



SUGAR RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION PLAN

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Introduction

Sugar Research Australia's Engagement and Consultation Plan guides our interactions and engagement with individuals and organisations and seeks to ensure that the engagement and consultation we undertake is meaningful.

As Australia's specialist sugarcane research organisation, we invest in evidence-based research, development and extension (RD&E) activities on behalf of sugarcane growers and millers to meet industry challenges and opportunities, and we recognise the importance of consulting with industry on decisions that matter most to them. We seek input to key decisions, processes and changes to achieve improved outcomes and value.

The core responsibilities of SRA are to:

- Deliver cost-effective R&D products and services to the Australian sugar industry to enhance its viability, competitiveness and sustainability
- Carry out, coordinate and provide investment for R&D activities in relation the Australian sugar industry
- Facilitate the dissemination, extension, adoption and commercialisation of results of R&D activities
- Support and develop industry research capacity.

SRA is funded through a range of sources, primarily through the statutory sugarcane levy paid equally by sugarcane growers and millers, and through co-contributions from the Commonwealth Government and grants through other government agencies, including the Queensland Government Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. As the declared Industry Services Body for the Australian sugarcane industry, SRA is responsible for the direct provision of RD&E activities and the ongoing management and investment of funds received from industry levy payers and government, for the benefit of the sugarcane industry and for the wider public good.

The Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) has developed guiding principles for consultation which apply to all rural research and development corporations (RDCs) including SRA, while recognising that each RDC is different and consults different with levy payers and other stakeholders.

As described in the *Best Practice Guide to Stakeholder Consultation*, SRA is encouraged to develop an overarching consultation plan that outlines its approach to consultation, the mechanisms used, and consultation activities undertaken, and to publish the plan online. SRA is also asked to demonstrate how it has applied these principles as part of its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities including annual reporting to DAWE.

This document is SRA's overarching engagement and consultation plan and is intended to inform dedicated plans that may be developed to support consultation on specific strategic activities.

Throughout this document, we use the term consultation in line with the *Best Practice Guide to Stakeholder Consultation*. Readers should view the term as applying broadly to both engagement and consultation.

Stakeholder consultation

Consultation is the process by which SRA interacts with individuals and organisations who have an interest in our activities and decisions. Our operations stretch across the sugarcane industry and we have a range of stakeholders with whom we interact, including:

- levy payers (growers and millers)
- members (comprising levy payers who opt to become members of SRA)
- industry representative organisations
- industry services, contractors and productivity providers
- broader industry – such as equipment and product sales/manufacturers
- industry and agricultural representatives domestically and internationally
- other rural research and development corporations (RDCs) and agricultural industries
- government – Federal/State/Local
- research institutions and the broader scientific community
- funding partners and potential funding partners
- community groups and environmental organisations
- regional communities

Objectives

The purpose of SRA's *Engagement and Consultation Plan* is to enhance our interactions with stakeholders, in support of our vision, purpose and strategy.

Our vision is to be a trusted partner, shaping the future prosperity of the Australian sugarcane industry and regional communities through innovation and ingenuity.

Our purpose is to keep the Australian sugarcane industry competitive, productive and sustainable through innovative research and product development.

To fulfil our duty to industry, our interactions are guided by our operating principles:

	We actively engage with industry
	We constantly seek opportunities to innovate and improve
	We take a long-term view
	We create opportunities for collaboration
	We act ethically and responsibly

Principles of consultation

SRA's stakeholder consultation is designed around the six key principles, of DAWE's [Best Practice Guide to Stakeholder Consultation](#). These principles underpin consultation that is conducted in a genuine, frank, and respectful manner, with trust at the core of interactions. We seek to make it easy for stakeholders to be involved in consultation.

1. Transparent

We strive to be transparent about operations and expenditure, and the setting and implementation of research, development and extension (RD&E) priorities and activities. We understand our responsibility to be accountable and make performance information available to stakeholders. We:

- are upfront about consultation expectations and clearly document and communicate roles and responsibilities of SRA, industry representative bodies, industry participants and other stakeholders, including the degree in which we will consult and when, and how their views will affect the project or activity
- are open to, and willing to accept feedback
 - demonstrate in a timely and respectful manner how stakeholder input has been incorporated
 - are clear, when stakeholder input cannot be incorporated, about why
- communicate key decisions relating to members and levy payers, including Board deliberations, and opportunities for input
- are transparent about why information cannot be shared where details are confidential and cannot be publicly shared
- use platforms and forums such as AgriFutures Australia's grow^{AG} and evoke^{AG} to share and engage.

2. Accessible

We endeavour to provide information in a format that is easy for stakeholders to understand, and through a variety of means that enables consultation in a simple and appropriate way. We:

- use plain English
- ensure the presentation, format and platform is easy to understand and appropriate
- include summaries in written communication to ensure stakeholders can quickly identify information relevant to them
- adapt or modify our approach depending on the stakeholder needs, providing online options where appropriate
- publish key information and research on website or other platforms, which are easily searchable
- strive to ensure that stakeholders are provided an opportunity to contribute
- respond promptly to the queries of stakeholders and show a genuine interest in their input.

3. Straightforward

We consider the needs and competing priorities of stakeholders to consult in the most appropriate and simplest way. We:

- ensure stakeholders are aware of the time commitment expectations and ensure consultation is efficient
- are understanding of demands already on stakeholders, including other consultation processes, and seasonal considerations
- monitor and evaluate where stakeholders rely on and appreciate regular consultation and where stakeholders are feeling over-consulted
- consider targeted or group requests to reduce the burden on stakeholders and improve efficiency
- where possible, consider opportunities to streamline consultation across RDCs
- use trusted and established industry pathways to communicate.

4. Well planned

As much as possible, we plan ahead and endeavour to provide advance notice about how we will undertake consultation. We strive to provide adequate time for stakeholders to prepare feedback and advice, to achieve meaningful input. We seek to:

- ensure consultation is purpose-driven, timely, appropriate, and adaptable
- have realistic timeframes, taking account of seasonal pressures, public holidays, the end of financial year and holiday periods, and being aware of competing activities
- engage stakeholders early so stakeholders can plan and prepare their input
- provide stakeholders multiple opportunities to provide feedback for larger projects
- recognise and link into industry events and annual general meetings

Notwithstanding our commitment to planning ahead, there will be instances where shorter consultation timeframes are necessary – for instance on a critical emerging issue (e.g., biosecurity, international trade, or suddenly emerging management or organisational matters). On these occasions, we will explain why consultation timeframes are short.

5. Fit for purpose

We recognise that different stakeholders have different interests and needs, and we work to balance their varying needs and expectations. We seek to:

- tailor our approach for different stakeholder needs and priorities
- base consultation and engagement on the most appropriate methodology (e.g., co-design, seeking comments on options to deliver an outcomes etc)
- adjust consultation depending on the issues under consideration, who needs to be consulted, and the available time and resources.

6. Responsive

We undertake M&E to support improvement in our interactions and consultation. This means we:

- collect data on what consultation methods are most effective (for example, which type of consultation was successful in what circumstances)
- regularly evaluate and review the ways we consult stakeholders
- look for informal opportunities to seek feedback and review performance
- are evidence-based and accountable to stakeholders
- are aware of stakeholder consultation fatigue and adjust consultation accordingly.

Consultation activities

SRA is committed to genuine and timely consultation that leads to improved decision making and better outcomes for the sugar industry. Our consultation activities include:

Strategy development

Our strategy is co-created with industry through a series of regional forums and engagement sessions, with input from external stakeholders and our employees. For example, SRA's Strategic Plan 2021-2026, released in July 2021, was developed from engagement and feedback by 700 industry and research stakeholders. In line with performance expectations under our Statutory Funding Agreement, we develop consultation plans for strategy prioritisation and development processes to ensure industry input is captured and considered in decisions about SRA's direction and investments.

Research investment

Development of our research investment plans involve extensive engagement with industry, including grower, milling, research partner and government stakeholders, as well as SRA employees. We incorporate stakeholder feedback to ensure investment is targeted in the areas of greatest need and on issues that matter most to industry.

We are committed to research that is strategic, collaborative and targeted to improve profitability, productivity, competitiveness and preparedness for future opportunities and challenges through a balanced portfolio.

SRA also operates a Board committee to provide independent oversight of the direction of SRA's research investment, portfolio decisions and performance monitoring and evaluation.

District planning

Across each of our five districts, district managers work with local industry and services providers to identify improvement opportunities and develop local productivity plans. SRA district managers provide a direct touch point in each district to build a deep understanding of the challenges and constraints that industry faces in their local area.

The district manager approach seeks to strengthen industry collaboration, moving beyond drawing on industry as interviewees or subjects of research, but involving them as equals in the co-creation of strategies at the local area.

Plant breeding and variety development

SRA's sugar varieties are central to help make the Australian sugarcane industry more productive, sustainable and competitive.

Through our Regional Variety Committees (RVCs), industry is directly involved in managing new variety release and maintaining recommended variety lists within each sugarcane biosecurity zone.

The RVCs are made up of industry representatives of growers, mills and productivity service organisations. Each RVC has formed and agreed on the composition and structure of their committee and determined acceptable voting requirements for progression of clones through the breeding program, for new variety release and to oversee appropriate disease thresholds for their region.

The RVCs make decisions on the final stages of the breeding pipeline, and most importantly the decision about whether a variety is released to be grown commercially. Varieties are first introduced to the committees as Final Assessment Trials and the decision on whether to progress will be made every year until the variety is either released or removed from the program.

Constitutional change

When considering any change to its constitution, SRA consults with the federal Minister, its members and broader industry to explain the rationale for the proposed change, and consider feedback received, ahead of voting at the Annual General Meeting.

Levy payer consultation

SRA undertakes consultation and engagement with levy payers in relation to any levy-related poll or survey it may seek to undertake. Consultation may also occur in relation to significant strategic issues or risks for the industry. The Levy Payer Register enables SRA to identify and consult with the levy payers who fund SRA's activities.

Regular information sharing, updates and communication

SRA's Board and leadership undertake direct engagement with industry and other RDCs to share updates and hear directly about topics of interest, including research outcomes, emerging issues, performance and opportunities for collaboration.

This occurs through regional Board meetings and leadership visits, and both face-to-face and online meetings with representative organisations. These sessions provide a vital opportunity for SRA to connect with sugar and broader agricultural participants and understand issues of importance, as well as synergies, across different regions.

Corporate governance

SRA operates openly and transparently ensuring proper use and management of funds and meeting legislative requirements.

We demonstrate performance against performance principles to levy payers and other stakeholders through our key communications channels including: newsletter, meetings, website, email or annual report.

In line with reporting and performance requirements, we also develop:

- Annual Report and Annual Operating Plans
- SRA Strategic Plan
- Supporting corporate policies and documentation.

Communications and publications

SRA uses a range of communications channels and publications to support information sharing and consultation with industry. This includes:

- quarterly *Cane Matters* magazine
- fortnightly eNewsletter
- social media – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, You Tube
- website
- eLibrary
- webinars
- publications of manuals and booklets
- tools, products, services and dissemination of scientific expertise/research outcomes
- district knowledge transfer events - including trials, field days, knowledge sharing sessions, workshops, participation in shed meetings and agricultural conferences and events
- Board and leader engagement sessions
- attendance and briefings through industry organisations
- cross-industry collaboration and knowledge sharing

Monitoring and evaluation

SRA monitors its performance and progress towards key objectives in its Strategic Plan and Annual Operational Plan, reporting through performance meetings to government, its annual report and in updates to industry.

We also undertake annual surveys across key stakeholder groups such as growers, millers and research partners, along with event-based surveys to understand perceptions of SRA performance, the value of activities undertaken, and intention to adopt/use the information or practices shared.

Where SRA seeks input, it commits to share outcomes with participants, along with any improvement actions that will be taken as a result of the feedback received.

SRA also monitors and evaluates its performance against performance requirements of its funding partners, including through periodic independent reviews.

Contact us

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