

# SRDC Research Project Final Report

**Title of the Project:** Building grower capacity in steps

**Project Reference Number:** REL001

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**Australian Government**  
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## **Executive Summary:**

The issue that the sugar industry faced was how to increase the level of participation of cane growers in on farm research and through that involve them more in the progress and maintenance of their industry. The intention of this research was to look at what skills were needed to be able to do this and what was needed to maintain these groups in the long term. A participatory learning approach was used and this meant that members of the group controlled the process and the research could only go ahead if there was a group where members were willing to take part.

When research began with this group, the group had two main aims. One was to have an outward focus by expanding and become involved with the industry and community and the other to continue with innovative farm trials. Energy for the first aim waned and with it, energy for this project. Even though this project ended early and did not reach its full potential as intended, there was a significant amount of learning between researchers and group members. A lot was learnt about what was involved in implementing group members' vision of an expanded group, the benefits that this will bring and the steps needed to implement the vision.

The actions that were taken in this project

- The Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers group offered to be part of the research.
- The researchers met with the group on five occasions over the period March 2006 – June 2007. The project ran from March 2007 – January 2008 and there was contact by email (20 plus) and by telephone in between these meetings. The email contact was to lift the skills of group members in the use of emails as well as to pass on information.
- Three workshops were run with the group and one survey.

The results

- Group members were enthusiastic about finding out about what skills they had and what they still needed to develop
- Research results showed what specific skills were needed immediately and what was needed later
- Group members developed skills in communication techniques.
- Group members learnt about various structures for groups such as theirs and what was needed to sustain groups
- Some email capability was developed with group members
- The change in the executive committee of the group meant a change of emphasis from expansion of the group back to on farm trials
- Even though the great majority of group members wanted to stay on the course of action that would expand the group and see it become a leader in the industry and in the community the energy for action dissipated
- The majority of group members wanted the researchers to take a more active role to bring this about but this was beyond the scope of this project and the project ended early
- A manual was written on the steps groups need to take to expand and sustain themselves

## **Findings against the objectives**

*Objective (a) To identify the particular higher order capacities and aptitudes that farmer groups need to accomplish their objectives.*

Actions

A training session was run with group members to identify existing skills and gaps and how members defined success. External communication skills were highlighted as the main priority by the group and the area they would like most to develop.

Results

An analysis of the team roles within the group demonstrated that there was a wealth of 'monitors, coordinators and team workers' – but a lack of 'lateral thinkers'. Group members defined their success in terms of technological gains, environmental credentials, survival and profitability – rather than, for example, group growth, innovation and industry contribution.

The findings suggest that the objectives of groups are defined to some extent by the mix of skills and the mix of team member attributes. The group had much of the capacity they needed to accomplish their local goals of technological

and environmental gains, survivability and potentially profitability. What has been raised by the study, however, is that for groups to broaden their goals beyond local and immediate priorities, and make an even further impact on their businesses and the industry in which they operate, further skills and capacity building may be required. These would appear to centre on this notion of ‘lateral thinking’ – thinking outside the box – and hence futuring and scenario planning.

The finding also implies a need for the second level communication skills of challenge, negotiation and conflict resolution. It is suggested that training and mentoring in these capacities may have a greater impact on group innovation and industry development than technical training or first order communication skills alone. Exposure to industry innovation and group processes outside of the sugar industry would be one way to address this issue and this has already begun with some members visiting groups such as the Birchip Cropping Group and groups in WA.

*Objective (b). To build the capacity of the Plane Creek Sustainable Farming grower group in areas such as working in groups, project management, evaluation, science research and presentation of findings.*

#### Actions

As a result of the needs analysis, training was given to group members in communication skills (giving presentations; advocating; writing media releases) and further follow-up practice was requested in these skills as well as the use of email.

Growers also requested a workshop on governance, project management to include time and financial management – and particularly on what their future as a group could look like. The Birchip Cropping Group method of operation was researched along with other relevant groups and the results presented to the group.

#### Results

Growers were called without warning and required to give an ‘off the cuff’ response to questions similar to what they could expect from a journalist. A story on ethanol was developed. Growers were also expected send and respond to emails. There were 22 emails in total with 7 members responding to at least 1.

There was a difference in how individual members viewed the groups potential and role with regard to governance. Some growers felt that it was be too ambitious to emulate The Birchip Cropping Group and what they really wanted was to continue with the on farm trials and employ someone to carry on the extension, while others still maintained a broader vision. The group is currently just beyond Stage 1 of a number of stages that other similar groups have gone through, but the comment was made that it was even a huge break through to get to this point. The comment related to the fact that sugar growers were not used to working in group so just to get them to that point was an achievement. Stage 1 is: *Small group, focus settled, no staff, members conducting trials, assisted by facilitator. Few sponsors. Likely to be heavily reliant on funding from R&D corporation. Activities focused on agronomy* (Roberts 2006). The group now has a part time communications officer that puts it beyond stage 1. There was some interest in moving to a larger more organised Stage 2 group (500+ members, one or two staff), and a little interest by some in moving to a Stage 3 groups (employed staff) – but not to Stage 4 group (more formal corporate structure). This range of perspectives on the group’s future was reflected in answers to a survey undertaken by group members.

*Objective (c) To ascertain the issues, barriers and strengths present in the group chosen and the steps needed to increase the required capacity or capacities.*

Information from the earlier objectives demonstrated that the group members had a number of strengths that enabled them to meet their immediate and local needs – their technology skills were strong and they had a common interest in developing specific relevant technology to the benefit of all group members. They also had a common interest in enhancing environmental credentials, survival and profits. The team role strengths in the group ensured that they kept on task with strong coordination and monitoring attributes. The informality (Stage 1 Group) also permitted individuals to easily contribute at their level of comfort.

The barriers related more to moving to different group stages – if desired. The lack of common agreement on the directions the group would take (expansion + on farm trials); the need for more ‘lateral thinking’ (in terms of group function, process and vision); and the lack of drivers such as executive officer (beyond what voluntaries can do) were barriers to broadening the role of such a group. Changing the leadership also was shown to affect the momentum for change within a group.

There are two critical questions related to capacity building within such groups: What are the ‘required capacities and end point wanted by the group members (and should they be challenged to think beyond them)?; and is it of benefit to the industry as a whole to encourage some groups to move to ‘higher’ level group structures and outlook (such as that seen in the Birchip group for example)? Exploration of these questions requires working across a number of groups at different stages and involving the wider sugar industry

*Objective (d) To isolate the critical points of change or transformation that are required to bring about the necessary increase in capacity.*

The research has identified a number of critical points of change or transformation within grower groups. These sit at the transition points between the four stages of group development as identified in this research.

The first capacity building priority is to bring members together and build their skills to work as a group. This was identified by one of the growers in the Plane Creek Group as a major achievement for them.

The second capacity building priority is to ensure that group members clarify where they *want to* go and build the capacity to do so. A key factor in achieving group goals is in having an appropriate governance in place – in this case having a coordinator or leader of the group with vision, confidence and a collaborative approach.

The third capacity building priority is to test that vision by exposing group members to alternative scenarios (such as other groups and examples outside of sugar) and providing training in higher level communication (such as visioning, negotiation etc) to see if different group objectives (different group stages) are of interest. Such exposure may reinforce the desire to keep with existing structures and goals or stimulate the group to moving to another group stage. If group members wish to move to a different group stage, it is important to encourage the group to establish the necessary structural mechanisms (eg executive officer input) to allow them to more effectively build towards this vision

*Objective (e). To generalise the results of the research and to develop a model for farmer groups which sets out a hierarchy of capacities and skills needed, the likely barriers encountered and to suggest ways to overcome these.*

A key generalisation of this research is that there are different stages of development of grower groups and many would be in Stage 1 - *small group, focus settled, no staff, members conducting trials, assisted by facilitator...few sponsors...likely to be heavily reliant on funding from R&D corporation....activities focused on agronomy.* Priorities – based on this case study – centred on technological gains, environmental credentials, survival and profitability. The achievement of these goals was assisted by having an informal committee structure to coordinate activities and the skills of participants helped to keep activities focused and on track. For this stage, leadership and group skills are helpful in ensuring that members' needs are considered and met through group action. Current communication skills assisted in applying for funds, reporting and allowing others to know what they have done.

The transition to progressive group stages requires further action – requiring a development of capacity in lateral thinking and higher level communication skills - scenario building, visioning and negotiation. Governance appropriate to the stage becomes a key issue both for the leaders and the group members who may be less comfortable with a more formal structure. There is a need for part-time/full time support to ensure that the momentum is maintained and necessary steps taken by someone with the time, resources and skills necessary.

For capacity building of group members to be effective, it needs to be demand driven. This demand is built by helping groups think through their group objectives and needs as well as by exposing them to alternatives outside of their immediate experiences.

## **Future Research Needs**

1. This research has highlighted the need to further research the transition of groups between the four stages in the context of the sugar industry that have resulted in groups that started out as Stage 1 groups to move to Stages 2, 3 & 4. This would involve looking at a cross section of groups at these different stages across the industry and seeking commonalities and differences in their context, make-up, structures and experiences.
2. A related research question is 'how much value is there to the broader sugar industry in fostering groups to move through these group stages?' Or should the industry be content to have most grower groups remain in Stage 1 and focus on local technological issues? Should an industry such as the sugar industry be home to a number of Birchip-type groups to drive a culture of innovation and change? What is the industry missing out by not having enough of these groups?
3. The impact of exposure to innovations and group process in other industries (and not even necessarily agricultural industries) on groups is another area of research. This research suggests that this activity (along with scenario development and visioning) could stimulate and motivate groups to go beyond their existing objectives and vision. If so, how can this be built into existing opportunities such as the Travel and Learning Grants?
4. Some research is needed into the culture of groups in the sugar industry, such as why men and women do not participate in the same group. There is currently research being done to involve women in the industry but the side question here is about the involvement of families in all aspects of the farm.
5. The effects of using the traditional, hierarchical organisational structure of chair, secretary etc. also needs research and how this hierarchy restricts or contributes to innovation.
6. The economic value that supportive activities provide to group members and to the industry.

## **Building grower capacity in steps**

### **Background:**

The need for this project grew out of research with or about farmer groups (Coutts et al 2005; Roberts et al 2004; Roberts and Coutts 2006). What was found was that when the researchers were evaluating projects, they came into the project at the end or sat outside the project with no direct influence. What was wanted in this project was to try to see if it was valuable to work directly with farmer groups to build the capacity. The researchers had built up a store of knowledge about what was needed by group members and had skill and expertise within the group in training and evaluation in rural industry.

With in the sugar industry moves were already afoot that signalled that not only were farmers now more willing to work in groups than before but that members in some groups wanted to work beyond their own boundaries and look at industry as well as community issues. It seemed timely for a project like this that would support this process. Work was started on the assumption that within a group, different capacities are required to accomplish different tasks and with different levels of skill. The skills may relate to research, project management and future planning. Some skills may already be held by a group and others require development.

There was currently no study that described the machinations of a group as it moves through its projects to identify the skills and solutions required. The researchers general work on empowerment and extension provided a platform for this identification but what was needed now was the study of a specific group over time and the development of a model for wider application

A proposal was put to the SRDC to fund such as project and the project was approved on the proviso that there was a group willing to work with the researchers. The Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers group was such a group and work began in February 2006.

### **Objectives:**

The objectives of the study were:

- (a) To identify the particular higher order capacities and aptitudes that farmer groups need to accomplish their objectives.
- (b) To build the capacity of the Plane Creek Sustainable Farming grower group in areas such as working in groups, project management, evaluation, science research and presentation of findings.
- (c) To ascertain the issues, barriers and strengths present in the group chosen and the steps needed to increase the required capacity or capacities.
- (d) To isolate the critical points of change or transformation that are required to bring about the necessary increase in capacity.
- (e) To generalise the results of the research and to develop a model for farmer groups which sets out a hierarchy of capacities and skills needed, the likely barriers encountered and to suggest ways to overcome these.

### **Methodology:**

The aim was to work closely with the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers group for about two years and to build capacity. What occurred was that the researchers:

1. Met the grower group in January 2006 to talk about a plan
2. Attended the GIVE day in February 2006 to meet growers from other groups, to see how growers presented their materials and to find out about the main issues in the sugar industry.
3. Met with the growers to do a "capacity stocktake" workshop in March 2006.
4. Planned activities to obtain the skills that the growers identified as needed to achieve their personal and group objectives.
5. Ran the first training workshop on communications in June 2006.
6. Kept in email contact with the group through out the year.
7. Investigated a model for building capacity in grower groups and presented this to the second training workshop in December 2006.
8. Carried out a survey with group members to find out what they wanted from the group, how they were benefiting from their membership and from our involvement.
9. Presented to the *High Noon* workshop for growers from all groups about a skills audit in February 2007.

10. Met with the group to talk about restating goals in February 2007.
11. Met with the chair of the group in June 2007.
12. Confirmed the planned activities for 2007/2008 in June 2007 but they did not go ahead.

A risk that was identified was that the group members would become too reliant on the researchers. This risk did not become a reality instead, the project was cut short because key individuals who supported the project changed roles or left.

Implementation of the project plan went well while there was support from the whole group. Once this waned, even though most of the other members wanted to go through with the planned program, the project came to a close. Evidence of this waning interest was: less and less time set aside at meetings for researchers to work with the group, group members not taking up leadership initiatives when they came up and not implementing the steps that would expand the group.

The project was ended prematurely because it was felt that the group had refocussed and that the drive had waned in those issues where the researchers could make a contribution such as the group expansion, internal and external communication, governance, project management and group health. The group now refocussed on farm trials especially those to do with controlled traffic and productivity and for this the group members had the skills they needed. While most members still wanted to have an external focus, the energy needed to take control of this work was not there.

## Findings

Findings are presented under the objectives of the project.

*Objective (a) To identify the particular higher order capacities and aptitudes that farmer groups need to accomplish their objectives.*

### Summary

*A training session was run with group members to identify existing skills that contributed to group process and gaps that were evident. Communication skills were highlighted as the main priority by the group – and the area they would like most to develop. A participative analysis of Belbin Team Roles demonstrated that there was a wealth of ‘monitors, coordinators and team workers’ – but a lack of ‘lateral thinkers’. This had the potential to inhibit innovation within the group process and function. Group members defined success in terms of technological gains, environmental credentials, survival and profitability – rather than, for example, group growth, innovation and industry contribution – reflecting the team roles evident and the gaps in broader communication skills.*

*The findings suggest that the objectives of groups are defined to some extent by the mix of skills and the mix of team member attributes. The group had much of the capacity they needed to accomplish their local goals of technological and environmental gains, survivability – and potentially profitability. What has been raised by the study, however, is that for groups to broaden their goals beyond local and immediate priorities, - and make an even further impact on their businesses and the industry in which they operate - further skills and capacity building were required. These centered on this notion of ‘lateral thinking’ – thinking outside the box – and hence futuring and scenario planning. It also implies a need for the second level communication skills of challenge, negotiation and conflict resolution. It is suggested that training and mentoring in these capacities may have a greater impact on group innovation and industry development than technical training or first order communication skills alone. Exposure to industry innovation and group processes outside of the sugar industry would be one way to address this opportunity.*

This objective was achieved by running a training session with members of the group that looked at identifying what skills were in the group and what was still needed. There were three parts to this workshop: Part 1 Each grower was asked to talk about what they had done so far with the group, why they joined and what they wanted to do in the future; Part 2, a skills identification kit was used to find out what each participant was good at where they still needed training; and in Part 3, the team roles were identified. The results were as follows.

### Part 1.

*What the group has done so far,*

1. Conducted trials of chemicals use and application and farming systems rows.
2. Held meetings

3. Promoted the work of the group
4. Written funding applications
5. Produced milestone reports
6. Facilitated bus tours
7. Taken photos of their activities

#### *Why group members joined the group*

Here, group members mentioned reasons such as a desire to be part of part of the group, searching for new ideas, options on how to conduct a better business and recognising the need to take account of environmental issues.

#### *What they want to do in the future*

The group identified the primary activities where they needed to put more emphasis and attention in the future. These were:

- Collect economic data from their projects
- Measure and better record the results of their trials
- Water run off quality (nutrient run off)
- Continuing and ongoing
  - Elevators
  - Mounds etc
- Soil health – samples
- Potential to employ people
- How to get more growers on board
  - Something bigger (than just the group)
  - Different processes
  - Communication improvements
- Promoting – sugar – sustainability
- Things not just to do with sugar such as travelling to other areas investigating the management of a group like the Birchip Cropping Group.
- Breaking down mindsets and communicating beyond the group

#### *Part 2. Skills that were needed*

It was found that these were the skills needed, in rough order of priority which was determined by the urgency of need for the skill:

1. Writing skills
2. Use of email
3. Computer skills
4. Communication pathway – outside the group to promote the industry
5. Time management
6. Financial management
7. Project management
8. Research planning
9. Team building

The group decided that for the next workshop, the focus will be on media skills to increase writing and presentation skills to build communication pathways to the community. Training was provided in a number of areas nominated by the group, such as working with radio and print journalists and to build relationships with the media as well as acquire some skills about how to write for newspapers and talk on the radio. The editor of the Mackay Daily Mercury (Lindsay Saunders) was very happy to work with the Plane Creek Group on what newspapers are looking for. Also at the workshop there would be training in verbal presentation skills and how representatives of the group can make meaningful statements “off the cuff”.

In between times. The researchers would email members of the group and gradually build up their email skills and confidence by emailing them regularly. The emails included information and instructions about how to better create and manage emails.

### Team roles

Belbin's team role profiles were used to ascertain what types of members were in the group and their attributes. The roles listed by Belbin include:

Coordinator  
Shaper  
Light Bulb  
Monitor  
Implementer  
Team Worker  
Resource investigator  
Completer Finisher  
Specialist

The team profile showed that there were many:

Monitors (evaluators)  
Coordinators  
Team workers

But that there was only one lateral thinker (this would have been taken up at a later training session).

Indicators of success for the group were listed by members as:

- A quicker uptake of controlled traffic
- Improved environmental credentials
- Get through the hard times
- More profitability for members and the industry

*Objective (b). To build the capacity of the Plane Creek Sustainable Farming grower group in areas such as working in groups, project management, evaluation, science research and presentation of findings.*

### Summary

*As a result of the needs analysis, training was given to group members in communication skills (giving presentations; advocating; writing media releases) and further follow-up practice was requested in these skills as well as the use of e-mail. The development of communication skills included members being called without warning and required to give an 'off the cuff' response to questions similar to what they could expect from a journalist as well as sending and responding to emails.*

*A story on the production and use of ethanol was developed and for the 22 emails sent by the researchers. 7 members responding to at least 1).*

*Growers also requested a workshop on governance, project management to include time and financial management – and particularly on what their future as a group could look like. The Birchip Cropping Group method of operation was researched along with other relevant groups and the results presented to the group in December 2006. There was a difference in how individual members viewed the group's potential and role - some growers felt that it may be too ambitious to emulate BCG and what they really wanted was to continue with the on farm trials and employ someone else to carry on the extension for them, while others had a broader vision. The group was assessed as being in 'Stage 1: Small group, focus settled, no staff, members conducting trials, assisted by facilitator. There was some interest in moving to Stage 2 and Stage 3 groups (employed staff) – but not to Stage 4 group (more formal corporate structure). This reflected the mix of elements in the literature that contributed to a 'successful' group and indicated that the elements that were lacking formed a barrier to the group breaking out beyond the individual local needs discussed earlier – eg: mechanisms in place such as an annual members' survey; sub-committees; employment of staff/executive office; broad membership and sponsorship.*

*The range of perspectives on the group's future came from answers to a survey undertaken by group members. Suggestions from the survey were about broadening the direct of the group even further and adding networking and the group being an umbrella for other groups in the region to the two previous aims which were to expand and to carry out*

*on farm trials. A series of next steps to assist with group growth and expansion were agreed on at the time.*

*The actions taken in pursuing this objective highlighted some key elements about supporting grower groups. Being a group in Stage 1, the emphasis was on informality and in meeting related individual local needs. This meant that, without a common group vision to be move to a Stage 2, 3 or 4 group, then the impact of capacity building activities were limited to those individuals who were more interested in expanding the group and broadening its role. It would appear that – as per the literature - the lack of an executive officer or equivalent is a major hurdle in a group moving from a more informal approach of neighbours working on common problems to a formalised group with a broader mandate and reach. If such a group shows interest in expanding its role, then, it would appear that a first step is to engage a (part-time) executive/project officer who can act on group decisions-made and maintain the practical momentum needed to convert training into group structure and action.*

This objective was achieved in part in that the group identified the skills they needed and training had started on these. The first workshop was about the development of communication skills so that farmers could present their own findings and communicate with a wide audience not just the sugar industry. Group members were increasingly called on to make presentations to large audiences such as the one made by Brian Stevens at the GIVE day 2006 where he talked about the modifications made to the elevator.



**Figure 1.** Brian Stevens presenting at the GIVE day 2006

The purpose of the first workshop was to pass on some communication skills to the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers group so that they could carry out some of the high level communication they had in mind for themselves. This was communication such as:

- Convincing other cane growers of the efficacy of controlled traffic farm management
- Conveying information to the sugar industry about the research from this group (such as the modification of the harvester, the on going discussion and row spacings and alternative rotational crops)
- Delivering information to the public about the necessity of keeping the sugar industry in Sarina viable.

Members of this group spoke about using print and electronic media, radio and television and making presentations. Not all members stated that they wanted to carry out communication in all these areas above, however, between them there was interest in all of these. Even so, they made the point that all of them will have to become comfortable about delivering research results to an audience in a face to face situation.

The program was planned for two hours but this was reduced to one hour, because the indoor part of the meeting started late because growers took the opportunity to test the harvester they had modified in the daylight hours. The communications program started at 5.30pm and went to 6.30pm.



**Figure 2. Talking generally about the harvester**

**Figure 3. Seeing the harvester in action**





**Figure 4. Discussing issues**

With regard to the communication aspect of the workshop, growers were asked to complete a short questionnaire that was emailed to them before the workshop. Three did this and the results were that overall that these three felt that they were fairly confident about being able to deal with speaking publicly.

**Figure 5. The communication workshop. Jeff Coutts talking about how to write press releases.**



The program was:

1. Selling an item.	This exercise was to get group members used to making a short speech about something familiar. It involved them trying to sell an item in 30 seconds. Items included: a bonds singlet, a teddy bear, their cane farm. They drew the subject of their speech out of a hat. Four growers took part in this exercise.
2. The 5 point plan	This exercise also involved advocating an idea and growers were asked to make a speech lasting one minute using a five point structure to convince a fellow grower about the efficacy of controlled traffic. The five points (with

	<p>one example) were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of bait to get the audience interested (<i>improve your soil</i>),</li> <li>• articulating the problem that was going to be solved (<i>unnecessary compaction</i>),</li> <li>• how it can be solved (<i>using same tracks</i>),</li> <li>• what benefit the solution would have for the audience (<i>cost saving and better production</i>) and finally,</li> <li>• what the audience need to do to take action (<i>give it a go</i>).</li> </ul> <p>Two growers were asked to take part in this exercise.</p>
3. PRES	<p>PRES stands for: point, reason, example, summary. The group worked in pairs and were asked to interview each other using various questions and for interviewees to respond using PRES, that is making it clear the point they were trying to make, the reason for them taking the view they do, providing examples and finally summarising their point. All group members took part in this exercise.</p> <p>The question was <i>What is good about sport?</i></p>
4. How to write a media release.	<p>Group members were taken through a short presentation on how to set out a media release. By this time it was getting towards the end of the evening. On going support in this area will come from Lindsay Saunders of the <i>Daily Mercury</i> if the group needs it.</p>

### What were the results

#### 1. Selling an item

Three of the four growers taking part in this exercise found it fairly easy. The fourth found it difficult largely because he could not relate to his subject. The exercise created some energy and injected some fun. Having a purpose to talk to seemed to make it a little easier to deliver a speech.

#### 2. 5 point plan.

Two growers were asked to deliver a one minute speech here about controlled traffic. They were given time to prepare and found it useful to think about controlled traffic in this way.

#### 3. PRES.

By the time growers came to do this exercise they were in the swing of constructing stories around a structure and readily engaged in this exercise. There was a lot of energy and noise in the room.

#### 4. Writing a media release.

Useful hints on how to write a press release came from the material Jeff Coutts had as well as that provided by Lindsay Saunders from *The Daily Mercury* (even though he could not be there).

Growers requested on going practise with various aspects of communication. These included practise with:

- Emailing
- The media
- Making presentations

## 1. Email practice

Emails were:

<b>Subject title</b>	<b>Date sent</b>
<i>Come to an end</i>	Fri 25/01/2008
<i>What's Happening? - Well what do ya know - its Christmas!!</i>	Tue 18/12/2007
<i>Stress Diary</i>	Thu 6/12/2007
<i>What's Happening?</i>	Wed 28/11/2007
<i>What's Happening E- news 7 November 2007</i>	Wed 7/11/2007
<i>What's Happening</i>	Thu 25/10/2007
<i>Time management</i>	Thu 25/10/2007
<i>What's happening!</i>	Tue 23/10/2007
<i>E network</i>	Tue 23/10/2007
<i>Care taker mode</i>	Thu 18/10/2007
<i>FW: meeting</i>	Mon 2/07/2007
<i>What next?</i>	Thu 31/05/2007
<i>Future directions</i>	Tue 17/04/2007
<i>Email (no title)</i>	Mon 2/04/2007
<i>Future directions</i>	Thu 29/03/2007
<i>What is your vision for the group</i>	Fri 23/02/2007
<i>organising a trip</i>	Mon 22/01/2007
<i>using communications skills and group structure</i>	Fri 19/01/2007
<i>Article on ethanol</i>	22 August 2006
<i>Kristin Beradi</i>	10 August 2006
<i>Critical thinking and Lost at sea exercise</i>	25 July 2006
<i>Communication workshop and questionnaire</i>	8 June 2006

The number of responses to each email varied. A total of 7 (approximately 30%) members of the group have replied to at least one email.

## 2. Practice with being interviewed by the media

### A story about ethanol

As part of the training in August 2006, several members were interviewed by research staff as if they were responding to a call from the media. Through this, an article about the future of ethanol was developed (see appendix b). The editor of the Mackay Mercury is waiting for contact from the group and willing to help with the publication of articles in his newspaper

Growers were asked:

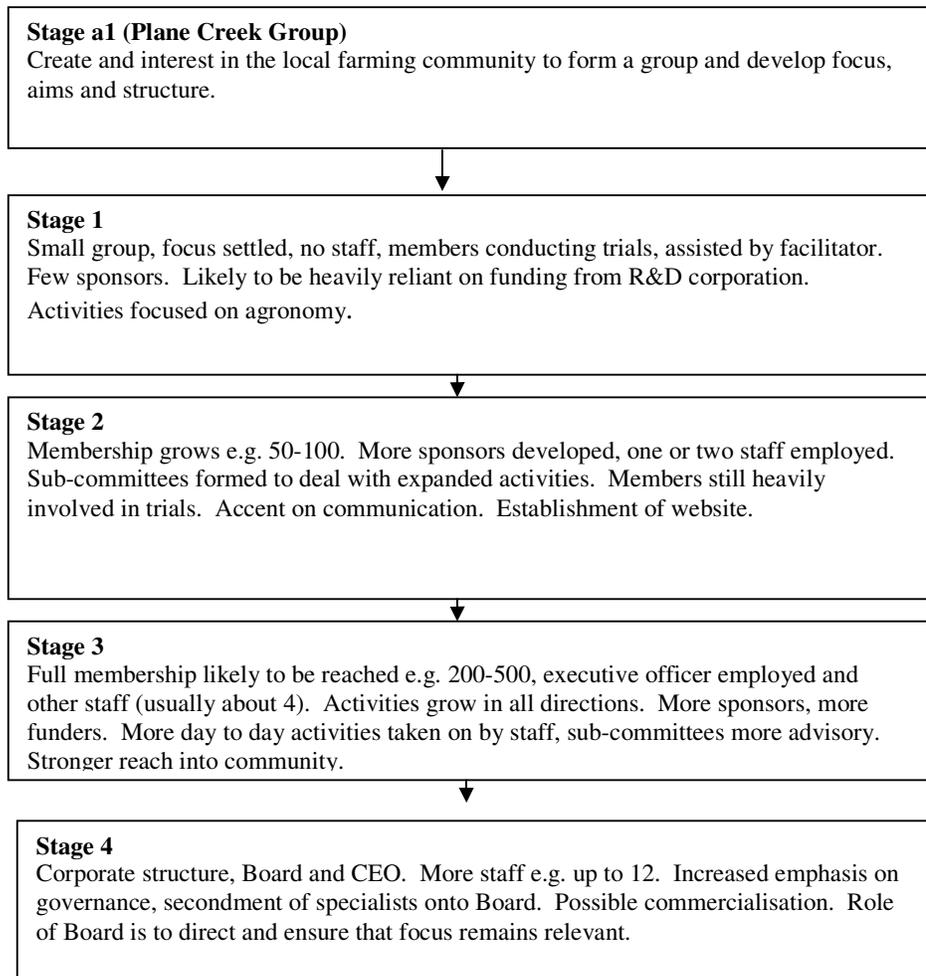
1. What views do you have as a producer about growing cane for the ethanol market?
2. What would be the advantages of doing that (as opposed to growing cane for sugar)?
3. Are there any disadvantages to growing cane for ethanol?
4. What is the price comparison for you between growing cane for ethanol and growing cane for sugar?

### **Workshop 3**

Growers requested a workshop on governance, project management to include time and financial management. What was more pressing than these matters given that quite few growers were undertaking directors courses, was information on what their future as a group could look like given that they showed an interest in what the Birchip Cropping Group was doing. To that end the BCG's method of operation was researched and the CEO was interviewed about what she thought were the factors that bred success for that group. The operations of several other groups were also investigated.

These findings were then presented to the group at the meeting in December 2006. Some growers who attended that meeting felt that it was too ambitious to emulate BCG and what they really wanted was to continue with the on farm trials and employ someone else to carry out the extension for them. Even so, the group, at that point was well on the way to becoming the type of group they had visualised for themselves. Members were still enthusiastic about

employing a communications officer and having an outward focus. In the diagram below, there are the four stages that all of the groups researched went through. However, the comment was made that there was a big step for members of this group even before stage 1 and that was to decide to work together and that this was their first stage (Comment P. Creber, December 2006). The stages of group development are then:



It was estimated that the Plane Creek Group is at stage 1 with an interest in going to stage 2 and perhaps stage 3.

From the literature it was found that what makes a successful group is:

1. Having a strong focus on the agricultural needs of the area and also recognising the need to maintain and strengthen the local community.
2. Growers are heavily involved in setting the research objectives, designing the program and in the running of the organisation.
3. The group should set achievable goals while “pushing the boundaries”.
4. Strong encouragement of growth of members and the building of trust and morale.
5. Strong partnerships between farmers, government and industry. These partnerships relate to research and the funding of the organisation.
6. Communication of the results of the research is vital and generally goes beyond the members of the group.
7. The structure of the organisation is appropriate to accommodate growth and changing circumstances.
8. Mechanisms in place to ensure the organisation remains relevant as it grows such as an annual members’ survey.
9. Use of sub-committees are common.
10. The employment of staff and particularly an executive officer is a hallmark of successful groups.
11. Sufficiently wide membership and sponsorship is a strong basis for attracting funds.

It was estimated that the Plane Creek Group has all of these with the exception of 8, 9, 10 and 11.

It was at this workshop that it became clear the group had refocussed and now wanted to concentrate much more on the farm trails and not so much on communicating with an external audience such as the community or the industry. A comment was made that it was the end of the year and that growers were exhausted and could not think beyond taking a break. An invitation to host the next GIVE day in February 2007 was turned down and a proposal put that it should be in 2008 if this group was to take a role. It was because of this change in direction that the researchers ran a survey in February 2007 among the growers to find out what they thought as individuals. Fourteen out of 19 gave responses to the survey.

In response to a question about vision for the group, all members who responded expressed an interest in the group staying together and moving forward. No member expressed a desire to see the group disband but a range of ideas as to how the group could best operate in the future was expressed. However, eight members wanted the group to become bigger and attract a larger membership. Three expressed interest in seeing the group grow to a size that could employ paid personnel to support activities which would provide some relief from constantly relying on volunteering. Within this range of responses, suggestions included an increased focus on research, becoming an independent body or taking up a networking role and acting as an umbrella organisation for other groups in the region. However, not all were clear on the group's vision and at least one member responded that they had never really understood the reasoning behind the group.

When asked how involvement in the group had helped with the running of their own businesses, the half the members (7) indicated their membership had exposed them to a range of new ideas, increased their confidence to try new things and provided information about potential funding sources. Another five were specific in linking this information to increased productivity on farm or better environmental management. However three members felt that being part of the group had not been beneficial for their business.

Members were asked to comment on how they felt the researchers might provide assistance or guidance to the group. Six members (30%) indicated that bringing a new perspective and drawing on experience with other groups would be beneficial to creating momentum and finding a direction for the group. The role of facilitation and communication was also identified as important. And finally, two members suggested that the researchers might provide assistance with some of the more formal arrangements regarding the group. For example, either through providing advice on how to expand the group into a bigger entity or by exploring options like cooperative arrangements and partnerships. More specifically, members' thought that the researchers might help with skills development, the direction of the group and networking. In relation to skills development, members picked up on a variety of areas for possible development ranging from communication skills through to management skills which might be met through specific training. One member also responded that just being able to recognise the skills they already had, had been valuable. Connecting with other groups and networking was also identified as important for members:

### **Next Steps from the survey results**

Most members of the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers Group have clearly said that they want to expand. A path was already laid out to help with this expansion at the meeting in December 2006 and the relevant steps were.

1. Check that the Rules of the group are capable of handling its projected expansion
2. Ensure that the management committee has the appropriate structure (number of positions, roles etc)
3. Set up sub-committees
4. Contact sponsors
5. Commence a drive to recruit new members
6. Investigate ways to employ staff. Employ a full or part time co-ordinator who can start the admin process; organise events; write up results of the trials, write funding submissions
7. Formulate topics of research and investigation requirements and start discussing on farm trials with researchers (DPI, CSIRO, BSES). Keep SRDC informed with what you are doing at all stages. Make all events fun

There was no energy to take control of these steps. For example, no one wanted to control a sub committee or contact sponsors. There was a drive to attract new members but the field day to which they were invited was cancelled at the last minute. The interest by one member to employ staff was resolved to some extent by employing a communications person on an ad hoc basis. This lack of enthusiasm was perplexing given the survey results. It was not a lack of resources that stopped action.

*Objective (c) To ascertain the issues, barriers and strengths present in the group chosen and the steps needed to increase the required capacity or capacities.*

#### Summary

*Researching the earlier objectives demonstrated that the group members had a number of strengths that enabled them to meet their immediate and local needs – their technical skills were strong and they had a common interest in developing specific relevant technology to the benefit of all group members. They also had a common interest in enhancing environmental credentials, survival and profits. The team role strengths in the group ensured that they kept on task with strong coordination and monitoring attributes. The informality (Stage 1 Group) also permitted individuals to easily contribute at their level of comfort.*

*The barriers related more to moving to different group stage. The lack of an agreed direction; the need for more ‘lateral thinking’ (in terms of group function, process and vision); and the lack of human drivers/doers such as executive officer (beyond what voluntaries can do) were barriers to broadening the role of such a group. Changing informal leadership also was shown to affect the momentum for change within a group.*

This objective was achieved in that barriers, strengths and issues could be identified to the group achieving its stated aim. The barrier was that members needed a driver to achieve the aim of expansion. In the past members looked to the chair and secretary. When the individuals in these positions changed and the incoming individuals did not have the same interest, group members had no strategy for continuing with their original aims. Training in leadership would help members develop strategies and give them confidence about what they can appropriately do.

There are two critical questions related to capacity building within such groups: What are the ‘required capacities and end point wanted by the group members (and should they be challenged to think beyond them?’); and is it of benefit to the industry as a whole to encourage some groups to move to ‘higher’ level group structures and outlook (such as that seen in the Birchip Cropping Group for example). Exploration of these questions requires working across a number of groups at different stages and involving the wider sugar industry.

*Objective (d) To isolate the critical points of change or transformation that are required to bring about the necessary increase in capacity.*

*The research has identified a number of critical points of change or transformation within such grower groups. These sit at the transition points between the four Stages of Group development (once a group has been established) as identified in this research. The first capacity building priority is to ensure that group members clarify where they want to go and build the capacity to do so (many start at Stage 1 – the informal group working on individual’s issues). A key factor in achieving group goals is in having an appropriate governance in place – in this case having an executive of the group with the vision and the confidence to implement it.*

*The second capacity building priority is to test that vision by exposing group members to alternative scenarios (such as the Birchip Cropping Group and other examples outside of sugar) and providing training in high level communication (such as visioning, negotiation etc) to see if different group objectives (different group stages) are of interest. Such exposure may reinforce their desire to keep with existing structures and goals or stimulate the group to moving to another group stage. If they wish to move to a different group stage, it is important to encourage the group to establish the necessary structural mechanisms (eg executive officer input) to allow them to more effectively build towards this vision.*

The critical points of transformation seem to be similar for most groups. Four stages were identified in the literature. Members of the Plane Creek Group identified a stage that came before where most groups start and that was that members come together as a group and begin to develop skills in how to work as a group. After this, the stages are those already referred to above.

This project did not reach its full potential for the group or the researchers because key personnel left or changed role and the project no longer had a driver within the group for the personal and group development work that the researchers were doing. Even though most of the group still wanted this type of development, it seemed that no one in the group besides the researchers who felt that they could consistently argue for its space on the agenda. Other innovations such as environmental issues, seemed to have similar difficulty.

If a project relies on key individuals or specific personal attributes (such as champions or drivers) these should be identified at the beginning of a project and identified as a risk if these change. For example, a project may rely on a group representative for endorsement or a group may rely on a driver to make sure action is taken and if these change

then the group as well as the project are affected. One way to overcome this reliance on key individuals is to have a more participative system of operating where all individuals share the leadership roles. This takes the pressure off any one individual having to feel responsible for the group and allows group members to work collectively on their ideas. This more open style of operating was identified as better suiting groups that were involved in developing technologies (technology development model of extension) or building skills (group empowerment/group facilitation model of extension) by Coutts et al (2005) and was the method of operating we designed for our involvement in the project.

*Objective (e). To generalise the results of the research and to develop a model for farmer groups which sets out a hierarchy of capacities and skills needed, the likely barriers encountered and to suggest ways to overcome these.*

*A key generalisation of this research is that there are different stages of grower groups and many would be in Stage 1 - Priorities – based on this case study – centred on technological gains, environmental credentials, survival and profitability. These goals are assisted by having an informal committee structure to coordinate activities and the make-up of participants helps to keep activities focused and on track. For this stage, leadership and group skills are helpful in ensuring that members' needs are considered and met through group action. The skills needed first are communication skills that assist in applying for funds, reporting and allowing others to know what members have done. Lateral thinking and creative thinking is also needed so that new ideas for research keep flowing through.*

*The transition to progressive group stages requires further action – requiring a development of capacity in appointing and managing employees and marketing to sponsors. Governance appropriate to later stages becomes a key issue both for the leaders and the group members who may be less comfortable with a more formal structure. There is a need for part-time/full time staff to ensure that the momentum is maintained and necessary steps taken by someone with the time, resources and skills necessary.*

*For capacity building of groups to be effective, they need to be demand driven. After time they become self perpetuating when a pattern of project development and implementation is established. This demand comes from group members wanting to carry out their own research.*

Even though this project did not proceed as planned, the learning from it was still useful to identify what are the critical points of success of any group. These are defined in the stages of group evolution referred to above. This objective is achieved by the development of a manual, *Successful farmer groups: Capacity and Barriers*, that was compiled largely from the research paper that was delivered to the groups in December 2006.

The project was stopped early because the crucial members of the group had refocused their attention back on farm trials and away from issues such as group development and external communications. Group members already had skills to carry out on farm trials within their group and the communication skills they needed to deliver their trial results. Other communication skills were delivered in a training session with us in June 2006, therefore, there was little more that the researchers could do with them that would justify more expenditure.

A hierarchy of skills for this group was developed from what group members thought were their first level skills and what they needed to function and then what was needed later. First level skills is what they needed immediately and were not skills they already had within the group. These first level skills would likely vary from group to group depending on the composition of the group and the combined skills of the members. The first level skills for the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers group were as follows:

#### **First level**

- Communication – presentation skills and how to engage beyond the group, email skills
- Leadership skills – who is the driver?
- How to chair a meeting
- Research skills
- Governance

The second level skills were identified by the group but also from research into what other similar groups found was needed would have been important had they gone onto to develop the group, employing a communications person and a facilitator. These skills would be:

## Second level

Managing dynamics within the group  
Managing employees  
Managing sponsors and external advisers.

## Outputs:

Outputs include:

### *Workshop 1 March 2006*

- Belbin Self assessment profile
- Results of skills audit for Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers Group
- Skills self assessment sheets (available in hard copy only)

### *Workshop 2 June 2006*

- Written and verbal communication handouts
  - Selling an item
  - 5 pint plan
  - PRES
  - Writing media releases

### *Workshop 3 December 2006*

- Paper: Roberts Evaluation 2006, *Structure of successful farmer groups* presented at a workshop.

### *February 2007*

- Results of grower survey

### *Other outputs 2007 include*

- Activity log
- Time management checklist
- Stress management diary

### *2008*

- A manual: *Successful Farmer Groups: Capacity and Barriers*

## References

Roberts, K and Coutts J. 2006, *Evaluating Empowerment*, The Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building and Innovation in Rural Industries, RIRDC Canberra

Coutts, J.; Roberts; K; Frost, F; and Coutts, A. 2005. *Extension for Capacity Building: What works and why?* Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation; Kingston, ACT

Roberts K, Paine, M. Nettle R & Ho, E 2004 *Mapping Rural Industry Service Providers*, The Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building and Innovation in Rural Industries, RIRDC Canberra

## Intellectual Property and Confidentiality:

We have produced a paper we would like to publish. These are of a general nature and do not breach confidentiality.

## Environmental and Social Impacts:

The project has had some social impact in that the training has increased the level of knowledge and skill of participants and the researchers. Through training and mentoring, group members increased their individual capacity in:

- Oral communication and advocacy
- Being interviewed
- Use of e-mails
- Writing a story
- Group dynamics

As a group, social capital was increased through:

- Structured consideration of group objectives, needs and value of the group;
- An understanding of Belbin Team roles and the importance of complementary team roles to achieving group outcomes
- Knowing about group structures and deciding where they fitted, wanted to go and how to achieve this.

Although the project did not directly target environmental skills or practices, the desire for the group to demonstrate 'environmental credentials' did emerge in the process of considering group goals and the improvements to group and social capacity should be expected to have a positive impact on how environmental issues are managed.

## **Expected Outcomes:**

The expected outcomes were:

1. Increased level of knowledge and skills in the participants from the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers Inc grower group.
2. Increased involvement of associates of the group such as their families (eg spouses and adult children).
3. Longevity of the group. The project will aim to assist with the long term sustainability of the group to carry out research.
4. A model and a manual for farmer groups which sets out a hierarchy of capacities and skills needed, the likely barriers encountered and to suggest ways to overcome these
5. Knowledge by other farmer groups of the results of the research

### *1. Increased level of knowledge*

Growers increased their knowledge of what skills they had within their group, the skills they still needed. They increased their communication skills, and now know what the path is if their group is to grow bigger. They would have also shared an experience of working with and managing external consultants.

### *2. Increased involvement of associates.*

This outcome had limited achievement. Three families out of 20 had more than one member involved in the group - adult children from two families and a wife from a third. There was strong involvement of some of the wives of the men of this group in other industry groups but they did not feel comfortable being also involved in this group. For example, wives and daughters have created the website, trained the men in the use of PowerPoint presentations, created presentations for them, written emails for them, trained them in computer skills yet they still feel excluded from the group. This phenomenon would have been explored later in this project.

What women bring to the group are not only skills and knowledge about farming about but also skills in running and maintaining group health and they are after all one half of the business. There is only one woman member of this group even though women in this locality are part of women's canegrower groups.

### *3. Longevity of the group*

While a number of workshops on skills were carried out, they did not have the effect of motivating and energising the group. Even though the majority of group members wanted to expand the group, engage the media, employ staff as well as carry out projects, there was only a clear champion for project work. Even so, group members became skilled at delivering their own presentations at public forums (with the help of family members), increased their knowledge about group development and what type of group they were and employed a part time communications officer.

### *4. A model and a manual for farmer groups*

A model and manual for farmer groups was developed and is attached in an appendix. The model relates to the group development process and the manual provides details about what is involved to get to each stage.

### *5. Knowledge by other farmer groups of the results of the research*

The dissemination of results continues to happen outside of any work done through this project. This project would have increased some skills in being able to present results but the facilitator and family members were helping group members in this task.

### **Future Research Needs:**

This project has highlighted a number of areas for further research.

1. This research has highlighted the need to further research the transition of groups between the four group stages in terms of the factors within the sugar industry specifically that have resulted in groups that started out as Stage 1 groups to move to Stages 2, 3 & 4. This would involve looking at a cross section of groups at these different stages across the industry and seeking commonalities and differences in their context, make-up, structures and experiences.
2. A related research question is 'how much value is there to the broader sugar industry in fostering groups to move through these group stages?' – Or should the industry be content to have most grower groups remain in Stage 1 and focus on local technological issues? Should an industry such as the sugar industry be home to a number of Birchip-type groups to drive a culture of innovation and change? What is the industry missing out by not having enough of these groups?
3. The impact of exposure to innovations and group process in other industries (and not even necessarily agricultural industries) on groups is another area of research. This research suggests that this activity (along with scenario development and visioning) could stimulate and motivate groups to go beyond their existing objectives and vision. If so, how can this be built into existing opportunities such as the Travel and Learning Grants?
4. Some research is needed into the culture of groups in the sugar industry, such as why men and women do not participate in the same group. There is currently research being done to involve women in the industry but the side question here is about the involvement of families in all aspects of the farm.
5. The effects of using the traditional, hierarchical group organisational structure of chair, secretary also needs research and how this hierarchy restricts or contributes to innovation.
6. The economic value that these supportive activities to group members and to the industry.

### **List of Publications:**

(Copies of substantive publications from the project should be included as Appendices. Where the project involves a student and the thesis is relevant to the project this should be referred to in the report and an electronic copy of the thesis sent with the report or as soon as it is available.)

## **Appendix a. Summary of results of survey February 2007:**

### **Summary of the Survey of members of the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers Group**

At the last meeting of the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers Group with Roberts Evaluation on 19 February 2007, it was agreed that members would complete a short survey on the potential future direction of the group. Sixteen members responded to the survey by either returning their responses by email or participating in a brief phone interview. A summary of these responses are presented below.

#### **1. What vision do you have for the group?**

In response to this question, all members who responded expressed an interest in the group staying together and moving forward. No member expressed a desire to see the group disband but a range of ideas as to how the group could best operate in the future were expressed.

Four responses indicated a desire to see the group continue as a place to exchange ideas and information:

Within the context of sharing ideas, some members (2 responses) specifically identified the group as playing a self-help role.

However, a number of members (8 responses) wanted the group to become bigger and attract a larger membership. At least three members expressed interest in seeing the group grow to a size that could employ paid personnel to support activities which would provide some relief from constantly relying on volunteering. Within this range of responses, suggestions included an increased focus on research, becoming an independent body or taking up a networking role and acting as an umbrella organisation for other groups in the region.

However, not all were clear on the group's vision and at least one member responded that they had never really understood the reasoning behind the group.

#### **2. What do you want out of your involvement with the group?**

The majority of members responded that they sought access to information, research and an exchange of ideas that would improve their management practice and increase productivity (8 responses). This included activities like practical trials and demonstrations.

Three members also identified the importance of sustainable farming practices and using the group to develop the skills to respond to climate change.

In addition to knowledge exchange and environmental management, one member also suggested the group could play a role in networking activities and the cooperative exchange of equipment among farmers in the area. Two members chose not to respond to this question.

#### **3. How does your involvement with the group help you with the running your business?**

In terms of how involvement in the group had helped with the running of their own businesses, the half the members who responded to this question (7) indicated their membership had been beneficial in that it had exposed them to a range of new ideas, increased confidence to try new things and information about potential funding sources.

Another 5 were also specific in linking this information to increased productivity on farm or better environmental management.

However not all members (3) felt that being part of the group had been beneficial for their business.

#### **4. How do you think we (the researchers – Roberts Evaluation) can help the group?**

Members were asked to comment on how they felt Roberts Evaluation might provide assistance or guidance to the group. Many members (6) indicated that bringing a new perspective and drawing on experience with other groups would be beneficial to creating momentum and finding a direction for the group.

The role of facilitation and communication was also identified as important:

And finally, two members suggested that Roberts Evaluation might provide assistance with some of the more formal arrangements regarding the group. For example, either through providing advice on how to grow the group into a bigger entity or by exploring options like cooperative arrangements and partnerships.

## **5. How can the researchers help the members?**

Members' responses to this question seemed to cluster around three main areas where Roberts Evaluation might provide some help for members of the group – skills development, the direction of the group and networking. In relation to skills development, members picked up on a variety of areas for possible development ranging from communication skills through to management skills which might be met through specific training. One member also responded that just being able to recognise the skills they already had, had been valuable.

Finding direction for the group was another issue which three members raised.

Connecting with other groups and networking was also identified as important for members:

### **Next Steps**

Most members of the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers Group have clearly said that they want to expand. A path was laid out to help with this expansion at the meeting in December and these are the relevant steps.

1. Check that the Rules of the group are capable of handling its projected expansion.
2. Ensure that the management committee has the appropriate structure (number of positions, roles etc).
3. Set up sub-committees:
  - Sponsorship
  - Membership
  - Research
  - Employment
4. Contact sponsors.
5. Commence a drive to recruit new members.
6. Investigate ways to employ staff. Employ a full or part time co-ordinator who can start the admin process; organise events; write up results of the trials, write funding submissions.
7.
  - Formulate topics of research and investigation requirements and start discussing on farm trials with researchers (DPI, CSIRO, BSES).
  - Keep SRDC informed with what you are doing at all stages.
  - Make all events fun.

## **Appendix b. Exercise in building the ethanol story with growers – August 2006**

### Interview questions

- 1. What views do you have as a producer about growing cane for the ethanol market?*
- 2. What would be the advantages of doing that (as opposed to growing cane for sugar)?*
- 3. Are there any disadvantages to growing cane for ethanol?*
- 4. What is the price comparison for you between growing cane for ethanol and growing cane for sugar?*

### **Grower 1**

1. It would be viable providing it returns more than sugar. I've heard that the returns on ethanol would be a lot smaller unless there was government intervention. As I understand it, if you are growing sugar at \$175 per tonne you are better off growing for sugar than growing for ethanol; unless you were growing for sugar off the first strike only. There are three strikes for juice. In Brazil, they use the first strike (which is the highest quality) for sugar and then the second and third strikes are used for by products.
2. If you were growing for ethanol you could use high yielding varieties of cane as quality of sugar wouldn't be a concern.
3. Could be the price differential see answer to question 1.
4. Could be the price differential see answer to question 1.

### **Grower 2**

1. It would be all right but there aren't any systems in place to grow cane for the ethanol market. Currently everything is geared to producing for the sugar market.
2. If the price was right and the returns were reasonable it would be a viable option.
3. Any disadvantages are price related. At the moment most of the ethanol that is produced from sugar cane product (molasses) is made by CSR. When we send our product to the mill we are paid on its sugar content only; any by products which can be used for gas, ethanol etc are kept and used by CSR and the farmers are not paid for that. That's the way it has always been. People always complain about farmers not changing but unless the current system changes and there is an option outside using a sugar mill, it won't happen. Ultimately growing for the ethanol market could be a good thing but we need a new processing system in place, beyond the current system of sending the product to the sugar mill where all returns on by products are paid to CSR rather than the producer. At the moment the industry is structured in an acquisition turn out and there is no mechanism for farmers to grow for anything other than the sugar market.
4. See answer to question 3.

### **Grower 3**

1. I think it's fine but there are a few things that would need to happen first.. First, the government would need to set a mandate on fuel prices, second, the growers would need to be involved in the investment in the industry, and third, we would need to negotiate a price that is reasonable for the product. The price would depend on what model of production was adopted; for example, if we took up the Brazilian model (i.e. first strike for sugar and second and third strikes for ethanol), we'd need to re-negotiate our cane price product.
2. It would lessen the risk to the world market price of sugar and give producers a broader income base.
3. As long it is set up as a viable operation, I can't see any disadvantages.
4. Price issue comes up in response to question 1.

#### **Grower 4**

1. As long as it pays to grow for the ethanol market, I don't see a problem with it. But it all comes back to the bottom line.

2. It may be the case that it is more stable financially to grow cane for ethanol. If it happened the way it's done in Brazil, the crop would be used for sugar and ethanol markets. The first squeeze which is the highest quality would be used for sugar production and the second and third squeezes which are lesser quality would go to ethanol production. In Brazil, this has meant a higher quality in the raw sugar market.

3. No real disadvantages as long as the price is right. It's all about the bottom line and the returns need to be viable.

4. It hasn't been established yet.

#### **CANE GROWERS LOCKED OUT OF ETHANOL FUTURE**

Four cane growers from the Plane Creek Sustainable Farmers Group in the Sarina area were interviewed this week about what they thought about the renewed interest in using ethanol as a fuel for cars. Their response was a little surprising given that most people would have thought that it could only help.

It seems that growers are only paid for producing for the sugar market and any profit from selling by products such as ethanol is kept by the mill. As one grower stated 'When we send our product to the mill we are paid on its sugar content only; any by products which can be used for gas, ethanol etc are kept and used by CSR [who make ethanol] and the farmers are not paid for that. That's the way it has always been'.

All four mentioned the situation in Brazil where 'there are three strikes for juice. ... they use the first strike (which is the highest quality) for sugar and then the second and third strikes are used for by products' such as ethanol.

When asked what would be the advantages for them producing for the ethanol market, they stated that first current structure would need to change so that they could be paid for the second and third crushings. If that happened, they could plant higher yielding varieties of cane where sugar content did not matter as much and supplying for this market would give them a broader income base.

A spokesperson for the Beattie Government stated that its pledge to mandate a blend of 5% ethanol in all petrol produced in Queensland by 2010 would only go ahead once the current trials by the Federal Government on the impact of E5 and E10 on a number of vehicles show there is no adverse impact.