

**A COMMUNIQUE FROM DR MICHAEL CRAWFORD
CEO OF THE CRC FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE SOILS**

17 November 2017

Greetings Soil CRC colleagues

Department of Industry, Innovation and Science feedback

The CRC Program Branch of the Australian Government's Department of Industry, Innovation and Science has now formally informed us that all 38 participant agreements have been executed to their satisfaction. They have also provided formal feedback following our presentation to them on 4 October concerning the status of the Soil CRC. In summary, the Department 'is satisfied that the CRC is implementing appropriate and timely action to address the funding shortfall and the departure of participants' as advised in previous issues of this Communique. Given this, and given that we have now satisfied all other compliance requirements, the Manager of the CRC Program Branch has approved the release of the balance of the first grant payment to the CRC, without any downward adjustment to our budget.

The CRC Program Branch also approved the formal admission of Griffith University as a participant in the CRC as flagged in previous issues and in the Major Partners' Agreement.

Quarterly reporting

To help meet our quarterly reporting requirements, we emailed each participant a template to report on any in-kind contributions in the first quarter. We received responses from 16 participants by the due date, leaving a significant number who did not respond. We understand that some participants had difficulties given that this was the first time, and given the tight timeframe. We will now move onto a regular timetable of in-kind reports being due 10 days after the end of the quarter so that we can submit a consolidated report to the CRC Program Office by the end of the next month. As such, we will be calling for the next quarter's reports in a few weeks so that the task can be attended to before the Christmas New Year break if need be. For those who were not able to respond in time, the next report can include both the first and second quarters.

Assessment of project submissions

Project submissions were received on 3 November and reviewed by the CRC Management Committee (CEO and Program Leaders) on 6 November. Formal feedback was provided by 7 November with advice on improvements to be made by 10 November. The revised proposals were then distributed to the Research and Adoption Panel who met on 16 November. The Research and Adoption Panel is an interim working group of the Board ahead of the more formally constituted Research and Adoption Committee. The Panel, chaired by Em Prof Roger Swift, was generally impressed with the standard of proposals, especially given the short time in which they were developed. Further feedback will be provided directly to Project Leaders. Formal release of funds for the projects will be sought at the Board meeting on 29 November, thus allowing projects to commence in December.

Communications

One area of activity that still needs to be accelerated in this establishment period of the Soil CRC is communications. I have appointed an Interim Communications Officer, Katherine Seddon, who will commence work at our head office in Newcastle on 29 November. Early priorities for Katherine will include overseeing the creation of a Soil CRC logo and associated branding, and the development of a Soil CRC website to enhance our external communication and brand awareness. Katherine will work closely with relevant communication staff of our participants to ensure alignment of our communication efforts.

Stakeholder visits and interactions

On 13 November, I met with the management and staff of the North Central Catchment Management Authority in Bendigo, Victoria, before travelling to Ballarat to meet with Federation University leadership and research staff. On 23 November, I will be visiting the University of Tasmania in Hobart and meeting with key contributors to the Soil CRC research program.

Given that we now move into the busy December period, which also corresponds with grain harvest in many agricultural areas of Australia, I do not anticipate that I will be having too many more face-to-face visits before Christmas. However, I would like to at least speak with the remaining participants via telephone for those I am yet to visit in person, so I will arrange a time that is convenient to us both.

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