



Australian Government



Cotton Research and Development Corporation

Grains Research and Development Corporation

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation

Sugar Research and Development Corporation

Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation

Cnr Denison St & Geils Crt
Deakin ACT 2600
Australia

Phone: 02 6122 8477
Fax: 02 6285 2288
Email: secretariat@crrdcc.com.au

6 August 2010

Dr Shona Batge

Committee Secretary

Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Dr Batge

Re: Inquiry into Industry Skills Councils

The provision of a skilled workforce for agriculture, fisheries and forestry is critical to the adoption of the outputs arising from research and development investments by the rural research and development corporations (RDCs).

The Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations (CRRDC) is the peak forum for the RDCs, facilitating coordination of research and strategic directions for evaluating the collective impact of the RDCs and for developing collaboration on major projects of national significance.

There are 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) covering virtually all of the agricultural industries within the Agrifood Skills Industry Council's scope, notably excluding Forestry, which is within the scope of ForestWorks skills council. The RDCs bring industry and researchers together to establish research and development strategic directions and to fund projects that provide industry with the innovation and productivity tools to compete in global markets.

While individual RDCs have worked with the Agrifood Skills Council on skills and workforce development strategies, the Council's relationship with Agrifoods is a developing one, and therefore this submission is confined to looking to future collaboration with the Agrifood Skills Council, in cross-sectoral work in building workforce capability and improving extension and adoption of research outcomes.

There is an urgent need for Australia's rural industries to invest in attraction and development of current and future workforce (including the sciences and other supporting fields). At the same time there is increasing demand for RDCs to build upon current investments in extension and adoption of R&D outputs.

There is a link between workforce development and the adoption and diffusion of higher level skills, new knowledge, processes and technologies. The Agrifood Skills Australia 2010 Environmental Scan states that for Australia to legitimately reposition itself as a knowledge economy, innovation and new knowledge must occur at all levels of the workforce, and that in order to meet industry's demand for new knowledge and practice there needs to be greater adoption of RDC and Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) outputs through VET and extension initiatives.

The October 2009 report to Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC) by its Industries Development Committee (IDC) Workforce, Training and Skills Working Group, October 2009 states that:

“...significant shortages in labour and skills are expected across virtually all regions, sectors and occupations of the agricultural industry in the long term. The challenges facing agriculture, including climate change and global food security will increasingly demand more labour and skills. The labour and skills shortages impede sustainable increases in productivity. The ability to develop and adopt new ideas and techniques to increase productivity and to remain competitive and responsive to future challenges is highly dependent on having the capacity as well as the capability within the workforce.”

Investment by RDCs in the areas of extension, adoption and workforce attraction/development/capability building occurs currently, mainly on a sector basis across a broad spectrum of areas from school curriculum, workforce attraction, vocational and higher education, skills and leadership development, capacity building, through to a wide array of extension activities.

The Council is currently working across the RDCs to improve collaboration, effectiveness and efficiency of investment in capability building and extension and adoption. As part of this work the CRRDC is working with the Agrifood Skills Council to identify areas of mutual interest. The work that Agrifoods has undertaken with the Cotton RDC and the Cotton CRC in adoption of research outcomes is of particular interest to the council, as is the capability within Agrifoods Skills Australia to provide advice on matters pertaining to workforce development, and possible partnerships in cross sectoral work.

Although early days the CRRDC looks forward to working with the Agrifood Skills Council in pursuit of our common goals across the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

It is essential for the RDCs that the Agrifood Skills Council is maintained and well resourced.

Su McCluskey

Chief Executive Officer