

# ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

*In response to the Independent Performance Review*







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The Independent Performance Review, completed in April 2024, recommended that SRA create a roadmap detailing key steps and timeframes for its change process, focusing on maintaining leadership stability during the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) transition, ensuring transparency in investment planning and decision-making, and embedding appropriate policies and systems. SRA recognises the need to build the confidence of our industry and government stakeholders by demonstrating our capability to implement these actions and to invest in and deliver research, development, and extension (RD&E) activities that benefit the sugarcane industry and regional communities.

The current document details our priorities for change including the actions we will undertake to achieve these objectives. It is a dynamic plan, with feedback on our implementation progress to be collected from our stakeholders regularly, including via our annual surveys. We are committed to responding to feedback and making necessary adjustments to the plan. Progress updates will be shared during tripartite meetings and SRA events and through our communication channels.



# Building a strong leadership team

SRA's leadership has undergone significant change in the last 18 months, justifiably causing concern amongst stakeholders about the company's capacity to invest in and deliver impactful research to the sugarcane industry.

To address this, the Board is committed to building a strong leadership team and has appointed Mr Mick Bartlett as CEO. Mr Bartlett brings extensive leadership experience in the commercial agricultural and research sectors across four continents, with significant achievements in innovation and sustainability. As Global Director of Operations at the International Rice Research Institute, Mr Bartlett managed initiatives across 21 countries. Additionally, as the CEO of the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, he facilitated AUD \$4.1 billion in trade annually making him ideal to lead SRA. Mr Bartlett's tenure as CEO commenced in October 2024.

Recruitment for other senior leadership roles is also underway. Dr Garry Rosewarne has been appointed to the General Manager of Variety Development to commence in January 2025. Dr Rosewarne joins SRA from Agriculture Victoria, where he is currently in the role of Research Director – Plant Production Sciences and brings extensive experience having led the National Lentil Breeding and Lentil Breeding Infrastructure programs. Additionally, recruitment for the General Manager of Finance and Operations, is expected to be completed by March 2025.

Following Ms Rowena McNally's decision not to reapply for another term as Chair of SRA's Board of Directors, a new Chair will be recommended by the Director Selection Committee and presented for endorsement at the Annual General Meeting in November 2024. Additionally, two new directors will be appointed to fill two vacancies on the Board.

## Mr Bartlett and the leadership team will address two priorities:

- Implementing the actions in SRA's Response Plan to the Independent Performance Review 2023-24.
- Assisting the sugarcane industry to be competitive, productive and sustainable through innovative research and product development as a research investor and provider.

The leadership team are focused on demonstrating the return on the investment made by levy payers and government investors from SRA's research. We will embed new systems and processes to ensure that the research we invest in and deliver is evaluated thoroughly, and that the benefits delivered across the sugarcane value chain are communicated clearly to our stakeholders.

Additionally, we will consult with our stakeholders about SRA's funding model; modernising our constitution and continuing to pursue the opportunities outlined in the Sugar Plus roadmap for research investment.

The Board will actively monitor the implementation and progress updates will be provided to our stakeholders via SRA's communication channels.

*SRA CEO Mick Bartlett (pictured left) and SRA Director Rosemary Richards (far right) are shown around the glasshouse at Meringa by SRA Weed Specialist Emilie Fillols.*



# A strategic approach to research

In June 2024, we released our *Ten-Year Research and Development Plan 2024-2034* (SRA's Ten-Year R&D Plan). The plan is designed to guide research investments and address critical challenges and emerging opportunities to strengthen the industry's competitiveness, productivity, and sustainability through strategic R&D. It aims to advance the opportunities presented by the bioeconomy identified in the industry's 2040 vision, Sugar Plus, such as converting co-products like bagasse, molasses, and trash into renewable electricity and biofuels. Additionally, it focuses on adding value to current opportunities and maintaining viability by developing technologies to improve production and breeding efficiency, manage biosecurity threats, and optimise the uptake of research outputs.

The SRA Ten-Year R&D Plan will guide investment planning through an integrated approach that balances our portfolio across five R&D programs, each with key priorities, identified by our stakeholders. These include:



## **VARIETIES** – Create the potential

Step-change in plant breeding.  
New varieties with improved production and processing performance.  
Correct variety adoption decisions.



## **AGRONOMY & FARMING SYSTEMS** – Achieve the potential

Optimise agronomic inputs.  
Improve sugarcane soil condition.  
Integrate data, technology, and innovation.  
Sustainable production.



## **CROP PROTECTION** – Safeguard the potential

Sustainable management of pests.  
Sustainable management of weeds.  
Sustainable management of pathogens.  
Biosecurity preparedness.  
Data and emerging technology.



## **MILLING & PROCESSING** – Deliver the potential

Optimise operations.  
Highly skilled and professional workforce.  
Opportunities for diversified income.



## **ADOPTION** – Reach the potential

The right information.  
Regional approaches.  
Industry transformation.

To implement the plan, the Board has allocated \$16M from our 10th Anniversary Research Fund for contestable activities addressing these priorities between 2024-25 and 2026-27. This includes a notional commitment of \$2M for Sugar Plus objectives, detailed in our Milling & Processing Program and \$3M to establish a Sugarcane Milling and Processing Research Centre of Excellence, also focused on Sugar Plus priorities. Additionally, \$1M has been allocated for innovative 'moon-shot' initiatives to explore high risk research that has the potential to transform industry. We will continue investing in both core and contestable activities that advance the plan's priorities beyond this period, including exploring co-investments with our partners.





# Transparent investment planning and decision-making

Our stakeholders are requesting more structured and transparent investment planning and procurement processes. They seek assurance that our investment governance structures effectively manage potential conflicts arising from our dual role as both a research investor and provider.

To address this, we will undertake several actions. First, we will adopt a more structured and strategic approach to stakeholder consultation as an immediate priority to build trust. We will continue:

- Our consultation process on research prioritisation with our levy payer stakeholders using our grower and miller surveys in October and November, ensuring a ground-up approach is used.
- To consult with industry representative and government stakeholders about priorities and investment allocation via tripartite and other meetings in December, including with our key investment partner, the Queensland Government's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.
- Facilitate a co-design process with key stakeholders to identify gaps in our research portfolio, including our contestable and core research activities and outputs, between November and February.
- Consult with levy payer and other industry stakeholders locally through our District Managers to pinpoint regional productivity constraints and investment priorities that will provide benefit between December and February.

Using this feedback, we will prepare our investment plans and Annual Operating Plan, including an indicative portfolio balance. We will present draft plans for further feedback during our annual R&D Forum in March, before commencing procurement of new investments.

Second, to improve management of contestability and probity obligations, the Board has restructured the Research Funding Panel (RFP) making it a Board committee responsible for providing independent, objective advice to manage SRA's entire research portfolio of core and contestable investments. As part of this change, a skills matrix was developed and membership requirements were changed to align with these new skills requirements, including milling experience. The Board will continue to re-appoint the RFP in accordance with these principles and make planned updates of the RFP Charter.

Third, we will revise our Procurement Policy in accordance with the review and our internal audit findings. A new Research Procurement Policy to guide investment decision-making will be developed, including specific details about the selection and evaluation processes for tenders.

Finally, we have improved our reporting on investment allocation to enhance transparency. Our corporate publications will now include a detailed portfolio balance, covering key dimensions such as R&D Programs, and the time and risk involved in the research we invest in. We will report investment allocation by research type such as strategic initiatives to address Sugar Plus priorities, as well as those that will support business-as-usual and add value across the industry value chain. We have also revised our income and expenditure summary to report on core and contestable activities separately, instead of using aggregate figures. Additionally, we will report the amount invested in our contestable pool and by Australian Government priorities for greater clarity. These updates will be reflected in our Annual Operating Plan 2024-25 and will be applied to our Annual Report 2023-24, as well as future corporate publications.



SRA CEO Mick Bartlett (left) visit Bundaberg at Bruce Petersons (right) farm.

# Best practice policies, charters and systems

SRA's leadership team and Board are conducting a comprehensive review of all policies and charters as part of our policy review program to uphold good governance. Key documents to be updated and published on our website include, but are not limited to, the Intellectual Property Policy, Compliance Policy, Cost Allocation Policy, and RFP Charter.

In addition, we are implementing a new Business Transformation System to integrate our processes and information technologies, aiming to enhance efficiency. This phased approach will bring significant improvements to our finance, reporting, and grant project management systems, among other areas.

