



# FINAL REPORT

## *Part 1 - Summary Details*

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Please use your TAB key to complete Parts 1 & 2.

**CRDC Project Number:**

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**Project Title: 18<sup>th</sup> Australian Cotton Conference**

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**Project Commencement Date:** 02/08/2016 **Project Completion Date:** 04/08/2016

## *Part 2 – Contact Details*

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## *Part 3 – Final Report*

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(The points below are to be used as a guideline when completing your final report.)

### *Background*

#### **1. Outline the background to the project.**

The 2016 Australian Cotton Conference – New Frontiers was the cotton industry’s 18th conference held over a 36 year span.

The Australian cotton industry has experienced a vast array of change over this 36 year period. As the cotton industry has developed, so too has the Australian Cotton Conference. What began primarily as on-farm, cotton growing-centred research sharing of knowledge, has now extended to all sectors of industry from research to processing and in more recent times it has been inclusive of post farm gate mechanisms so that our complete supply chain process from “dirt to shirt” is examined.

Conference is a key industry forum and an important focal point for R&D knowledge sharing. As such, Conference promotes a collective sense of industry identity, direction, connectivity, and purpose.

For 2016, a Conference Committee was formed from Cotton Australia members, Australian Cotton Shippers Association members and representatives from other industry organisations and sectors (including CRDC, CSD, growers, the R&D sector, agronomists and

young industry representatives) to oversee the conference program and activities that contributed to a successful conference. The Committee, guided by the Board and Executive of both organisations, was responsible for implementing program initiatives.

The 2016 Conference program provided the following platforms to showcase CRDC funded R&D and extension activities:

1. Plenary session/s with relevant topic content that were devised to provide a platform for CRDC and/or R&D sectors to present information about strategies, research and development and extension. CRDC was proactively engaged in the development of the conference program.
2. Continuation of the “Three Minute Thesis” program which in 2014 replaced printed program proceedings and the scientific poster display. Expressions of interest were invited from the R&D sector with some 54 theses being presented under the banners of: Digital Agriculture (2); Healthy Soils & Crop Nutrition (5); Precision Technologies (4); Balanced Land & Water Use (5); Herbicide Resistance (2); New Markets & New Uses (7); Crop Protection (10); Crop & Water Management (4); Raingrown & Limited Water Production (3); Alternative Thinking for Farm Business Frontiers (5); Energy Frontiers (2); Mind, Body & Soul (1); and Climate Risk Management (4).
3. Proceedings made available by presenters and scientific research papers submitted to Conference were made available to the public via the [www.australiancottonconference.com.au](http://www.australiancottonconference.com.au) website and will remain available for an indefinite period of time.
4. Proceedings, presentations, posters and papers from past Conferences were transferred to CRDC’s online library Inside Cotton. A link is provided from the Conference site to [www.insidecotton.com](http://www.insidecotton.com) so that interested parties can access papers from 1984 through to 2014.
5. Conference reaffirmed its commitment to the science sector and once again a conscious effort was made to engage with that sector. The Australian Cotton Researchers Association was approached and invited to nominate two persons to represent the interests of the R&D sector. Dr Warren Conaty and Dr Stuart Gordon were duly nominated and were active participants of the conference organising committee – seeking relevant input from the Australian cotton science community on current research areas.

R&D’s contribution to Conference and how it is represented:

- a) With the R&D sector invited to present “Three Minute Theses” on topics relevant to the program. The theses were also published to the website and abstracts were also invited to be published
  - b) Continuation of specialised presentations relevant to the program format
6. As part of Conference’s desire to replicate industry at the forefront of technology, 2016 saw the development of a specialised App which largely replaced a printed program. (Note there was a brief program of events provided for those that resisted digital technology.) The App not only provided for an interactive program of events that could be used via a smart phone, tablet or laptop, it also provided:

- Presenter profiles
- Attendee names (opted in)
- Sponsor profiles
- Exhibitor profiles
- General information
- A medium for submitting questions during the main plenary sessions

For a first-time App development it provided a simple and good introduction to this technology and it will be further developed for 2018.

7. CRDC was part of the Conference trade display. We had 90+ exhibitors on display sites of varying sizes. CRDC's site was 10 x 4 m in a prime, preferred position at the delegate entrance to the trade hall.

Trade Hall manager Brian O'Connell liaised with CRDC regarding logistics of the site and facilitated CRDC publication launches from its site, announcing and encouraging delegate attendance.

### *Objectives*

#### **2. List the project objectives (from the application) and the extent to which these have been achieved.**

The Australian Cotton Conference is a platform that fulfils many functions for industry and our aims in 2016 were to:

- i. Increase industry knowledge relating to R&D and extension activities and how to implement those activities at a local level.
- ii. Provide a platform to share information, discuss and debate issues confronting the Australian cotton industry (and agriculture in general). Those included cotton and agriculture's place on a global and local level; competition (synthetics); branding and promotion of Australian cotton; on-farm issues (and research areas relating to the same) with an overall theme of new frontiers, focussing on digital technology. The program also included specific non-cotton presenters that aimed at providing personal development opportunities to all delegates.
- iii. Provide an opportunity for all sectors of industry to come together to foster and grow a culture for learning and innovation. Conference provided an opportunity for connectivity and a vision for the long term sustainability of our industry.
- iv. Provide an overall "health" and wellbeing check to industry by way of the health check stand where delegates were invited to undertake some basic health checks (blood pressure, cholesterol, healthy lifestyle analysis and skin checks; presentations about health (particularly focussing on mental health) and the fundraising activity for the Royal Flying Doctor Service on day 3.

### *Methods*

#### **3. Detail the methodology and justify the methodology used. Include any discoveries in methods that may benefit other related projects.**

The Conference committee developed a program of events that provided information and appeal to general audience and also targeted specific sectors (ie younger growers, new to industry, women, regions where fewer growers attended Conference).

### *Outcomes*

#### **4. Describe how the project's outputs will contribute to the planned outcomes identified in the project application. Describe the planned outcomes achieved to date.**

Whilst no specific objectives were agreed with CRDC, the following overview will demonstrate those areas of interest to CRDC.

260 Conference delegates responded to our post-event survey and rated elements of Conference as:

- 96% rated the *overall experience* of Conference as excellent/good
- 75% rated *relevant topics* as excellent/good
- 90% rated the value of *networking* as excellent/good

The following overview of subject matter demonstrates the Conference's comprehensive and diverse array:

- **New Frontiers** - our opening session that provided opportunity for personal development and new frontiers for agriculture
- **New Heights - Digital Agriculture** - digital technology in agriculture – research; on-farm applications; precision cropping; and data management
- **iGEN** - stepping up; how to tell your agricultural story; and the seven habits of highly successful people
- **Healthy Soils & Crop Nutrition** - new frontiers for nitrogen; phosphorus; and potassium
- **Bollgard 3 & Beyond** - 20 years of biotechnology in Australia; cotton breeding frontiers; resistance management
- **Farm Business Succession Management** - fair, equitable and sustainable succession planning; working through generational change
- **Precision Technologies Workshop** - new to the program in 2016, an opportunity for an update on new products – cotton cartage; tillage; syphon automation; soil sampling; precision agriculture; drones;
- **Balanced Land & Water Use** - Northern Murray-Darling Basin review; Australian water policy; getting your message heard; irrigation development opportunities in Queensland
- **Outrunning Herbicide Resistance** - resistance in production systems; weed science; management tactics; robotic weeding
- **New Markets & New Uses** - fibre trends and alternative uses; cotton in 3D printing; macro trends in fashion; gin trash value
- **Taking Australian Cotton to the World** - An overview of Australia's major buyers of cotton and opportunities for developing markets; global cotton economics
- **Crop Protection Frontiers** - verticillium wilt research
- **Sustainable Cotton – Perspectives from global brands and supply chain** – what drives brands and retailers towards sustainability; supply chain forum
- **People Power** – workforce innovation; myBMP top five challenges made easy and fast-tracking practical solutions for myBMP

- **Fresh Approaches to Crop & Water Management** - smarter irrigation; irrigation automation
- **Raingrown & Limited Water Production** - plant growth regulators; dryland cotton growers forum; row configuration, planting dates and timing; breeding for variable rainfall environments
- **Alternative Thinking for Farm Business Frontiers** - gin/grower ownership; alternative ownership and investment models for farming
- **Energy Frontiers** - Queensland and NSW energy audits; funding models for energy efficiency and financing; off-grid solar system case study; solar powered pumping and energy storage; renewable battery technology; renewable technology and innovation in practice
- **Resilience Assessment – Theory & Application to Cotton Businesses** - launch of resilience assessment of the Australian cotton industry
- **Mind, Body & Soul** - mateship and humour; getting back to basics
- **Leadership & Resilience** - embracing the challenge of the future; resilience, teamwork and courage; leadership and workforce development strategies for inter-generational change

80% of survey respondents *liked the mix of sessions*

A cross-section of industry stakeholders attended Conference. Survey respondents were:

Cotton producer	22%
Post-farm gate supply chain	10%
Value chain (spinner, agent, brand-owner etc.)	1.5%
Exhibitors	13.8%
R & D Sector	17%
Industry group	6%
Student	5%

30% identified as *first-time* attendees; 19% as *Next-Gen (under 35)*; and 65% as *previous* conference attendees

In response to the question “*Based on your experience of this year’s Conference, would you attend the Australian Cotton Conference in 2016*” 95% of respondents answered yes.

## 5. Please report on any:-

a) Feedback forms used and what the results were

All delegates were invited to participate in a post-event survey. Detailed responses are attached.

b) The highlights for participants or key learnings achieved

Some 1946 delegates attended Conference. Of those 510 were voluntary levy paying growers. 22 plenary sessions were staged. More than 140 presenters/participants share their knowledge and skills with delegates.

The organising committee believes that the objective of increasing industry knowledge relating to R&D was met but has no way to measure if those activities were implemented at a local level.

The objectives listed in point 2 were without a doubt achieved and were demonstrated by the number of delegates participating in forums, presentations and activities. Delegates were provided with boundless opportunities to share information, discuss and debate issues confronting the Australian cotton industry (and agriculture in general); cotton and agriculture's place on a global and local level; competition (synthetics); branding and promotion of Australian cotton; on-farm issues (and research areas relating to the same). The program also included specific non-cotton presenters that aimed at providing personal development opportunities to all delegates.

Preventative health staff from New England HealthWISE, Australian Hearing and UNE medical students provided health checks over 2 ½ days of Conference, with 173 health checks completed. The dietician provided education and advice to 84 delegates; Hearing Australia screened 54 delegates for hearing loss and Dr Jim Stacey provided skin checks for over 90 delegates (and found a number of suspect spots for follow up).

c) The number of people participating and any comments on level of participation

General Delegates	886
Grower Delegates	510
Exhibitor Delegates	298
Student/U22 Delegates	68
Day Delegates	120
Other	64

### ***Budget***

**6. Describe how the project's budget was spent in comparison with the application budget. Outline any changes and provide justification.**

### ***Conclusion***

**7. Provide an assessment of the likely impact of the results and conclusions of the research project for the cotton industry. What are the take home messages?**

The 18th Australian Cotton Conference provided a platform to showcase the Australian cotton industry and enhance the outputs from CRDC funded R&D and extension activities to the industry at large.

The conference provides for the largest gathering of industry participants in any calendar year and delegates were presented with information in various formats during the conference program that demonstrated and extends improvements in outcomes for the industry.

Industry was challenged to share information, discuss, debate and respond to and adopt findings of research and projects around maximising individual and industry profitability and sustainability through the adoption of home-grown R&D.