

BLUEBERRY INTERAGENCY WORKING GROUP MEETING

15 FEBURARY 2017, GRAFTON

Present: Jason Mannall (OEH), Selina Stillman (DPI), Melissa Kahler (DPI), Mark Hickey (DPI), Rik Whitehead (DPI), Tony McGowan (NC TAFE), Rodney Wright (CVC), Bruce Coffee (Safe Work NSW), Samantha Hessey (CHCC), Brad Harrison (NSW DPI), Leanne Growcott (CHCC), Sarah (CHCC)

By phone: Alex Smith (RDA), Craig Jenkins (Dept of Industry), Julie Dart (LLS)

Apologies: Peter Hackett (Water NSW), Tim Gilbert (OEH), Jonathan Lidbetter (NSW DPI), David Greenhalgh (DPI Fisheries)

Meeting opened 10.15am. Chaired by Mark Hickey.

Previous minutes and actions addressed.

1. *Action: Tim Gilbert to link in with Craig & Alex's work with Strategic Plan development. Need to ensure work also links with national industry plan being developed. Need to consider what is relevant to national plan, e.g. exports, and not duplicate efforts.*

- Tim Gilbert was happy to run with Craig and Alex's Strategic plan, being included as needed.

2. *Action: Selina to contact Peter Hackett and spatial analyst to discuss concept further with respect to water layers and harvestable rights review and report back to group.*

- Addressed by Selina later in meeting

3. *Action: Alex Smith to discuss mechanical harvesting uptake with Melinda Simpson offline.*

- Melinda and Alex discussed mechanical harvesting and agreed it is 5-10 years away. Further actions put on hold.

4. *Action: Craig Jenkins & Alex Smith to provide details of project to Mark for circulation to group.*

- Addressed by Craig and Alex later in meeting

5. *Action: Melinda to provide information on Market Segmentation Project to group.'*

- Melinda emailed info on Market Segmentation project to group after previous meeting and provided recent update:
 - This project involved interviewing 10 blueberry experts to identify the factors thought to influence the risk of water and nutrient discharge and risk of erosion from blueberry farms. The set of factors that were identified by these 10 interviews will be validated by interviewing a sample of blueberry growers. These interviews will be used to test the motivation of growers to adopt erosion control, irrigation and fertigation technologies and practices.

Update from members:

OEH

- 22 new incidents of native vegetation clearing in the Coffs and Clarence areas, this is an increase from previous meeting. Some of this clearing has occurred in areas where conservation funding has been given to previous owners.
 - In these 22 incidents there are repeat offenders
 - Majority are smaller land holders, some part of Ozgroup.
 - Growers prepared to pay fines as a business cost.

- The new vegetation act will commence July 2017; it will be more lenient and allow greater clearing than previous Act. Staff will complete training for new authorisation by July 2017.

DPI – Agriculture land use planning

- Received complaints about water use, clearing and netting
- Selina talked about the workshop that was run recently with Far North Coast councils on the pork industry and suggested a similar workshop for blueberries.
- Purpose of the workshop would be to discuss land use planning and industry requirements surrounding tunnel and netted horticulture, to better plan for future development and reduce land use conflict and environment issues. Also to enable exchange of information between neighbouring councils regarding how they are responding to these issues.
- Table was in agreement with the idea of running the workshop.
- Suggestions included:
 - Include bigger growers and key industry reps
 - Make the workshop one day, with the idea that the morning would involve the councils and industry would be invited to attend the afternoon session.
 - Suggested councils: Bellingen, Coffs, Clarence, Kyogle, Ballina, Richmond Valley, Nambucca

Action: Selina, Mark, Melissa and Melinda to discuss further and develop a working group to make workshop happen

DPI – Horticulture

- The 2016-17 season will reach approx. 11,000 tonnes and is predicted to be at 16,000 tonnes in 2020.
- Blueberry industry's main focus is getting export access for blueberries. They have employed a lobbyist Peter Bailey, to try and get blueberries on the priority list for export access to China. Work is being done in Western Australia to look at controlling med fly by cold storage to regain export entry in Japan which was suspended in 2011 due to QFF and Medfly.
- Industry has agreed to fund a small 6 month project looking at blueberry replant problems and yield decline. They have decided to put bigger projects on hold until they get the collective industry fund set up with HIA.
- Industry is still working on the national strategic plan
- Plant protection guide is now available on NSW DPI website.
- Discussed idea of having industry representative attend next meeting

Action: Margie Milgate (Executive officer – Blueberries) or other industry rep to attend next interagency meeting. Melinda to organise

DPI – Fisheries

- Receiving complaints about new farm developments – particularly in the Coffs and Clarence areas
- Mainly higher order streams and veg clearing around creeks and runoff from new farms down formed rows
- Most of the activity is occurring in 1st and 2nd order streams.
- Sediment erosion control appears to be non-existent.
- Sediment can cause problems with eastern cod (threatened species).
- Work should be carried out to engage with industry and educate on practices and impacts that they can cause.
- Structured talks to council on why we have the legislation we have is important.
- Should consider a regional strategic response as part of the planned council workshop.

- May be useful to consider how other areas in NSW and interstate have dealt with the seasonal worker accommodation issues, e.g. Bundaberg, Riverina.

NC TAFE

- National level training package completed.
- TAFE institutional structure has been abolished, now regional based with Hunter and Coffs merging.
- At the local level there has been encouraging business engagement, moving towards employer of choice and attracting and retaining people.
- By customizing, workshops have been successful in achieving engagement where they haven't before.

Safe Work NSW

- A number of complaints have been received, mainly about accommodation facilities and workers safety on site.
- No serious injuries have been reported
- Costa is developing safe work package for workers and are trying to reach out to workers prior to starting.
- Haven't been able to make contact with Ozgroup.
- A Code of Practice is available for facilities
- Coffs council raised issue with amenities and asked for guidelines on these.

Action: Bruce to send further information on guidelines around amenities

Coffs Harbour City Council

- Highlighted issues include: illegal clearing, chemical use/spray drift, accommodation (approx. 6 complaints per week about number of people living in rooms), backpackers living at beach and on footpaths, noise
- Raised the following issues:
 - Having to refer customers calling about complaints on to numerous agencies. Raised idea of a one point of call for all issues. Is there potential to engage a Project Officer as the initial contact person for enquiries? Can explore this suggestion at the workshop.
 - Unless rehabilitation work is passed on to buyer by previous owner there is no way of highlighting it.
- Blueberries are high on councils strategic plan review
- Will be running workshops for contractors to provide information on regulations and their role in checking permits etc.

LLS

- Workshops looking at erosion sediment management plants have been conducted with PIA Dollmann (Coffs regional landcare)
- Workshops on agenda include: educating contractors, soil properties

Clarence Council

- Standard complaints: clearing, spray drift, workers accommodation
- Raised the idea of having minutes available publicly
- Supported the idea of a workshop for councils and would try and get representatives from the department of planning.
- Noted the idea of looking at Code of Practice in other industries

Blueberry Infrastructure Business Review (Craig and Alex)

- Review carried out to outline economic and business barriers for the blueberry industry.
- Report still in draft form, needs to go to minister for approval before a copy can be circulated to group.
- Supply will cross demand possibly 1 – 2 years, small farms will be affected more than bigger farms. Smaller farms in Woolgoolga expected to become marginal.
- Investors are looking at bigger farms
- Social licence is a big issue for industry particularly with no make good provisions
- Infrastructure (getting product to market) will be looked at by Northern Rivers Transport and Infrastructure Report currently being undertaken.
- Looking at building facilities for shipment out of Gold Coast
- Exports to China (years away), Indonesia will now accept irradiated products.
- Mechanization not likely to occur in the foreseeable future
- Backpacker accommodation at Tabulum worth looking at, has shared cooking facilities and amenities. Kyogle LEP amendment for temporary on-farm accommodation passed.
- Blackspots for telecommunication an issue in some areas for pickers.

Blueberry Mapping Resources (Selina and Melinda)

- This would be a decision making tool for highlighting potential blueberry sites
- Concern from previous meeting was if it would be possible to map water section
- Selina and Peter talked about possibility of mapping water. Peter has been working on mapping harvestable rights and another colleague has been mapping licensed irrigation areas so there is belief that this could be done. Main issue will be around trading rules and how to best reflect in mapping product but perhaps could have this in text as a pop up when you point to a particular land parcel.
- Idea of water reuse highlighted.
- Tony noted that TAFE once ran a whole farm planning course. Involved property owners bringing in an aerial view of their property where they would then go over the constraints involved
- Brad highlighted that there is a threatened species map that could be incorporated.
- Issue of who would lead and fund the project was raised. Mark suggested the Environmental Trust (an independent statutory body established by the NSW government to fund a broad range of organisations to undertake projects that enhance the environment of NSW) as a funding source.
- Selina noted that SEED: NSW environmental portal already exists
- Idea of a system where messages are displayed on who should be contacted if certain areas cannot be mapped.
- Rik suggested putting idea to Agri food alliance steering group as it links to two of their priorities within the State Plan:
 - 1. Making it easier to start a business
 - 2. Encouraging business investment

Action: Form a working group to determine the feasibility of mapping, scope the usability, issues, setbacks etc. and prepare information for support from the Agri-food alliance group.

- Melinda presented Google earth mapped horticulture industries in NSW thanks to OEH and Karen Danaher.

Action: Melinda to find out if this can be passed onto group and if so send link through.

Agri-food alliance working group- project ideas

- Two initiatives were decided to be raised with the Agri-food alliance working group to gain their support for regional significance:
 1. Undertaking an industry information workshop with council
 2. Investigate and scope industry mapping project

Clarence Environment Centre Letter

- Letter to be re-sent to Jason and other relevant agencies for separate replies. Selina has drafted DPI Agriculture's response.

NSW DPI Marine parks email

- Email proposed that the group writes a letter requesting consideration that intensive horticulture needs to be in LEPs as an activity that requires development consent.
- This idea has been raised by many and has had plenty of discussion at Council level.
- It was decided that writing of a letter to the Coffs Council was outside the scope of this group however that it was an important issue which will be discussed at an upcoming workshop for councils being organised by DPI.

Action: Mark to respond to David about intensive horticulture requiring development consent.

Other business

- Next meeting – Wednesday 23rd August
- Three month meetings with subgroups, 6 months meetings with all members.
- Google drive link for sharing of working group information is as follows:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B7_06mV1eQ7JZUdBbkVPeGVPX3M
- Promotion of best practice growers needs to be explored further. Discussion over promotional opportunities to be discussed further at subgroup meeting.

Meeting closed 1pm. Thank you all for you input and continued participation.