

**50TH ANNIVERSARY
of the
AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURAL CONSULTING PROFESSION
Held at Canberra on 23/4/2009**

WORKSHOP SESSION

Planning for the Successful Future Growth and Development of the Profession

Facilitator: Neil Inall

Given the scope of the workshop and the time available the participants were divided into three groups to discuss consulting in the Rural, Agribusiness and Government and International sectors. The discussions were focussed on the threats to, and the opportunities for, consulting in each of the sectors. The leaders of each sector group delivered a summary to the Workshop at the end of the discussions.

The following notes are based on the final reports from each sector and should be read in conjunction with the papers delivered by the three afternoon speakers – Graham Peart on Rural Consulting; David Trebeck on Agribusiness and Government Consulting; and David Crombie on International Consulting.

1. RURAL SECTOR CONSULTING

Threats

- External threats include the world financial crisis, global warming, unsustainable population increases, fossil fuel reliance and policy changes in responses to consumer concerns.
- Consumer perceptions on agriculture's role on climate change (especially carbon emissions from ruminants) GMO, animal welfare and ad-hoc policies arising from these concerns.
- Compliance issues related to tax, OH&S, environmental conservation, land clearing and land use, animal welfare, chemical use and inter-state / intra-state requirements regarding these issues. .
- Economic challenges from rising costs of farm inputs (especially fuel) and compliance issues and decreased water availability
- Challenges in general/specialist careers, e.g. the sheer volume in technology involved in such things as integrated pest management.

- Reduced R&D following cuts to CSIRO and State Government agricultural research units.

1.2 Opportunities

- Continuing changes in the political, social and technical aspects of agriculture present ongoing opportunities for technical and economic services. Current knowledge of farmers' performance provides scope for integrating increasingly complex technology and economic advice to the individual farmers' situation.
- Scope for professional development and sharing of ideas and strategies through the AAAC and other venues.
- Scope for re-modelled 'clubs' providing security for the single operator.
- Becoming more involved in the management of the integrated supply change.
- Global food crisis provides scope for seeking innovative food security with replacement enterprises (e.g. coffee, tea, nuts) and improved farm output.
- Scope to develop farm and laboratory research using industry levy funds and farmer group funds.

2. AGRIBUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT CONSULTING

Threats

- Scope for other professions to "take-over" the role of the agricultural consultant / scientist.
- The range of expertise within the end-user organisations.
- The sheer scope of market opportunities to be serviced and the range of skills required and possible need for specialisation.
- The need for accreditation with AAAC as a regulator of the ethics of the operator and a need for quality assurance.
- Need for more lobbying within Government and media to gain recognition of the role of AAAC consultants' agribusiness expertise.

2.2 Opportunities

- The range of organisations to be serviced provides considerable scope for the employment of a range of skills e.g.
 - Government: policy, legislation, compliance, technical.
 - Agribusiness: suppliers, operators, technical inputs.
 - Financial management (on and off farm), asset management.
 - Aquaculture, Horticulture, Irrigation, Viticulture, Agroforestry
 - Associated or affiliated services: accountants, auditors, engineers, vets.
 - Expert opinions for legal cases, loss assessing and prospectuses for Agribusiness.

2.3 Market Research for agricultural products and businesses.

2.4 R&D organisations research, education, compliance.

2.5 Natural resource management: land, water, bio-diversity of flora and fauna.

2.6 Sustainability: Emissions, energy, water, waste, biodiversity, carbon credits, audits, assessments and consulting.

2.7 Education, training, mentoring, monitoring.

- Servicing the supply chain and packaging skills within the supply chain.
 - Government: policy, legislation, compliance, technical.
 - Agribusiness: suppliers, operators, technical inputs.
 - Farm to market.
 - Market to store.
 - Store to consumer.
 - Waste management and recycling bio-mass to agriculture.

- Scope for on-going training and improvement of technical skills evolving from the graduate through further training, experience and gaining further qualifications.

3. INTERNATIONAL CONSULTING

Threats

- Lack of effective dialogue with AusAID re the role of agricultural consultants in Sector / Governments programs.
- Increasing reliance of AusAID on ACIAR / CSIRO for project implementation and management along OECD / UN models using “in-line” staff from existing government departments despite their lack of experience in community development programs.
- Perceived decrease in effectiveness of, and opportunities with, UN agencies, particularly FAO.
- Increasing role of NGO’s and public bodies.
- Difficulty of using AIAST to promote consultants when many of the senior people are in ACIAR and CSIRO.
- Increased in-country implementation including the capacity of the AusAID post to hire direct in-country.
- Increased impact of “governance” and its attributes weakens opportunities for project innovation.
- Increased involvement of public sector in project implementation diminishes role of private sector project consultants and managing agents.
- National and state agricultural research teams are now subject to much more financial pressure for research dollars making it more attractive to tap into ACIAR supported federal funding through its own funding and AusAID contracts
- USAid model is reputed to be providing the model for AusAID but Third World evidence suggests that project delivery, project efficiency and project outcomes may not be enhanced by use of the US model.

3.2 Opportunities

- Development of effective liaison with AusAID through lobbying and cooperation with the Engineering profession (Australian Association of Consulting Engineers) which has now acquired many of the agricultural consulting companies.
- Increasing worldwide food crisis requiring increased and improved agricultural inputs to complex questions regarding GM crops, gas emissions from agriculture, environmental degradation of crop and rangelands and so on.
- Special role of agricultural consultants in technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation, efficiency of aid delivery, capacity building and private sector involvement with investment.
- Identification of emerging areas of high demand for consulting services in specific agricultural industries, service delivery and marketing outside government bureaucracies.

3.3 Weaknesses

- During the period 1996 to 2007 the Aid sector was dominated by policies involving governance, direct intervention in failing states and a reduction in the importance of multilateral agreements.
- Private sector agricultural consulting and management firms, undergoing a period of coalescence in a time of economic and financial change, have been less willing and committed to seeking dialogue and partnership with organisations such as AusAID to their detriment.

3.4 Strengths

- AAAC and the Institute represent an important constituent of the delivery of aid to third world countries. ACIAR may have a competitive advantage in terms of the generation of new technologies but has a much less significant record in terms of actual technology transfer.
- AAAC members who deal with the commercial solution of agricultural problems on a daily basis are best equipped to assist lesser developed countries and their farmers who need practical, financially appropriate and socially integrated solutions to their problems.