



MEDIA RELEASE
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New expert group formed to further improve cotton sustainability

An inaugural meeting of a select group of experts and community leaders has provided a valuable boost to the Australian cotton industry's sustainability framework, PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock.

The Australian Cotton Sustainability Reference Group (ACSRG) recently held its first meeting, establishing a formal platform to help industry better understand stakeholder expectations and discuss its sustainability performance.

The ACSRG involves representatives from brands and retailers, environmental organisations, First Nations, governments, merchants, regulators, community organisations, health and safety, as well as cotton growers, researchers, input providers and other broadacre agriculture sustainability frameworks.

Cotton Australia Chief Executive Officer Adam Kay said genuine stakeholder engagement is a key factor in the success of the PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock. framework.

"The logic of effective stakeholder engagement is compelling: we're more likely to be successful if we understand and manage what is important to the people who influence our success," Adam said.

"We engage every day with many stakeholders, and this new Sustainability Reference Group adds another level by providing a regular formal process to bring a diverse group of experts and thought leaders together to inform industry sustainability decision-making.

"Importantly, we have brought together a group of advanced independent thinkers who will question and challenge what we are doing, if they think necessary, and suggest new actions and directions."

The ACSRG first met on 3 November to discuss items identified by participants as being most important to them, including industry actions and future plans for water use, biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions, soil health, and health and safety.

The Group has asked to meet twice-yearly to provide constructive feedback on opportunities for collaboration, emerging risks, and suggestions to increase existing pathways and plans for greater positive impact.

Cotton Research and Development Corporation Executive Director Dr Ian Taylor said the Group is one part of the work being done by the industry to make evidence-based decisions on sustainability progress and investments.

"Our sustainability aspirations are guided by science and aligned to stakeholder expectations," Ian said.

“We hope the diversity of people in the ACSRG will provide another mechanism to ensure we are in line with societal goals, and also bring new thinking and different perspectives that will help us to see new opportunities and solutions.”

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BACKGROUND: PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock.

PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock. is the Australian cotton industry’s sustainability framework created to guide work to set sustainability targets, coordinate a whole-of-industry strategy to achieve these targets, and engage effectively with stakeholders on actions and progress.

PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock. is currently targeted at on-farm cotton production. Through a process of consultation and review, nine topics have been assessed as being most important to customers, cotton growers and other stakeholders:

- PLANET: Water, greenhouse gas emissions, pesticides, biodiversity, soil health
- PEOPLE: Workplace, wellbeing
- Paddock: Productivity, profitability.

The industry has set draft five-year targets for most of these topics, and is working to improve accurate baseline data for others before setting ambitious targets.

PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock is delivered by the cotton industry’s Sustainability Working Group (SWG), which consists of representatives from Cotton Australia, the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC), myBMP, CottonInfo, the Australian Cotton Shippers Association and growers. The SWG reports to the Boards of Cotton Australia and CRDC.

BACKGROUND: AUSTRALIAN COTTON SUSTAINABILITY REFERENCE GROUP MEMBER ORGANISATIONS INCLUDE:

External stakeholders

- Brands and retailers: Country Road, ELK, Hanes Australasia, Kmart and Target Australia, Rodd & Gunn
- Finance: Rabobank
- First Nations: Aboriginal Employment Strategy Ltd
- Government: NSW Department of Primary Industries
- Murray Darling Basin Authority
- Merchants: ADM Trading Australia, Agri Direct Australia
- Other agriculture peak body sustainability initiatives: Australian Beef Sustainability Framework, GrainGrowers Limited, National Farmers’ Federation
- Society: Country Women’s Association of NSW
- Sustainability Initiatives (cotton): Textile Exchange
- Workplace: Rural Safety and Health Alliance

Internal stakeholders

- Growers: Anderson Farms, Berwyndale Pastoral, South Bunarba Agriculture
- Input providers: Cotton Seed Distributors Ltd
- Researchers: CSIRO