Organic Industries
Voice of Australia's organic industries
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Review Advisory Panel
Modernising the Research and Development Corporation System
Department of Agriculture
GPO Box 858
CANBERRA ACT 2601

RE: Call for public submissions to the review

The organic industry practices sustainable farming methods. In its broadest sense, sustainable production requires that the nation's stock of natural resources may be higher, but may not be lower, than before the production occurred. This requires an adequate and continuous investment in natural resources to support the production process.

Many agricultural production practices in Australia are not sustainable—natural resources are typically depleted through conventional production processes. To maintain or increase production, most farmers compensate for this depletion in natural resources by inappropriately applying artificial fertilisers and synthetic chemicals—but, in so doing, they exacerbate the depletion of the natural resources. The result is that the value of agriculture to the nation is less than is recorded in national accounts, and current generations of farmers will bequeath a poorer country to next generations than was inherited by them.

The achievement of sustainable farming methods should be the overriding objective of all publicly funded research, development and extension work in the agriculture sector. Sustainable farming practices would involve practices that emphasise:

- the use of renewable resources and the conservation of energy, soil and water
- recognition of livestock welfare needs and appropriate stocking practices
- environmental maintenance and enhancement, while producing optimum quantities of produce without the use of artificial fertiliser or synthetic chemicals

The organic industry has been practicing sustainable farming practices in Australia for several generations. We are by no means perfect in this regard, but we have developed practices and expertise which can be harnessed to improve practices in conventional farming. Together, organic and conventional farmers could develop best practice methods for adoption across all Australian agriculture sectors.

Our industry often feels left out of mainstream RDC activities. Industry consultations (https://organicindustries.com.au/sites/default/files/OneVoice/Final%20Report%2020180213%20version.pdf) reveal almost unanimous support for ways to ensure that the compulsory levies for R&D are targeted to industry needs via a greater focus on influencing the work of the RDCs. This is difficult because the organic industry is organised around production systems rather than specific commodities—indeed, our industry produces commodities which are covered by every one of the RDCs. And yet, no one RDC adequately represents our collective needs.

- There is industry consensus on the need to influence and direct RDC strategy and policy, to gain better value for the levies paid.

- There is also a role for RDCs to be more focussed in assisting the industry with:
  - improving market access in export markets—our industry has more complex hurdles for market access than most other agricultural sectors, especially in respect of seeking equivalent recognition of our certification processes; and
  - export market development.

We do have some success in attracting RDC funding when proposals are strictly commodity focussed. Both national and some state governments have also been involved—to differing extents between jurisdictions and over time—in efforts to catalyse an organic sector that is sustainable in the long term, market responsive and that makes the most of export opportunities. And the former Rural Industries RDC administered a research effort in the area of organic agriculture; however, this has long since been abandoned.

Government levies on organic production amounted to an estimated $3.7 million in 2015-16 (http://www.organictrustaustralia.org.au/sites/default/files/OTARE%20RP-1902.pdf). With government matching contributions approximately doubling this amount, the organic industry should have more than $7 million available for R&D and marketing purposes. Instead, the predominant view across our industry is that it receives poor value from these levies.

Another critical issue for our industry is identifying viable ways to fund some of the activities and services of the industry peak body—those focussed on R&D, market development and export market access (https://organicindustries.com.au/Exports). Current arrangements are inadequate, and many in the industry argue they are inequitable. An organic industry peak body, with R&D and marketing activities funded from agricultural levies paid by its organic operators, would represent a significant investment by Government in a strongly growing premium industry.

As a relatively new industry peak body, we are eager to develop collaborative working arrangements with Governments, other peak bodies, RDCs and industry stakeholders to pursue the interests or organic producers, processors and traders, and our customers.

We welcome the opportunity to be involved in this review.

Yours sincerely,

Dalene Wray

Dalene Wray
Chair, Organic Industries of Australia Ltd

OIA Ltd (website) is the peak body representing all Australian organic operators, regardless of which certifier provides their organic certification. Our members include some of Australia's largest organic certifiers, producers and exporters, including Bellamy's Organic, NASAA Organic, Organic Food Chain, Australian Certified Organic, OBE Organic, Hancock Agriculture, Paris Creek Farms, Rural Organics, Queen, Norco Foods, Rosnay Organics, Australian Organic Meats, Primal Foods Group, and Pure Harvest.

OIA Ltd was founded after the Australian Government Department of Agriculture led a process of preliminary discussions with the organic industry over the period of September – December 2016. This tested the waters on the interest of the industry in working together to increase the competitiveness of the Australian organics sector.

During 2017 and 2018, the Australian Organic Industry Working Group (AOIWG) was formed and developed a roadmap to improve the representation of Australia's organic industry (website). The AOIWG consisted of industry leaders from across Australia collaborating on establishing a harmonised national voice for all organic producers, certifiers and the supply chain.

In an expression of unity at the Love Organic symposium (14&15 February 2018 in Canberra), industry delegates agreed to establish a new peak body that is the voice for Australia's organic industries in regard to policy and market access and OIA Ltd was born.