

Communiqué 7

Australian Soil Network - implementing the National Soil RD&E Strategy

Committee meeting: Video conference, September 2020

The Australian Soil Network held its twentieth meeting via teleconference on the 24th of September 2020, with representatives attending from Federal and State agencies, Research and Development Corporations, Universities, the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment and guests from Soil Science Australia, the office of the National Soil Advocate, the Soils CRC and the Soil Policy section of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

Update from National Soil Advocate's office

The Honourable Penny Wensley AC was appointed National Soil Advocate by the Prime Minister in August 2020. A former Governor of Queensland, distinguished Australian diplomat, and Patron of Soil Science Australia, Ms Wensley will work to champion sustainability and to support the integrated management of our soils, water, flora and fauna. The ASN welcomes Ms Wensley and looks forward to engaging with her during her coming term.

The ASN also paid tribute to the former National Soil Advocate Major General, the Honourable Michael Jeffery AC, AO (Mil), CVO, MC, who stepped aside from the role due to health concerns. Major General Jeffery was a passionate advocate for the importance of soils, bringing to the attention of the public and our governments the need for improved soil health, a coordinated national approach to managing our soil resource, and in raising the profile of those many land managers successfully enhancing their soils and landscapes. His advocacy was pivotal in the establishment of a permanent office of National Soil Advocate as well as the Prime Minister's announcement of the development of a National Soil Strategy.

Update on National Soil Strategy

Troy Clarkson (DAWE) provided an update on the development of the National Soil Strategy (NSS). Consultation workshops were held in each of the states and territories with ~200 participants attending. Consultation with Commonwealth Agencies has also been undertaken. An online 'have your say' survey was undertaken with ~ 230 responses. Synthesis of the workshops, consultation and survey is currently underway and will be circulated to stakeholders in the next month or so. A National Soil Strategy Steering Committee has been established with representation from each state and territory and the Commonwealth.

Scoping of a potential National Soil Monitoring Program has been undertaken with a number of workshops conducted with stakeholders and the support of VenturePro. It is expected that development of this program will take another couple of years.

The relationship between the existing Soil RD&E Strategy and the new National Soil Strategy was discussed with broad support for an integration of the two Strategies. The Soil RD&E Strategy will be a key building block of the National Soil Strategy.

The National Soil Strategy needs to be finalised by the end of June 2021.

National Soil Information Framework (ASN Working Group 2)

The Australian Soil Network (ASN) is tasked with implementing the national Soil Research, Development, and Extension Strategy. The ASN has developed five key priorities to effectively implement this strategy. Key priority 3 is the development of “better information systems for soil related knowledge exchange”, and is aimed at improving accessibility to soil information. The ASN tasked Working Group 2 to implement this priority. John Friend presented and sought feedback on a summary of the National Soil Information Framework (NSIF) business case. The proposed NSIF aims to improve the national coordination of soil information by enabling an increase in the pool of soil data and significantly enhancing the accessibility, consistency, and utility of new and existing data sets. This framework aims to underpin Australia’s sustainable development, resilience, and economic prosperity by supporting high quality, evidence-based, and timely decision-making by government, industry, community, researchers, and land managers.

The strategic business case that John Friend presented recommended a three-stage implementation of the NSIF, providing stop/go opportunities. This is to ensure the direction, intent, and rationale for the NSIF remain aligned to developing better information systems for soil related knowledge exchange.

The three stages outlined were:

1. Scoping, planning, and costing
2. Collaboration and design
3. Implementation

The business case shared widespread support upon discussion by the ASN committee. Approximately \$150,000 will be required to complete Stage 1. A motion was passed to provide partial funding to support implementation of Stage 1. Other organisation members agreed to investigate additional funding opportunities to support this activity.

Finalisation & release of 3rd Edition of Australian Soil Classification

The Australian Soil Classification (ASC) is the official means of classifying soils across Australia and is critical for understanding and managing soils. Chair of the National Committee of Soil and Terrain (a standing committee of the ASN), Mr Jason Hill submitted a paper on the finalisation and release of the 3rd Edition of Australian Soil Classification. The NCST have sought financial support from the ASN to develop an online version of the ASC to increase its utilisation. The concept shared widespread support and the request for funding was approved subject to finalisation of quotes for the project.

The National
Soil Research,
Development and
Extension Strategy



Further information: Please contact the ASN secretariat at asn.secretariat@dpi.nsw.gov.au