

## Communiqué

### Soil Research, Development and Extension Strategy Implementation Committee meeting – Adelaide, August 2015

The Soil RD&E Implementation Committee held its third meeting in Adelaide on the 27th August 2015 with representatives from CSIRO, Federal and State agencies, Research and Development Corporations and Universities.

#### **Rural R&D for Profit – Round 2**

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The second round of the Rural R&D for Profit program will provide grants to RDCs for collaborative research that enhances farm-gate profitability and supports continuing innovation in Australia's primary industries. The research has to focus on delivering cutting-edge technologies and making research findings more accessible for primary producers. It must also improve coordination and cooperation between stakeholders.

Members of the Implementation Committee agreed to support the development of coordinated bids for Round 2 that reflect the priorities of the Soil RD&E Strategy. RIRDC is coordinating the initial process of calling for soil research ideas. Implementation Committee members have distributed information about the call throughout their networks. The RDCs will work with partner agencies to refine the projects prior to submission to the Australian Government.

#### **Report from Advocate for Soil Health**

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The Advocate for Soil Health, Major General Michael Jeffery, gave a brief update on his activities. The Soil Advocate has been actively engaged in setting the agenda for soil research, development and extension in Australia and has undertaken consultation in recent months and presented proposals and options to key decision makers and stakeholders including Australian Government Ministers and the Prime Minister. The Implementation Committee thanked General Jeffery for his outstanding efforts and then discussed a range of practical actions to support his ongoing activities.

#### **The Australian Soil Assessment Program**

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The proposed Australian Soil Assessment Program (ASAP) was discussed including the need for national soil data infrastructure, the need for soil information at sub-paddock scale, and the need for the monitoring and forecasting of soil condition. It was acknowledged that some of the benefits from ASAP would be public as well as private but that there is a lack of investment opportunities (and institutional model) for public-good soil RD&E. The ASAP proposal provides a comprehensive plan for reengineering the national soil information infrastructure so that it can provide the required data and information to regularly assess the condition of soils and their responses to land management across Australia. More significantly, it provides the basis for achieving the five national priorities recently endorsed by the Soil RD&E Implementation Committee. Several core components of ASAP are also

essential if Australia is to take full advantage of the Big Data revolution in agriculture. The ASAP proposal seeks to establish a missing piece of national infrastructure but current institutional settings have to be adjusted if it is to proceed. The Committee identified that a more detailed business case is now required with solid analysis of the likely returns on investment into ASAP. This had to include aspects relating to the monitoring of land-use and land-use change, likely impacts on agricultural productivity and implications for sustainable use and management of soil resources. Institutional models for implementing ASAP were also discussed.

### **Soil RDE website**

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The proposed website design was endorsed at the meeting. The development of a website is required by the Soil RD&E strategy. The purpose of the website is to provide information on implementation activities and related outputs. The content of the website will include the priorities for soil RD&E, activities of the Implementation Committee, updates from the working groups and a news function. Links to sector-specific projects will provide a snapshot of existing soil RD&E activities along with connections to the other RD&E strategies. A key feature of the website will be the emphasis on links to other soil websites that provide access to data and information resources. It is anticipated the website will be publicly available in December 2015.

### **Annual Forum**

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Each year the Soil RD&E Implementation Committee hosts a forum. Given the increasing policy interest in soil matters internationally (e.g. [OECD](#), [Global Soil Partnership](#), [Soil and Big Data](#), [Soil Security](#)) and in Australia, it is essential for the Soil RD&E Implementation Committee to have a clear strategic intent and program of action. It is also essential for strong engagement with industry, government and other stakeholders. The Committee agreed to hold an intensive 2-3 day workshop that will produce a position paper on the key strategic issues that need to be addressed to ensure its five national priorities are achieved. An overview of the position paper will be presented in a session on soils and natural resource management at Outlook 2016.

### **Vote of thanks for Martin Blumenthal**

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The committee acknowledged the major contribution made by Martin Blumenthal from GRDC in the development and implementation of the National Soil RD&E Strategy.