

# **Grains Industry Agrees on Need for Better Grower Representation**



7 November 2009

## **Communiqué from the Roundtable.**

The Australian Grains Industry has agreed on the need for new ways of providing for the interests of grain producers to be represented at a national level.

At a national Roundtable gathering of many grower organisations and other interested parties in Canberra on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2009, agreement was reached on the need for the development of a business plan for a national body to represent grain producer interests.

This Roundtable was a constructive forum, with emphases on finding a sustainable, accountable, inclusive, 'grass-roots' responsive body for representation of grain producers' interests. During the meeting a range of concepts and options as to how a National grain grower body can be sustainable, independent and accountable into the future were considered.

It concluded with agreement that a working party present to growers a business plan for such a body.

The Business Plan will present a single set of recommendations, ready for immediate action, for the operation of a national body for the future.

In this instance there was agreement existing arrangements, including the operation of the Grains Council of Australia, require new ways of operating.

The essential roles and functions of a national peak grain producer body, as carried out by GCA at present are to be preserved, while the business plan will identify mechanisms for engagement with grower organisations, growers at large and other national bodies, for example, the National Farmers Federation.

The Plan will outline how effective functional relationships are to be built with grain producers and the many organisations, groups and bodies; how these are to operate so that growers can begin to interact with a national body; how the functions of such a body will be funded, and how such a body can interact with the many other organisations within the value chain, government and related bodies.

## **Organisations represented at the Roundtable**

AgForce Grains Queensland; Council of Grain Grower Organisations (WA); Grains Council of Australia Ltd (GCA); Grain Growers Association (GGA); Grains Industry Association of WA; Grains Research Foundation Limited (Qld) (GRFL); NSW Farmers Association; Pastoralists and Graziers Association – Western Grains; South Australian Farmers Federation; Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association; Victorian Farmers Federation; Western Australian Farmers Federation; WA Grains Group.

**Presentations from:** National Farmers Federation (NFF); GGA; GRFL; GCA.

**Observers:** Plant Health Australia

## **What did Grain Producer Representatives Agree**

1. The need for a national, independent body to represent grain producers' interests.
2. The need to identify a means of funding such a body that is both sustainable and independent.
3. The need to find a structure that allows for effective representation, accountability and an ability to interact with the rest of the value chain.

4. The desire to regain a presence within the NFF structure.
5. That a staged approach be followed to develop a full range of activities and breadth of membership. This is to have a focus on forming an effective national grower representative body in the first instance, with later expansion to matters concerning engagement with the broader industry and NFF to come with time.
6. Considering structures and potential alternatives on their merits, without wanting to limit the options available.
7. A desire to retain the valuable parts and activities of the current GCA.
8. For the pro's and con's of alternative means for funding a national body be analysed and presented.
9. That an independent Working Party be formed to develop a Business Plan for agreement by grain producers, ideally early in the New Year. The business plan is to be developed to incorporate the matters raised during the meeting and through further consultation with relevant groups. It was agreed that a staged implementation was important.

The participants at the Roundtable agreed on a range of desirable features of such a body:

- A body that is independent and sustainable into the future
- A body that incorporates the existing grower organisations, but can also consider how grass roots engagement can be extended further.
- A body that has the capacity to engage with the wider industry, NFF and other key stakeholders on issues of National importance.
- A body that would provide effective advocacy for Australian growers.

## **Considerations for a Business Plan**

The meeting agreed on the need for a Business Plan to be developed in the short term. The Business Plan is to be completed by mid January 2010, with an objective of having approval by grain producer bodies and interested parties such that work to put in place the Plan can begin from then.

While some variety in views are present about possible ways of operating a national representative body, there was agreement that the time for considering options was past, and that all options are known, and arguments have been presented. The work of the Business Plan is to map a way and means for operating that takes consideration of the options that are available. Consultation will continue throughout the development of the business plan, but the business plan will provide a recommended course of action that will aim to provide a sustainable and accountable model for National grain grower representation.

It is to be assembled by independent consultants who have knowledge of the industry, grower needs, all options that have previously been presented and evaluated, and the needs for the industry in the future.

## **Major focus:**

The major focus of the Plan will be to provide a structure, funding and operational guide for ensuring an effective, efficient and accountable national grower representative body.

The crucial areas for addressing in the plan include funding and accountability, with a means for growers to be more directly engaged. Options are available and will be tested to identify the best way for a national body to operate, be funded and structured.

## **Terms of Reference**

Terms of reference for the work are being developed from the input and discussion on the day.

These will be available and will be sent to all participants for their reference.

## **Media**

The meeting also agreed that during the period of the operation of the Working Party, there is little or no need for any media about these developments, feeling that the time for media will be following the next industry Roundtable to consider the Business Plan.

To this end, few if any press releases will be issued, and media comments to do with developments at GCA will be handled by Jamie Smith.