

**Facilitating the  
development of the  
Queensland nursery  
industry**

John McDonald  
Nursery & Garden Industry  
Queensland

Project Number: NY01024

## **NY01024**

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# **FINAL REPORT**

## **HORTICULTURE AUSTRALIA LIMITED (HAL) PROJECT**

**NY 01024**

### **Facilitating the Development of the Queensland Nursery Industry Milestone # 6**

**(1<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2001 – 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2003)**

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**Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland  
(NGIQ)**

NY 01024  
1<sup>st</sup> July 2001 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2003

**Facilitating the Development of the Queensland Nursery Industry**

Project Start: 1 July 2001

Project Completion: 30 June 2003

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**Nursery & Garden Industry  
Queensland**

## **Horticulture Australia Limited Project Number: NY 01024 - Final Report**

The above HAL Project was originally planned to operate for a 5 year period (July 2001 – June 2006) however due to changes in funding arrangements between HAL, NGIA and NGIQ the project was terminated in June 2003. The project was replaced by a broad industry partnership agreement, including an annual operating plan, between the states and NGIA into which industry development was incorporated.

Facilitating the Development of the Queensland Nursery Industry (NY 01024)

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Project Completion: 30 June 2003

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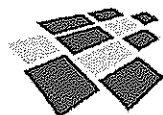
Project Administrator

Donald Scotts

NGIQ Executive Officer

Facilitating the Development of the Queensland Nursery Industry project has been in place since 1<sup>st</sup> July 2001. This report has been compiled to comment on the activities, results and achievements of three years of industry development within the Queensland nursery industry based on a five year plan. The information provided within will address the three years of the project (NY 01024) that carried on from the HAL projects (NY 628, NY 97016 and NY 98007) conducted between 1996 and 2001.

The project acknowledges the support of Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) – formerly Horticultural Research & Development Corporation, the Commonwealth Government and the Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland (NGIQ).



**Horticulture Australia**



**Nursery & Garden Industry  
Queensland**

23 April 2004

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## Media Summary

Facilitating the Development of the Queensland Nursery Industry (NY 01024) project has been a project undertaken by the Nursery Industry Development Officer (NIDO) – Queensland. The project has provided, to the Queensland Nursery Industry, a dedicated position focused on delivering industry specific outcomes and providing technical advice and direction to the NGIQ. With the national R&D program continuing to address the issues identified by industry, there is a very real need to have this information disseminated throughout the nursery industry in Queensland.

This project has formed an integral link between industry, key stakeholders, researchers, government and the broader community of agriculture and horticulture to enhance industry uptake of information, technology and development. The NIDO has assisted industry apply relevant R&D outcomes, based on industry specific R&D Projects, through the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA), workshops and seminars, industry events (National Horticulture, State & National Conferences) and through industry liaison at government level.

Key indicators to the success of the project is the increase in NIASA membership from 65 to 72, a further 15 businesses lodging NIASA applications, the contact via email, fax and telephone from industry members seeking assistance in infrastructure development, plant health, market access, regulations, technical support covering irrigation, filtration, pesticides, growing media, etc and the involvement of industry in the events designed to provide information transfer. Over the past 2 years there have been in excess of 30 training events (RIFA, ChemCert, Plant Costing, Bus Tour, etc) with an attendance exceeding 700 participants. The project participated in the development and provided significant input into a range of industry projects including the 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition of the NIASA Best Management Practice Guidelines, Nursery Industry Pesticide Application Best Practice Manual, Pesticide Management Diary – CD-ROM, Red Imported Fire Ant pesticide trials, Integrated Pest management, Minor Use/Off Label Pesticide Permits, etc.

The fundamental strength of this project is its relationship on the ground with growers and industry members and through this contact aid in the application of technology and industry programs to improve business performance. The on-site relationship also provides the NIDO with insight into the issues affecting the industry with the opportunity to relay this to relevant industry and government groups whose input steers policy and funding. The NIDO position has the potential to further assist industry determine the relevance of R&D projects and provide real time input on the value, need and likelihood of the uptake of project outcomes.

## **Introduction**

This project (NY 01024) 'Facilitating the Development of the Queensland Nursery Industry' has followed on from the previous Horticulture Australia Ltd project NY98007 – Nursery Industry Development Officer – Queensland for which funding had been provided from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1998 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2001. The completed project has maintained the existing network of Nursery Industry Development Officers, around Australia, by having a position in Queensland as well as facilitating the development of the Queensland nursery industry.

The nursery industry in Queensland is valued in excess of \$585 million (source, DPI&F) farm gate and a total value to the state is estimated to exceed \$1 billion. The nursery industry continues to grow (approximately at 8% per annum – DPI&F) and requires an enormous amount of information and the transfer of national R&D outcomes into production and retail nursery systems. With industry taking ownership and control of the expenditure of its R&D dollar, the industry needs to be provided with services specific to its requirements. The Nursery Industry Development Officer (NIDO) has been identified as '... clearly having made a positive difference in the provision of information...' to the nursery industry (source: Information Needs in the Nursery Industry NY00017) and is therefore ideally placed to facilitate industry development.

The project initially set five key strategic areas in which the facilitation of the development of the Queensland nursery industry would be delivered through:

### **1. IMPROVE THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF THE NURSERY INDUSTRY.**

To assist in the ongoing growth and development of the Queensland Nursery Industry through the regular interaction with industry, the identification of wants, needs and desired outcomes. The above wants, needs and outcomes will be communicated to relevant organisations for action in R&D projects or the provision of services. Identifying information and skills gaps within the industry and providing training, workshops, seminars, etc to address these industry needs. These need areas are anticipated to remain focused on plant production, environmental sustainability, business management, export and industry professionalism and profitability. Target/goal 1 aligns with the draft Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) Strategic Plan 2001 – Objective B – To raise the level of skill and professionalism of industry members.

### **2. RAISE THE PROFESSIONAL PROFILE OF THE NURSERY INDUSTRY.**

To raise the profile of the Queensland nursery industry within the broader community, horticulture in general and at all levels of government. This will be achieved through networking, attending conferences, identifying opportunities to promote the industry and working effectively with government departments. Target/goal 2 aligns with the draft NGIA Strategic Plan 2001 - Objective A – To raise community perception of the value of gardening, and Objective B – To raise the level of skill and professionalism of industry members.

### **3. PROMOTE INDUSTRY BEST PRACTICE THROUGH NIASA**

To value add the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA) through promotion, providing business links, export compliance, and sound technical support. Encourage the industry to continue to embrace NIASA and to form a co-operative approach to the integration of, NIASA and the Australian Garden Centre Accreditation Scheme (AGCAS), members in improving the professionalism of the industry. Transfer R&D outcomes to industry and assist in the practical uptake of information through workshops, seminars, articles and on-site technology transfer. Target/goal 3 aligns with the NGIA draft Strategic Plan 2001 - Objective B – To raise the level of skill and professionalism of industry members.



#### 4. SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH SELF REGULATION

To provide technical support to businesses, in the nursery industry in Queensland, so they remain environmentally sustainable, and the NIDO will have input into the relevant environmental bodies and forums on behalf of the nursery industry. Maintain a link between R&D providers, government and industry in the search for practical solutions to industry specific problems and the implementation of strategies and practices ensuring compliance and sustainability. Target/goal 4 aligns with the draft NGIA Strategic Plan 2001 - Objective C – To ensure the industry responds to community environmental concerns.

#### 5. TO PROVIDE TECHNICAL BASED SUPPORT TO THE INDUSTRY AT PEAK BODY LEVEL.

Through the input, at state and national level, the NIDO Project will work with the peak industry bodies in evaluating, reviewing and interpreting issues that are technically based for the improvement and increased profitability of the nursery industry. Many issues are presented to the industry for comment on and participation in. These issues range from quarantine requirements, project input, legislative comment, industry processes, and the broader fields of environment, natural resource management, and statistics. The NIDO will use the Nursery Industry Development Manager (NIDM) as a conduit to the national level and through the participation, at state level, on various NGIQ committees including the Technical & Environment Committee, NIASA Committee and the Executive Committee; provide input relevant to the industry at both state and national levels. Target/goal 5 aligns with the draft NGIA Strategic Plan 2001 - Objective E – To ensure the NGI associations have appropriate resources and structures for the future.

The project was able to achieve many of the above either in entirety or in part with completion expected within the original 5 year timeframe under the new partnership agreement between NGIA and HAL.

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### **Technology Transfer Strategy and Methodology/Activities**

The Nursery Industry Development Officer - Queensland has continued to build on the previous project through strategies aimed at specific areas such as business management, environmental issues, plant production, marketing, export, best management practice, etc. Furthermore, the project has addressed the strategic issues in the national plan such as raising the industry profile, enhancing the profitability and professionalism of businesses and building and improving NIASA.

The NIDO - Queensland project has delivered significant outputs both directly and indirectly to the nursery industry. The outputs are varied with a focus on advice to industry member's on-site and training events with multiple attendees'. Strategies employed are itemised below and include:

1. One-on-one nursery visits to assist businesses implement relevant R&D outcomes and interpret technical information into useable information.
2. Provided technical support to NIASA businesses with the twice yearly audits to ensure compliance and encourage the continual professional development of the business through 'Industry Best Management Practice'.
3. Provided direct advice and assistance, to retail and production nurseries, via telephone, facsimile, email, etc on topics such as environmental management and compliance, nursery production, business management, and industry best management practice.
4. Attended NGIQ branch meetings throughout the state and provided one-on-one discussion and communication. This has allowed the NIDO to act as a direct link on industry development issues for businesses and the relevant state and national industry committees.
5. The project has delivered Quarterly Reports to the National Nursery Industry Development Manager along with Milestone Reports, to the Program Leader Horticulture Australia Ltd, every six months. The NIDO has also provided technical advice to various NGIQ Committee's such as: the Technical & Environment Committee, Executive Committee, Management Committee and the NIASA Committee.
6. Raised the technical understanding and education of the industry to a level from which they can implement change and make a more informed decision relating to a variety of fields. This skill enhancement has been achieved through one-on one visits, NIASA visits, workshops, presentations and seminars at conferences, branch meetings, and formal events. With over 700 industry participants over the 2 year period the project feels that uptake has been encouraging and change is occurring based on visits to production nurseries.
7. Liaised with government departments (QDPI, EP A, DNR, etc) on behalf of the nursery industry to achieve recognition, partnerships, and understanding pertinent to the Queensland Nursery Industry. The project has achieved greater government recognition through departmental officers and has resulted in agencies consulting the industry for input in a variety of areas including environment, natural resource management, workplace health and safety and industry development.
8. Promoted the aims of NIASA and its membership to other industries, government and consumers through activities such as National Horticulture, Green Expo, State Conferences, National Conferences and developed links with AGCAS. NIASA is gaining significant exposure through the involvement as a sponsor for the Primary Industries Achievement Awards.
9. Maintained communication through the NIDO network and the NIASA National Technical Officers Group to disseminate information and provide efficiencies through the sharing of information in these forums. NIASA and development issues are successfully discussed and ideas have been exchanged through the NIDO network to the benefit of the nursery industry.

10. Identified industry needs and information gaps and directed this information into the relevant industry committees for consideration and incorporation into R&D Projects, Strategic Plans and training events. The project has had a close link with the NGIQ Technical & Environment Committee and by association into the Industry Advisory Committee through the Queensland representatives. This formal linking has aided in project development and directing the R&D program into areas that benefit industry.

11. Developed and delivered workshops, seminars, field days, etc and published articles addressing R&D outcomes to the nursery industry in Queensland. The project has been directly involved in over 30 training events across Queensland with continued support from industry.

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## **Evaluation of Outcomes**

The project has successfully utilised a number of the above strategies to deliver information, skills

and concepts to the production sector of the Queensland nursery industry. Through the various operational committees of the NGIQ the NIDO was directed to undertake a range of activities in support of the project. The outcomes achieved are listed below:

1. Provided in excess of 22 individual articles in industry publications and contributed to a further 4. Topics such as Red Imported Fire Ant, wetting agents, growing media, pest & disease, NIASA, frost, etc were covered. In NGIQ industry surveys the state newsletter ranked second as the most important vehicle for industry information.
2. The Queensland NIASA membership has increased from 65 to 72 businesses with each business being audited twice a year. A further 15 businesses have applied for NIASA accreditation which allows for NIDO support on-site due to the commitment of the business. Over the past two years NGIQ has sold over 100 copies of the NIASA Best Practice Guidelines indicative of the interest generated throughout the state.
3. The NIDO travelled extensively throughout Queensland (from the Tweed River to the Daintree) at least twice per year undertaking NIASA audits, attending NGIQ Branch meetings and providing technical assistance to both retail & production nurseries. The NIDO is also engaged twice per year to provide NIASA technical support the Nursery & Garden Industry Northern Territory via a weekly visit each 6 months. That the NIASA membership has increased in the NT is supportive of gains made in increased professionalism in both NT and Qld.
4. The NIDO organised, delivered and co-ordinated in excess of 30 training/information events (**excluding** state & national conferences, Green Expo's and National Horticulture) made up of workshops, field days, bus tour and seminars. These events attracted over 700 industry attendee's and covered all major centres along the Queensland eastern sea board and west to Toowoomba. A comprehensive industry training program was undertaken as a direct response to the Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) infestation of southern Queensland in 2001.
5. During the course of this project the NIDO undertook more than 250 nursery visits (retail & production) with the majority being technology transfer and NIASA audits at production nurseries. Included in this number are the audits undertaken on behalf of the Australian Avocado Growers Federation of nurseries operating under the Avocado Nursery Voluntary Accreditation Scheme (ANVAS).
6. The project was able to successfully secure funding for industry events (direct sponsorship, advertising or project funding) from government departments and industry participants with a value of \$35 000. This funding was directed at off-setting the costs to industry of conducting workshops, seminars, field days and publication costs associated with the above, as well as specific projects (eg. SuSCon Green trials relative to Red Imported Fire Ant).
7. Participated, reviewed, commented on and instigated approximately 15 individual projects covering industry specific areas (eg. Pesticide Application Best Practice in the Nursery Industry) to cross commodity projects involving horticulture generally (eg. Understanding the Elements & Adoption of Environment Best Practice in Horticulture) and projects that have been ongoing such as the Integrated Pest Management training course.
8. Undertaken comprehensive survey's of the Queensland industry annually questioning their R&D needs. These surveys provided the backbone, for the NGIQ, when dealing with R&D providers and the national industry body (NGIA). The information gathered supported the direction industry took in the provision of training/information events such as workshops and seminars.

9. With regular contact with government agencies (EPA, QDPI, DNR and local authorities) the NIDO has been able to form firm communication links with officers that allowed the free flow of information to occur. This has assisted in the securing of funds, agency support, and departmental personnel focused on the nursery industry in Queensland. Furthermore, the NIDO has provided technical advice and details of the nursery industry which has assisted in the structuring of protocols (review & input) for various exotic pests including (Spiraling White Fly & Red Imported Fire Ant).

10. Maintained open communication with state NIDO's, and the NIDM, which has strengthened the IDO network in the transfer of information, between states and nationally. This network has done much to assist in the co-operation between each state industry body (eg. NGIQ) and the national peak industry body (NGIA) in planning the future strategic direction of the industry.

11. The NIDO position has provided a conduit between the grass roots level of the industry and the upper echelon of industry peak bodies (state & national) resulting in many of the R&D issues being addressed as a result of industry input. This is different from the past where R&D providers (eg. Departments of Ag & Universities) have directed industries R&D investment through speculative project submissions.

12. Developed a strong working commitment with the Queensland GCDO and involved in developing links between NIASA and AGCAS. These programs are delivering a more professional industry and are increasing the profitability of the nursery industry.

## **Discussion**

The NIDO project has been successful in completing the targeted milestones by:

1. Expanding the Queensland membership of NIASA to 72 accredited sites. Worked closely with the Queensland NIASA membership in the uptake, by industry, of R&D project outcomes. The uptake has been facilitated by having direct access to the NIDO providing clarification and interpretation of information on a practical level. The NIASA membership has acted as a focus group in the implementation of change and demonstrated to the wider industry the concept of 'best management practice'. NIASA members have also demonstrated a commitment to the continual development of a professional, profitable and sustainable industry. The links that developed between NIASA and AGCAS will assist industry to recognise the levels of professionalism already present and to grow strong business relationships to further the profitability of the industry.

2. The skills of industry have been improved at all levels (managers - nursery hands) through accurate identification of industry needs and the analysis of skills gaps. The NIDO project has improved industry skills and fostered the process of change within the industry via workshops, seminars and field days on topics such as nursery industry best practice, WH&S, environmental sustainability, irrigation, nutrition, pest & disease, NIASA, etc. Demonstrated to industry the effects of change through field days and industry bus trips. This has assisted in encouraging industry uptake of R&D outcomes through practical demonstrations of businesses employing new technology and systems.

3. Environmental sustainability has been improved through the adoption of industry best practice and the implementation of the environmental components of NIASA. The nursery industry will need to address significant environmental issues over the next 5 years including; water access and use, drainage management, waste water management, noise, odour and dust. The NIDO project has begun the process of delivering practical solutions to industry such as the Environmental Management Systems (EMS), NIASA - environmental auditing, and strategies to recognise industry natural resource management. The nursery industry is in a stronger position to demonstrate environmental responsibility and sustainability to legislators, with the overall aim to self regulate as shown by the development, through Queensland Farmers Federation, of the government recognised 'Farm Management Systems'.

4. Promoted the nursery industry to the wider community, governments and agricultural/horticultural industries which has raised the profile of the industry for marketing purposes and assisted the industry gain funding on a equitable basis. Many projects are termed "horticulture" however the nursery industry is not directly involved even though the issues being studied have direct relevance to the nursery industry. QDPI staffing and service levels for ornamental horticulture are below par and are not based on industry value. A professional industry with clearly defined objectives (strategic plans, R&D plans, etc) has attracted attention from various bodies including government, universities, and private industry willing to undertake and support projects on behalf of the industry (specific R&D, marketing, joint ventures, etc).

5. National relevance of the NIDO project has included participation in the various R&D forums, NIASA Technical Officers Group, the NIDO Network and the NIDM. Through the continuous exchange of information between the NIDO network, problem solving and information sharing has delivered significant benefits to the nursery industry in Queensland. The NIDO - Qld established linkages, between the Queensland Nursery Industry, national R&D projects, the national peak industry body (NGIA) and Horticulture Australia Ltd. The linkages promoted Queensland participation in R&D projects thereby ensuring relevance, resource allocation from NGIA/HAL and related projects delivered into Queensland in a timely fashion. This allows the issues confronting the Queensland industry to be heard, at a national level, and considered for attention or incorporation into national strategies.

6. The Queensland nursery industry is spread from the Daintree River in North Queensland to the

Tweed River in South East Queensland. The production sector is primarily located along the eastern seaboard of Queensland. With such a wide spread industry it is vital that the NIDO spend time travelling the state and attend branch meetings and functions to provide regional relevance to the state and national programs. The nursery industry north of the Sunshine Coast, particularly north Queensland, is isolated from many of the activities in southern Queensland. The NIDO successfully developed and encouraged industry to form businesses relationships with the northern industry to the mutual benefit of all involved. More northern nurseries are accessing the markets of southern Queensland and are now venturing into the southern states particularly those with established partnerships with businesses in south east Queensland.

7. Ensured industry stayed in touch with factors affecting horticulture, and business generally, the NIDO has kept abreast of the issues through industry networking at conferences (eg. Queensland Farmers Federation), seminars, trade exhibitions and field days. This information was transferred to industry through articles published in various industry magazines and newsletters and at industry seminars and conferences. Issues affecting the industry nationally have been relayed through the NIDM or relevant industry committees.

8. The NIDO project delivered to industry the relevant sections of the Nursery & Garden Industry National Strategic Plan 2001 - 2006. The NIDO endeavoured to successfully guide the Queensland industry to act on the relevant sections of the plan. The key areas that were considered are:

1. Raise the community perception of gardening,
2. Have all members accredited and staff trained,
3. Ensure the industry responds to community environmental concerns,
4. To double the income collected from the levy and broaden the base it is collected from,
5. To improve industry leadership and representation.

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## **Recommendations**

The critical success factors for industry development projects are delivering information in a useable form with direct relevance to industry. The mode of delivery must be accessible and easy to handle and focus on practical implementation with supporting technical assistance. The industry must also recognise the need to change and in some areas private businesses need to dedicate

operations staff and infrastructure to nursery production to take full advantage of new information and employ successful implementation.

To enable the nursery industry to deal with the continual changes in markets and business environments, continual learning and upgrading of skills, knowledge and procedures is critical. To allow this to happen on a constant basis, the industry development projects will need to endeavour to instil a desire for ongoing learning, continual seeking and assessment of new information and increased attendance levels at industry learning workshops. The industry must recognise, through quality information, that progressive change will benefit the business via market access and sustainability, reduced operational and compliance costs and a skilled workforce.

The nursery industry in Queensland needs to be identified as a professional industry requiring specialist skills and knowledge, and recognised as a major commodity group within horticulture. The financial and social value of the nursery industry, to the Queensland economy, is under valued due to the difficulty in gaining a true net worth based on turnover and willing industry participation in statistics gathering. The industry at both a state and national level must change the culture of fearing the provision of statistical data and a focus on highlighting the overall benefits needs to be adopted. Change is required at all levels of government if resources are to be directed towards the nursery industry.

Without validated data government agencies will continue to direct the attention of governments towards the known agriculture/horticulture commodities such as beef, wheat and vegetables. The nursery industry must at the same time examine the tertiary education system to establish the content relative to primary production data and agriculture/horticulture course knowledge and the inclusion of nursery production. Increasing course content with accurate data will profile the industry for future graduates moving into the workforce including government agencies.

The mainstream in horticulture, including many government departments and teaching facilities, fail to consider the nursery industry as a member of horticulture in its broader context. This has led to the exclusion of the nursery industry from many projects, funding and support programs and monetary grants. Future industry development projects need to liaise with various groups (eg. Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers (QF&VG), Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF), etc) to raise the industries profile and participate in various forums representing industries point of view. With the generation of accurate, statistical information, the industry is able to present this to a range of groups and government agencies to encourage the distribution of services, to the nursery industry, on an equitable basis.

The nursery industry is facing increasing pressure on the environmental front. This includes areas such as waste water management, water reuse & recycling, irrigation water access, industrial noise, dust and odour. The industry will also face increasing concerns over waste management strategies particularly in relation to plastics (pots, trays, tags, etc). The nursery industry must start to adopt environmentally sustainability practices if it is to manage its own future under the umbrella of self regulation. Industry development will need to utilise various extension methods (one-on-one visits, field days, workshops, seminars, etc) to educate and inform industry of the tools available to manage environmental issues.

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The nursery industry will need to work closely with local authorities, state and federal government agencies and other industry groups (QFF & QF&VG) on environmental efficiency and sustainability projects to enable input into the development of practical and acceptable policy decisions by regulatory agencies. The industry will also need to promote, to the above, nursery industry initiatives such as NIASA/AGCAS and how 'Best Management Practice' equates to



business efficiency, environmental sustainability and long term business profitability. Through the promotion of the pro-active nature of the nursery industry, on environmental responsibility, the opportunity exists to deliver outcomes that allow industry to be accepted as one that is capable of self regulation, is responsible and in the short and long term, sustainable.

The nursery industry will need to develop tools to ensure that they are able to demonstrate to various state and federal authorities and to the general community, that they are environmentally responsible and sustainable. The development of an Environmental Management System (EMS) framework embracing many of the outcomes from the national R&D program such as water management, pesticide management, best management practice etc needs to be recognised as a priority. The industry will require training in the future to maximise the EMS and nationally the industry must recognise that funding will be required to achieve significant industry uptake.

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