

Monday 2nd July, 2012

Another practical research organisation bites the dust

The closure of the Cotton Catchment Communities Cooperative Research Centre (Cotton CRC) on Sunday 1st of July highlights the lack of Government investment into practical real world on-the-ground research in Australia.

The National Irrigators' Council, CEO Tom Chesson said the work of the Cotton CRC was legendary and had provided a \$1 billion payoff not just to cotton producers, but the also for our communities and our environment.

"The failure of the Government to continue to fund the work of the Cotton CRC is in stark contrast to Recommendation 14 of the 'Of droughts and Flooding Rains', Parliamentary Inquiry into the Murray Darling Basin water reforms, Chaired by the Independent Member, Tony Windsor.

The Committee recommended 'that the Commonwealth Government focus greater investment into research and development to improve irrigation efficiency.'

"If we do not substantially increase funding for agriculture research, development and extension services then the nation's food security will be severely compromised. We need help to keep doing more with less.

"The Cotton CRC is not the only research organisation to be abolished in recent years. Land and Water Australia, the Irrigation Futures, and Forestry Co-operative Research Centres have all been axed. This just makes no sense and is a travesty," he said.

Mr Chesson said as food and fibre producers we are proud of the role we play in feeding and clothing the nation and the world. We are proud of the fact that we are amongst the world's best farmers. We know that we would never be the best without the support of our practical scientists. We know that science in this country is underfunded and our productivity is declining because of it. We need increased funding for the practical scientific endeavours which will enables us to produce more with less.

"And more than anything we need extension services which take the research from the lab back to the paddock. This is exactly what the Cotton CRC did and closing it is a backward step.

"Agriculture is recognised as the best enabler of new technology of any industry in Australia and the drought saw farmers embrace a range of new technologies, proving necessity is the mother of all invention.

Mr Chesson said he was gravely concerned that the twisting of scientific opinion is devaluing science in general and turning scientists into activists, often resulting in a high degree of mistrust.

"Only recently at the Windsor Inquiry into the proposed Basin Plan we saw a self anointed 'Independent expert', Jamie Pittock from ANU present evidence under the Australia Conservation Foundation banner.

"It is time the Government undertook an audit to ensure scarce funding isn't being siphoned off and wasted by organisations that continually make spurious claims to the media to justify their existence and more funding.

Mr Chesson said given the lack of funding available for scientific research there should be more focus on practical research which allows farmers to produce more with less whilst improving environmental outcomes instead of funding for the histrionic doom and gloom merchants who inhabit our Universities and act as spokespeople for big environmental organisations.

Media Contact: Tom Chesson 0418 415597