

Minutes of WDM RAC Meeting – 25 March, 2010

Roma Bowls Club, Roma

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

N. Boland (Chairman), J. Crocker, V. French, E. Hill, C. Nason, A. Borrell, J. Colborne, M. Dieters, J. Sturgess

Nominees: D. Poulsen (QDPI), J. Sheppard (GRDC), D. Scanlan (GRFL)

Guests: G. Rennick

Co-ordinator: N. Jensen

4. Apologies

N. Benson, M. Duffield, A. Kluck, A-M. Bach, T. Kapcejevs, P. Banks, L. McIntyre, R. Taylor

5. Election of Chairman

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

Nev Boland was elected unanimously and unopposed as Chairman for the coming year.

6. Confirmation of Minutes (18 August, 2009)

Confirmed

7. A) RAC Members' Reports

The Chairman invited members to raise issues for general discussion. Items put forward included:

- Crop management notes in hard copy format are required by growers. Web-based resources are well and good, but growers want crop management notes that they can read and make notes on at their table, as well as carry around in their ute as an on-farm resource. Limited farmer-centric information is available to help make crop planting choices. It is fine to use agronomists as a resource, but farmers want to access information directly as well. The lack of availability of comprehensive information is having an impact on the uptake of new varieties.
- High transport costs faced by growers in the region. Costs are so high that wheat yields need to be exceptional to make crops economically viable.
- There are doubts about whether yield gains have been made in wheat in the WDM region.
- Recent flooding will cause an increase in the incidence of foliar and root diseases.
- Recent flooding highlights the perennial problem of managing climate variability (an extension issue), and the need for better prediction systems (beyond the Southern Oscillation Index).
- Some growers are trialling integrated sorghum/pasture systems.
- Partners in Grain have set up a Women's Agronomy Group in the Mungindi, Boomi, Thallon and Dirranbandi districts.
- It can be difficult to get growers to attend field days, but Dale Kirby (QDPI, Roma) is doing a good job of setting up and running field days.
- Feathertop Rhodes grass is a serious weed problem that is getting harder to control with chemicals. Fallow management strategies for hard-to-kill weeds are essential.
- There was concern expressed about potentially invasive weeds: e.g. rats tail grass and acid grass (*Sporobolus sp.*).

- From a risk management point of view, the lack of alternatives to glyphosate presents a problem for growers and the community.
- There are reports from growers that glyphosate may not be as effective as it was previously (increased rate required to get a kill).
- An industry solution to the problem of spray drift is required.
- Information is required about the response of legumes to Phosphorus.
- Sorghum varieties and management strategies are required for arid regions.
- The increase in on-farm grain storage means that an extension effort is required about grain storage and pest control.
- There is interest in knowing more about the allelopathic benefits of wheat and barley in the cropping system.
- Only limited quantities of oat seed had been available for planting, and chickpea seed was unobtainable, 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 restricted distribution platforms (i.e. the official Licensees) leaves growers in an impossible position.
- The diversity of grain crops grown in Queensland makes the State unique, and growers are heavily reliant on breeding programs for crops other than wheat and sorghum. It is a concern that breeding for minor crops (i.e. other than wheat and sorghum) may not be adequately funded.
- It is expected that foliar diseases in wheat will become more important and pose a greater risk to growers: not only has QDPI cut staff in this area, but it also does not maintain a wheat stripe rust collection in Queensland with which to do testing.
- Crown rot and nematodes are widespread and require more of an extension effort.
- Climate change presents an opportunity to re-evaluate frost risk (is the frequency & occurrence of frosts changing?) and planting times.
- It would be helpful to know how much stay-green there is in each commercial sorghum hybrid.
- Barley has a place in the WDM cropping systems - for grain, forage and silage uses.
- The continuing decline in public investment in RD&E is a serious concern.

7. B) strategies for new RAC members

There was discussion about how difficult it is for members to attend WDM RAC meetings, especially in view of its broad geographical distribution and long travel times.

Action item: request that GRFL:

- consider options for the RAC such as (i) splitting the WDM Region into two sub-regions (although this would put pressure on agencies such as QDPI to provide additional nominees), or (ii) using webinars or other technology to enhance meeting attendance and reduce travel requirements for members.
- promote the RAC in the local press with the aim of increasing the number of grower members.

8. Guest Speaker

Dr A. Borrell (QDPI).

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

9. Review of priority issues for the Western Downs and Maranoa region

9.1. Priority Issues Paper

The WDM priority issues were reviewed and updated.

Some additional points of discussion included:

- The potential of summer pulses (especially cowpea) in the WDM cropping system.

- *Action item:* regarding Priority Issues 23 & 7 (which relate to providing information to growers, advisors and consultants in the form of hard copy notes), it was agreed to write to Minister Mulherin highlighting the importance of hard copy notes to economically- and environmentally-sound decision making.
- *Action item:* regarding Priority Issue 15 (which relates to disease probe varieties), write to GRDC and QDPI to request disease probe varieties be included in trials as a biosecurity measure.

9.2. Top 3 issues for the WDM region.

- I. Disease resistance in wheat – foliar and soil-borne diseases.
- II. Stopping the loss of RD&E capacity and effective succession planning within RD&E agencies.
- III. Drought adaptation strategies, including options for growing crops other than wheat.

10. RAC nominees' reports

10.1. Mr Sheppard (GRDC) reported to the meeting on points including:

- The prospect of NVT advisory groups (which would include growers and consultants) being formed in Southern and Central Queensland.
- A number of follow-up items including: 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.
- GRDC's new Farming Systems model for delivering RD&E (e.g. GOA and NGA), with nodes to be set up in the Queensland part of the Northern Region.
- Changes in the way the GRDC sees the grains RD&E pathway.
- How the GRDC Northern Panel sets priorities.

10.2. Dr Poulsen (QDPI) reported to the meeting:

- The chickpea variety PBA HatTrick has been released.
- Regarding barley, the variety Shepherd has been released, and the variety Grout is doing well in the North with a market share of about 30%. A large-seeded North Dakota barley line that had shown promise will not be commercialized by the QDPI, but the Pork CRC may decide to release the line. Two forage barleys have been sent to breeding companies for evaluation and potential commercialization.
- QDPI has expanded its maize program and will be looking for molecular markers for disease resistance.
- In conjunction with Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), QDPI have successfully submitted an expression of interest to undertake a project on pasture run-down.
- Although the contract for NVT is still being finalized with GRDC, QDPI has started work on preparing for this season's wheat, barley, durum and chickpea trials in Queensland.
- The Cereals CRC bid was not successful, and it is unlikely that another bid will be developed until the National Framework for grains is finalized.
- The Queensland Alliance in Agriculture and Food Innovation (QAAFI) should be set to go on 1 July 2010. A selection process is currently underway for those QDPI staff wishing to become a part of QAAFI. When QAAFI is operational, about 40 QDPI staff will become UQ staff (QAAFI staff). QAAFI will focus on three main areas: plant science, animal science and food technology. Some QDPI staff who currently work in the area of grains RD&E are expected to become part of QAAFI.

10.3. A CSIRO report was tabled, for distribution to members by email.

10.4. Dr Dieters (UQ) reported that the University had undertaken a review to consider whether or not the School of Land, Crop and Food Sciences should continue to operate under the existing faculty arrangements or if it should be incorporated into the Science Faculty.

There are moves within the University to change the Agricultural Science course (e.g. to drop the current research project requirement in the last year of the course).

Action item: write to the University of Queensland to ask: (i) what changes are planned for the Agricultural Science degree; and (ii) what plans there are for talking to industry about the changes.

10.5. Mr Scanlan (GRFL) reported to the meeting:

- GRFL has been involved in discussions about a new National Representative organization for grain growers – Grain Producers' Australia. Mr Scanlan 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 a Check List (in February 2010) outlining some key components of a new national model. A business plan for Grain Producers' Australia has been developed by an independent committee and that document should be distributed by the committee shortly
- GRFL is co-hosting (with CFI) a Northern Region grains RD&E industry forum in Toowoomba on 22 April.
- An Independent Director position has recently been filled by Ronald Thompson from Chinchilla.
- A new Executive Officer (EO) is being sought after the resignation of the current EO (effective 16 April).

11. Next meeting

Date: 19 August, 2010

Venue: TBD – at or near an NVT site

Speakers: TBD.

12. Closure

Meeting closed at 4:35pm