

Minutes of Darling Downs RAC Meeting – 2 March, 2010

Dalby RSL, Dalby

meeting commenced at 9:45am

1. RAC introduction

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

2. Chairman's Welcome and Confirmation of Agenda

Mr Newton, the outgoing Chairman, opened the meeting and welcomed the members and guests.

3. Attendance

Members: W. Bidstrup (Chairman), C. Hornick, C. Joseph, M. Burgis, T. Jorgensen.

Nominees: R. Williams (QDPI), D. Freebairn (GRDC), J. Whish (CSIRO), W. Newton (GRFL)

Guests: D. Jordan, T. Schragg, B. Chase, D. Skerman, R. Evans

Co-ordinator: N. Jensen

4. Apologies

L. Berry, S. Pfeffer, B. Warren, B. O'Mara, J. Thompson, M. Sutherland, Z. Hochman, A. Wright and J. Cook

5. Election of Chairman

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

Wade Bidstrup was nominated (moved C. Joseph, seconded T. Jorgensen) and elected unanimously and unopposed as Chairman for the coming year.

6. Confirmation of Minutes from the meeting of 17 August, 2009

Confirmed

7. Business

7.1. NVT

Dr Williams reported that QDPI and GRDC are currently finalizing a contract which will see QDPI run NVT for wheat, durum, barley and chickpea in Queensland for the next three to five years, starting in 2010. QDPI 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. It is still being decided which QDPI staff member(s) will co-ordinate the NVT yield trials.

GRDC have contracted CSIRO to collect soil and water data at the NVT trial sites, and this data will be used as input for modelling research.

There was some discussion about the feasibility of running canola and mustard trials alongside the NVT trials at one or two sites.

Summer crops will not be included in NVT.

7.2. National RD&E Framework

Dr Freebairn 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 won't fund RD&E in all areas of agriculture, so the various agricultural industries have been prioritized by each State. In theory, the end result should be fewer, but higher quality research stations across the country.

The National Framework committee for grains is being led by GRDC and DAFWA. The National Framework committee for grains is close to finalizing an RD&E capacity audit, and plan for the future. There are three grower representatives on the National Framework

committee for grains (e.g. Wayne Newton for the Northern Region), but they are bound by strict confidentiality restrictions.

For the Northern Region, the GRDC Northern Panel has developed a plan which may be released as a Discussion Paper.

Dr Whish reported that CSIRO has been involved in the National RD&E Framework discussions, but independently of those discussions CSIRO has undergone a significant internal restructure – with a move to a “Flagship” model.

There was discussion about whether or not the National RD&E Framework would encourage innovation.

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. Future of Barley Breeding in the Northern Region

Dr Williams reported that the existing Barley Breeding Australia (BBA) agreement will be in force until June 2011. This agreement funds a breeding node for the Northern Region, based in Warwick. QDPI and GRDC are looking to transfer to a more “commercial model” than the current arrangement, which is funded by QDPI and GRDC. BBA are undertaking a survey of potential commercial investors.

Dr Freebairn noted that GRDC recognize there is market failure for barley breeding in the North, so they will continue to provide some funding.

Mr Newton reported that GRFL were exploring options for grower investment in barley breeding in the Northern Region.

7.4. 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 Williams reported that the Minister is still committed to his disinvest/reinvest strategy for research stations.

There was discussion about the State Government’s failure to recognize grower equity in the Leslie Research Centre.

b) “Fresh Approach” for Service Delivery

Dr Williams reported that QDPI are focused on developing a strategic plan for Service Delivery.

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

Dr Williams provided an update on the QAAFI Institute at the University of Queensland. UQ and QDPI are developing QAAFI in order to strengthen agricultural research in Queensland, get better industry outcomes, attract additional funding, and increase student numbers. Once QAAFI is established, approximately 40 QDPI staff are expected to become UQ staff (QAAFI staff). QAAFI will focus on three main areas: plant science (including grains), animal science and food technology. QAAFI will be a “virtual centre”, with no new infrastructure being built to house the Institute.

7.5. National issues

a) Grains Levy Payers’ Association

Dr Jensen 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 is being 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.

7.6. Stay-green in sorghum and the recent GRDC Northern Panel meeting

Dr Jensen reported that the GRDC Northern Panel had met with QDPI and private company sorghum breeders on 2nd and 3rd February 2010, and one of the topics they discussed was the value of the stay-green trait in sorghum. As an input for this meeting, Northern region RAC members had submitted their comments on the importance of stay-green in sorghum: support for the trait was considerable (consistent with the 2009 Priority Issues Paper), and harvest management strategies for stay-green varieties were identified as an area requiring additional RD&E. Also in the lead up to the meeting, the participants were reminded that the Darling Downs RAC had written to the private breeding companies in April 2008, and GRDC in July 2008 (Mr Rob Taylor was the Chairman at the time), to encourage the private companies to incorporate the stay-green trait into commercial varieties.

At the meetings on 2nd and 3rd February, Mr Taylor presented a view contrary to that of the DD RAC regarding the value of the stay-green trait in sorghum. Although Mr Taylor is no longer a member of the DD RAC, some meeting participants mistakenly took Mr Taylor's comments to represent the views of the DD RAC.

Action item: write to the sorghum breeding companies (Pioneer Hi-Bred, Pacific Seeds and HSR Seeds) reiterating the DD RAC's support for the development of sorghum varieties incorporating the stay-green trait.

8. RAC members' reports

RAC members reported to the meeting.

Comments included:

- Mung bean acres were up but dryland sorghum acres were down.
- Lots of crops had had false starts – either dying once they had emerged or being sprayed out. Farmers are exploring a range of options for getting their crops started.
- In terms of pests, there are some mice, midge and rutherghlen bugs about.
- Fleabane is still an issue and spray drift continues to happen. There was discussion about why these two items are still a problem despite the amount of money that has been spent to try to deal with them.
- Energy and coal mining companies are moving into agriculturally productive areas in the region. The Queensland Government has released a proposed new planning framework for strategic cropping lands, which deals with the issue of mining on cropping lands. Submissions relating to the proposed plan are being accepted until 12 March.

Mr O'Mara provided a list of issues to the RAC in writing, and these were tabled at the meeting.

9. Guest Speaker – Dr D. Jordan (QDPI)

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, breeding objectives, and the difference in perspective between growers and seed companies about the value of ergot resistance.

10. Review of priority issues for the Darling Downs region

10.1. Priority Issues Paper

The DD priority issues were reviewed and updated. Some additional points of discussion included:

- Improvements in weather prediction would be valuable, in particular accurate forecasts for two to three weeks and two months in advance.
- Innovative systems are required for helping farmers make crop sequencing decisions: considering short- and long-term economic, soil, water use, *et cetera* impacts.
- The need to build markets that can take large volumes of high-value grain crops.
- The quality of seed purchased from traders is variable, with there being large differences observed in germination and vigour. Purity is also a concern, especially in wheat where impurities can cause problems with stripe rust management.
Action item: write to AgForce Grains requesting the introduction of new BMP standards for seed production and “truth in seed labeling” (actuals, not minimum standards).

10.2. Top 3 issues for the DD region

- I. Stored grain pest control (Priority Issue #13).
- II. Information: growers, agronomists and consultants need to be able to find information quickly and easily (Priority Issue #25).
- III. Summer and winter grain legumes (Priority Issues #2 & #6).

11. RAC nominees' reports

Dr Freebairn (GRDC) reported on a number of items including:

- Changes in the way the GRDC sees the grains RD&E pathway.
- The way the GRDC Northern Panel sets priorities and develops projects.
- GRDC's new Farming Systems model for delivering RD&E (e.g. GOA- or NGA-style arrangements for Queensland).

Dr Williams (QDPI) reported on a number of items including:

- QDPI will produce a highlights/achievements document again this year, and copies will be sent to the RACs.
- QDPI is committed to a maize project, which has been developed with GRDC.
- Farming Systems replacement projects (crop sequencing projects) for Queensland are currently being negotiated with GRDC.
- The chickpea variety PBA HatTrick has been released.
- David Hamilton and David Lloyd have retired from the Department.
- QDPI website has been refreshed.

Dr Whish (CSIRO) reported on the Southern Queensland Farming Systems (SQFS) project, and negotiations with GRDC for a crop sequencing project in the region. Details are being finalized, but a system of agronomist/farmer nodes is likely to be established in Southern Queensland (like the NGA model): (i) Dalby and black soil areas; (ii) Chinchilla to Roma; and (iii) St George, Meandarra, etc.

The level of funding for the crop sequencing project in southern Queensland will be significantly less than that for the SQFS Project. In accordance with the GRDC tender documents, the new crop sequencing project will not do research as such, but it will have a strong focus on development and extension (D&E).

Dr Sutherland (USQ - Centre for Systems Biology) and Dr Schmidt (USQ - NCEA) provided written reports to the RAC and they were tabled at the meeting.

Mr Newton reported on GRFL activities and provided additional background regarding the development of a new National Representative organization for grain growers.

12. Next meeting

Date: 17 August, 2010

Venue: Warwick

Speakers/Topic: chickpeas

13. Closure

Meeting closed at 4:40pm