

Show us the benefit of relocating GRDC

Australian grain growers want to see the business case for relocating the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) out of Canberra, particularly how it will benefit the grains industry.

Grain Producers Australia (GPA) is presenting the agreed view of AgForce Queensland, Grain Growers Ltd, Grain Producers Australia, Grain Producers South Australia, NSW Farmers Association, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, VFF Grains Group, WAFarmers, and WA Grains Group.

GPA chairman Andrew Weidemann said the Minister for Agriculture has stated he intends the GRDC to relocate from Canberra to a regional centre, at a potential cost of over \$30 million to achieve, and that GRDC, which means growers' levy funds, would have to pay for the relocation.

"The Minister's aim to boost regional communities and create jobs in regional centres is fine – as residents of regional Australia we understand such issues very well – however we are less certain about the costs and benefits to grain producers of such a move," Mr Weidemann said.

"The first and major issue of concern to us is the inevitable disruption to GRDC operations that would be caused through the process of moving the organisation, whether through direct loss of skilled staff and their knowledge of work in progress or simply the diversion of resources to undertake the actual move.

"The disruption will need to be assessed for its impact on regional researchers right across Australia, because they are people the industry relies on for advice and critical direction on research-related activities.

"How will causing all this disruption actually benefit growers?"

"Then there is the actual cost of the move, which the Minister has told us could exceed \$30 million – we are unclear as to why the grain industry should pay for what is clearly a community project more suited to general taxpayer funding.

"GRDC funds are contributed for the purpose of spending on work to benefit the grains industry, so we would like to see the business case that explains how spending such a sum to relocate the organisation will produce a better result for productive agriculture than spending the money on research.

"We have researchers and research organisations crying out for funding to help lift the industry's productivity, so it's a big issue.

"GPA and Australia's various grain grower representative organisations have been in discussion with the Federal Government for some time about the challenges facing the GRDC, its governance structure and how it communicates with the levy-paying growers it exists to serve.

"Nowhere have our proposals for improvement suggested shifting the organisation, because the reality of travel in regional Australia is that wherever the office moves to, while it might be closer to growers in the immediate vicinity, it will be further away from everyone else.

"The industry is in discussion with the Government about the potential to transform GRDC into an industry-owned corporation; if or when that occurs it will be a very important step, so surely it should be up to that organisation to decide its office location, rather than pre-emptively making decisions like this.

"Research expenditure and good management of that process is vital for the grain industry's productivity and lifting productivity is our priority, so we invite the Minister to explain the business case for this project he is suggesting we must fund," Mr Weidemann said.

ENDS

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