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CEO COMMUNIQUE

4 May 2022

2022 Major Investment Round 5

The Board of the Soil CRC met last week and considered the recommendations of the Research and Adoption Committee (RAC) regarding project proposals submitted to the Soil CRC under the 2021 Major Investment Round 5 (Round 22-1). In summary, the Board approved 5 projects with a project lifetime commitment of \$2.8 m.

The Research and Adoption Committee assessed all project submissions against the criteria outlined in the Guidelines for Proposals and subsequently ranked and prioritised them. The recommendations of the RAC were presented to the Board, who after considerable discussion, approved the recommended projects. Some projects were approved with conditions and will require modification before being contracted and we will be working with Project Leaders and their partners in coming weeks to achieve this.

The projects that have been approved by the Board under Round 22-1 are as follows (Project title, project leader, lead organisation):

Program 1 – Investing in high performance soils

- A new tool to better assess the risk/reward of new farming practices and technologies – Nathan Craig, West Midlands Group
- Assessing economic feasibility and benefits of adopting high-grade organic fertilisers recovered from waste streams – Richard Culas, Charles Sturt University

Program 2 – Soil performance metrics

- Commercialising the 'Bilby' below ground wireless sensor node – Marcus Hardie, University of Tasmania

Program 3 – New products to increase fertility and function

- Glasshouse and field evaluation of innovative microbial carrier products – Chengrong Chen, Griffith University

Program 4 – Integrated and precision soil management solutions

- Building resilient soils and enhancing carbon stocks in cropping systems through plant diversity – Terry Rose, Southern Cross University

A further project was approved at the previous Board meeting as a co-investment with the Western Australia Government:

- Using living plant systems and modern farming methods to sequester soil organic carbon and improve soil fertility – David Minkey, Western Australian No-Tillage Farmers Association

All Proposal Leaders and their organisations have been informed directly of the Board decisions and are now in the process of communicating to their project teams. Whilst the Project Leaders and their organisations are listed above, all projects involve collaboration between CRC participants, including farmer and grower group participants.

Further details on each of these projects will be placed on the Soil CRC website in coming weeks, including information on the value and benefit that each project will deliver to farmers, in the short or long term.

I would like to thank and acknowledge everyone who contributed to this process, especially the project leaders who coordinated the scientific thinking, the writing and the budget preparation with each of their proposed project teams.

This brings the total amount of cash funds that the Soil CRC has now committed to projects to over \$30 million.

2022 Soil CRC Participants Conference

The 2022 Soil CRC Participants Conference will be held in Adelaide on 23-25 August 2022. Following the cancellation of the 2020 and 2021 events and the postponement of the March 2022 event to August, we are looking forward to the opportunity to come together and meet in person, put faces to names, and establish and re-establish the relationships and networks upon which the success of the Soil CRC is predicated.

Day 1 (Tuesday 23 August) will be reserved for project meetings and student workshops, with a Welcome Reception scheduled in the evening at the Adelaide Oval. Day 2 (Wednesday 24 August) will see a series of keynote presentations, highlights of our research to date, and some interesting, provocative panel discussions. This will culminate in a Conference Dinner that evening at the National Wine Centre. Day 3 (Thursday 25 August) will focus more internally on Soil CRC operations and program updates and presentations, finishing up at 2.30 pm to allow attendees to return home that evening in most cases.

Registration will be free for staff, students and members of Soil CRC participants. Look out for registration details in June.

In the meantime, if you have any suggestions as to what you want to see on the program (or what you want to present), please contact me directly.

A video recording of the Soil CRC Participants meeting that was held on 23 March (in lieu of the conference) can be accessed [here](#).

Soil CRC PhD Student Cohort

The Soil CRC PhD student cohort continues to gain momentum and we now have 35 students enrolled, in addition to two PhD completions. Over the past six months, students have participated in a range of online workshops covering topics from networking strategies and effective communication through to psychological wellbeing. They are excited about coming together at the Soil CRC Participants Conference in August for a one day workshop with their fellow students, and then engaging with the rest of the Soil CRC community via the conference and project meetings.

Soil CRC PhD internships

Soil CRC PhD students are encouraged to undertake a 3-to-5 month industry-based internship with one of our Participant organisations during their PhD. Participants interested in hosting a PhD

student intern, and PhD students interested in doing an internship, can contact our PhD Program Manager, Dr Cassandra Wardle, to facilitate discussions around the potential for an appropriate internship project and to help connect the right students with the right organisations at the right time.

Interested students should first use the Soil CRC website and the Participant Capability and Contacts Compendium (under 'investment calls') to identify potential internship organisations. Interested Participants might like to have a look at some of the [student profiles](#) on our website to get an idea of the research areas, skills and experience of our PhD cohort

2022 Board meetings

COVID permitting, the Board likes to hold its quarterly meetings at locations across Australia where it can engage with participants and other key Soil CRC stakeholders. Since the commencement of the Soil CRC, the Board has held meetings in all states of Australia, but this program has been curtailed in the past two years. Consequently, the Board is very excited to be meeting in person in a few weeks at CSU Wagga Wagga. The meeting will be preceded by a research tour on the previous day and a dinner with local stakeholders that night. Planned locations for the next few meetings are:

24 May	Wagga Wagga NSW (Charles Sturt University)
30 August	Perth WA (Murdoch University)
22 November	Lismore NSW (Southern Cross University)
February 2023	Hobart Tas (University of Tasmania)

MLA project

We have signed an agreement with Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) to deliver two scoping studies related to livestock grazing systems – Soil Management in Livestock Grazing Systems and Soil Indicators for Livestock Grazing Systems Performance. MLA proactively approached the Soil CRC to deliver these reports, and I am grateful to Soil CRC participants Federation University, NSW DPI, PIRSA and Facey Group for expressing interest in contributing to the project team to deliver these outputs. There is potential that it could lead to further research projects with the Soil CRC and MLA.

In-kind contributions

We recently submitted our quarterly report to the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, as per our Funding Agreement. Disappointingly, our reported in-kind staff contribution was significantly less than what has been collectively committed by participants. Our analysis of the reasons for this leads to the following observations:

- In some cases, there is under-delivery at a project level against what was committed in project proposals and formalised in project agreements
- In some cases, there is under-reporting at a project level, either by some partners within a project, or by project leaders not lodging a project report on time.
- In some cases, there is under-reporting (or no reporting) of non-project in-kind contributions, both staff and non-staff.

In summary, if you said you were going to do it, do it. If you have done it, tell us. We can't make up actual participant contributions, as our reporting is comprehensively externally audited each year – we rely upon our participants to report their contributions in a timely manner, as per the Partner Agreements signed at the commencement of the CRC and subsequently in Project Agreements.

Fortunately, there is one more reporting period this financial year, and there is the opportunity to add any retrospective in-kind contributions that have not yet been reported and counted. Note the

due dates for this are locked in as they are designed to enable us to compile and check the contribution and report to the Commonwealth by the due date each quarter, and there will be no opportunity to submit late reports.

A reminder that all contributions are reported through SoilCentral and that they are due on the following dates:

- Project Quarterly Reports (PQRs) are due 1 July 2022 (SoilCentral closes 10 July 2022)
- Non-Project In-Kind (NPIK) reports are due 10 July 2022 (SoilCentral closes 20 July 2022).

Should you need any assistance with this, please email projects@soilcrc.com.au.

Continued under-delivery (or under-reporting) of in-kind contributions to projects puts our Commonwealth payments at risk and may result in us having to withhold project payments to partners.

SoilCentral – New External Portal

The external portal within SoilCentral is being updated in the coming weeks. The upgraded portal will provide an enhanced and more user-friendly platform for everyone to use. The Research Administration Team is waiting for the portal to be released into the UAT system where they will be able to test and learn about the new features. Once tested, the CRC will then roll over the portal into the live version of SoilCentral after informing all users of this significant change.

The portal changes are self-promoting so that when a user next logs onto the system, SoilCentral will provide an automatic step by step guide on what has changed for the user to follow. This will occur before next quarter closure 30 June 2022.

Staff update

We are pleased to announce that Rhona Hammond has commenced as our part-time Intellectual Property Officer, assisting project leaders with the management and tracking of intellectual property in the Soil CRC and that Lisa Mahoney is working in the project office on a temporary assignment, assisting in the management of project agreements and reporting. We welcome both Rhona and Lisa to the team and the Soil CRC family.

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Contact list

We forward this communique directly to staff in our Participant organisations who we believe should be receiving communications about the CRC. If you do not wish to receive communications directly, please unsubscribe below. If there are others who wish to be on the list, please forward their names to Kathy Stokes at kathy.stokes@soilcrc.com.au.



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