



Council of Rural R&D Corporations

STRATEGIC APPROACH

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Contents

Rural R&D Corporations	2
Background	3
The Council of Rural RDCs.....	3
Scope.....	4
Situation analysis and considerations.....	4
Purpose, role and objectives	8
Roles, expectations and responsibilities	14
Planning and reporting cycle.....	14
Supporting strategies	15
Related Activities.....	15
Contacts	15

Rural R&D Corporations



**Wine
Australia**

Background

The Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations (the Council) is the structure through which the 10 industry-owned companies and 5 statutory corporations, collectively known as the Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs), collaborate and coordinate collective efforts on matters of common interest.

The role of the Council is to support and facilitate the RDCs to fulfil their broad purpose where action by any of the individual organisations would be impossible, impractical, inefficient or ineffective. The Council aims to create and build value for the RDCs by focusing attention and effort where collective action is necessary, preferable or otherwise beneficial for the RDCs. The Council provides a mechanism for the RDCs to harness the strength of their combined resources and networks, aggregate intelligence, amplify and disseminate messages and engage with common stakeholders. In particular the Council operates on behalf of all RDCs to promote, strengthen and provide advocacy for Australia's highly regarded rural RDC model, the research investment made and the benefits delivered.

The Council of Rural RDCs

The Council of Rural RDCs is an unincorporated joint venture of the Rural RDCs. The Council has no legal standing. Australian Pork Limited is the Managing Agent and provides legal, financial and employment support as necessary.

The Council has its origins in the enabling legislation for the RDCs, with the Minister required to call an annual meeting of the Chairs of each of the RDCs to discuss and coordinate investments and activities. This 'Chair of Chairs' arrangement was supported by a part-time Executive Officer and a small amount of funding was made available for joint activities, particularly focusing on communications. Responsibility for the administrative support was connected to the Chair of Chairs position, and rotated around the RDCs.

In the mid-2000s the RDCs agreed to change the resourcing and support model for the Chair of Chairs, and outsourced the service to an independent consultancy. Support for communication services also increased at this time, and this was also outsourced to a communications agency. In line with the increased sophistication of the approach, the Chair of Chairs group was recast as the Council of Rural Research and Development Corporation Chairs.

This arrangement lasted for about three years when it was agreed to end outsourcing the secretariat and appoint a full-time CEO to manage the affairs of the Council. It was during this period that the word 'Chairs' was removed from the title to become the Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations, and an independent Chair was appointed to lead the Council. Australian Pork Limited agreed to take on responsibility as Managing Agent.

The departure of the CEO and independent Chair in 2013 triggered another review of the structure and focus of the Council, and it was subsequently agreed to reduce the funding contributions from the RDCs and implement a maximum cap from any single RDCI, reclassify the staffing role and revert to a Chair appointed from within the Chairs group rather than independently.

¹ As at August 2016 the contribution income for the Council is set at \$520,000 a year, with the cap on individual contributions set at \$120,000 a year.

Membership of the Council is open to all Rural RDCs. Funding contributions are calculated annually in line with an agreed formula based on eligible RD&E expenditure on a rolling three-year average to account for the different sizes and scales of the RDCs. The structure and funding is confirmed through a three-year Contributions and Management Agreement signed by all RDCs. The current agreement will expire in June 2017.

The Council is supported by a full-time executive officer and a part-time administrative assistant.

Scope

Under the terms of the Statement of Intent, the Council is responsible for and has authority to make determinations in all matters relating to its strategic direction, policies, practices, management, finances and operations, in order to fulfil its role and purpose and meet its objectives. This includes:

- 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.

The strategic approach covers issues necessary for the Council to be effective and achieve its desired outcome including collective activity of the Rural Research and Development Corporations and influencing factors across the planning, execution, management and administrative of strategic investments and partnerships on behalf of industry and government stakeholders. Research, development, technology transfer and adoption are common activities across all RDCs. Some RDCs are also involved in market access, market development, promotion and the delivery of services to and for industry.

Items that are out-of-scope for the Council include activities, investments, priorities or decisions of individual RDCs, and developments within specific industry sectors or rural communities.

Situation analysis and considerations

The Rural R&D Corporation Model is well established, unique and envied around the world. The RDCs have individual and a collective history of success and delivery spanning more than 25 years. Despite the RDCs and the RDC Model being extensively reviewed, they continue to be subject to ongoing questions relating to performance (impact and operations), accountability, transparency, priority and cross-RDC collaboration.

Collective annual expenditure across the RDCs is approximately \$800 million, with levies accounting for about \$470 million, Commonwealth funding \$250 million, and the remainder being funded through a mix of royalty incomes, interest, and draw down of reserves. The 15 RDCs have a total staffing of more than 900 full-time equivalent positions.

The bulk of activity and expenditure is directed towards research, development and extension, with the annual RD&E spend being about \$580 million. Levies account for \$330 million or about 60 percent of the funds available for this research investment.

Except for Sugar Research Australia, the RDCs do not undertake research, directly employ research staff or own research infrastructure. Being separate from the management and maintenance of research infrastructure and capability, the RDCs are able to direct funding to issues of highest priority and research providers best placed to answer critical research questions. Research funding is invested on the basis of competitive processes and merit-based selection.

The RDCs arise from an explicit agreement and partnership between industry and government. During the 1980s the Australian Government pursued a series of policies designed to open up the Australian economy including floating the currency, deregulating industries and reducing tariff and other trade barriers. While these policies would deliver major gains for the population and economy overall, there was also a recognition of the potential for significant negative impacts for rural industries who would increasingly be exposed to international competition. Producer competitors often have lower costs of production and enjoy high levels of market intervention, subsidisation and government protection.

The Minister for Primary Industries at the time, the Hon. John Kerin, championed the role of industry-driven research and innovation as a way to maintain and improve the productivity and sustainability of Australian farmers, fishers and foresters. Some industries were already collecting levies to support research and other industry functions. A new policy would make this arrangement available consistently across the sector. Through their commodity levies, producers are able to invest in their own research needs, something that is otherwise practically impossible on the scale needed to have significant impact.

To incentivise industry to agree to the levy collections, address the issues of market failure, and acknowledge that benefits from rural R&D also flow to consumers, communities and the environment, the government also agreed to make a contribution to the R&D effort. This contribution would be on a dollar-for-dollar basis up to a cap of 0.5 percent of the gross value of production for each levied commodity. The levies and matching arrangements were then confirmed through legislation.

With the funding mechanism came the need for structures to manage the investments in research, development and extension. The partners agreed to the establishment of new, independent organisations that would operate at arms' length from both industry and government but be responsive to the needs of both. Thus the RDCs were born. For alignment with the source of levies funds the RDCs are constituted along commodity lines. The Rural Industries RDC has a specific mandate to manage R&D investments for industries too small to set up their own R&D entity, and to address multi-industry and national interest RD&E needs. A separate RDC was also established to work on sustainability and natural resource management issues, but this organisation was abolished by the government in 2009, with some functions being devolved to the remaining RDCs.

The RDCs were all initially established as statutory corporations of the government. Over time many RDCs have been reconstituted as industry-owned companies, enabling industry to consolidate a range of services under a single organisational structure and create efficiencies. The core elements of the RDC model remain, namely, independent organisations with funding from industry and government to drive positive improvement for producers, industries, communities and the environment.

The RDCs were also established as entities at the margins of the rural innovation system of the time. With no direct responsibility for research staff or research infrastructure, the RDCs would be able to direct and redirect funding to areas of highest priority and need. This approach means the RDCs leverage off the investments being made by other parties for necessary research capacity, capability and functionality. Since the early 1990s the RDCs have gradually moved into a dominant position within the system as funding for the research providers has either stagnated or reduced. The RDCs are estimated to account for about one third of the direct funding available across the rural innovation system. However, the leveraging arrangements means more than half of the remaining

two thirds of investment is also directed to the priorities identified and being addressed by the RDCs.

With responsibility for funding from both industry and government the RDCs are subject to high levels of scrutiny and competing interests. Pressure on government spending is unlikely to abate any time soon. While the government has previously rejected the Productivity Commission recommendation to change the cap for the Commonwealth funding model, it is understood that the proposal receives active consideration from time to time. While matching contributions are capped to gross value of production at the farm gate by commodity the enabling legislation does not incorporate an upper limit for the total of the government's contribution across the sector. This creates a level of uncertainty which is of particular concern to central agencies as they try to project forward expenditures.

The RDCs also represent a large proportion of the total portfolio budget for Agriculture and Water Resources. Due to the matching funding arrangements, increased output by industries (a measure of success for the RDCs) could have significant impact on the portfolio and department over time. During the life of the last Parliament the department sought to amend the enabling legislation for the RDCs in order to withhold amounts of Commonwealth matching funds for non-R&D activities that were deemed to be of industry benefit. While the amendments ultimately did not pass the Parliament, this development demonstrated the requirements within the department for looking at all options for budget savings, and the importance of the legislation in protecting the funding arrangements.

Another area of tension facing the RDCs relates to cross-sectoral research and cross-RDC collaborations. There is a strong perception that the RDCs are weak in being able to appropriately resource and prioritise collaborative, cross-sectoral R&D, and that cross-sectoral RD&E more generally suffers from under investment and a lack of coordination. Under the National Primary Industries RD&E Framework eight cross-sectoral RD&E strategies have been created to try to address these issues, but almost all report similar challenges in implementation. Progress is slow. The government is now implementing the Rural R&D for Profit programme with the stated intent of getting the RDCs to engage in more collaborative R&D with each other as well as with third parties. There is a concern that the Rural R&D for Profit programme provides a model for future intervention from the Commonwealth as it seeks to generate additional value from the matching Commonwealth investment through the RDCs.

Most recently, the Plant Biosecurity CRC commissioned the Australian Farm Institute to examine options for the future of plant biosecurity research after the current CRC ceases in 2018. That report has recommended a new entity be formed to take over responsibility for coordinating and investing in plant biosecurity RD&E, with projected funding of about \$25 million a year. Should this be recommended by adoption by government, it is expected that at least a portion of the funds should be drawn from the RDCs to cover contributions from industry and government.

While the external environment is presenting a number of challenges for the RDCs, within and across the network there are high levels of goodwill and energy that can be directed towards delivering positive outcomes through collective action. As an example, the plant industry RDCs have agreed to explore and develop (and with an expectation of implementation) an alternative model for coordinating investments in plant biosecurity across the RDCs. This approach may be appropriate for other areas of cross-sectoral RD&E. The RDCs have also committed to an annual collaboration and co-investment process which would see a strong focus on identifying the areas of strategic alignment,

working together to refine and develop investment priorities and projects, reviewing outcomes and learning and reporting on the results.

An analysis of strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Rural RDCs and the Council appears below (Table I).

Table I. SWOT analysis

	Council of Rural RDCs	Rural RDCs collectively
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a wide range of people within the 15 Rural RDCs and Australian Government • Internal and external goodwill • Departmental support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well established • Access to resources (funding and people), knowledge and expertise • Ability to leverage investments • Industry connections and support • Govt connections • Record of achievement • Strategic capacity and oversight
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited dedicated resources • Fragile support structure and capacity • Low ownership of Council outcomes • Lack of visibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership of collective outcomes/shared vision • Duplication of effort and investment (real and perceived) • Siloes of operation
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common messages to build awareness of and support for the RDC model • Increase exposure of role of Council • Inform national policy • Become a forum of influence • Systems-level analysis to identify improved processes • Brokerage of cross-RDC RD&E investments • Collective purchasing to drive additional value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveraging of collective activities and aligned investments across multiple sectors • Improve research performance • Alignment with current govt rhetoric • Curation of existing content • Capacity for responses at multiple levels (commodity, enterprise, industry, sector, regional, national)
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to the funding model • Lack of engagement of RDCs • Withdrawal of support from members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Govt imposing lowest common denominator responses • Compliance and accountability requirements exceed risk, diverting resources from core business • Perceptions of duplication, waste • Perceptions of a lack of value added • Focus on costs not impacts • Withdrawal of government funding and services (national and state) • Collapse of the National Primary Industries RD&E Framework

Purpose, role and objectives

The ambition of the Council is to ensure Australia's rural industries are thriving through innovation, now and into the future. It will deliver on its ambition by leading, championing and communicating rural research and development for Australia. It builds on the work of the Rural RDCs who invest in research, development, technology transfer and adoption, and in some cases market access, market development and promotion, to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits for producers, rural industries, rural and regional communities and the nation.

In order to create and deliver value for its members, the Council focuses on activities where collective and coordinated responses are necessary, preferred or otherwise beneficial. It has a particular interest in Australia's rural innovation system, and the evolving role of the RDCs within it. The areas of focus for the Council, where individual action by the RDCs would be impossible, impractical, inefficient or ineffective have been identified as:

- Articulation of an overall performance story for the Rural RDCs and the industry-government partnership (Rural RDC) model
- Aggregation and analysis of data and information relating to the role and performance of the RDCs within the rural innovation system
- Coordination and brokerage for more effective partnerships and collaborations, and to leverage investments made across the RDCs for greatest impact and benefit
- Representation on the benefits of the RDC model and the impacts of the RDCs, including a strong focus on engagement within the National Innovation and Science Agenda and interaction with the National Farmers' Federation.

The strategic approach adopted by the Council revolves around three key areas of effort:

- Collaboration and Partnerships – enhancing and improving existing and potential internal and external relationships and arrangements through which the RDCs do their work
- Impact Assessment and Performance – verification and analysis of collective outputs, outcomes and impact of RD&E investments; demonstrated high levels of governance, accountability, efficiency.
- Communications and Positioning – the RDCs collectively as leaders of rural innovation, professional managers of RD&E investments, as high quality partners in rural innovation delivering results for rural industries, communities, the environment and the nation.

The work of the Council and the RDCs collectively is then underpinned by two core strategies:

- Policy – informing and advising national innovation policy and rural innovation delivery from the perspective of the largest and most successful industry innovation investment program, the largest industry-government partnership program, and the third largest RD&E investor program in Australia
- Portfolio – maximising benefits (impacts and generation of value) for levy and tax payers, government and other investors through collaboration, coordination and optimisation of investments and activities

Figure I. The five elements of the Council of Rural RDCs Five-year plan

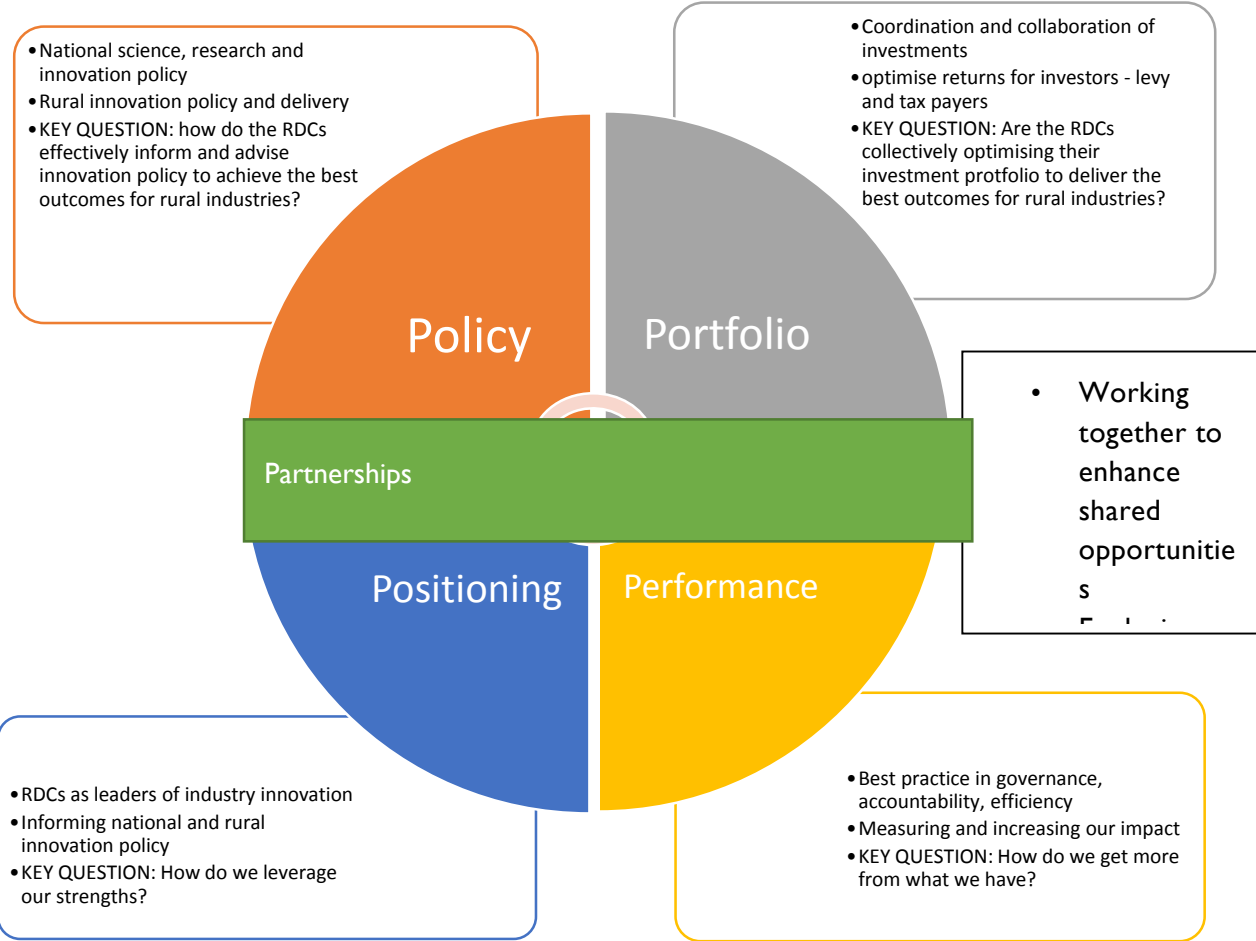


Table 2 below captures the different elements of an overall monitoring, evaluation, impact assessment, reporting and communications structure for the Council. It positions the three priority areas of work against each other, and draws connections back to the activities and lines of evidence generated by each RDC. Colour-coding is used to identify where work is underway but not complete, and where additional effort may be needed. It also articulates an overall performance story and value proposition for the RDCs which can be demonstrated through the cumulative outcomes the work. Each of the three areas of work is supported by a defined strategy and or implementation action plan. The overall performance story and value proposition underpins the Council’s representation efforts and will support positioning of the Rural RDC industry-government partnership model within the national and rural innovation systems.

Table 3 on the subsequent pages presents a program logic to connect from the Council’s ambition and mission statements through the strategies and tactics and to specific projects and products to be completed and produced during the period of the plan.

Table 2: Monitoring, Evaluation, Impact Assessment and Performance Reporting and Communication across the Rural RDCs

Logic stage →	Inputs	Organisational performance	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts	Benefits
	Rural RDCs: Economic, environmental and social benefits for producers, rural industries, communities and the nation					
Activities at the RDC-level	Annual operating plans	Reviews of performance	Annual reports	End of Strategic plan reports	RDC evaluations	Sectoral analysis
Sources of evidence	Budgetary control	Governance measures		Benefit Cost Analysis	Stakeholder surveys	Case studies
	Council of Rural RDCs: Rural industries are thriving through innovation, now and into the future. Creating and building value for the RDCs by focusing where collective action is necessary, preferable or otherwise beneficial.					
	COLLABORATION and PARTNERSHIPS			IMPACT ASSESSMENT and PERFORMANCE		
Cross-RDC Aggregations	R&D portfolio analysis	Corporate benchmarking	Annual collaboration statement	Annual impact assessment	Longitudinal Impact assessment	Community attitude, expectations analysis
Lines of Evidence/ Metrics	Total RDC revenue Total RDC expenditures	Project leverage Collaborations Efficiency gains?	Projects funded Outputs generated	BCA trend analysis	Rural sector productivity growth (ABARES + PC)	Public good impacts / social licence
Tools /systems /processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration platform (shared documents and work spaces) 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder surveys and industry change 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration and co-investment framework • Priority setting and review processes 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact assessment framework and tools 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregated collection and reporting systems 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social licence and community trends analysis 		
	COMMUNICATIONS and POSITIONING					
Communication theme	Value for money, Efficiency	Leverage Investment	Innovation	Market Access, International Competitiveness	Farm gate profits	Employment, Vibrant Communities
Key message	Return on funds invested underpins research and development programs	Co-investment and collaboration bring scale, capability and greater impact	Innovation and practice improvement drive cross-sector gains and public good	Market intelligence and market access power demand for Australian food	Smarter farming drives improved productivity and profitability, on and off farm	New skills and changed practices deliver better jobs and boost regional capacity
RDC Value Proposition / Performance story	Innovation, agility and efficiency are crucial for the future of Australia's rural industries. The Rural Research and Development Corporations are supporting the success of the rural sector through strategic, targeted and relevant research and development. The RDCs, Australia's largest productivity-driven industry innovation program, are highly efficient and effective research managers, co-investors and partners focused on delivering benefits for producers, industries, rural and regional communities, the environment, and the nation as a whole.					
	Business as usual practice		Agreed and being actioned		Agreed by not yet actioned	
	Outside of the RDCs		Completed and no future plans		Not yet determined / agreed	

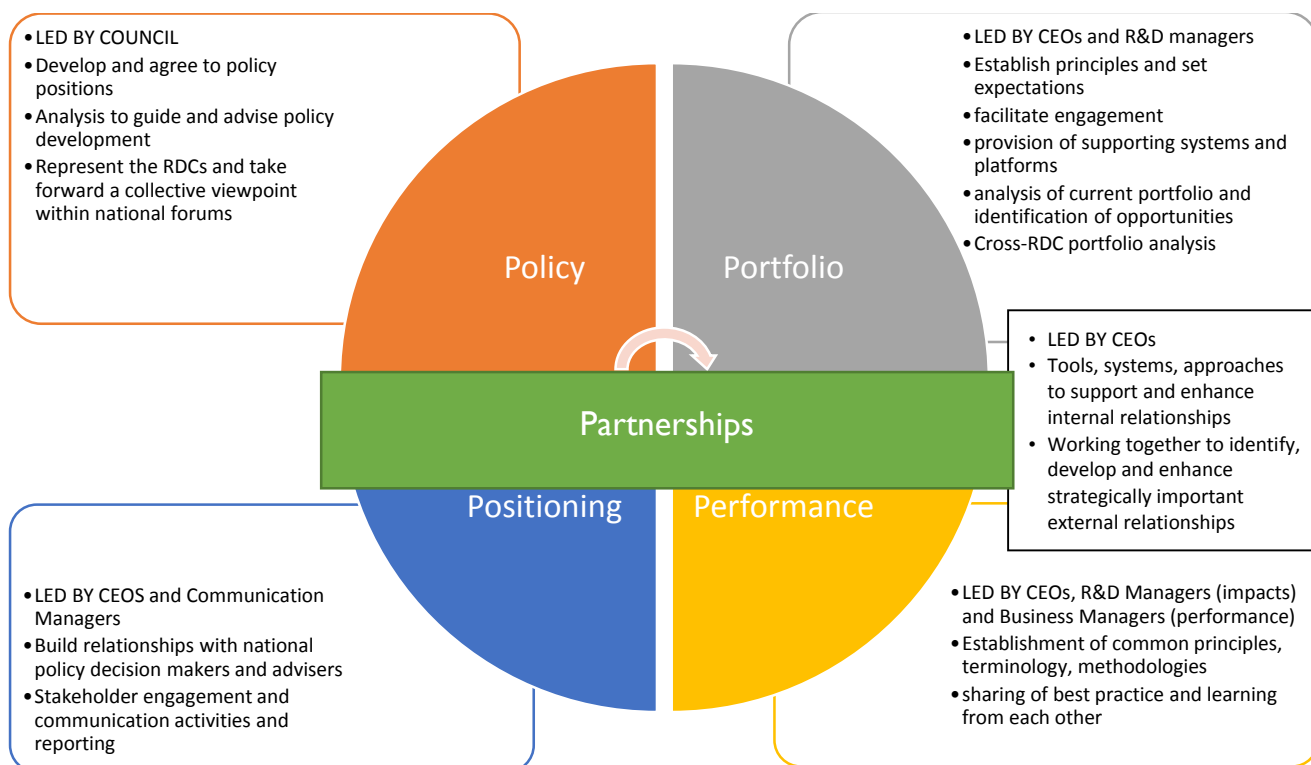
Table 3. Program Logic

		DETAILS	COMMENTS AND ASSUMPTIONS
ASPIRATIONS / AMBITION	AMBITION	Australian rural industries thriving through innovation, now and into the future	Rural industries make an important contribution to Australian society and economy. Thriving requires industries that are both successful and sustainable. Innovation is driven by research, development, technology transfer and adoption.
	MISSION	Create and build value for the RDCs by focusing efforts where collective and coordinated responses are necessary, preferable or otherwise beneficial.	The Rural RDCs make important contributions to rural industries and the nation, and these contributions can be enhanced through collaborative and coordinated actions.
	OBJECTIVES	1. Lead, communicate and champion rural R&D for Australia	R&D (and E&M) are critical functions that drive and underpin the innovation needed to ensure rural industries can be successful and sustainable in the short, medium and longer-terms.
		2. Facilitate and enhance collective responses where it makes more sense than individual actions	The Council enables the RDCs to create and maintain useful structures and mechanisms through which they will work together
EXPECTED RESULTS	OUTCOMES, IMPACTS, BENEFITS	Improvements within the rural RD&E system that drive better outcomes for industry, government and the community	Australia's rural RD&E system is complex. Working together through the Council the RDCs can target initiatives and activities that deliver improvements to the way the system functions. A more functional and effective system should lead to improved delivery of research outcomes, the adoption of which can be expected to deliver benefits to industry, the government and the community.
		Rural industries supported to maximise their opportunities through adoption of innovations	RD&E are central to innovation which drives improvements in industry productivity. Improved productivity leads to greater competitiveness and profitability. Improving delivery of RD&E outcomes and adoptable innovations will enable rural industries to maximise the opportunities presented to them.
	INDICATORS, MEASURES and TARGETS	Growth of the rural sector (economic value, amount of production, jobs)	The overall performance of the rural sector is the result of a range of factors, some of which can be influenced by the RDCs (eg development of innovations that lower costs or improve quality) and some of which cannot (changes in the value of the Australian dollar). RD&E are acknowledged as major drivers of industry productivity, and growth of the sector stands
		Increased impact from RDC operations and investments	Effectiveness of investment/activity is a key performance measure
		Improvements achieved in RDC operations and investments	Efficiency of operation is a key performance measure

ACTIONS	STRATEGIES	1. Policy – inform and advise the development and implementation of national and rural innovation policy and delivery	Govt is a primary and common stakeholder across all the RDCs, enables levy collection and distribution, and a significant investor in the rural R&D system. Policy refers to the processes and statements that governments use to establish priorities, guide their actions and allocate funding. The RDCs were created and continue to operate thanks to policy, and changes in policy can impact the capacity of the RDCs to deliver positive outcomes for rural industries. This plan aims to move the RDCs to a point where engagement in policy is a strength.
		2. Portfolio – smart collaboration, coordination and optimisation to maximise generation of value for levy and tax payers	The RDC portfolio is where the strength, opportunity and leverage of the RDC system can be found. The Council itself has no role in directing or priorities RDC resources, other than those that are allocated by the RDCs to Council activities. However, stakeholder expect the RDCs to work together where we can and to learn from best practices being applied.
	TACTICS	1. Performance – generate, analyse and communicate performance information to monitor, evaluate and improve the collective efficiency and effectiveness of the RDCs.	Evidence of outcomes and performance provide the foundation for policy engagement and the positioning work. Understanding performance will also assist in identifying opportunities for improvement
		2. Partnerships – understanding, promoting and improving the current and potential internal and external relationships that enable RDC success	Partnerships are central to the RDCs achieving their goals, whether internal to the RDC network, or involving external collaborators, co-operators or contributors. Improving the quality of existing arrangements and building new ones will support the RDCs to increase efficiency and effectiveness. The combined leverage of the RDCs could be applied instigate and explore new opportunities, domestically and internationally.
		3. Positioning – leverage the RDCs unique position, model, partnerships and scale to increase delivery of value for levy and tax payers	The RDCs model is unique in the world for the way it brings together industry and government as partners and investors. The RDC portfolio covers approximately \$800 million of annual expenditure and more than 900 FTEs. The RDCs are significant contributors to the rural innovation system and have a major influence with research and other service providers. The collective portfolio of the RDCs may offer some additional leverage opportunities in terms of establishing new and novel partnerships, negotiating with common stakeholders and suppliers. Positioning the RDCs as a force within the rural innovation system, efficient and effective managers of RD&E services, and as positive, accountable and equitable partners, will support the individual and collective RDCs maximising their leverage.

OUTPUTS	MEMBER SERVICES AND PROJECTS	Collaboration and co-investment framework	Establishing and maintaining systems, tools and processes that support, encourage and facilitate the RDCs working together on issues of strategic alignment and shared priorities.
		Evaluation and Performance Assessment	Developing and implementing a performance and evaluation framework for the RDCs. Implementing systems and processes that support collection, analysis and reporting of multiple lines of evidence and data sets across outputs, outcomes and impacts.
		Business process improvement and service delivery	Utilising collective intelligence and leverage to continue to streamline and enhance processes and service delivery.
		Representation	Engaging within national policy forums to promote the importance of rural innovation and improved coordination across the rural innovation system
		Stakeholder Engagement and Communications	Implementation of a strategy to support RDCs using common messages and a unified voice; utilising a variety of communication approaches and channels
	PRODUCTS AND OUTPUTS	High quality information and analysis to inform policy debate, development, implementation and improvement	
		Regular publication and promotion of a variety of performance information and analyses	
		Targeted communication products and engagement activities for international and external audiences	

Roles, expectations and responsibilities



Planning and reporting cycle

Execution of the plan involves coordination across and within the 15 RDCs. A defined and regular planning and reporting cycle will assist to more clearly define the roles and involvement of the operational working groups in achieving the Council's objectives. The proposed cycle is:

- September – Council reviews activity and environment, establishes/confirms areas of priority and expectations
- By early Feb – working groups develop a forward agenda to address priority areas, identify potential projects and collaborative activities for the coming financial year
- February – the secretariat collates this material for consideration by Council
- March – Council meets, determines priorities and funding allocations, establishes the workplan
- July/August – working groups review activity and prepare advice for Council regarding current and future priorities
- September – report to Council of previous year's results and current activities

Supporting strategies

- Council of Rural RDCs Collaboration and Coinvestment Framework (May 2016)
- Impact Assessment and Performance Evaluation Guidelines and Procedures (updated May 2014)
- Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Strategy (endorsed December 2015)

Related Activities

- National Primary Industries RD&E Framework
- National Innovation and Science Agenda
- Food and Agribusiness Growth Centre

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