

Hort Innovation Levy Payer Workshop Outcome

Quality Mildura Hotel Grand, Mildura, NSW

Thursday 4 February 2016

Background

Horticulture Innovation Australia (Hort Innovation) has held Levy Payer Workshops nationally to assist with the development of the company's inaugural Strategic Plan, setting the strategy to 2018. The purpose of the workshops was to consult with horticulture levy payers to gain their input in shaping the company's strategy and its implementation. The strategy is also underpinned strongly by Hort Innovation's constitution and the Deed of Agreement with the Commonwealth.

Presentations were delivered at each workshop regarding company operations, particularly in relation to levy investments (Pool 1) and the Strategic Co-investment Funding Pool (Pool 2). Feedback was received at each workshop and collated into a summary. All workshop summaries will contribute towards the compilation of the company's inaugural Strategic Plan.

The summary below outlines the feedback received from attendees at the Mildura workshop.

Main discussion points

Hort Innovation in general

It was raised that the timing of the levy payer workshops may not have suited some growers. Growers need a viable reason to attend meetings and communication for this meeting was via the networks encouraging others to attend. Some growers would like to see Hort Innovation partaking in more farm visits and have more interactive meetings, as opposed to listening to presentations. Hort Innovation acknowledged this and will take timing into consideration for the next round of workshops.

A point was raised that growers are used to the Industry Representative Body (IRB) representing their affairs. With the new company structure, some growers asked how members access Hort Innovation, indicating the pathways for feedback need to be made clearer. Growers would also like to see direct communications from Hort Innovation. The presenter confirmed that direct email communications go to Hort Innovation members via a newsletter and the new structure is available on the website. Further communications are delivered through the IRBs particularly where they have been levy funded to provide communications delivery. The Hort Innovation website also has a concept form that allows growers to submit ideas for new R&D and marketing programs directly.

There was some discussion that the levy collection system needs to be improved. This however, is largely a matter for the Levies Revenue Service and the industry representative body.

It was also raised that it is cumbersome to verify voting rights each year in the lead up to the Annual General Meeting. It would be preferable if this were to occur every five years or a simpler process implemented instead. This will be taken into consideration by Hort Innovation when planning future voting and Annual General Meetings. It was also noted that this matter was the subject of the recent senate enquiry into the levy system. The enquiry has recommended the development of a levy payer register which, if implemented, would make voting verification a much simpler and easier process.

It was agreed that growers would like to see a strategic plan in place, and then see the investment strategies come together. They would also like to have more input into the strategic plans. Hort Innovation acknowledged this and encouraged an ongoing dialogue between growers and Hort Innovation, not only during this consultation process but in future strategic planning processes at the industry level.

Finally it was a concern that growers are having their levy money deducted but they feel they are not getting enough information on the return on their investment. A bi-annual statement would be helpful. Hort Innovation advised that levy financial operating statements and project lists can now be accessed via the website, but also noted the recommendation for a bi-annual statement which will be considered as an option for reporting to levy payers.

Advisory mechanism

There was concern regarding the management of IP when it comes to proposal submissions. This was acknowledged and it was noted that a clear process is in place prior to submission of any concepts into the new Hort Innovation concept pipeline process that accounted for IP. It was agreed that there needs to be continued communication with service providers on this.

A question was asked as to whether or not IRBs were able to be on the new advisory panels and another question regarding the process of providing feedback to proposal submitters, and the timeline of the advisory panels. The presenter explained the process and operations of the advisory panels, noting recruitment of panel members is skills based, and the selection process aims to ensure that there is good representation of different sectors and geographic areas. It was noted that two IRB representatives were able to participate on the panels.

There were comments that recognition should be given regarding all ideas that are submitted through the funnel. Further, a question was asked about the flow of submissions, whether it be in batches or a constant "stream". Hort Innovation explained the process of the new innovation concept pipeline and the nature and quality of the concepts which have been coming in. It was stated that it may not be possible to keep a continuous flow of feedback to people who have submitted ideas as from a systems perspective this is not

something that is easily done at present. It was noted that the intake of ideas currently is continuous however Hort Innovation may move to a batched intake or processing in future if required.

Finally, attendees queried where information about dried fruit is available on the website. Hort Innovation advised that each levy industry has a dedicated page on the website containing project lists, financial summaries, key project highlights, strategic plans and other information.

Communications

It was raised that Hort Innovation need to work on better pathways to communicate to its stakeholders. It was suggested that one of the ways to do this is to communicate more through IRBs, some individuals heard about the levy payer meetings through the grape vine. This was acknowledged by the presenter and it was agreed that communications could be improved to growers through the IRB.

Attendees would like to see more communication of information through industry and regional groups. It was also noted that some of the feedback received to date had indicated that growers would like to be able to opt in and out of different Hort Innovation communications to ensure that they are only getting the information that is most relevant to them.

It was agreed that growers would like to see a weekly newsletter with links to industry specific stories on the website. It was also raised that information pathways need to be improved. Growers are mostly looking for information which is specific to their industries. The question was also asked as to how Hort Innovation communicates to supply chain and growers. A suggestion was made that Hort Innovation should observe existing research into what stakeholders want to hear about and how they want to be communicated to. Communications coming from the company need to be specific and to the point. Hort Innovation acknowledged these suggestions and the need for tailored communications with growers and industry. The presenter confirmed that the current newsletter does link to the website and is sent fortnightly. The presenter made note of this and Hort Innovation will take it into consideration for future communications.

It was raised that the pathways for communication need to be improved. The question was also asked as to whether or not Hort Innovation are collating statistics from the website and whether there is any traffic coming from overseas. Hort Innovation acknowledged this point and an undertaking was made to look into this.

A point was raised regarding IP, in that attendees want to keep ideas within their own industries.

Finally, it was suggested that all content needs to be double checked before it goes onto the Hort Innovation website to ensure accuracy, particularly relating to financial and project statements. Hort Innovation made note of this with an undertaking to look into this further.

Pool 2 investment

A process was undertaken in which each participant 'invested' a nominal \$100 across the five established and further 14 proposed funds under 'Pool 2' (the Strategic Co-investment Fund Pool).

It was noted that this process was not the only process being used to prioritise investment and that other factors would be considered when determining the final investment funds.

The results were as follows:

Theme/Fund	'Investment'
Building capacity	
Leadership and people development (established)	\$140
Industry data	\$127
Discovery research	\$54
Contingency research	\$27
Driving growth	
Asian markets (established)	\$190
Health, nutrition and food safety (established)	\$20
Consumer and market insights	\$127
New product development	\$27
Stimulating productivity	
Intensive and protected cropping	\$47
Emerging and advanced technologies	\$117
Genetic improvement and breeding	\$167
Food waste	\$8
Managing risk	
Fruit fly (established)	\$190
Pest and disease management	\$127
Chemical access and registration	\$157
Enabling sustainability	
Green cities (established)	\$0
Pollination capacity	\$27
Land, soil, water and climate	\$112
Northern Australia	\$37

Key takeouts for the Strategic Plan

Company operations

- Lines of communication between Hort Innovation and IRBs need to remain open for the benefit of industry and growers.
- Hort Innovation to consider the timing for Levy Payer Workshops in future – more lead time required for some growers.
- Communications need to be flexible (opt in and out option) where possible.
- Hort Innovation to consider the IRBs and other regional groups for communication as they can be valuable channels for growers.

Levy investment (Pool 1)

- Hort Innovation to consider and further explain IP when industry and growers are submitting industry specific ideas to the Concept Proposal Form on the website.
- The processes, rules, activities and outcomes of Hort Innovation's advisory panels are to be more transparent.
- Hort Innovation to actively seek grower input when developing industry strategic plans.

Strategic Co-investment (Pool 2)

- Mildura presented a diverse interest in investment areas with a strong interest in Industry Data, Genetics and Technology funds and strong support for Hort Innovation's established Pool 2 funds.

Attendees

Approximately 16

Industry sectors represented

Almond, Avocado, Citrus, Dried Grape, Olive, Summerfruit, Table Grape, Vegetable