



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 24 May 2012

Agricultural Deans welcome science review

The Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture welcomes the release of the Chief Scientist's Review into the health of Australian science. Australia's Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb, released the Review at the National Press Club this week. Agricultural science was a special case study in the Review.

The President of ACDA, Professor Iain Young commented that it was pleasing to see agricultural science included in an analysis of the innovation system, as it was often ignored, and to see the important role that agricultural science plays.

"Over the past decade publications in agricultural science doubled and the impact was higher than most other science fields," Professor Young commented.

"Some 45% of the papers were published in collaboration with international scientists," he added.

The ACDA also emphasised that there were sobering elements to the report with a decline of agricultural science as a proportion of R&D spending from 10.7% to 6.8% over the decade.

"This is part of a world trend in reduced funding for agricultural research," said Professor Young.

"The world has become complacent regarding its food supply and Australia is demonstrating that complacency too. Such attitudes will not address the need for a 70% increase in food production in the next 40 years to feed the projected increase in world population to over 9 billion," he said.

The Review highlights the extent of contraction of the State Departments in R&D. The ACDA is concerned that this wind back from the major contributor in research spending will leave the industry without the necessary expertise to address the future challenges.

The ACDA highlights that R&D over the past 50 years has underpinned the high productivity gains in agriculture where the industry's productivity was double the national average. However such gains have levelled out in recent times reflecting the contraction in R&D.

ACDA Secretary Professor Jim Pratley commented that in the mining boom era the contribution of agriculture to our standard of living, our export earnings, our regional communities and our economy generally has been largely overlooked.

"As the resources boom subsides then the nation will need to rely on other sectors and agriculture is a major part of that," said Professor Pratley.

However he warned that unless serious consideration and investment in strategic R&D rather than the search for 'quick fixes' was taken, agriculture will come up short relative to its capability and the opportunities in the offing.

The recent comments by ANZ CEO Mike Smith are also endorsed by the Deans. Mr Smith indicated that there needed to be a much harder look at the agricultural sector and its declining productivity relative to those of competitors such as Brazil.

Mr Smith commented that Australia is falling behind and it has failed to recognise this and the opportunity costs involved.

Professor Pratley emphasised that Mr Smith's comments are too important for governments to ignore.

Contact: Iain Young
President ACDA
iyoung@une.edu.au
02 6773 2529
0419 204 636

Professor Jim Pratley
Secretary ACDA
jpratley@csu.edu.au
02 6933 2862