



COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRES PROGRAM

CRC for Tropical Savannas Management

First Year Visit

25 March 2002

Darwin

REPORT

The First Year Visit to the CRC for Tropical Savannas Management was held at the Northern Territory University, Darwin on 25 March 2002.

The visiting panel comprised:

Chair: Mr Graeme Kelleher

Visitor: Dr John Vercoe

CRC Program: Mr Adrian Linehan

The centre was represented by:

Board Chair	The Hon John Kerin
CEO	Professor Gordon Duff
Business Manager	Ms Susanna Martin
Communication Coordinator	Dr Peter Jacklyn
Theme 1 Leader (Landscape Ecology & Health)	Dr John Ludwig
Theme 2 Leader (Industry & Community Natural Resource Management)	Dr Jill Landsberg
Theme 3 Leader (Regional Planning & Management)	Dr Daniel Walker

The CRC was a successful new from existing application in the 2000 Selection Round of the CRC Program and established as an unincorporated joint venture in July 2001.

Summary of Resources

Resource summary over seven-year contract period (from Commonwealth Agreement)

- CRC Program grant \$18.2m
- Total in-kind contribution (participants) \$63.7m
- Total cash contribution (participants) \$2.8m
- Other cash \$2.1m
- Total resources \$87.014m
- Leverage on program funds 4.7:1 (87.0/18.2)

No conditions were attached to the Commonwealth's letter of offer for funding and no issues were raised on execution of Commonwealth and Centre Agreements.

Major Issues and Recommendations

This centre addresses an issue of great importance to the whole of the tropical north of Australia. The major issues are correctly identified in the objectives of the centre. In particular, it is vital to build the fundamental scientific understanding necessary to serve as the foundation for ecologically, socially and economically sustainable development. Collaboration between institutions (including government) and stakeholders is essential. The centre has developed an approach involving extensive collaboration with all stakeholders as the basis for integration, cooperation, two-way communication and application of research to achieve the centre's objectives.

The centre is assessed as having made excellent progress, building on the success of its predecessor. It has no evident significant weaknesses and the panel's recommendations are therefore not major, but are incorporated in the text below.

Objectives of the CRC

- The objectives are considered appropriate in relation to the problems and potential of the tropical savannas of northern Australia.

Quality and relevance of the research program

- The research program has been set through an analysis of the current and future issues in collaboration with end users. It is arranged into four themes which feed into four key result areas. Projects are aligned under the themes and are tested for their contribution to the key results required.
- The science demanded by the new research areas is being adequately supplied by the addition of new core parties. The board approved policy for the selection of new research projects has strengthened the quality and relevance through enhanced peer review processes and increased communication.
- In recognition of the importance of capturing and applying indigenous knowledge in association with western knowledge in the tropical savannas, the centre's focus on joint research into problems and opportunities is supported.
- The development of capabilities in all stakeholders is a key feature of the research program.
- In line with the experience of other CRCs, the centre might consider the merit of ensuring that research carried out in the first few years is of the kind that underpins subsequent research that is necessary to achieve the centre's overall objectives.

Strategy for utilisation and commercialisation of research outputs

- The centre has invested much time and energy into engaging stakeholders fully in the planning and monitoring of the research program; the first step towards enhanced utilisation.
- Being primarily a public good CRC its outputs are largely knowledge based educational based products, of little commercial value. Nevertheless they need to be protected to ensure professional marketing strategies and to maintain quality control.
- The centre has established an incorporated body the role of which includes the management of IP.

Education and Training

- The centre has developed a comprehensive education program targeting undergraduates and post graduates. Recognising that the necessary long term changes in management of the tropical savannas will require strong commitment from people who are presently at primary or secondary school level, the centre might consider working with other related CRCs (eg Weeds and /Aboriginal and Tropical Health) in the production and dissemination of educational materials for use in schools.
- The very strong commitment to information exchange, as opposed to information transfer, is commended, as is the continued development of the award winning web site.

Collaborative arrangements

- The new core parties have been rapidly integrated into the new program. The centre is actively encouraging additional parties (core and associate) to join the CRC where additional resources will add value.

- The centre is already working collaboratively with other relevant CRCs and is pursuing further collaboration. Recognising the limitations in available resources and the efficiencies that derive from this approach, the centre is encouraged to continue this initiative.

Resources and Budget

- The promised resources are forthcoming.
- The CEO's intention to negotiate larger time commitments of key researcher in exchange for fewer commitments of smaller time parcels is commended.

Management structure

- The management structure is conventional in most respects and is evidently working well. An innovation is the Scientific Program Advisory Group (SPAG) comprised of independent scientific assessors. This innovation is commended.
- The Chairman spoke highly of the value of the stakeholder advisory committee (SAC) and the work of its chairman.

Performance evaluation

- The structure of the performance evaluation system is considered to be excellent

Mr Graeme Kelleher
Chair
First Year Visit Panel

25 March 2002