

SA GROWER

CRCs encouraging more collaboration

POTATOES SA

By ROBBIE DAVIS, CEO

COOPERATIVE Research Centres were developed in the early 1990s to support and foster collaboration and cooperation between research institutions, industry, community and government.

They are about bringing the 'best of the best' together, often including international experts if the research requires input beyond Australian knowledge and experience. To date, more than \$4 billion has been committed to more than 200 CRCs, with participant commitment in cash and in-kind exceeding \$12b.

There are 34 active CRCs across mining, manufacturing, agriculture/horticulture and services. CRCs may be less in number from a peak of 72 in 2007, but the CRCs are now larger and there is also additional competition from competing research programs at state, national and international levels.

The companies that participate in CRCs aim to

develop and commercialise intellectual property, form joint ventures and cement linkages between future researchers with industry. The overall leverage is better.

Looking at governance, CRC boards vary in composition, as do all commercial boards. Directors can be representative of the participants, some boards are totally independent, and some display a combination of industry and independent directors.

Chairs are required to be independent and women account for 25 per cent of all CRC directors, with the CRC Association initiating a move to lift gender diversity to a target of 50pc.

I am fortunate to be a non-executive director of the Fight Food Waste CRC. I am the only industry participant on the board and see it as an enormous privilege but with a considerable duty attached.

This duty, apart from fiduciary and strategy-setting, concerns assisting in the maintenance of relevance to

industry. The original bid to the federal Department of Industry, Science and Technology was industry-led; an unusual but winning strategy.

The board of seven - including the independent chair - has three female non-executive directors, setting the benchmark for gender diversity.

Personally, I believe selection must always be based on merit and how a director can add value.

Across CRCs, boards are demonstrating a greater professionalism of governance with directors now very engaged in general governance and strategy, but also far more 'hands-on' than in the commercial sector.

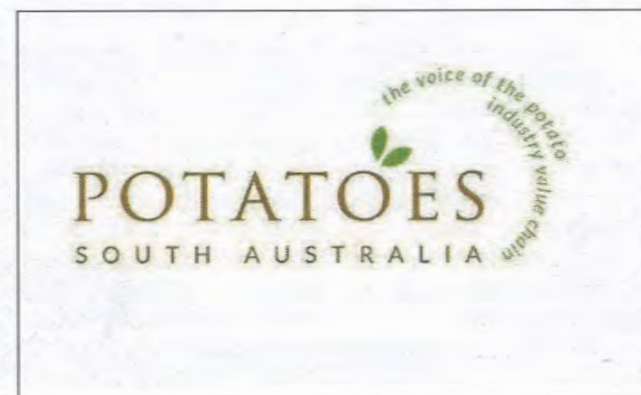
This is particularly so in the development of the CRC's initial structure, policies and processes.

There is a critical need to lift research and industry collaboration and then extension, and it is the aim of CRCs to address these challenges.

Although leading technology innovation, our country



In Australia, there is a critical need to lift research and industry collaboration and then extension, and it is the aim of CRCs to address these challenges.



Potatoes SA is the voice for seed producers, growers, packers, processors, exporters, wholesales and retailers.

is the worst performing of 26 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries this decade, regarding the collaboration of small and medium enterprises and larger companies

and research institutions.

I believe that all directors have a duty to work across government, industry and academia to enhance collaboration, but particularly extension.

The CRC output R&D innovation, if able to be effectively commercialised, must reach the industries that need it for productivity gains.

The Fight Food Waste CRC is spades ahead in this regard as it is industry-led, so let's aim to correct this position in the OECD line-up.

Overall, reviews of the CRC program have shown a 3:1 return on investment.

There are no better outcomes for industry but again, the key is implementing these R&D initiatives, not shelving them for dust collection.

Need to know more? For more information on the Fight Food Waste CRC, visit fightfoodwastecrc.com.au