

CEO's Report

There has been considerable activity in the CRC since our last newsletter several months ago, not least of all being the Centre's formal launch at Parliament House on 4 September, by The Honourable Peter McGauran, Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The launch was a great success with many people still commenting on the large number of people who attended. The CRC's first Symposium was held on the 2 days following the Launch and was also a resounding success with the number of attendees very close to our maximum capacity. We were pleased to receive good representation from our students, researchers and Participants, as well as international attendees from US and NZ. I would like to particularly acknowledge the efforts of Sue McKell and Mellanie Balment-Sanders in making both events a success and to Chevron Australia Pty Ltd for their sponsorship of the Symposium.

The next big undertaking for the CRC has involved a Supplementary Bid to DEST to introduce a new program on **Post-harvest Integrity Research** into the Centre. As with our original CRC bid in 2004, the Supplementary Bid involved 2 application rounds and a lot of work by the bid team, culminating in a presentation and interview in Canberra on 23 November. We were very pleased to receive news today that our bid has been successful, and we look forward to welcoming Graincorp Ltd, ABB Grain Ltd, Cooperative Bulk Handling Ltd as new core Participants to the CRC in 2007. The bid has also brought Charles Sturt University on board as a new supporting Centre Participant, and provided an opportunity for some of our existing Participants (CSIRO, GRDC, NSW DPI, QDPI&F and DAFWA) to increase their investment in the CRC. The investment in the new Post-harvest Integrity research program will increase the size of the CRC to around \$100 million, and we look forward to an opportunity to make an even bigger impact on Australia's plant biosecurity in the years to come.

The CRC has continued to build strong linkages with other groups/organisations. ACERA (Australian Centre of Excellence in Risk Analysis) is one group with whom the CRC has developed strong linkages and several projects will have close collaborative links. Following the Symposium, several members of the Centre's Science Committee met with Dr Gordon Gordh (USDA-CPHST), Mr Dan Fieselmann (USDA-CPHST), Dr Grant Smith (B3-NZ) and Dr Craig Phillips (B3-NZ) to identify research areas where collaboration could be developed. Plant Biosecurity offers many new exciting research opportunities and it is my hope that the linkage between the QUADS nations (Australia, Canada, NZ, and US) organisations will continue to strengthen.

The CRCNPB undertook its first year review in September. Chairman of the CRC Programme, Dr Peter Jonson, undertook the first year review with support from Mr Philip Hodgson from DEST. The outcome was positive with the panel commenting that we have good governance and management systems in place that will enable the CRCNPB to achieve its objectives.

On that positive note, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the CRC team and associates for your support during our first year, and wish you all a merry Christmas and happy new year. I look forward to another big year in 2007!




Simon McKirdy
CEO

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View from the (arm of the) Chair



Professor John Lovett
Chairman

A sense of déjà vu enveloped FECCA House (CRC's Headquarters in Canberra) in mid-November as the date for the Supplementary Bid "test" drew near...

"We'll never be ready in time!" was the cry. "We'll need to bowl a maiden over!" came the response. Some of us had heard that one before. "Send for Sue McKell!" was the consensus. Displaying all the acumen of an England cricket coach but with much better technique (and decidedly better results), Sue McKell sharpened her intellect and produced a cricket bat. Cracking it round the CEO's ears had a marked effect on his presentation skills – hooks and fluent drives abounded. The Chairman remained impassive at first slip but was always ready to target other bid team members, particularly those lingering around silly mid-off, when a sharp chance was on offer. And this was only at the practice stage.

After several innings and instant replays, the team assembled at Graincorp's pitch in Sydney on Monday afternoon, 20 November, for a 20/20 rehearsal. The practice went well: the team was calm, serene and resolute under constant sledging from the bullish practice panel (assembled meticulously for the occasion and led by debonair Board member, Jim 'Watch Out for The Flipper' Cullen). Came the dawn on Tuesday 21 November and news filtered in that rumblings on the wheat futures market meant that the Board of AWB Ltd would not be able to sponsor the team; reluctantly, the single desk would have to settle for a position of moral support from the sidelines. The match umpire, Terence 'Spoil Sport' Cole was reviled; calmness and serenity were no longer in evidence. Even the Chairman was muttering and examining the ball stitching.

At this point, the real strength of the bid team kicked in. The industry players rallied round and a new ball was brought in before final practice overs on Wednesday, 22 November, at a tricky batting strip in the PHA Ltd Board Room – scene of the original CRC match just two years previously, and as famous in its way as the Long Room at Lord's (although no Ashes in evidence).

Finally, on Thursday morning, the day of the big match had arrived. The team assembled. **The Chairman** opened for Plant Biosecurity, partnered by **Tom Keene** (Managing Director, Graincorp Ltd). A solid foundation was laid before **Geoff Masters** (Grain Client and Quality Services Manager, ABB Grain Ltd) came in at first drop. Geoff retired after scoring a whirlwind half century to be followed by **Simon McKirdy** (CEO, CRC Plant Biosecurity). A strong tail order completed the team: **David Feinberg** (Grains Operations Manager, CBH Ltd), **Ray Akhurst** (Interim Program Leader), **Christine Campbell** (Executive Chair, Twynam Agricultural Group & CRCNPB Board member), **Andrew Inglis** (Chairman, PHA Ltd), and **Chris Richardson** (Chairman, Agricultural Protection Board - WA & CRCNPB Board member). The innings concluded, the team was commended, not least about the seniority and commitment of the industry representatives who had given up their 'day jobs' to take part. The fact that these competitors in the market place were prepared to cooperate for the greater industry good – and a few lusty hits over long on – did not go un-noticed.

And so, with the decision now in the hands of the third umpire, the waiting game began...

Until finally, on one fine day in December 2006, news was despatched that the bid had been successful. Relief and elation filtered through the team. All their hard work had paid off. Tomorrow would bring much work in planning the future for post-harvest integrity research for the grains industry but, for now, a celebratory toast is in order. A very happy Christmas to you all!

CRC Plant Biosecurity Launch

4 September 2006, Parliament House, Canberra



The Cooperative Research Centre for National Plant Biosecurity (CRC Plant Biosecurity) was officially launched at Parliament House on 4 September by The Honourable Peter McGauran MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Speaking at the launch, Mr McGauran said, "This Centre will have a significant role in maintaining Australia's clean and green status by strengthening plant health and our response to disease incursions... [It will] make a vital contribution to the improved prevention, diagnosis, surveillance and impact management of plant pests."



The Centre was announced in 2005 as the national coordinating body for plant biosecurity research in Australia, responsible for almost \$70 million in government and industry funding under the Commonwealth's Cooperative Research Centres Programme.

CRC Plant Biosecurity's CEO, Dr Simon McKirdy, emphasised the importance of plant biosecurity research to the Australian economy: "The future of Australia's plant export industries hinges on getting biosecurity right. If a disease like Karnal bunt got into Australia, our wheat exports would be put in jeopardy, so we need to do everything we can to make sure that we have the best science to back us up."

The CRC's Chairman, Professor John Lovett, who chaired the launch, commented on the strong support that the CRC has enjoyed in its first year of operation, as evidenced by the large turnout at the launch: a crowd of almost 200 attended the event including students, researchers, Centre partners, industry representatives and a large contingent of Members of Parliament.

Images (top-bottom):

(1) Minister McGauran speaking at the National Plant Biosecurity CRC

(2) Dr Simon McKirdy, CEO, National Plant Biosecurity CRC, Minister McGauran, Professor John Lovett, Chair, National Plant Biosecurity CRC launching the National Plant Biosecurity CRC

(3) Dr Simon McKirdy, CEO, National Plant Biosecurity CRC, Minister McGauran, Professor John Lovett, Chair, National Plant Biosecurity CRC



CRC Plant Biosecurity Symposium

5-6 September 2006, Manuka Oval, Canberra

James Ridsdill-Smith
Science Coordinator

The CRCNPB science team put together a two-day symposium at Manuka Oval in Canberra to introduce the CRC's science program and consider future research directions. For many participants, this was the first chance to get a feel for the directions and breadth of the Centre's science program.

Day one started by setting the scene: an outline of the general directions for the CRC by John Lovett (Chair), Simon McKirdy (CEO) and James Ridsdill-Smith (Science Coordinator), and was organised around the four research programs and the education program. After an introduction by the CRC's Program Leaders, there were a total of some 23 separate talks, demonstrating the range of research activities, and the degree of collaboration being undertaken at the Centre. A highlight for day one's program was hearing about the exciting research projects being undertaken by the Centre's PhD students - it was a good opportunity to glimpse into the future for plant biosecurity research.

Symposium delegates stayed on for a conference dinner where keynote speaker Gordon Gordh (from the US Department of Agriculture) gave us as chance to hear about plant biosecurity research from an international perspective. The Symposium dinner sponsor, Chevron Australia Pty Ltd, represented by Johann Van Der Merwe, gave guests an insight into the plant biosecurity problems that a multinational energy company shares with Australian agricultural producers, providing food for thought on how plant biosecurity as a discipline could do more to encompass environmental, as well as agricultural, research concerns. The dinner was hosted by the very entertaining Barry Windle, CRCNPB's Deputy Chair, and the involvement of Centre Directors continued on as session Chairs through the rest of the Symposium program.

Day two of the Symposium took a more informal approach, with four panel discussions being held in "cafe style" throughout the day, with invited talks from invited speakers followed by open discussions with delegates. The subjects for these sessions included: identification of the "real" biosecurity risks; the future for plant biosecurity diagnostics; the science of surveillance, and the role of plant biosecurity research in future Australian trade. Most attendees would have gone away with a much better idea of the role of the CRC in developing the science that will underpin Australia's future plant biosecurity. Thanks to many who made important contributions, but especially to Sue McKell, our new Communications Manager and Delivery and Adoption Program Leader, who planned the symposium, and Mellanie Balment-Sanders for her organisational skills.

Images (top-bottom):

(1) Dr Paul de Barro (CRCNPB Program 1 Leader) speaking at the CRC Plant Biosecurity Symposium. (2) Professor John Lovett (CRCNPB Chairman) takes the mic. (3) Jo Luck (DPVIC) and Jane Fisher (RIRDC) at the Symposium dinner.



Education Report

POSTGRADUATE WORKSHOP

A presentation skills workshop for CRC Plant Biosecurity's current postgraduate students (Honours and PhD) was held on the Monday before this year's Symposium in Canberra. The workshop was facilitated by Astrid Sweres, and involved a number of fun exercises as well as feedback on the type of content to include in a presentation, and techniques for voice control and breathing. At the end of the workshop, following some fine tuning, the students were filmed and later recieved a DVD of their presentations. Later in the week, students were given a chance to meet the Centre's Science Committee and gave short talks about their projects.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications are now being accepted for Vacation scholarships (value \$2000), Honours scholarships (value \$5000) and PhD Top-Up Scholarships (up to \$5000), for students working on plant biosecurity-related projects in 2007.

Note that *students must already be identified* for these projects (as compared to the full PhD scholarships that are advertised). The standard Project Proposal form, along with a Scholarship Application form and a copy of the academic transcript of the student should be submitted to the CRC'S Education and Training Program Leader, Kirsty Bayliss. Please [visit our website](#) or [contact Kirsty](#) for further information.

VACATION SCHOLARSHIPS

We are currently compiling a list of suitable projects for students to conduct as vacation projects. Project ideas may be submitted using the standard CRC Project Proposal form. Please [contact Kirsty](#) if you have any questions about our Vacation Scholarships or would like to discuss potential project ideas.

2007 WORKSHOP AND TRAINING DAYS

There are already two workshops currently being developed for 2007; however, is there an area of Plant Biosecurity that you would like to know more about? Do you know how to distinguish black Sigatoka from yellow Sigatoka? Can you tell a weevil apart from a beetle? If you have any specific workshop/training requests, please [send your wish list to Kirsty](#).



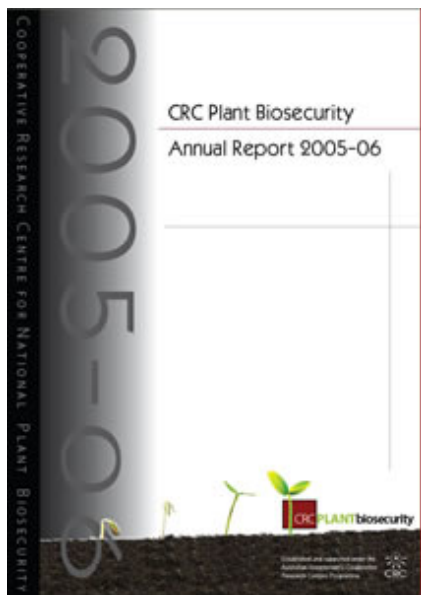
CRC Plant Biosecurity postgraduate students at this year's Symposium. *Front row, L-R: Phil Davies (USyd), Kelly Rigg (USyd), Jono Terlich (USYD), Melissa Bexley (Murdoch), Steve Coventry (UA)*
Back row, L-R: Mark Stanaway (QUT) and Paul Royce (CDU).

[Kirsty Bayliss](#)

Education and Training
Program Leader

Annual Report

CRCNPB's first Annual Report to DEST is now available for download at: crcplantbiosecurity.com.au.



Visit CRC Plant Biosecurity online: crcplantbiosecurity.com.au

Travel Grants

CRC Plant Biosecurity is inviting applications for research travel grants from CRC members and researchers of Participant organisations for research-related travel during 2007.

Proposals should address the CRCNPB Strategic Plan, available for download from the CRC's website at crcplantbiosecurity.com.au. Applications will be assessed on their merits against the following criteria:

- appropriateness of the travel in relation to CRCNPB's objectives;
- value of the expected outcome to Australia's plant biosecurity system;
- demonstrated achievements of the applicant in the context of his/her career to date; and
- level of contribution made from a participant organisation towards the travel.

The potential for the travel to initiate or consolidate long-term collaborations and facilitate the development of the applicant's career will also be considered.

Travel proposals can seek funding up to \$5,000. Travel proposals will be assessed and awarded by the CEO in consultation with the Science Committee.

Proposals should be submitted using the Travel Proposal template, available for download from the CRC's website. Proposals must be submitted to CRCNPB's Office Manager, Mellanie Balment-Sanders by email (mbalment@crcplantbiosecurity.com.au) by close of business Monday 5 February 2007. Researchers are encouraged to consult their relevant Program Leader with any questions regarding their travel proposals.

Visit the [research](#) page on the CRC's [website](#) to download travel application forms