
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Inquiry into the Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research Annual
Report 2011-12

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry

June 2013
Canberra

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Foreword

In November 2012, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry resolved to inquire into the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) Annual Report 2011-12.

The ACIAR works within Australia's international aid framework to encourage Australian agricultural scientists to use their skills for the benefit of developing countries and Australia.

ACIARs key functions include:

- commissioning research into improving sustainable agricultural production in developing countries;
- funding project related training;
- communicating the results of funded research;
- conducting and funding development activities related to research programs, and
- administering the Australian Government's contribution to the International Agricultural Research Centres

The ACIAR conducts a broad program of activities including collaborative research programs, international aid assistance, and contributing to food security initiatives.

The Committee's inquiry canvassed a range of issues relating to ACIAR's operations. In particular, the Committee considered a recently released independent review into ACIAR; the newly established Australian International Food Security Centre; and the domestic benefits arising from ACIAR's work.

In May 2013, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade released the report of an independent panel established in 2012 to assess ACIAR's work. The panel examined ACIARs work in the context of:

- its appropriateness in achieving the goals of Australia's aid program, largely reducing poverty;

- its effectiveness in improving livelihoods through productive and sustainable agriculture; and
- its operations and arrangements for managing research programs and building its own capacity.

The panel, accounting for recent changes to Australia's international aid program, raised a number of questions about ACIAR's model, management approaches, stakeholder engagement and other issues, including the operation of whole-of-government aid arrangements.

The Committee found that overall the independent review was positive about ACIAR's work, despite making 27 recommendations covering those questions raised. The Committee noted however that it is currently unclear whether the Australian Government intends to act upon all of the panel's recommendations, beyond simply updating ACIAR's own strategic plan. The Committee has therefore recommended that the Government responds publicly to the review. In responding, the Government should prioritise a number of areas highlighted in the review – mechanisms to develop whole-of-government responses to overseas development assistance and the ongoing evaluation of ACIAR's activities.

One of ACIAR's core initiatives is the Australian International Food Security Centre (AIFSC). The AIFSC aims to strengthen the Australian Government's commitment to global food security through technological innovations in agriculture. It currently runs a range of programs in the Asia Pacific and Africa to assist communities in maximising crop yields, details of which can be found on their website www.aciar.gov.au. The Committee believes that the AIFSC will allow Australia to take a leading international role towards improving global food security. The Committee supports recommendations made in the independent review of ACIAR for the AIFSC to include food security research in its mandate.

While its benefit to communities in developing countries is clear, the Committee was also interested in the domestic benefits stemming from ACIAR's research. The Committee heard that some ten per cent of the benefits accruing from ACIAR research were applied domestically in Australia, particularly in relation to biosecurity including rabies, foot and mouth disease and other exotic diseases. The Committee considered that the Australian Government should continually evaluate ACIAR research and apply any relevant results or lessons learnt domestically. Finally, the Committee also noted that better communication and promotion of ACIAR's work and research to Australia's general public, scientific and research communities would help to raise further awareness of the agency's important work and would also assist to further domestic and international collaborative opportunities. We need to do more to telegraph our expertise and findings to the world.

I would like to thank staff of the ACIAR for their assistance during the Committee's inquiry. Their ongoing work through Australia's overseas development program is providing significant benefit to the livelihoods of agricultural communities in the developing world and also important benefits to Australia as well.

Hon Dick Adams MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

Chair Hon Dick Adams MP

Deputy Chair Mr Alby Schultz MP

Members Mr Darren Cheeseman MP

Mr Rob Mitchell MP

Mr George Christensen MP

Mr Dan Tehan MP

Mr Geoff Lyons MP

Committee Secretariat

Secretary Mr David Brunoro

Inquiry Secretary Mr Muzammil Ali

Administrative Officers Ms Jazmine Rakic

Ms Karen Underwood



Terms of reference

On *Thursday, 29 November 2012*, the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry resolved to inquire into the 2011-12 Annual Report of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.



List of abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| ACIAR | Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research |
| AIDSC | Australian International Food Security Centre |
| IARCs | International Agricultural Research Centres |
| IFAD | International Fund for Agricultural Development |
| CGIAR | Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research |
| AIFSC | Australian International Food Security Centre |
| CAPF | Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| SIMLESA | Sustainable Intensification of Maize-Legume cropping systems for food in Eastern and Southern Africa |



List of recommendations

3 Issues and analysis

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government publicly respond to the Independent Review of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

