

Comment on Draft Report of Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Rural Industry Research Corporations

As senior UQ staff working within areas covered by the Rural Industry Research Corporations, we support the submission by the Australian Academy of Science, the Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture in arguing that that the Productivity Commission Draft Report and Recommendations do not adequately address important issues on the role of Australian rural Research and Development Corporations and their contribution to the overall productivity, sustainability and international competitiveness of our primary industries. In particular, less government support and the separation of productivity research from sustainability research will make it more difficult to deliver outcomes which enhance our food production and care for our environment in a sustainable manner.

Particular Comments

There has been a recent decline in public funding for agricultural and food related research and the proposals from the Productivity Commission Inquiry would continue this trend in the face of increasing need. This has had disastrous consequences in terms of education and capacity building within the relevant scientific disciplines and should be reversed, i.e., more public funded made available.

More support does need to come from industry too, especially as some projects do provide outcomes with a net benefit to private entities. If government funding is reduced, a likely consequence is that funds from industry and other agencies will also reduce. This does not appear to be appreciated in the draft report and is certainly a lose:lose situation.

The current R&D model with investment from the rural industries and the Australian Government is considered to be best practice. While there is always room for improvement, a decrease in total funding and a separation of public-good rural research from industry-specific research does not appear to be the way to go. Most projects have components of industry benefit and public good outcomes, e.g. the future livelihood of rural industries requires them to look after their environment. Multidisciplinary productivity and sustainability research should be aimed at achieving both outcomes, so putting them in different systems would not appear to be effective or efficient.

It is our belief that specific levy rates should continue to apply and that industry would be prepared to contribute more if they have continued (or more) say in defining what that research should be. An example is the Research Advisory Committees that exist within the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

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