Plant Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre:
Stakeholder Survey Report 2015

Summary version

Prepared by Currie Communications | February 2015
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Background

The Plant Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre (PBCRC) was established in recognition of the need to strengthen the plant biosecurity scientific capacity of Australia.

The PBCRC commenced its six-year term on 1 July 2012, as an extension CRC from the Cooperative Research Centre for National Plant Biosecurity, which began operating in November 2005.

This document outlines results from an independent survey of PBCRC stakeholders. The survey aims to:

- Evaluate stakeholder satisfaction with PBCRC’s performance
- Gain feedback on the value of PBCRC’s investment, research innovation, overall performance and work to transition beyond its six-year lifetime
- Ensure PBCRC understands the expectations of stakeholders.
Methodology

Surveys were completed by 55 respondents, out of 111 provided by PBCRC, over 13 days (Tuesday, 3 February – Monday, 16 February). Five were removed due to being incomplete and three surveys were completed over the phone with Currie Communications.

The online surveys comprised 49 questions and covered five key themes:
- Governance and management
- Research
- Results
- Performance
- Looking ahead.

Key benchmarks were established, to be tracked in future surveys:
- Satisfaction with PBCRC’s performance
- Perception of PBCRC’s level of research innovation
- Perception of quality of PBCRC research
- Belief that research outputs will meet end user requirements
- Value of PBCRC investment
- Value of PBCRC collaboration
- Satisfaction with transition plans.

The largest group of respondents was project leaders (51%), PBCRC representatives (38%), science advisors (21%), end users (15%) and end user advisors (11%)
Executive Summary

Governance, management

- Most respondents are generally quite happy with the governance arrangements.
- However, half feel only ‘somewhat clear’ or have just a ‘limited’ understanding of the governance environment in which PBCRC operates.
- Most (74%) rate the level and quality of communication from PBCRC management as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’.

Research

- Most respondents (75%) are happy with the balance of PBCRC’s research portfolio.
- Most (74%) say that PBCRC’s research outputs will meet the requirements of their organisation and are well set up to meet the requirements of its end users.
- Nearly all (85%) respondents agree that PBCRC’s research is of a high quality.
- Nearly all (85%) respondents agree that PBCRC’s research investment is collaborative.

Results

- Almost all respondents agree that the new knowledge generated by PBCRC is valuable and relevant.
- Nearly three-quarters (70%) say PBCRC is creating products, processes and know-how that will benefit them and their sector.

Performance

- Nearly all (85%) respondents rate PBCRC’s performance as good or excellent, and 77% are ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the value provided.
- Nearly all (93%) respondents consider the involvement of end users in PBCRC’s research to be very valuable or valuable.
- Most (72%) respondents rate their organisation’s performance in PBCRC as ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’.
- Most respondents (74%) find PBCRC’s research collaboration ‘very valuable’ or ‘valuable’ for their organisation.
- Collaboration and networking opportunities are the most valuable thing provided by PBCRC, followed closely by funding and resources. Additional administrative burden is the least favoured aspect of PBCRC.
Looking ahead

- Respondents are evenly split between being clear and not very clear on the strategic direction PBCRC is taking for the medium to long-term.
- Respondents feel it is very important that they/Australia have national leadership and co-ordination around plant biosecurity RD&E, following the life of the PBCRC.
- Most respondents are unsure of the work being undertaken to transition PBCRC beyond its six-year lifetime.
- Communication around research results and outputs are a high priority for the next twelve months, as well as new diagnostics resources
- A strategy to ensure a national biosecurity program into the future is a high priority for the next four years.
- Some respondents are unhappy with the arduous administrative requirements of participating in the CRC.
- Common responses for future desired outcomes include the development of new diagnostic tools and the publishing of research.
Benchmark figures

The following benchmark figures have been separated according to respondents’ self-selected role in the PBCRC. Respondents could pick choose more than one role.

PBCRC’s research investment is valuable

Most (83%) respondents ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that PBCRC’s research investment is valuable.

Project leaders (24):
- Strongly agree – 9
- Agree – 11
- Disagree – 0
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 3
- Skipped – 1

Science Advisors (10):
- Strongly agree – 2
- Agree – 6
- Disagree – 1
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 0
- Skipped – 1

End Users/Advisors (10):
- Strongly agree – 3
- Agree – 6
- Disagree – 0
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 0
- Skipped – 1

Representatives (15):
- Strongly agree – 3
- Agree – 6
- Disagree – 1
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 3

PBCRC’s research collaboration is valuable

Most (74%) respondents find PBCRC’s research collaboration ‘very valuable’ or ‘valuable’. Six respondents find it ‘not valuable’.

Project leaders (24):
- Very valuable – 17
- Valuable – 3
- Not valuable – 1
- Can’t say – 2
- Skipped – 1

Science advisors (10):
- Very valuable – 2
- Valuable – 3
- Not valuable – 1
- Can’t say – 3
- Skipped – 1

End Users/Advisors (10):
- Very valuable – 4
- Valuable – 3
- Not valuable – 0
- Can’t say – 2
- Skipped – 1

Representatives (15):
- Very valuable – 3
- Valuable – 6
- Not valuable – 4
- Can’t say – 2
Most satisfied with PBCRC's performance

Most (85%) respondents rate PBCRC’s performance overall as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. Six respondents find it ‘poor’.

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Perceptions are high of CRC research quality

Most (85%) of respondents ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that PBCRC’s research is of a high quality. Two ‘disagree’ and one ‘strongly disagrees’.

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Majority find CRC’s research innovative

More than two-thirds (68%) of respondents ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that PBCRC’s research investment is innovative. Nine ‘disagree’ and two ‘strongly disagree’.

Project leaders (24):
- Strongly agree – 5
- Agree – 14
- Disagree – 2
- Strongly disagree – 1
- Can’t say – 1
- Skipped – 1

Representatives (15):
- Strongly agree – 0
- Agree – 8
- Disagree – 6
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 1

End Users/Advisors (10):
- Strongly agree – 0
- Agree – 7
- Disagree – 1
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 0
- Skipped – 1

Science advisors (10):
- Strongly agree – 0
- Agree – 5
- Disagree – 3
- Strongly disagree – 1
- Can’t say – 0
- Skipped – 1

Most believe research outputs will meet end user requirements

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that PBCRC’s research outputs are well set up to meet the requirements of its end users. Five ‘disagree’ and six couldn’t say.

Project leaders (24):
- Strongly agree – 6
- Agree – 13
- Disagree – 1
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 3
- Skipped – 1

Representatives (15):
- Strongly agree – 2
- Agree – 8
- Disagree – 3
- Strongly disagree – 1
- Can’t say – 1

End Users/Advisors (10):
- Strongly agree – 0
- Agree – 8
- Disagree – 1
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 0
- Skipped – 1

Science advisors (10):
- Strongly agree – 0
- Agree – 6
- Disagree – 2
- Strongly disagree – 0
- Can’t say – 1
- Skipped – 1
Most are unsure about transition plans

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents could not say if they were satisfied with the work being undertaken to transition PBCRC beyond its six-year lifetime. Most were unsure of the strategy or felt removed from this aspect. 27% were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’.

Project leaders (24):
- Very satisfied - 1
- Satisfied - 6
- Dissatisfied - 0
- Very dissatisfied
- **Can’t say - 15**
- Skipped - 2

Representatives (15):
- Very satisfied - 0
- Satisfied - 4
- Dissatisfied - 1
- Very dissatisfied - 0
- **Can’t say - 9**
- Skipped - 1.

End Users/Advisors (10):
- Very satisfied - 0
- Satisfied - 6
- Dissatisfied - 0
- Very dissatisfied - 0
- Can’t say - 2
- Skipped - 2

Science advisors (10):
- Very satisfied - 0
- Satisfied - 1
- Dissatisfied - 2
- Very dissatisfied - 0
- **Can’t say - 4**
- Skipped - 3.
Insights

PBCRC satisfaction

Respondents are happy with performance of PBCRC overall, in particular the:

- Value provided by the CRC
- Quality of research taking place
- Expertise and research collaboration/networking opportunities provided.

"Very happy with the management group of the PBCRC, performing very well."

"Enjoying the journey with the PBCRC."

"Happy with my experiences with the CRC."

"It’s great working within the CRC and I really value the opportunity to do so."

"Globally the PBCRC is unique and our science is quality. We should promote this."

There are a handful of stakeholders whose responses did not reflect the majority, and who expressed varying levels of dissatisfaction. It is difficult to ascertain whether these responses reflected the individual’s opinions, or that of their organisation.

Currie recommends further conversations are had with these stakeholders in order to gain a better understanding of their needs and expectations. In nearly all cases they are responding from an organisation that offered positive feedback.

"More openness and clarity. The CRC is by far the most expensive organisation I deal with in terms of the costs associated with project development. The lack of clarity about how decisions are reached is a huge concern. The whole project development process involves a complicated process that appears to be highly variable in terms of the value add. What it does do is add considerable cost to the proposal developers without necessarily improving the final product."

"These plans, in the words of CRC management, are pretty broad. In other words being on track to deliver is something a kin to being able to hit the wall of a barn while standing inside it. It is not about the value or usefulness of the achievement."

"It appears very disjointed rather than coherent. It is the ongoing story of too many participants and not enough money, and the participants who scream the loudest get the most (e.g. CSIRO)."
National coordination and leadership

There is a consensus amongst respondents around the need for national leadership and ongoing legacy arrangements for plant biosecurity research and development.

Most (60%) end users and end user advisors feel satisfied/very satisfied with the transition plans. However, project leaders (29%), representatives (27%) and science advisors (10%) either are not satisfied with plans, or do not know of them.

There is an opportunity for stronger leadership in this area, particularly through increased communications around PBCRC’s plans to transition beyond its six-year lifetime.

“I’m not sure what they’re doing. I know there’s talk in that area but I’m not aware what the transition is about.”

“At this point I don’t have a clear picture of the strategy post-CRC.”

Re: top three outcomes from PBCRC in the future:
- “Establish a new national program in biosecurity to replace the CRC”
- “A strategy to ensure the future of the PBCRC”
- “Clear plan for national leadership and co-ordination of plant biosecurity R,D&E post CRC”
- “Plan for long-term, Australian biosecurity R&D”
- “A clear way we can work together towards what comes next. So that those of us that can, are able to participate fully in that process”
- “A strategy to ensure the future of the PBCRC.”

Strategic direction

It appears a lack of understanding of the governance environment may impact on some stakeholder’s perception of PBCRC strategic direction. While there was no specific question in the survey to highlight what role respondents felt that they had in this, some respondents commented that their own contribution could improve.

“By providing more leadership to the CRC and more interaction. I think a lot of the people that we have here are along for the ride, and not actually putting in the hard yards.”

“Need to know the requirements of my organisation - at present they are vague.”

“Actively engage with the PBCRC and provide support (knowledge, data, experience, advice) to CRC projects.”

“Yes we could really empower them greatly, however the transactional cost and real lack or relevance to our sector limits this.”
Administrative requirements

A number of respondents referred to the arduous nature of the processes and ‘bureaucracy’ when dealing with PBCRC. Clearly this is frustrating but again may reflect a lack of understanding of the organisation’s governance environment.

“Red-tape and bureaucracy: The relationship between my organisation and the PBCRC is beset with tedious, time-consuming, inconsistent, baffling red-tape - working on which detracts from, and delays (seriously), the ability to do the work (and report on it). This is not necessarily PBCRC’s fault.”

“Some of the reporting processes are bureaucratic and unnecessary to end users.”

(Re: governance arrangements) “The whole thing seems overly bureaucratic and governance heavy.”

Research investment

With regard to research balance, while 75% feel the research portfolio is good or excellent, many don’t feel confident commenting on any depth on any area other than their own, or aren’t clear on how the balance was derived.

This may be reflective of the breadth of PBCRC’s investment portfolio and the nature of the CRC structure per se.

There is also some suggestion of competition between partners, for example satisfaction and perceived value in the grains portfolio was high, which was not the case in the horticultural area.

“It is far too grain heavy. Regardless of who invested the dollars, there is more to plant biosecurity than grain.”

“Clearly have under invested in grains and storage and overinvested in Hort, but this levels the playing field a little for Hort compared to the other complexities this industry faces. Great to see SB research getting a run…”

“The way the review structure is set up, there are opportunities to choose the directions of the research. Certainly there's an element of competition between end users but in the research area I'm involved in, I'm aware of that and have been for many years. Both competitive and collaborative. Opportunities for direct investment in determining the direction of CRC research.”

(Re: least valuable aspect of PBCRC) “Organisations protecting their own patch and not willing to openly cooperate.”

“I am not sure that PBCRC has set targets and then asked who can provide that work so that our trade and biosecurity position is improved. I get the impression that researchers bid on pest projects and then don’t publish and then bid on the next
round of pet projects - maybe I am wrong and perhaps I am not closely engaged with the PBCRC process.”

There was mixed feedback about PBCRC’s research investment being well set up to meet market opportunities – particularly in the open ended comments.

Half the respondents feel PBCRC’s research investment is well set up to meet market opportunities. The others (in particular science advisors, of which only 50% could answer) aren’t as sure of the work taking place in this area or what they should expect.

The lack of understanding of ‘market opportunities’ presents an opportunity for communication from PBCRC about where and how its research is being used.

“...Has been responsive to emerging requirements during the life of the CRC. Uncertain regarding extension of this to commercialisation and market opportunities.”

“I'm not aware of the CRC doing market opportunity research and so identifying what opportunities are there.”

“All your projects need to ensure that results are published in peer reviewed journals otherwise they are just opinions without consideration by one's peers. For trade discussions with overseas partners, DoA can only take in peer reviewed paper to argue for better market access conditions for Australia...”

Some comments also indicated some tension between strategic and applied science investment. It is possible this reflects a broad concern about the well-documented withdrawal of funding from extension in recent years, and how or who is now filling this space.

“True definitions of "strategic" and "applied" are not reflected in PBCRC-approved projects. PBCRC needs to let us know who the end-users are. Growers, academics, PhD students, who???”

“Increase the level of strategic basic research. There are funding agencies in Australia who can fund the very applied end - but very very few to fund the strategic/basic.”

“Basic science is underrepresented. CRC's have industry focussed objectives, heavily weighted towards applied science, but I think it's appropriate - I think it's excellent.”