



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

17 December 2024

It has been many months since I have communicated to participants in this format, but that doesn't mean we have been taking it easy. We are now in the eighth year of the Soil CRC with just on 2.5 years to go until our CRC Program funding comes to an end, and there has never been more happening.

There are many items in this Communique, but two items I want to highlight are an offer by GRDC to contribute \$1.8 million to the CRC (subject to conditions) and the call for EOIs for a new Program 2 Leader, to replace Assoc Prof Richard Doyle who is moving on from the University of Tasmania.

GRDC fast tracking Soil CRC outputs to the grains industry

We have been in discussions with the GRDC regarding the relevance of our research outputs to the grains industry, and in response they have offered to invest up to \$1.8 million over our last two years (2025-27) to help fast track Soil CRC outputs to the grains industry. The offer requires us to identify and put forward proposals that clearly demonstrate a compelling value proposition for the Australian Grains Industry, addressing a significant market need or opportunity.

Proposals must build upon existing or planned Soil CRC outputs, preferably those at TRL 7-9, that with the assistance of GRDC investment, can be delivered to grain growers or their advisors, over the next two years. Any investment is subject to GRDC's proposal review and approval processes.

We propose to take a consultative approach with our participants to build a number of proposals across our portfolio that meet the GRDC requirements. Each of the Program Leaders have already commenced discussions with their program teams, and our Soil Knowledge Broker, Felicity Harrop, is identifying opportunities from our Soil CRC Adoption Plan.

This provides a significant opportunity for additional funds to be directed to our participant organisations in the last two years of the Soil CRC, over and above any CRC Program commitments, and without the need for matching in-kind contributions (although the usual GRDC budget requirements will apply). Project size will be a minimum of \$300,000 and a maximum of \$900,000.

We need to submit proposals to GRDC by 31 January. **If you have an idea that builds upon Soil CRC outputs, you are encouraged to discuss them with Program Leaders or myself, by email or by phone, as soon as possible.** When we return from leave on 6 January, we will be reviewing possible proposal ideas and identifying which ones to develop into proposals over the following weeks.

Program 2 Leader, Richard Doyle, to step down

Following some structural changes at the University of Tasmania, Assoc Prof Richard Doyle's position will no longer exist, and he is taking a redundancy at the end of January 2025. Consequently, he has advised that he will no longer be able to fill the role of Program Leader for Program 2 in the Soil CRC.

The Board and Management of the Soil CRC want to express their recognition of the tremendous contribution that Richard has made to the CRC. Richard was an important contributor to the design and development of the Soil CRC bid in 2015-16 and has led and guided Program 2 (Soil Performance Metrics) since the CRC commenced in 2017. His passion for soils and his interest in being able to communicate the importance of soils to multiple audiences, including students and farmers, has helped the Soil CRC to achieve what it has.

We wish Richard well and we hope that he can continue some involvement with the Soil CRC in future.

Expressions of Interest – Program Leader: Program 2, Soil Performance Metrics

Expressions of Interest to lead Program 2 are called for from interested applicants from participant organisations in the Soil CRC. Program Leaders are a 0.5 FTE role (or less by negotiation), provided as an in-kind contribution from the Program Leader's organisation as part of their in-kind commitment to the CRC.

Program Leaders make a critical contribution to the successful operation and research delivery of the Soil CRC. The four Program Leaders work together as a team, with the CEO and staff of the CRC, to ensure an integrated approach is taken, while also being responsible for their individual programs.

This Program Leader role presents a significant opportunity for an early to mid-career scientist working for a Soil CRC participant organisation to enhance and establish their national reputation as a leader in Australian soil science, while being coached and mentored by the CEO and other Program Leaders. It also presents an opportunity for the Program Leader's organisation to become more fully engaged with the management and direction of the Soil CRC.

Further details of the role, along with a description of the role's responsibilities and required capabilities, [can be found here](#).

To express your interest in this role, please submit an application containing:

1. A statement summarising your suitability for the role and why it is of interest (400 words max)
2. Your resume
3. A letter of support from your organisation, identifying their willingness to recognise 0.5 FTE of your time as an in-kind contribution to the Soil CRC.

For further information, or to discuss your interest, please contact Dr Michael Crawford, CEO of the Soil CRC, on 0419 355 296 or michael.crawford@soilcrc.com.au.

Applications need to be emailed to michael.crawford@soilcrc.com.au and need to be received by **9am AEDT, Monday 20 January 2025**.

Year in Review 2023-24

I am proud to release our latest 'Year in Review' publication, presenting an overview of achievements and progress in the Soil CRC over the past year. The Year in Review is designed to be more readable and relevant to our participants and stakeholders with a focus on project updates and case studies, and there is a list of publications and PhD students. The [full report](#) and a [summary of the report](#) can be found on the Soil CRC website.



Board appointments

Prior to the 2024 AGM on 28 November, Kate Lorimer-Ward informed the Chair that she would be stepping down as a Director, due to increased commitments she had taken on in her new role as

CEO of NSW Local Land Services. Kate had been on the Board since late 2017 as an elected representative of the Major Partners, while working for NSW DPI. Her contribution was highly valued, and coming from a stage government agency and having been trained as a soil scientist, she brought a unique and valuable perspective to the Board. We wish her well in her new role.

Members of the Company (i.e. the Major Partners) were asked to vote on nominations for the vacant position. At the AGM, it was announced that Prof Helen Thompson of Federation University Australia was the successful candidate. Helen is the Director of the Centre for eResearch and Digital Innovation (CeRDI), leading transformative advancements in digital research for over 20 years. A highly accomplished leader in eResearch, Helen has driven impactful initiatives in data interoperability, digital innovation, and agricultural research. She holds a Doctorate of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) with Distinction from the University of Ballarat.

Earlier in the year, as announced at the Soil CRC Participants Conference in August, Prof Roger Swift retired from the Board, having served on the Board and as Chair of the Research and Adoption Committee since the commencement of the Soil CRC.

The Board appointed Dr Peter Carberry as an independent Director with skills in science and research, to replace Roger. Peter is an agricultural scientist whose last position was General Manager, Applied Research, Development and Extension at the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC).

Prior to joining GRDC, Peter was Director General of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), headquartered in Hyderabad, India, where he was based from 2015. From 1986 to the end of 2014, he worked at CSIRO in Australia, leaving as Chief Research Scientist.

Soil CRC Adoption Plan launched

At the AGM, I launched the Soil CRC Adoption Plan 2024-2027, following its approval by the Board at its September meeting. It was the culmination of a lot of activity and consultation, led by Soil Knowledge Broker, Felicity Harrop, and importantly, it was the outcome of the valuable input provided by the Adoption Plan Working Group, as identified in my previous Communique.

The Board were very grateful for the input of the Working Group. They were also keen that we continue to engage with and utilise the expertise and experience of this group and proposed that the Working Group transforms into an Advisory Group to “provide expert advice from a participant perspective on the implementation of the Adoption Plan to the CEO and the Soil Knowledge Broker”.

However, having finalised the Adoption Plan, the majority of the work is ahead of us. As we move into 2025, I will work with Felicity and the Program Leaders to lead its implementation. Successful implementation will require the involvement and contribution of many of our participants and I encourage you to familiarise yourself with its contents.

[The Adoption Plan can be found here.](#)

2025 Soil CRC Participants Conference – Save the date!

Planning is progressing for the 2025 Soil CRC Participants Conference to be held in Perth, WA on 26-28 August. As in past years, registration will be free for staff, students and members of Soil CRC participant organisations. Project Leaders will have the opportunity to have meetings on Tuesday 26 August and there will be field trips organised for Thursday 28 August.

This will be a great opportunity for participants from the eastern states to learn more about Western Australia soils and agriculture and to interact with our WA colleagues on their 'home' territory. Please keep the dates free.

Soil Science Australia / New Zealand Society of Soil Science Joint Conference

This year, Soil Science Australia combined with the New Zealand Society of Soil Science to run a joint **Soil Science Conference in Rotorua**, New Zealand on 2-5 December.

The Soil CRC was well represented with the CEO, two Program Leaders and the Soil Knowledge Broker in attendance. Importantly, and pleasingly, there were more than 15 presentations from Soil CRC researchers and PhD students, both oral and poster, providing an opportunity to both showcase the work of the CRC and to receive comment and feedback from peers.



It was great to see so many Soil CRC PhD students at the conference. Pictured here with me are Vijay Kumar Aralappanavar, Sadia Sabrin Nodi, and Chenting Jiang.

Soil CRC Board Meeting

The Soil CRC Board will hold its next quarterly meeting at the Mt Helen campus of Federation

University in Ballarat on 25 February 2025. This will also be a chance to engage with Soil CRC stakeholders in the region.

Quarterly reports and Christmas closure

From the Projects Office, a reminder that quarterly reports are due over the Christmas/New Year period.

The SoilCentral portal is now open for FY2024-25 Q2 reports. Project Quarterly Reports (PQRs) and Non-Project In-Kind (NPIK) reports are all due on 10 January 2025. The SoilCentral portal is open now and we encourage you to access the portal and submit your reports prior to the Christmas break.

Many of our office staff will be on leave from 20 December and will be returning on Monday 6 January 2025. I will be working until 23 December and then returning from leave on 6 January. Should you have issues accessing or submitting your report in SoilCentral during this time, please send an email to projects@soilcrc.com.au. Minimal monitoring of this 'projects' inbox will occur during the closure period, so it may be a few days before you receive a response.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our participants for your contribution to the Soil CRC and I look forward to seeing more of you in person in 2025.

Enjoy your break if you are taking one and enjoy good times with family and friends.

Dr Michael Crawford

Chief Executive Officer

CRC FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE SOILS

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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 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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