



CEO COMMUNIQUE

15 December 2020

Parliamentary Friends of Soils breakfast

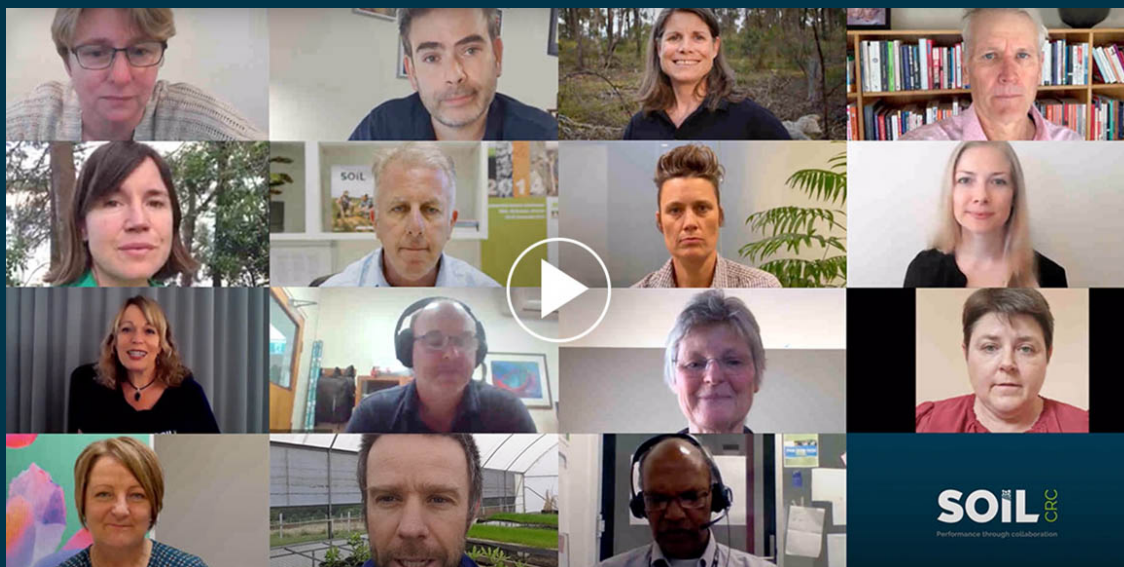
The Soil CRC was the lead host of a breakfast at Old Parliament House on 3 December to launch the **Parliamentary Friends of Soil**, and to coincide with World Soil Day. With support from Soil Science Australia and Soils for Life, it was an opportunity for all three organisations to come together and highlight the importance of soil, soil management and soil research to politicians in a non-partisan way.

I had the honour and opportunity to act as master of ceremonies and introduce the speakers including the group's two co-chairs, Deputy Prime Minister the Hon Michael McCormack MP and the Hon Linda Burney MP, the Minister for Agriculture, the Hon David Littleproud MP, and the National Soil Advocate, the Hon Penny Wensley. With good attendance and support from other ministers and parliamentarians, as well as the other 80 participants, the event shone a spotlight on Australia's soil policy and management, including the contribution of the Soil CRC.



Annual General Meeting

We (or more accurately, the CRC for High Performance Soils Limited) held our AGM on 25 November, via video, with most participant organisations represented. The Soil CRC Chair, Dr Paul Greenfield AO, presented an overview of the CRC's progress, and I gave a [report of our progress](#) in the past 12 months against the [Soil CRC's Strategic Plan](#). We also showed the [Soil CRC Year in Review video](#). The [Year in Review](#) (a short wrap up of 2020) is now on the home page of our website.



PhD Project Funding Approvals

At its meeting on 25 November, the Board approved funding for five PhD projects and students which were submitted in response to the opportunity announced in the previous [Communique](#).

The successful projects, lead supervisors and universities are:

- Exploring economic aspects of adopting soil amendments for ameliorating soil constraints in Australia – Frank Agbola, University of Newcastle (Program 1)
- Evaluation of gamma radiometrics as a tool to manage soil water repellency in cropping soils – Richard Harper, Murdoch University (Program 2)
- Next generation below ground sensor communication using seismic waves for smart soil applications – Joarder Kamruzzaman, Federation University Australia (Program 2)
- Food waste valorisation products as a nutrient source and carbon amendments – Nanthi Bolan, University of Newcastle (Program 3)
- Managing soil carbon to increase soil productivity – Nanthi Bolan, University of Newcastle (Program 3)

The next closing date will be 1 February 2021, thus allowing proposals to be considered by the Research and Adoption Committee and the Board at their next meetings in February.

If you have a student interested in undertaking a PhD through one of our eight university partners, in an area of relevance to the Soil CRC, please discuss your concept in the first instance with the relevant Program Leader. If you decide to proceed, obtain an application form and guidelines by emailing projects@soilcrc.com.au.

2021 Major Investment Round 4

The next round of Soil CRC project investment (Call 21-1) was opened for proposals on 22 October with a closing date of 4 February. I know there has been significant interest and project development activity by participants over the past two months, but there are still opportunities to develop and refine project proposals. If you have an interest in contributing to one of the priority areas, please contact the relevant Program Leader. The [Investment Call Guidelines](#) are available on the [Members page](#) of the Soil CRC website, along with video recordings of webinars that were delivered on each program to explain the priorities and application process in more detail. Approximately \$5.9 million is being made available for investment across the 4 programs for projects up to three years duration. Once again, precedence will be given to proposals that best address the priorities, demonstrate collaboration between Soil CRC participants, are of high scientific merit and present good value for money.

Project Reporting and In-kind Contributions

A very important aspect of our reporting to the Australian Government is reporting on the in-kind contributions of our participant organisations. In submitting our CRC application in 2016, each participant organisation committed to contributing a certain amount of in-kind resources, both staff and non-staff. This commitments largely get realised by contributions through projects. Each project application specifically and carefully identified what in-kind contributions would be made by each project partner and their staff, and this was an important consideration in the Board approval of each individual project.

However, through the project quarterly reports, we are experiencing significant shortfalls of actual staff in-kind contributions against what was promised at a project level. This is either because 1) staff are not contributing as much time to Soil CRC projects as they said they would and we are experiencing under-delivery, or 2) they are not accurately and completely reporting their in-kind contributions to their project leaders and we are experiencing under-reporting.

The Board has asked that we focus on this in coming quarters. Project participants are asked to ensure that they do contribute to projects as promised and that they accurately report this contribution to the Project Leader for inclusion in the project quarterly report (the next one is due on 10 January). Projects whose actual in-kind contribution continues to fall short of their promised in-kind contribution will be asked to explain why.

Webinars

The 2020 Soil CRC Webinar series came to an end on 8 December with a presentation by Program 4 Leader, Dr Lukas Van Zwieten on Soil Biology. It was the highest attendance for the year, and attracted significant international interest, as well as attendees from across Australia, both within and outside of the Soil CRC. All the [2020 webinars](#) can be found on our website, and watch out for announcements for the 2021 program, recommencing in February. If you have any suggestions for speakers or topics, or would like to volunteer a webinar, please speak to a Program Leader or to Communications Manager, Katherine Seddon.

Commonwealth Milestones

All Soil CRC participants recognise the importance of the Commonwealth milestones in shaping our priorities and investment allocations. In 2020, we undertook a process to review and revise (where necessary) the Commonwealth milestones that were first drafted and agreed to in 2016 - 17. Through a process of engagement and consultation, all participants had the opportunity for input, and various versions were reviewed by the Research and Adoption Committee before a final version was approved by the Board in August and submitted to the Commonwealth's CRC Program Office. The CRC Program Office agreed to accept our proposed changes and a formal

variation to the Australian Government's Grant Agreement was executed to embed these changes. The updated versions of the [Soil CRC Grant Agreement](#) and the [Commonwealth outputs and milestones](#) can be found on the Members page of the website.

Soil CRC Participants Conference – 23-25 March 2021

The 2021 Soil CRC Participants Conference will be held (COVID permitting) in Adelaide on 23-25 March 2021. The first day, 23 March, will be reserved for project meetings and the PhD student workshop and a welcome reception will be held on that evening. Wednesday 24 March will be open to the public and will shine a large spotlight on the research coming out of the Soil CRC. Following a conference dinner on the Wednesday night, Thursday 25 March will focus more on the business of the Soil CRC and we will hold program workshops to bring participants together to talk about future research and adoption activities. Save the date, and watch for more information, including registration details, in late January.

Season's greetings and leave arrangements

Soil CRC head office staff will be taking a well-earned break with most staff finishing later this week and recommencing on 11 January. Julie Moulton will be available at projects@soilcra.com.au on 7 and 8 January to assist Project Leaders who may need help finalising their project quarterly reports on SoilCentral.

As we finish 2020, I would like to wish all our participants a safe and happy Christmas, hopefully shared with family and friends, and I look forward to working with you all in 2021 in what must surely be a better year for us all than 2020.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



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Contact list

We forward this communicate 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. If there are others who wish to be on the list, please forward their names to Kathy Stokes at kathy.stokes@soilcra.com.au.



Performance through collaboration

CRC for High Performance Soils

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