



## **COUNCIL OF RURAL RDCs – BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**What is the purpose of the Council of Rural RDCs?** The Council of Rural RDCs provides a structure through which the Rural RDCs can work together on matter of common interest and importance. The aim of the Council is to enable the RDCs to generate additional value, over and above what can be achieved through individual action. The Council operates on behalf of the RDCs and enables them to develop, share and communicate common positions, platforms and messages.

**What is the role and drivers of the RDCs?** The RDCs are service providers to industry and government, and their role is to prioritise, invest in and evaluate research, development, technology transfer and adoption (extension), and in some cases market access, market development and commodity promotion. These efforts aim to deliver benefits to producers, supply chain participants, consumers, the community and the environment.

**What is the Council?** The Council is formed by the RDCs who are its organisational members. All 15 RDC are members of the Council. Members are represented at Council meetings and for the purposes of decision-making by the Chairs and chief executives (or their delegates) of each of the Rural RDCs. Decisions of the Council are generally made by consensus. Should a vote be required decisions are based on agreement by a majority of members.

**Why do we have a Council?** The 15 RDCs cover the gamut of agricultural, fisheries and forestry industries in Australia. Each RDC responds to the circumstances of the industries that it serves, and there are strategic and structural differences between them. However, all RDCs also have a common stakeholder in the Australian Government, and this stakeholder facilitates the system by maintaining the necessary policies, enacting compulsory levy arrangements, collecting and disbursing levy funds, and through co-investment contributions to research, development and extension. With political accountability for taxpayer and levy funds, government (including Ministers and other government colleagues, the Parliament in general, and the public service) are highly attuned to issues relating to expenditure (eg areas of potential duplication and or inefficiency) and performance. The Council arrangements give the RDCs a forum to discuss issues and structures to coordinate responses as necessary.

**What do the joint RDCs want to achieve?** Through the Council the RDCs have a stated ambition of seeing rural industries thriving through innovation, and is contributing to achieving this goal by leading, championing and communicating rural research, development and extension. RD&E powers industry innovation which in turn enhances productivity and sustainability, leading to greater competitiveness and profitability. These are critical ingredients for thriving rural industries.

**Where does the Council focus attention?** Two spheres of influence have been identified as being strategically important for the joint RDCs.

The first is defined as **Policy**, which is the space in which government sets and delivers on its agenda, where it establishes rules and regulations, and where it conducts its business. The RDCs are apolitical and do not get involved in politics. However, the RDCs are also collectively the largest industry innovation program, and Australia's third largest source of publically-available funding for research in Australia. This role, resources and insights of the RDCs can inform policy development.

The second area is termed **Portfolio**. The RDCs collectively invest around \$600 million a year into RD&E, and have a total budget of about \$800 million. The aim under Portfolio is to increase opportunities for the RDCs to optimise and leverage their resources for greatest impact and benefits.

**What are the current priorities?** The Council has three priorities for action:

1. Collaboration and coinvestment
2. Impact assessment and evaluation
3. Stakeholder engagement and communications

**Collaboration and co-investment** will deliver against the Portfolio goal as it speaks to the resources that are available to the RDCs and how they are deployed, and the opportunities available to the RDCs to get better results by working together. This work also addresses a key risk in the Policy space regarding perceptions of the RDCs of not work together, not coordinating investments, and potentially duplicating effort.

**Impact assessment and evaluation** is about understanding and articulating performance of the RDCs and the investments being made, and it provides an evidence base which may help inform future investment decisions as well as underpin the communication program.

**Stakeholder engagement and communications** is about developing common messages, capabilities and promoting the benefits of co-investment in rural innovation.

## What are the key roles and responsibilities?

**The Council of Rural RDCs:** The Council is responsible for matters relating to its strategic direction, policies, practices, management, finances and operations, including:

- articulating and promoting a shared vision for the Rural RDCs;
- overseeing and endorsing the development and implementation of a strategic plan to achieve the shared vision;
- reviewing annual performance and progress towards achieving the Council's objectives, and identifying remedial action where necessary.

### **Council Chair:**

- representing the Council for official functions and engagements, including liaising with the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources and the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources;
- providing leadership to the Council and ensuring proper functioning of Council meetings;
- establishing the agenda for each Council meeting in consultation with the Executive Officer;
- mentoring the Executive officer and conducting performance reviews;
- working with the Executive Officer to progress the Council's strategic agenda and workplan.

**Executive Officer:** management of Council activities and functions on a day-to-day basis, with all powers, discretions and delegations as authorised by the Council. Includes:

- implementation of the Strategic Plan and delivery of agreed outcomes;
- ensuring effective communication with the Council, members, delegates and representative to enable relevant decisions to be made;
- management of the Secretariat functions;
- management of the Council budget.

### **More information:**

- [Council of Rural RDCs Statement of Intent, February 2016.](#)
- [Council of Rural RDCs Strategic Approach, August 2016.](#)