Working Group: Kylie Dunstan, Jen Galloway, Ruth Redfern, Toni Somes
April 2025

### OVERVIEW

Australia's 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) and the levy­ funded model that underpins research, development and extension (RD&E) are at a critical juncture.

For 35 years RDCs have supported productivity gains across the agricultural sector and farmers in their quest to increase farmgate returns.

Today RDCs face increasing scrutiny into the levy system and agricultural innovation, from a Commonwealth Government with declining revenues, and from farmers and industry leaders with often divergent views about the value and purpose of RDC RD&E.

## STRATEGIC INTENT

This strategy aims to provide a collaborative approach for 15 distinct RDCs to achieve the mutual goal of building trust in and support for the RDC model and ensure ongoing commitment for continued investment in the RDCs.

The strategy enhances and builds on the strategies already in place by the individual RDCs.

## CONTEXT

Rural industries – agriculture, fisheries and forestry – are economically, environmentally, socially and culturally important for Australia. The gross value of national agricultural production has increased by 34% in the past 20 years from $61.5 billion in 2004–05 to $82.4 billion in 2023–24. Including fisheries and forestry, the total value of production has increased by 30% in the same 20-year period from approximately $67.7 billion to $88.3 billion.

 The successful, long-term industry-government co-investment partnership delivered through the RDCs has enabled the strategic research and innovation investments for industry that underpin productivity growth whilst considering environmental and social impacts.

The Rural RDC model is unique and envied around the world. It is stable, sustainable and it works. It succeeds because it brings the innovation system closer to the research end user, and it allows expensive, specialist and time-consuming projects to be commissioned and managed. This is a task beyond the capacity and resources of most individual agricultural enterprises, and – in some cases – entire industries.

The RDCs continue to look for opportunities for collaboration that draw on the collective strength and experience of the group, to deliver better results for levy and taxpayers.

The RDCs are independent (arms-length but not hands-off) from both industry and government, and are tasked with delivering economic, social and environmental benefits to their industries, communities and the nation. The RDCs are also independent of the research community and are able to direct resources within a portfolio that balances short-, medium- and long-term impacts and benefits for industry and the community.

With our R&D partners (including State and Territory departments, CSIRO and Universities), RDCs deliver relevant and practical information for Australia’s primary producers and industries to use on-farm, in their businesses and throughout supply chains. Economic analysis shows that the RDCs leverage $1.27 of co-contribution for every $1 invested.

In 2023-24, RDCs helped to direct and invest around 40% of all Australian agricultural R&D funding. The total funding received by all RDCs in 2023-24 was around $1.47 billion – $573.2 million from private industry levy contributions, $470.3 million from Government R&D matching contribution, and $427.6 million from other sources, including project-specific grants.

The transformative value of this investment was underscored recently by Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) research that found for every $1 invested in agricultural R&D, an almost $8 return is generated for farmers over 10 years. The benefits don’t get much clearer than that.

## OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of this strategy is to ensure ongoing support for the RDC model from key decision makers.

This will be achieved through:

1. Building awareness of and trust in Australia’s RDCs
2. Demonstrating RDC collaboration – how and why the RDCs work together
3. Demonstrating RDC impact – the collective impact achieved by the RDC model

## KEY MESSAGES

1. The RDCs are efficient, effective and deliver impact for rural industries. They are trusted partners in Australia’s rural R&D system and play a unique role at the intersection between industry, government and the research community.
2. Though their investments, the RDCs deliver positive impacts that support the long-term future of Australia’s rural industries and rural and regional communities. For every $1 invested in agricultural R&D, an almost $8 return is generated for farmers over 10 years.
3. The RDCs effectively work together to increase the reach, effectiveness and efficiency of their operations and investments.
4. Productivity – Agricultural productivity has outpaced other sectors (ABARES reference)

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Government:

* Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
* Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
* Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
* Ministers and Shadow Ministers for other key portfolios, including Trade; Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water; Industry, Science and Resources; Employment and Workplace Relations; Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts.
* Departmental Secretaries for these Departments
* Key Departmental and Ministerial office staff

Industry:

* National industry reps, including the National Farmers Federation. (Complementing and aligning with industry relationships that the RDCs hold in their respective commodities).

Media

Targeted national media – The Australian, Guardian, AAP, ABC (Landline). With links through to regional outlets.

## APPROACH

This strategy includes direct stakeholder engagement, strategic collaboration at key events, utilising the support of third-party advocates, targeted publications and strategic media engagement.

Priority activities:

1. **Stakeholder mapping** –awareness levels and attitudes of key stakeholders to the RDC model before and after the completion of the strategy and to inform key messaging.
2. **Direct engagement** – with key stakeholders, through briefings and meetings designed to build, maintain and support critical relationships. This will complement and align to the activities of individual RDCs.
3. **Leveraging key events** – attended by key stakeholders to visually demonstrate collaboration and impact. Consideration for events related to government priorities, (eg climate, science) identify 2-3 core events annually which will be identified in the Annual Workplan. Examples are AgriFutures Australia’s annual evokeAG event, the Department of Agriculture and ABARES annual Outlook conference, the biennial cross-RDC Impact Showcase, and the annual Science and Technology Australia Science meets Parliament event, NFF Conference, Friends of Parliament, PMs Prize for Science.
4. **RDC Champions** –enabling key stakeholders who wish to champion the RDC model within industry, research and government. This involves a joint RDC briefing pack and shared narrative (overseen by RDC Communications GMs) which enables RDCs to brief their ‘RDC champions’ – a selection of credible, influential and respected individuals with appropriate credentials who wish to speak authoritatively about the benefits of the model.
5. **Developing key publications** – for communication of key messages to key stakeholders. Key publications include the annual Collective Research and Innovation Outcomes report, associated ‘placemat’, RDCs resource pack, Case Study examples, which all work together to highlighting collective investment and impact.
6. **Strategic media engagement** – around key events and publications to enhance messaging and reinforce these to key stakeholders.

## ACTIVITIES AND LEAD

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Approach** | **Activities** | **Responsibility** |
| Stakeholder feedback | Understanding awareness and satisfaction of key stakeholders. | Council secretariat |
| Direct engagement | 1. Collective targeted letters to Ministers, Shadow Ministers, and Departmental Secretaries following the Federal Election in May 2025. A standard paragraph re the RDCs and our collective impact to be provided to all RDCs for inclusion in their own letters post-election.
2. Key briefing meetings with all stakeholders (potentially including backbenchers)
 | Council secretariatChair of ChairsExecutive Committee |
| Leveraging key events | 1. evokeAG (annual, Feb, location varies)
2. ABARES Outlook (annual, March, Canberra)
3. RDC impact showcase (biennial, June, Canberra)
4. Science meets Parliament (annual, Feb, Canberra)
5. Collateral to be developed for utilisation across all events.
6. National Ag Day
7. NFF Conference
 | Comms GMs to leadCouncil secretariat coords joint contractual and investment arrangements  |
| RDC Champions | Identify and brief champions  | Each RDC to support their Champions |
| Developing key publications | 1. Collective Research and Innovation Outcomes report and associated snapshot
2. Overview of RDC investment placemat
 | Comms GMs oversightCouncil secretariat contracts and oversees provider  |
| Supporting individual RDCS to promote joint RDC message  | Provide resource pack which includes consistent key messages from comms strategy + placemap publication (see below) + collective impact report | Comms GMs oversightCouncil secretariat contracts and oversees provider  |
| Strategic media engagement | Related to events and publicationsEstablish Council RDC LinkedIn profile | Comms GMs oversightCouncil secretariat contracts and oversees provider  |

## MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

TBC

## PLAN ON A PAGE

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strategic intent** | To provide a collaborative approach for 15 distinct RDCs to achieve the mutual goal of building trust in and support for the RDC model, and ensure ongoing commitment for continued investment in the RDCs. |
|  |
| **Stakeholders** | Government | Industry | Media |
|  |
| **Objectives** | Overarching: to ensure ongoing support for the RDC model from key decision makers. |
| Objective one: Building awareness of and trust | Objective two: Demonstrating collaboration | Objective three:Demonstrating impact |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Approach** | Stakeholder survey | Direct engagement | Leverage key events |
| Enabling third party advocates | Developing key publications | Strategic media engagement |

## APPENDIX 1: STAKEHOLDER MAP

*Note: to be completed in more detail during Q1 and Q2 of Strategy implementation*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Stakeholder** | **Contact** | **Importance** | **Desired relationship** | **Information source/s / Influenced by** | **Engagement and communication opportunities** |
| Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  | Minister Collins | Portfolio lead and key decision maker for the system | RDCs as a trusted, critical, ‘go-to’ partner within the portfolio for advice and delivery | Advisers (CoS, R&D)Department Party and Parliamentary colleaguesRDCs / CouncilIndustryMediaAGMIN / AgSOC | BriefingsEvents (speaking opportunities)Media – outgoing (eg announcements/ launches)Media – incomingParliamentary processes (QoNs, inquiries, QTBs)Council meetingsSocial media |
| Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry | Minister Chisholm | Portfolio responsibility for horticulture, fisheries, forestry and wine. Potential to reinforce or diminish key messaging. | RDCs as trusted, critical, ‘go-to’ partner within the portfolio for advice and delivery | Advisers (CoS, R&D)Department of Agriculture and Water ResourcesParty and Parliamentary colleaguesRDCs / CouncilIndustry Media | BriefingsEvents (speaking opportunities)Media – outgoing (announcements/ launches)Media – incomingParliamentary processes (QoNs, inquiries, QTBs, Estimates)Council meetings and activitiesSocial media |
| Ministerial advisers to Minister Collins and Assistant Minister Chisholm. | Nicole Gazenbeek, Senator Chisholm Office | Key influencers of Minister and Assistant Minister | RDCs can be trusted, and are a critical, ‘go-to’ partner within the portfolio for advice and delivery | DAWRParliamentary processesRDCs / CouncilIndustryMedia – incomingSocial media | BriefingsCorrespondenceParliamentary processes (QoNs, inquiries, QTBs, Estimates)Departmental processes (briefs, correspondence)Direct and indirect engagement |
| Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  | Adam Fennessy  | Departmental lead for the portfolio.Key decision maker in terms of dept engagement and approaches. Source of advice to the Minister.  | RDCs are aligned to the broader portfolio aims. The impact of RDCs work is clear and understood | Deputy SecretariesFirst Assistant SecretariesAssistant SecretariesLine areasRDCs / CouncilAPS colleaguesAgSOC colleagues | BriefingsParliamentary processes (QoNs, inquiries, QTBs, Estimates)Departmental processes (briefs, correspondence)Council meetingsMedia – incoming |
| Deputy Secretaries  | Matt Lowe (Dep Sec for AFF Policy)Tina Hutchinson (Ag Trade and Regulations) Justine Saunders (Biosec, Ops and Compliance)Tess Bishop (COO CSO) | Departmental lead for the portfolio.Key decision maker in terms of dept engagement and approaches. Source of advice to the Minister.  | RDCs are aligned to the broader portfolio aims. The impact of RDCs work is clear and understood | Deputy SecretariesFirst Assistant SecretariesAssistant SecretariesLine areasRDCs / CouncilAPS colleaguesAgSOC colleagues | BriefingsParliamentary processes (QoNs, inquiries, QTBs, Estimates)Departmental processes (briefs, correspondence)Council meetingsMedia – incoming |
| Ag PolicyFood policyLevies, Innovation and Livestock  | Joanna StanionPaul DennyAlison Curran | Departmental lead for the portfolio.Key decision maker in terms of dept engagement and approaches. Source of advice to the Minister.  | RDCs are aligned to the broader portfolio aims. The impact of RDCs work is clear and understood | Deputy SecretariesFirst Assistant SecretariesAssistant SecretariesLine areasRDCs / CouncilAPS colleaguesAgSOC colleagues | BriefingsParliamentary processes (QoNs, inquiries, QTBs, Estimates)Departmental processes (briefs, correspondence)Council meetingsMedia – incoming |
| Agvet chem, Fisheries and ForestryFisheriesTrade and Biosecurity Groups | SJ McCormackGeorge DayTina HutchinsonJustine Saunders | Departmental lead for the portfolio.Key decision maker in terms of dept engagement and approaches. Source of advice to the Minister.  | RDCs are aligned to the broader portfolio aims. The impact of RDCs work is clear and understood | Deputy SecretariesFirst Assistant SecretariesAssistant SecretariesLine areasRDCs / CouncilAPS colleaguesAgSOC colleagues | BriefingsParliamentary processes (QoNs, inquiries, QTBs, Estimates)Departmental processes (briefs, correspondence)Council meetingsMedia – incoming |
| Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and ForestryShadow Minister for Rural and Regional Australia |  | Potential voice of dissent and source questions. Has indicated will launch an inquiry if elected to government | RDCs as a critical component of the rural innovation system | AdviserCommitteesParty and Parliamentary colleaguesIndustryMedia - incomingRDCs / Council | BriefingsParliamentary processes Media - incoming |
| National Industry Representatives – NFF etc  | David Jochinke NFF President, Troy Williams, CEO | Influence pathway. Potential to reinforce or detract from key messages | RDCs understood to be effective, efficient and trusted players within the portfolio | Members (levy payers)RDCs / CouncilMedia – incoming | BriefingsCorrespondenceSponsorships and eventsDirect and indirect engagementInvite to a Council meeting each year |
| National Innovation System leaders/ RDC ally’s | CRC Association?CSIRO?SERD Panel membersScience meets Parliament | Influence pathway.Increase recognition of RDCs within National Innovation System | Supporters of RDCs. | Research providers seeking funding from RDCs.Board directors. | Strategic RDC attendance at key events and forums.Seeking opportunities for RDC presentations – sharing the narrative about importance of model. |
| Ministers for Trade, Science, Climate Change; Environment; Workplace Relations |  |  |  |  | BriefingsEvents (speaking opportunities)Media – outgoing (eg announcements/ launches)Media – incomingParliamentary processes (QoNs, inquiries, QTBs)Council meetingsSocial media |
| Media |  | Influence pathway. Potential to reinforce or detract from key messages | RDCs delivering for AustraliaCouncil provides a point of contact and content for cross-RDC activity | PoliticiansIndustryRDCsSocial media | Direct and indirect engagementProviders of content |

APPENDIX 1: Summary of reviews relating to RDC Model



**2024 – 2025 Strategic Examination of Research & Development (SERD)**

The SERD is led by the Federal Department of Industry, Science and Resources. An expert panel of four is overseeing the review. The RDCs made joint and individual submissions in March/ April 2025. Review findings expected in late 2025. The SERD is designed to identify ways to enhance Australia's research and development (R&D) system and is expected to make recommendations about: How to get more value from R&D investments across universities, industry, and government; increasing business investment in R&D; leveraging Australia's scientific strengths to address national priorities and foster new industries; and how to strengthen the translation of research into practical applications and commercial outcomes.

**July 2025 Australian Government Focus on Increasing Productivity**

The Australian Government has announced it will be reviewing productivity across the economy. The RDCs have been invited to engage with DAFF on this process which commenced in July.

# Appendix 2: Priority Ministerial Portfolios + Shadow Portfolios

## Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

| **Title** | **Minister** | **Other Chamber** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry** | The Hon Julie Collins MP | Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy |
| Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry | Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm |   |

## Industry, Science and Resources

| **Title** | **Minister** | **Other Chamber** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Minister for Resources** | The Hon Madeleine King MP | Senator the Hon Don Farrell |
| **Minister for Industry and Science** | Senator the Hon Tim Ayres | Senator the Hon Don Farrell |

## Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

| **Title** | **Minister** | **Minister** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Minister for Climate Change and Energy** | The Hon Chris Bowen MP | Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister |
| **Minister for the Environment and Water** | Senator the Hon Murray Watt | Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister |
| *Assistant Minister for Climate Change and Energy* | *The Hon Josh Wilson MP* |   |

## Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

| **Title** | **Minister** | **Other Chamber** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government** | The Hon Catherine King MP | Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy |
| **Minister for Communications** | The Hon Michelle Rowland MP | Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister |
| **Minister for Northern Australia** | The Hon Madeleine King MP | Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy |
| Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories | The Hon Kristy McBain MP | Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy |
| Assistant Minister for Regional Development | Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm |   |

## Prime Minister

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Prime Minister** | The Hon Anthony Albanese MP | Senator the Hon Penny Wong |

## Education

| **Title** | **Minister** | **Other Chamber** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Minister for Education** | The Hon Jason Clare MP | Senator the Hon Murray Watt |
| Minister for Early Childhood Education | The Hon Dr Anne Aly MP | Senator the Hon Murray Watt |
| Minister for Youth | The Hon Dr Anne Aly MP | Senator the Hon Murray Watt |
| Assistant Minister for Education | Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm |   |

## Employment and Workplace Relations

| **Title** | **Minister** | **Other Chamber** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations** | Senator the Hon Murray Watt | The Hon Tony Burke MP |
| Minister for Skills and Training | The Hon Andrew Giles MP | Senator the Hon Murray Watt |
| Assistant Minister for Employment | The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP |   |