

Tasmanian Agricultural Productivity Group Chairman's Report 2009

Minister Llewellyn, Invited Guests, Fellow Directors and Members, I have much pleasure in presenting the Chairman's Report for 2009.

In this report I will speak briefly about the organizational health of TAPG, summarize our activities for the year and conclude with some observations on possible future challenges and directions.

In terms of the organizational health of our Group I would note the following:

1. Early in the year we adopted a comprehensive "Decision Making Policy". This acknowledges the complexity of our membership and the restraints and unique opportunities that this diversity provides.

It deals with "Contentious Issues" in a manner that is fair and predictable. It does not detract from the rights of members to act as individual entities yet still provides for discussion and support in seeking an ethical position.

It also states our intention to work pro-actively with other groups involved in setting agricultural policy and related legislation. While all groups aspire to work in a less reactive way, we are confident that our policy acknowledges that this will only occur when sound communication, trust and mutual respect have all been established.

2. A second new policy, although not yet fully implemented, is underway. Our "Recognition and Awards" draft policy statement has several layers. At the surface level it calls for TAPG, as a peak industry body, to recognize and award commitment, innovation and achievement within our industry. And we expect to use next year's AGM to make the first of these annual awards. We believe this process will provide another vehicle for the development of a sense of identity for the agricultural industry as a whole.

Public opinion on many critical issues is increasingly polarized and the industry, collectively, has not been good at providing reassurance in response to this often strident criticism.

We recognize that our industry needs to be better at managing the media in this area and are committed to work with like minded groups to provide an improved Industry voice.

3. The final point regarding our organizational health relates to the Board itself.

For the first time we've needed to conduct a ballot for some of the Board vacancies. This is significant for several reasons:

- The Group and its profile has reached a point where increasing numbers of leading industry figures are prepared to offer their time and skills to make a contribution.
- It gives increased creditability to the Board itself when we speak on behalf of our members.
- I would like to congratulate all candidates who stood for the vacant Board positions. To submit yourself to the scrutiny of your peers in this way takes courage and earns deserved respect.

You will shortly be asked to ratify the membership of the Board for the coming year. You will note that we have utilized the flexibility provided under our Articles of Association to create a twelfth position on the Board to acknowledge the regulatory affairs area with particular emphasis on chemical issues.

I commend this change to you.

The highlight of our activities this year was the Sustainable Soils Series of Field Days and a Seminar held in the middle of March. TAPG underwrote the cost of bringing Prof. Dick Godwin and Tim Chamen to Australia from England to share their research and experience with Tasmanians. The planning team reflected our strong relationship with TIAR and, led by John MacPhee, produced a well designed program that attracted good numbers. The four day event began in the Northern Midlands and then moved to the NW Coast.

The Board recognised that further developing the skills and knowledge of people involved in managing our soil would be a pro-active initiative that warranted the impetus that a peak body such as ours could provide.

This sentiment was clearly echoed across industry as sixteen very diverse industry related groups helped sponsor the event by contributing \$34,000 to help offset the organizing costs! Remembering the state of the economic outlook for the country in the first couple of months of this year the total raised can only be considered exceptional.

The Board of TAPG wishes to record in this formal report its appreciation of both the organizing committee's work and the outstanding sponsorship

received. The capacity of these firms to see the “common good” does them great credit and should serve to encourage us all as we work together to meet future challenges.

Following up on the Sustainable Soils Series the Board sought to further capitalize on “whole of industry segment” initiatives.

Again, it was our close working relationship with TIAR that provided an opportunity. The issue of soil compaction and the logical links to wheel centres and the use of guidance systems all fitted together as a focus for TAPG to provide support and leadership.

We conducted a seminar where John MacPhee, Pete Aird and Jason McNair all helped to develop our understanding of the issues and opportunities.

Members were enthusiastic about the potential for the application of technology in this manner and commissioned an Industry Forum to be held in Launceston where the issues could be explored with practitioners. This Forum attracted sixty participants who were briefed on the current status of developments in Europe by John MacPhee and others who had recently returned from a study visit to Europe. This was followed by a workshop where participants worked through the limitations and opportunities of the topic.

There was consensus at the end of the day that moving to two metre centres was the most practical step that could be taken to assist the development of Controlled Traffic Farming in the short term. An Industry Reference Group was established to further the development and implementation of other issues such as GPS Base stations and Gantry technology to name but two. Apart from the obvious thanks due to John and his team I would like to record our recognition of the leadership provided by Nigel Carey. Nigel was a Director of TAPG and has since resigned following his move to a new position in South Australia. Nigel headed our working party in this activity and carried out the liaison work that made the Forum a great success. Nigel was nominated as the chairperson of the Reference Group and we need to find a replacement to ensure this initiative continues.

Networking and Liaison related to agricultural productivity remained a key activity for TAPG throughout the year. The Executive Officer and sub groups of the Board represented us at a host of meetings and events including the following:

- A delegation met with Ben Stapley from Croplife, a peak agricultural chemical body. While sympathetic to the constraints that they work under, our group maintained that they needed a stronger presence in

- Tasmania and that they needed to be constantly working on a public relations campaign. We also very strongly urged that they engage people with media expertise to promote these messages in a manner that the general public would understand and accept.
- TAPG has also maintained or extended its connections with both Cradle Coast NRM and NRM North both of whom provided excellent support to our Sustainable Soils Initiative.
 - We are also currently developing a draft Partnership Agreement with the Tasmania Together Board where we will be actively promoting stronger representation associated with the agricultural industry. It is pleasing to report that a final meeting will be held tomorrow where it is expected that a draft document ready for scrutiny by the new Board will be finished.
 - The Agricultural Marquee at Devonport's "Taste the Harvest" continues to be organized by TAPG. A pleasing mix of large companies and boutique exhibitors was in evidence at this year's very well attended event. A "Chefs of the Future" cooking competition highlighting our fresh produce is an improvement planned for next year.
 - Irrigation Initiatives have been monitored closely and we were pleased to have contributed to the group that has been meeting with Bankers and Financiers, understanding of the nature of the opportunities being presented to farmers.
 - We continue to find ourselves in the pleasing situation where we are constantly approached or invited to be involved in many very worthwhile activities. However, we have a very finite resource in terms of the voluntary time of the Directors combined with our part time Executive Officer. Setting and maintaining priorities that reflect our member's interests and expectations remains an on-going challenge for the Board.

To conclude this year's report I wish to make the following points:

- I would like to acknowledge the work of Colin Bell, a Director who resigned during this year due to his relocation to Queensland. Colin was based in the south of the state and was a very committed and insightful board member who made a strong commitment to our work.
- I would like to thank Minister Llewellyn for providing his senior advisor, Dr Kathryn Campbell as his representative to our Board. The

- presence of Kathryn and her proxy, Mr. Nick Wright, has already vastly improved the opportunity for our effective communication.
- I would like to challenge the new Board to continue the initiatives currently underway and to capitalize on the opportunities presented by this unique group. The industry sector representation of our Board is both a strength and a challenge. We need to continue learning from each other and further our understanding of each other's working environment to capitalize on the talent available to us.
 - I would also like to challenge our general membership to increase their awareness of the range of activities that TAPG are involved with. Communication is a two way process and each member needs to understand the competing needs of the agricultural industry as a whole as well as the finite capacity of the TAPG resources. I would commend our "Decision Making Policy" to you all as a way of furthering understanding in this area.
 - We cannot control the value of the Australian Dollar. The vagaries of weather do not respond to our direction and legislators in other countries are equally easy to blame. However, what we can rely on is ourselves, our fantastic Tasmanian agricultural environment, and an increasing understanding that we must work together.

I wish to formally move my report for adoption and, in so doing, seek endorsement for the directions contained within it.

Thank you

David Stirling
Chairman

26 November, 2009