout from the implementation of the National RD&E Framework.

Under the National RD&E Framework the Queensland Government will continue to support the world-class National Sorghum Research Program based at Hermitage.

Queensland will also play a leading role in summer pulses and modeling/predictive systems research.

However Mr Scanlan said there was a distinct downside, with winter cereals research largely being done outside of Queensland.

“Arrangements to shift wheat breeding and other wheat research out of the region have been in place for some years now, and there is an effort at the moment from the Queensland Government and GRDC to push barley breeding interstate in July next year when the current Barley Breeding Australia agreement finishes,” he said.

“This raises concerns about how relevant future research will be for grain growers in the Northern Region.”

“As the State agriculture Departments, GRDC, Universities and the CSIRO move to lock in arrangements under the National RD&E Framework, GRFL will continue to put forward the principles it outlined last year about reshaping grains RD&E in the Northern Region.”

“First and foremost, a genuine partnership with grain growers is the key to successful grains RD&E, and northern grain growers have a strong tradition of partnering with Government and Universities to do research,” Mr Scanlan said.

“Just look at the results that came out of the Leslie Research Centre in Toowoomba, which Queensland grain growers paid for, and the IA Watson Grains Research Centre in Narrabri, which was bought by northern NSW grain growers.”

“Those partnerships were the foundation for the excellent productivity gains reaped by the grains industry in the north.”

He said any new model must support the Northern Grains Industry (Queensland and Northern NSW) for at least the next 25 years and provide world-class research staff and facilities for this region.

Mr Scanlan said it was also vital that grower equity in facilities such as the Leslie Research Centre and the IA Watson Grains Research Centre be recognised in a tangible way.

“This investment by grain growers, and their continuing investment through the payment of RD&E levies, needs to at least see growers at the table having a real say in managing the direction of grains RD&E, not just being told what others have decided after the fact,” he said.

“There should also be an improved management model with grains research having its own Research Director capable of attracting substantial funding and increasing staffing capacity.”

“Putting that Research Director in charge of an independent organisation overseen by a skills-based Board of Directors would see better outcomes for all investors in grains research, including growers, industry, Governments and Universities.”

“It would also see new opportunities for investment in RD&E by private investors, and linkages between a range of research agencies would be strengthened.”

“The sugar industry, with BSES Ltd, has demonstrated that this type of model can be successful.”

Mr Scanlan said research facilities should also be open to the public, so the community and consumers understand what value grains research delivers in terms of food production, land stewardship and economic returns to the State.

“Despite moves by DEEDI management to pull away from a genuine partnership with growers in recent years, GRFL looks forward to working with all parties to strengthen the relationship and ensure there will be a robust and effective RD&E effort for the grains industry in the Northern Region,” Mr Scanlan said.

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