

CRC for Forestry Third Year Review

Response by the CRC for Forestry Board to the Third Year Review Report

The CRC for Forestry Board was pleased to receive the report from the third year review panel on 14th January 2009, and commends the panel for a thorough and considered review of the CRC. We note the strongly positive tone of the report, and endorse the report's overall conclusions:

“The Review Panel was impressed by the quality of research being performed by the CRCF, the management structure underpinning this and the degree of interaction with end-users. The CRCF is performing extremely well and certainly justifies the investment made by the Commonwealth. The Panel does not recommend any major changes.”

We have considered the report, and our responses to the specific recommendations contained in the report are as follows:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation (R1): *The Panel recommends that a discretionary fund be established to assist the CEO to respond to changing circumstances.*

The Board endorses the recommendation, and has instructed the CEO to revise the CRC budget model to accommodate a discretionary fund. The CEO will also provide to the Board a summary of likely new initiatives that address some of the significant changes in the CRC's operating environment that have occurred since establishment.

Recommendation (R2): *The Panel recommends that membership of Program Coordinating Committees be reviewed to ensure that pathways to adoption are best represented.*

The Board accepts this recommendation, and the matter will be raised at the next round of PCC meetings. The CRC senior management group will report back to the Board on the outcomes.

Recommendation (R3): *The Panel recommends that the CRCF should encourage industry to form a peak body to represent forest operations research across the sector.*

The Board has considered this recommendation, and has concluded that in the short term, the intention of the recommendation would be best achieved by the CRC taking an active role in facilitating ongoing interactions between research providers, developers and industry in this field, with a view to ensuring continuity of R&D in this area beyond 2012. The Board has asked CRC Management to develop a business plan for this initiative during 2009.

Recommendation (R4): *The Panel recommends that the CRCF take advantage of the flexibility permitted under CRC Program procedures for Program changes whenever it feels this to be justified and desirable.*

The Board notes this recommendation, which complements the Board's understanding of the nature and expectations of the Commonwealth Agreement. The Board understands that this allows for redirection of CRC resources to emerging strategic priorities, taking account of the necessary internal processes and agreements already in place. Where redirection of resources will result in changes to milestones and deliverables identified in the Commonwealth Agreement, the Commonwealth will be notified according to the requirements of that Agreement.

Recommendation (R5): *The Panel recommends that the CRCF investigates the possibility for initiating additional new areas of research, particularly those in forestry related areas in carbon and water, either through the gaining of new funding sources or by adjustments in its present research portfolios.*

The Board endorses this recommendation, and has instructed the CEO to develop a proposal for the establishment of a significant research initiative in the area of "Managing forests for Carbon." The CRC will investigate opportunities for further collaboration and leverage of available resources in order to generate outcomes focusing primarily on stakeholder needs. The Board notes that this recommendation is consistent with recommendation 1.

Recommendation (R6): *The Panel commends the CRCF for its strategic approach to planning for the continuation of its partnerships and activities after wind up of the present structure and recommends that the CRC Committee also considers the relevant system wide issues.*

The Board endorses this recommendation, while noting that it is primarily directed at the CRC Committee and Secretariat for further action.

Recommendation (R7): *The Panel recommends that Project Operating Plans have well defined procedures for delivering results and promoting adoption.*

The Board endorses this recommendation. The CEO has advised that several initiatives were already in train prior to receipt of the review report. In particular, there will be a comprehensive audit of pathways to adoption undertaken for the 2009-10 Project Operating Plans prior to the 2009-10 budget signoff, and the results reported to the Board. Areas of need will be identified and addressed, initially by the CRC senior management group. Adoption initiatives identified will include, where appropriate, formal measures of success (see recommendation 8). As previously planned, the economic impact assessment conducted in 2008 will be revisited in 2010-11, with a view to measuring and validating identified impacts.

During 2009, a planned review and refinement of the CRC's Adoption and Engagement strategy will take place.

Recommendation (R8): *The Panel recommends that more rigorous ways of measuring the success of adoption be considered.*

The Board accepts the recommendation – see response to recommendation 7.

Recommendation (R9): *The Panel recommends that expectations across Programs about the quantity and quality of the deliverables should be better specified. In particular the type and commercial potential (and for whom) of the IP generated should be clarified.*

The Board accepts the recommendation and notes that this will emerge as a result of the planning cycle and audit of project operating plans. IP generated will also be tracked as part of the planning cycle.

Recommendation (R10): *The Panel recommends that a more detailed description of the commercialization and adoption of research should be drafted. This should include what should be the role of industry partners in implementing IP and how to monitor the expected changes in practices and impacts. Given the importance attributed to Education and Training in the CRCF, the changes in rate of employment of highly skilled forest professionals by industry should be specially monitored.*

The Board accepts this recommendation, and agrees to include graduate outcomes amongst the impacts to be measured (see response to recommendation 7). The role of industry in implementation is regarded as integral to any adoption strategy, and we concur that monitoring of resultant impacts and improvements should take place whenever it is feasible and cost effective to do so.

Recommendation (R11): *The Panel recommends that the CRCF consider mechanisms to ensure that there is an on-going capacity to train end-users in the operational use of the model CABALA.*

The Board notes this recommendation and supports the intent. We note however that CABALA is primarily a research tool rather than a decision support system, and considers on the basis of advice from the CRC's management team that it will be more useful to our stakeholders to continue the development of tools based on CABALA, such as BPOS, which are more adaptable to the needs of industry. The CRC will undertake a coordinated approach to the development of decision support systems, taking particular note of end-user needs and expectations, and a workshop advancing this initiative will take place in the first half of 2009.

Recommendation (R12): *The Panel recommends that the CRCF consider alternative strategies to meet their contractual research commitments should the planned recruitment of postgraduates not eventuate or be delayed.*

The Board notes the recommendation, and notes that this issue has received ongoing attention since the commencement of the current CRC. The Board notes further that there is considerable flexibility in situations where research students are contributing to contract research outcomes, such that no contractual relationship exists between the CRC

and any student that could be construed as a fee-for-service arrangement. The Board accepts the need to maintain flexibility where difficulty exists with respect to student recruitment, but notes that continuing to train and produce high quality research graduates is a significant outcome in its own right, irrespective of the contribution made by students to the CRC's overall research effort. We will therefore continue to make every endeavor to recruit and train high quality research students where opportunity exists within the program, and redirect resources only as a last resort. The Board will also consider mechanisms to maintain a steady rate of graduate student recruitment into the forestry sector as the end of the current term of the CRC approaches.