



Developing the National Grower Group Collective (NGGC)

*Workshop outcomes on discussions of the future of the collective
23rd February 2023*

Over the past three decades the emergence and growth of farming systems grower groups across the nation is playing an ever-increasing critical role in the development of sustainable and profitable broadacre farm practices through their strong relationships with RDC's, research providers, State and Commonwealth government agencies, NRM regional organisations, the Future Drought Fund Drought Hub network and industry.

These groups have several common features that aid them in collaborating to improve their collective effectiveness. These features include being:

- Farmer owned and driven
- Driving local innovation through the validation of research findings and extending these findings to their farmer members and non-members
- Are employers of local expertise to manage and operate the groups and conduct locally relevant research and extension.

In addition, many of these groups:

- Are mature with strong and trusted relationships providing significant value for investment. It's very expensive and time consuming to build this from scratch.
- They provide a regional context to suit variability across the country
- They have critical structures and capacity to facilitate group discussion, engage experts and validate research at the local level with demonstrations and trialling
- They can demonstrate their impact and have a continuous improvement philosophy.

Across Western Australia, South Australia and the eastern states there are now over 80 farming systems groups. The West Australian based *Grower Group Alliance*, the South Australian based *Ag Excellence Alliance*, the NSW *Grower Group Alliance*, and several of the large grower groups in south-eastern Australia have made significant strides in developing a national representative approach to the issues and opportunities with the grower group network.

A number of attempts have been made over time to form a national representative body for the grower group network, recognising the strength that comes with a collective vision and voice for farmer driven RD&E.

In the final workshop various ideas were developed as to how to progress the National Grower Group Collective. These are summarised below with a series of actions listed at the end of this report.

Define the value proposition

Scope

- Support to grower groups
- Outreach, extension and adoption excellence
- Influence / advocacy for agricultural RD&E priorities
- Contributing to existing systems, processes / RDC's.

Model

- Farming systems groups contribute \$5,000 subs per annum
- State body or individual groups on committee - perhaps on a rotational basis?
- Recurring funding top up / where does government invest – gaps (DAFF, State governments)
- Annual budget of \$600K
- CEO / secretariate, support training, annual gathering – requires energy and passion
- Strategic committee made up of grower group representatives.
- Hold national event.
- Link to Drought Hubs

National Grower Group Collective (NGGC) - Purpose

Influence

- Business case to DAFF and involve state governments
- More links with R&D organisations to maximise E&A.
- Influence RDC's on effective E&A and grower groups are funded to provide this expertise.
- Input into national policy development
- Provide a national voice by farmers in the research cycle (currently too politically driven)
- Sort out 'in kind'
- Develop a transparent costing model for universities, State agencies and CSIRO - need to be accountable.
- Engage and educate our commodity and funding bodies.
- Drive E&A as an integral part of research projects where appropriate.
- Maximise extension investment.

National Projects

- Collective approach to funding
- Value of a national collective – establish a 'warm' alliance that is positioned for future opportunities developing national projects that need a grass root network.
- Deliver national projects.
- Create more opportunities to do the 'fun stuff' – have professionals manage the higher-level project management.
- Develop better applications for national projects.

Farmer Focus

- More voice from grower groups on farmer issues.
- To be more efficient to advance agriculture and maximise resource use.
- Champion farmers, demonstrations, opportunity cost for farmers.

Extension Professional Development

- Be recognised for extension & adoption excellence.
- Develop extension program value proposition.
- Become known for one iconic, valued program.
- Extension excellence program focus on extension & adoption skills / gaps.
- Target scientists - need for extension & facilitation skills to support adoption.

Sharing Resources / Exchange Opportunities

- Sharing knowledge of SME's.
- Better understanding between groups of what each group's strength remit is.
- National collaboration – sharing knowledge across all systems.
- Less protection of territory.
- More focus on outcomes to member collective benefit.
- Lobbying upcoming students, provide pathways to placement.

- Talent development
- Job placement – expatriate.
- Share best practice.
- International tours.
- Collective is cross sector.
- Where does Grain Grower Ltd fit? How can their resources be out to benefit.

Next steps

- Form a Victorian Alliance – Cam
- Formalise NSW Alliance – Andrew
- GGA to share document – Nikki
- Agree there is value in a NGGGC
 - focus on common value within groups
 - Clarify value proposition:
 - Focus on outreach, extension & adoption
 - Increase extension and advisory skills & capacity
- Develop a stakeholder map – Mark & Jeanette
- Complete the value proposition, scope and value – Andrew & Diana
- Set up Teams space for NGGC – Kalista
- Structure discussion on: how to access funds; who pays what; who contributes?
- Funding opportunities - Mark



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