



Fifth Year Review

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Australian Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) have traditionally been required to undertake reviews of their science and operations in their second and fifth years of operation according to strict guidelines provided by the Commonwealth. Although there was no formal requirement for a CRC to undertake a review if it was not to be refunded in 2006, the Board of the Rainforest CRC decided it was important to hold regular external peer review to gauge the CRC’s progress and standards it is achieving, as well as to seek advice for future operations.

A fifth year review was therefore undertaken from 1-4 June 2004 in Cairns. We were fortunate to have the experience and advice on the Review Panel of Professor Andrew Beattie (Chair) (Director, ARC Key Centre for Biodiversity and Bioresources, Macquarie University), Professor Henry Nix, (Centre Visitor and former Director, Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University) and Professor David Bowman, (Director, ARC Key Centre for Tropical Wildlife Management, Charles Darwin University). Professor Beattie has chaired previous reviews of the CRC and provided a long-term perspective with previous review reports. Professor Nix has also been involved in previous reviews of the CRC and as Centre Visitor, and reviewer of many other CRCs, provided a knowledge of other CRCs for comparison. The Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Rainforest CRC accompanied the Review Panel.

There are currently no guidelines for Fifth Year Reviews for CRCs and hence the Review Panel used the most recent guidelines provided in 2002 as a basis for their review. The Review Panel was provided with summary outlines and achievements of projects and programs, as well as a report from the Chief Executive Officer. Other information including annual reports and technical reports were made available to the Panel.

The Review was combined with a Program Support Group Summit (1-2 June). This allowed the Review Panel to meet stakeholders and researchers to hear their comments on the CRC and its work. Members of each Program and six postgraduate students presented summaries of their research. The Review Panel met with the Board and external stakeholders and also spent a day in the Daintree visiting the Australian Canopy Crane Research Facility.

The Executive Summary of the Review Panel’s report is presented on page 9 – a full copy of their report may be downloaded from www.rainforest-crc.jcu.edu/latestNews/FifthYearReviewOutcomes.pdf

The Fifth Year Review Panel visit the Australian Canopy Crane Research Facility (from left: Sir Sydney Schubert, Professor Henry Nix, Professor David Bowman and Professor Andrew Beattie with Rainforest CRC CEO Professor Nigel Stork and Canopy Crane Researcher Kylie Goodall)



Fifth Year Review: Executive Summary

1. The Review Panel was very impressed by the CRC personnel ranging from the leadership of Sir Sydney Schubert, Professor Nigel Stork and the Program Leaders to the energy and innovation of the staff and postgraduate students. The CRC has clearly achieved a first-rate community of scientists and a series of creative and productive research programs. At the same time, this is an extremely critical period for the CRC because it must both plan for the future and fully transfer the benefits of its research to the community and to the nation.
2. The Rainforest CRC has developed world-class research in several research areas and has created a unique structure for pure and applied tropical rainforest research that is leading to the sustainable use, conservation and management of Australia's tropical forests.
3. The Review Panel recommends that no new research initiatives are funded, and that the CRC take a more proactive role in overseeing the completion of funded programs, including identifying and remedying any problems or barriers to completion.
4. The Review Panel commends the CRC on its highly innovative landscape-scale research and its increasing focus on research that extends beyond the rainforest to adjacent ecosystems and tenures particularly through its *Catchment to Reef* Program, and recommends an increasing focus on, and allocation of resources to, catchment and regional scale issues.
5. The need for syntheses of knowledge, particularly cross cutting through the various programs, was clearly apparent: natural links between Programs 2, 5, 6 (and possibly 3 and the Bush Tucker project in Program 7), and Programs 1, 4 and 7 were evident but not advocated. It was remarkable that the current communication strategy was not discussed and the CRC should re-examine it in the light of these recommendations.
6. The Review Panel was very impressed by the continued integration of Indigenous issues at all levels. It recommends that these initiatives be built on, possibly through the establishment of a special program at James Cook University in Cairns to continue the development of cross-cultural research, training and capacity-building. This would be a clear outgrowth of Program 7 and would ensure the maintenance of the impressive networks established with the Indigenous community. It would also provide expert advice and input from Indigenous communities and Native Title holders into the planning process, Natural Resource Management (NRM) programs and other research programs such as those that focus on bush tucker and sustainable diversified agriculture.
7. Current spatial data arrangements are poorly integrated. The issues of Intellectual Property and data curation, particularly spatial data, require urgent attention. There is an excellent opportunity for the CRC to trigger the establishment of a geographic information system hub at James Cook University to provide standardised data layers to various stakeholders and NRM users.
8. The Review Panel recommends that the CRC convenes a major thematic conference within the next eighteen months to communicate what has been learnt (both scientifically and administratively) in the course of carrying out its large interrelated cluster of pure and applied programs. A clear, well planned mission for further research should be set out at this conference explaining how this builds on the demonstrated past achievements, and addresses the urgent environmental issues afflicting tropical landscapes locally, regionally and globally.
9. The Rainforest CRC should provide the its partner universities with the benefits of its experience with the Australian Canopy Crane Research Facility to ensure the future of this unique facility, both in terms of research and funding.

The Review Panel very strongly recommends that the CRC enter into negotiations with State and Commonwealth agencies, and industry, to ensure that (a) its activities continue; (b) the excellent progress it has made to date is not wasted; and (c) its intellectual capital, research applications and productive partnerships are appropriately applied to community, regional and national issues.