

Chairperson's Annual Report 2015

I wish to welcome and thank the Deputy Premier of Tasmania and Minister for Primary Industries and Water: The Honourable Jeremy Rockliff, who has again kindly consented to deliver the Annual Address to Members today.

May I also acknowledge the many Parliamentary Members who have chosen to join us today. As a group TAPG seeks to influence government policy settings with respect to agricultural policy on behalf of our member companies, and it is important to this function that elected representatives from all political persuasions come to know, understand and ultimately trust the integrity of our organisation. Participating in today's program is an important step in building this relationship. We won't always agree but you will know what we think and that these policy recommendations will be presented to you as representing the current experience of the processing industry along with our understanding of best practice scientific research. Importantly, you can also be assured that our views will be delivered in a timely and professional manner that will not seek to ambush or embarrass. *We want to be hard on the problems that need to be solved and gentle on the people who have to find the solutions regardless of their role.*

Finally, welcome to our Award Recipients who will be more formally recognised later;

Other distinguished Guests,

members of TAPG.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present the Chairman's Report for 2015.

As I have already stated in my welcome, the core business of TAPG is to engage with government on behalf of our member companies.

The nature of this engagement varies greatly but most often it takes the form of representative membership of key standing reference groups or various short term response opportunities. Current examples of this work include:

- SAFE FARMING Tasmania Program

- AGRISKILLS REFERENCE PANEL
- Land Use Planning and Approvals (Tasmanian Planning Scheme) Amendment Bill 2015
- GMO Annual Update Briefing & discussions

We also regularly provide formal responses to a range of government policy positioning papers as the opportunity has presented itself.

Now, all of these activities I have briefly listed can rightly be considered the “bread and butter” of a representative body such as ours and indeed, when carried out diligently, represent good value for money for the relatively low membership fees that are paid by member companies to support our part-time executive function.

However, our Board over the past several years has recognised that if our processing sector is to reach its full potential then a supportive and proactive focus on relevant extension programs in the “growing” phase of the supply chain is essential.

Following earlier industry field days and seminars on soil compaction led by TAPG, and in close working collaboration with TIA, we have been successful in attracting approximately one million dollars of funding under the Caring for Country, Innovation Grants Program to extend this work on Controlled Traffic Farming and to conduct commercial field trials that included utilisation of “Sub-soil Manuring” techniques. At last year’s AGM we displayed our purpose built machine in the car-park for your inspection prior to commencing field work with it. Since that time we have conducted scientifically rigorous soil amendments to the paddocks of collaborating farmers across the Northern Midlands where the prevailing duplex soil type presents challenges when utilising the full potential of irrigation. An indication of the scope and intensity of this work is revealed through the list of properties involved. They include “Bluegong” at Cressy, “Woollen Park” at Longford, “Formosa” at Cressy, “Armidale” at Carrick, “Mayfield” at Cressy and “Rannoch Park” at Longford. Other CTF specific work is being conducted across the north of the state with Michael Nichols at Sisters Creek, Mark Kable from Harvest Moon at both Forth and Kinburn, Addison Farm Produce at Moriarty, Botanical Resources Australia at Hagley and David Whishaw at Armidale, Carrick.

While full scale, first year monitoring, of crop yields and soil health data will begin over the next few months we have already been heartened by anecdotal reports from some of these sites. These range from observable crop vigour where amendments have been made through to one instance where there has been “preferential grazing” of treated strips from a fodder crop. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the outstanding work carried out by John McPhee from TIA in bringing the project to this point.

From the brief summary of this important project I hope that a clear description of an emerging priority is taking shape. TAPG has joined the entire agricultural community in applauding the emergence of the state wide Irrigation Scheme. Its creation is an outstanding example of a critical infrastructure project receiving sustained State and Federal Government support by both sides of politics. Now that water is about to be widely available across the state we believe that the next challenge facing the agricultural industry is dealing with “sub-soil constraints”. Regardless of where you are farming in the state this is a common problem. We are advised that even the best potato paddocks on the NW Coast still have areas in them that do not return the cost of farming that ground.

It was just this realisation that caused TAPG member companies, Simplot and Serve-Ag, to initiate discussions around the possible role that Precision Agriculture could play in addressing this issue. A group of interested stakeholders was formed and TAPG was invited to assist them in applying for funding to implement an “extension project” that would trial and demonstrate the benefits of these techniques. Happily, the State government were already looking at supporting effective uptake of the irrigation opportunity through their “Water for Profit” initiatives, and our project funding was approved.

Once again our strong relationship with TIA has ensured the efficacy of the project design and delivery. AgriGrowth’s Robin Thompson and Howard Nichol, while representing the government as our client, also exercise a mentoring role with the management committee who reflect a balance of TIA, Industry and TAPG personnel. The success of this team approach is already in evidence with a highly successful Precision Agriculture EXPO being conducted in April this year. The unique blend of formal presentations, displays by spatial technology and machinery providers, combined with practical field

demonstrations, represented a fresh approach to field day and extension activity design. With close to three hundred people present on the day this model has clearly been appreciated. The mix of researchers, field officers, farmers and commercial providers attending was another pleasing feature of the day. I can advise that the committee have set Thursday 21 April for next year's EXPO at Deloraine and are using feedback from this year's event to ensure that the field demonstrations in particular will become even more targeted to Precision Agriculture techniques.

In support of the P.A. Agenda more broadly, the committee have enlisted the participation of collaborating farmers whose properties represent a wide spread of the most commonly found cropping soil types in Tasmania. This wider spread of collaborators includes the following: Beswick Holdings - Sisters Creek, Forthside Research Station, Gibson Agriculture - Hagley, Marengo Partnership -Waterhouse, Rannoch Park - Longford and Lowes Park - Tunbridge.

The Project has already completed pH mapping of all the chosen paddocks at these sites and will continue to build up PA data layers including EM38 mapping, Digital Elevation and NDVI. We will be looking at variable rate application technologies and yield monitoring at harvest. It is expected that our annual EXPO will be a splendid opportunity for demonstrating and reporting to the wider grower community. I commend the project team on the success of the EXPO that served as a launch for the Project and the enthusiastic follow up work since.

The Board supports our involvement with this project because ultimately it will help shed light on the practical use and place of data in our modern agricultural enterprises. The management team along with planning their field work and the next EXPO are hoping to engage the wider agriculture community with some or all of the following issues:

- Who "owns" the data collected and how can we secure privacy?
- Can we develop an understanding that two or more people can "utilise the same data" without diminishing it?

- How “old” will data have to become before it is no longer useful to assist decision making?
- Where will we find or train the “third party providers” needed to analyse data, because data has no value until someone turns it into information or knowledge?
- Will “automated system controls” allow more time for discussions between agronomists and producers that will, in turn, lead to better management decisions.
- What will the “internet of agricultural things” look like and who will manage it? As a practical example of this issue our project team has to produce an on-line “Precision Agriculture Shopfront” as one of the outcomes listed in our funding Grant Deed. We note that there are now more “connected devices” in the world than there are people!
- Can we help to convince the federal government that phone and internet connectivity in rural Australia is a major “bottleneck” to growth?
- Can we shift the farming paradigm to a point where soil is recognised as the “engine room of agriculture” and that we need to manage farming from the “soil up” rather than “inputs down”?

We look forward to making a useful contribution to answering these and the many related questions. We trust that the “connectedness” of the entire Tasmanian agricultural industry, through the agency of the relevant representative groups, our research bodies and government will allow us to take a leading position nationally in this space.

The second priority area that the Board has pursued avidly since our last GM relates to Microwave Assisted Thermal Sterilisation or “MATS” as it is more easily referred to. This is a downstream processing technology that results in packaged meals that don’t need refrigeration and have a shelf life of two

years. The critical difference between this process and the existing “ready” meals industry is that all the desirable aspects of a home cooked meal are retained. Taste, texture, nutritional value and appearance are all maintained. This then is not only a desirable product at the top end of the retail price point but also requires for its production all the commodities that Tasmania is already excellent at growing!

The following points best illustrate the Board’s efforts to promote this opportunity for Tasmania:

- Professor Roger Stanley was invited to make a full presentation to our Board in December 2014. The Board agreed unanimously to support industry access to the technology in Tasmania generally and specifically in the NW Coast.
- Member company Simplot was contacted and shared their willingness to be involved.
- TAPG convened a special Board Meeting in May this year where a significant amount of time was allocated to the MATS opportunity. This meeting was convened at the Simplot boardroom in their Ulverstone factory. Callum Elder, Head of Simplot's R. D&E for Australia provided a presentation on the opportunities provided by MATS. At this presentation we also arranged to have present: Deputy Premier, The Hon Jeremy Rockliff, Mr Wayne Johnson, Chairman of TFGA. Mr Peter Skillern, CEO, TFGA. Without wanting to be quoted out of context it is fair to say that all present recognised the enormous contribution that MATS could make to commodity processing sector in Tasmania. It also appeared that Simplot are well across the technology and were happy to implement their plans on the NW Coast. Full "pre" (TFGA) and "post"(TAPG) farm gate support was strongly in evidence with industry co-operation seen as essential.
- TAPG's Executive Officer, Terry Brient, became aware of the "feasibility study/report being prepared for the Department of Defence and contacted one of the commissioned authors, Tom Lewis of RDS partners

(another TAPG Member company) and offered our full support at any level to move this matter forward to implementation.

- We have provided a letter of support to Professor Rob Sale last Thursday as we became aware that he was preparing a business case for the deployment of MATS technology into the Defence Force facility in Tasmania.

TAPG believes there is a unique and timely opportunity for Tasmania wrapped around the MATS technology and it behoves all of us to work together to secure it.

While much remains to be done to bring the two existing activities I have detailed to completion the Board are con-currently engaged in what could best be described as an “environmental scan” in the “education and training” pathway that is available and promoted to Tasmanian students, such that they actively seek out a career in agriculture. Over the past two years we have engaged with senior leaders of UTAS regarding the shape of the tertiary courses currently under offer. As significant “end users” of the product that the courses produce we felt our opinions ought to be considered.

To the credit of UTAS our representations were well received to the point where we now have a standing committee from TAPG that acts as a reference group to the university’s curriculum design/review committee. As you can imagine it was then only a small step for us to start looking at the pre-tertiary environment and how it promotes Tasmanian students. A very important first step for the Board has been to conduct a meeting at the Hagley Farm School where we were hosted by the Principal Mick Davey and Lead Teacher, Agriculture Education, Andrew Harris, who between them provided the Board with a valuable overview of the status and resourcing of Agricultural Education as it stands currently. We are pleased to have both of these officers as our guests today and thank them publically for the excellent service and support they provide to many schools across Tasmania. Our Board will be continuing this agenda item at our next meeting in December.

In a few minutes time this meeting will have the opportunity to ratify the incoming Board for the next twelve months. Honorary member Michael Hart

has retired from TIA and will be stepping down from his role on the Board. He has represented both the Department in proxy positions and TIA through the current position for many years and his service and advice have been greatly appreciated by all who have worked with him. We wish him well in retirement.

Rick Rockliff has also retired following a distinguished career with Tasmanian Alkaloids. Rick first became a Director of TAPG in 1995 and has provided fearless advocacy throughout his twenty years of service. It goes without saying that Rick's experience and friendship will be missed by all who have served with him and we unreservedly thank him for his commitment to our industry.

We also welcome Rick's successor, Rohan Kile who is Head of Crop Supply for Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Australia. As many of you would be aware Sunpharma have bought out the Poppy side of GSK's business in Australia. We wish both Rohan and Sunpharma all the best as they move forward in one of the backbone industries of Tasmanian agriculture.

To conclude then, may I offer additional comments where I began my report as I attempted to describe the nature of the role for TAPG as a group and most particularly its Executive function, the Board?

Just like politicians the task of a Board is to consider issues that affect their constituents; in this case, our members. In undertaking this task the responsibility is to gather evidence, think deeply and engage in productive debate with others of different perspectives. In short, it is what we all would like to do if we had time and motivation.

Our TAPG members are critically interested in the issues that the Board spends time on and certainly don't lack motivation! However, we don't have the time, the resources or, very often, the opportunity to engage with other experienced leaders to help shape and present our views.

Again, like politicians, our Board Members, in accepting office, undertake to carry out this reflective thinking, prioritising and advocacy on behalf of their members.

If you wanted to hire as business consultants, senior and highly networked leaders with a lifetime of experience from the fresh and frozen vegetable

industry, agribusiness services, dairy processing, primary production, plantation forestry, rural banking, agri-business marketing and other crop processing sectors, and put them in a room for a day to work for you, what do you think you would have to pay them? Clearly the answer is a lot.

Yet, when you choose to join TAPG this is exactly what you get. You also get this commitment for a full two year term and you pay for it with a cup of coffee and sandwiches at Board meetings. Your investment in TAPG delivers an unparalleled level of cooperation between the vast breadth of Tasmanian agricultural enterprises, and remains the envy of our mainland counterparts.

If this isn't a strong value proposition for your interests I'd be very surprised.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my good fortune to work with this outstanding group of people and my great pleasure to present this report on their behalf.

Thank you for your attention.

Jim Wilson

Chairperson

Tasmanian Agricultural Productivity Group