final report

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Strategic Science Coordination Support

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Milestone
Report to the MLA Manager on progress against objectives, and significant material issues arising out of the services

Abstract

Project objectives
Provide support to the Manager, Strategic Science by undertaking the following key activities:

- Facilitate the development of projects and programs within the Strategic Science Portfolio as directed;
- Identify synergistic linkages between programs, projects & researchers and facilitate where applicable to strategic science;
- Supervise delivery of research outcomes against contracted milestones in allocated projects;
- Facilitate communication on strategic science matters between the RDCs and externally to producers, advisors and researchers as directed;
- Oversee the preparation of relevant reports and press releases.

Success in achieving milestone

The Strategic Science Co-ordination Support project envisaged high level support for the StSc program in facilitating planning and development of new StSc research investments, coordinating StSc workshops, participating in program and project reviews, participating in R&D workshops, developing draft contracts and facilitating the development of multi-disciplinary research teams etc. The tasks that were allocated focussed more on helping with developing and refining the overall Strategic science charter, helping with development of the new climate change/ Green House Gas initiative and coordinating the new Strategic Science Advisory Committee meetings and a range of related activities.

With significant budget uncertainty in MLA over an extended period, no new projects were allocated for development to contract.

Overall progress of the project

The Strategic Science portfolio seeks to identify and invest in strategic basic science to underpin transformational innovations for development and application to research into, and practice of, red meat production systems.

The role of the “Strategic Science Coordination Support” project is to assist MLA program and project managers to plan and implement the Strategic Science charter.

This project commenced in March 07 and was extended to June 30, 2008.

During this period, MLA budgets were revised due to income pressures imposed by the drought and the development of a risk management policy to manage on-going budget commitments in an environment of financial uncertainty due to concerns of the prospects of the drought continuing and projected income being constrained.

Within this administrative climate, the Strategic Science group focused mainly on managing existing investments and providing a planning framework for developing the MLA Strategic Science Charter of which planning for the Climate Change and Green House Gas initiative, regarded by the MLA Board as being priority, was given emphasis.

Another key initiative during the period was the establishment of the Strategic Science Advisory Committee which was established to gain access to high level advice from science and education leaders.

In summary the activities which were allocated to the role of "Strategic Science Coordination Support" during the period included:

- Strategic Science Charter – participate in developing and reviewing the charter as a key platform for taking this initiative forward.
- Strategic Science Advisory Committee –
    - Help identify, review and recruit members of the committee
    - Act as Executive Officer for the committee resulting in planning, organising and chairing the committee meetings and provision minutes and follow –up actions
    - Develop, review and comment on briefing papers for the committee consideration
    - Facilitate communication between committee members and MLA on matters concerning committee business.
    - Participate in communications among the Strategic Science Group on matters relating to planning, managing and running committee meetings
- Represent MLA at selected conferences/seminars and provide reports:
    - Healthy soils conference for development of R,D & E on soil biological health
    - C4 Molecular breeding workshop for developing a research network on novel plant breeding in response to climate change
    - CSIRO strategic science workshop on plant roots and R&D collaboration between New Zealand and Australia
- Climate change and green house gas research portfolio planning
    - Comment on draft program plans
    - Provide ideas on research approaches for consideration as part of the plan
    - Participate in internal communications relating to shaping the program
    - Researched and alerted to the capacity of SARDI in researching gut microflora
- NRM R&D engagement
    - several meetings with relevant NRM leaders regarding developing NRM R&D priorities
    - promotion of outputs from the Strategic Science research soil biology initiative to application with the NRM sphere
    - Broker and host meetings with NRM research planners and SARDI to demonstrate the innovations developed with the Pasture Soil Biology Program
- New project ideas
    - Developed a suite of new project proposals for MLA which had relevance to both the Strategic Science. This required liaison with a range of researchers across diverse disciplines, plus the conception of ideas from the coordinator (Hannam) perceived to have relevance for and provide opportunities for MLA research interests.

- Pasture Soil Biology Program – promote outputs from this program to researchers across diverse disciplines
- General –teleconferences, reports developed, others reviewed, general communications by phone and email plus travel

These activities consumed in excess of 30 days during the period.

Recommendations

The Strategic Science Program has responsibilities and inputs across most silos of activity within MLA in the context of contributing and facilitating strategic science ideas and activities which complement these silos and link with the LPI Strategic Plan.

Some suggestions on tasks for the “Strategic Science Coordination Support” role include:

- Provide executive officer services for the advisory committee
- Participate in planning and evaluation of strategic science investments – strategic and operational plans
- Develop and manage allocated investments to contract and then provide supervision and drive reporting, evaluation, drive communications and delivery commitments of contractors to comply with contracts.
- Represent MLA at relevant research forums and report on opportunities
- Develop and manage selected knowledge and opportunity audits to underpin strategic science planning within MLA
- Help plan and manage Strategic Science delivery activities
- Facilitate internal (and perhaps public) communication forums to promote and communicate project activities and progress, plus foster synergistic linkages between complementary projects
- Interact with non-traditional science fields to identify new knowledge and novel technologies with potential transformational impact for the red meat industries
- Manage relationships between co-investors in research programs
- Finish off the Pasture Soil Biology Program
    - agreed communications activities, broker publications and scientific papers, continue to promote the outputs from the program.
    - Develop future investment in Quorum Sensing Signals activity
    - Develop a strategy to encourage continuation of the soil biology research effort to capitalise on the investments made so far.
- Develop relationships with strategically selected producers for ideas and feedback on strategic science investments, particularly in the soil and feedbase areas
- Participate in MLA internal research and communications planning meetings of relevance to allocated tasks within the strategic science area
- Coordinate external advice regarding past progress and future priorities

The tasks suggested above to be allocated to this role are aside from anticipated delegated tasks associated with developing and implementing assigned elements of the Climate Change/GreenHouse Gas program.

Tasks should be defined first and time and resources allocated to ensure the tasks can be completed to a high standard.

A true systems approach should be encouraged for this role to broker connections between the disparate elements of MLA programs and integration into decision making