



11th October, 2010

Hon Minister Paul Caica MP
Minister for Environment & Conservation
GPO Box 1047
Adelaide, SA 5001

Dear Minister Caica,

RE: "A Way Forward to Integrate Sustainable Agriculture and NRM Using Existing Resources, and Further Shared Resources in NRM to Reduce Bureaucracy"

The Advisory Board of Agriculture (ABA) has compiled several ideas for consideration in response to your request for our input into the above scenario.

Over the last few weeks ABA members from the six non-arid NRM regions have put forward their thoughts to improve integration. This information was further discussed at our most recent meeting with the higher priority concerns and suggestions being pulled together in a facilitated session.

ABA members have experienced varying levels of satisfaction with the existing interaction / collaboration between NRM personnel and landholders, dependent on their personal involvement and which region they are involved with.

Detailed information follows in Attachment A. However to summarise key points, members felt that the following were important on a State level;

- More collaboration between NRM and industry (including Grower Groups/Ag Bureaux), particularly at a higher level
- Take successful elements from regions and roll out in other areas
- Funding programs designed to meet grower needs in terms of project outcomes, timing, length of project etc

In a regional context the following were key considerations to improve integration;

- Acknowledge and value landholder's knowledge and experience
- Long term projects, 3, 5 and 10 years' duration
- Farming Systems / Grower Groups and Ag Bureau have a key role to play in NRM delivery and extension and could be further utilised



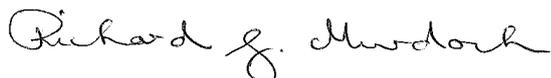
- Production and environmental outcomes should be addressed together
- Soil and land management should be back on the agenda
- Environmental stewardship acknowledgments and fair payments are important
- Develop professional extension skills of NRM staff
 - Production / NRM integration
 - Communication and education skills
 - Develop mutual understanding

The Board has welcomed this opportunity. Members feel that there needs to be a considerable increase in engagement of landowners / producers in natural resource management activities. Achievement of this is of high importance for long term sustainable agriculture.

We are aware that PIRSA and DENR funded the Ag Excellence Alliance to carry out six Grower / NRM / Industry forums across five NRM regions earlier this year, and several of our Board members participated in these. A final State Planning Session was held in early July with representatives from PIRSA, DENR, DAFF, Agribusiness, Ag Excellence Alliance, and various Grower Groups. Data related to projects, opportunities, and issues collected at the forums was reviewed and plans formulated to advance the integration of sustainable agriculture and NRM. We alert you to the document currently being completed from this State Planning Session by PIRSA, DENR, and Ag Excellence representatives and believe that it will be of considerable interest to you.

We are very happy to discuss our suggestions further with you.

Kind regards



(Richard Murdoch)
CHAIRMAN
ADVISORY BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

Attachment A: Increasing Integration of Sustainable Agriculture and Natural Resource Management

Higher level collaboration and integration:

1. More collaboration between NRM and industry particularly at a higher level
 - Organisations such as Grower Groups, Ag Bureau Branches, Ag Excellence Alliance, Independent Consultants, Agribusiness, and Research & Development Corporations have a high understanding of the on ground needs of growers, and have highly skilled people working within. These bodies could contribute to formulation of policy, recommend funding directions, and use their established networks to assist in roll out of activities.

2. Take successful elements from regions and roll out in other areas,
 - eg, EP was considered to be well advanced in their collaborative process, and other areas may have other successful activities, such as effective landcare facilitators / sustainable ag officers. These successful elements could be documented and shared across regions
 - Ministerial / NRM Council directives to NRM Boards / NRM staff re the value of sustainable ag and the importance of engaging with Farming Systems Grower Groups and Ag Bureaux

3. Funding programs designed to meet grower needs with project outcomes, timing, length of project etc.
 - Project outcomes driven / initiated by growers
 - Ensure grower's on ground priorities are recognised in NRM plans and gain appropriate investment
 - Funding cycles longer eg: 3, 5 or 10 years to allow full seasonal cycles, so that trials can be replicated and results therefore more accurate
 - Longer projects to allow employment of good project managers to ensure successful roll out and completion
 - Alignment of funding rounds to allow co-investment
 - Longer application process time to encourage well thought out project development, less ad hoc, resulting in better NRM outcomes
 - Funding realignment to support extension and adoption process

The more regional processes for integration of sustainable agriculture and NRM tend to revolve around recognising the value and importance of sustainable ag to community, economical, and environmental outcomes.

1. Acknowledge and value landholder's knowledge and experience
 - Consult and involve in decision making and solution seeking

- Landowners are key NRM stakeholders and key deliverers of NRM outcomes managing 68% of non arid NRM regions
2. Long term projects, 3, 5 and 10 years duration (as per higher level collaboration)
 3. Farming Systems Grower Groups and Ag Bureaux have a key role to play in NRM delivery and extension and could be further utilised
 - These grower groups have well established networks with growers, especially those more likely to adopt, so provide a good mechanism for NRM delivery
 - Grower Groups, including Ag Bureaux, Ag Excellence Alliance, have considerable volunteer contribution and strong links to broader rural communities to support community integration / ownership of NRM practises.
 - In some areas these Grower Groups have good linkages with NRM staff / landcare facilitators and this practise should be strongly encouraged in all regions
 - Collaborative projects between NRM and Grower Groups / Ag Bureaux to increase grower NRM buy-in
 - NRM staff give greater importance to involvement with Grower field days / meetings for networking, gaining understanding of grower needs, sharing their NRM message. Growers are time poor so NRM should utilise events growers consider high priority to deliver the NRM message.
 4. Production and Environmental outcomes should be addressed together
 - Reinforces importance of sustainable ag
 - In some areas members believed that NRM is too focused on environmental conservation and biodiversity and there needs to be balance between these, and food/fibre production, community, and landowners.
 5. Soil and land management should be back on the agenda
 - An opportunity for NRM to support growers and gain grower buy-in
 6. Environmental stewardship acknowledgments important
 - Community not paying for environmental services, ie pastures, trees, waterways etc
 - Stewardship acknowledged in \$\$\$ or in kind to recognise grower effort towards natural resource management
 7. Develop professional extension skills with NRM staff
 - Key people to deliver production / NRM integration
 - Communication and Education skills in regions
 - Government could take lead role and put skilled people in the regions and explore the possibility of support from organisations such as GRDC.