



CCA History

An unclear beginning...

In 2016, Crop Consultants Australia celebrated its 30-year anniversary. It was a date selected not necessarily as an anniversary, but as an opportunity to recognise CCA's evolution, development, and the ongoing contribution that it has made to broad acre farming during its existence.

In truth however, like many community based organisations, it is difficult to be certain exactly when the organisation had its true beginnings. CCA as it is today, evolved from two likeminded organisations – both called the **Crop Management Consultants Association (CMCA)** and based respectively in QLD and NSW. The history particularly of the CMCA (Qld) has been difficult to research however it is believed to have started in the early 1980's and focused on all crop production, from horticulture, to broad acre, and eventually to newly created cotton industry. An association with a similar name still operates on the Whitsunday Coast of Queensland today, with a focus on horticultural production.

It's NSW counterpart however, has a well-documented history. In the early days of cotton production in Australia, agronomists were primarily employed by the large chemical companies – namely Bayer, Shell and Lanes. In the early 1980's, a NSW based Agronomist Chris Lehmann, decided to break with the industry mould, and establish himself as an independent agronomist. His business model aimed at communicating directly with researchers and chemical companies to give tailored advice to clients on a fee for service basis. As this was information that to date, growers had been receiving free of charge, it represented a large shift in thinking within the industry.

“It was completely unique in agricultural industries at that point” - Steve Warden.

Chris was soon joined by a number of other independent agronomists including Anne and Lindsay Tuart. They realized that there would be mutual benefit in coming together as a profession – particularly as they sought to access information directly from the researchers of the time. After floating the idea with some fellow consultants, the informal industry group known as the **Professional Independent Consultants Association (PICA)** was formed. This group, consisting of 8-10 members including Chris, Anne and Lindsay, Maurie Fay and Steve Warden, would meet annually at the Moree Gentlemen's Club at the end of each cotton season.

By 1986, the cotton industry in NSW, and the group was continuing to gain momentum. They had become aware of the Queensland based CMCA and during the Cotton Research Conference held that year, there was a realization that there was a need for a more formal Consultants/Agronomists Association. Members of the Queensland group were present at an initial meeting and were able to explain their organisation and method of operation. It was resolved at the meeting to seek to combine with the Queensland group to avoid duplication, however upon surveying of potential NSW

and existing QLD members, it was decided to form a separate organisation in NSW, with a focus on the ever expanding cotton industry.

The NSW organisation began its operations with 40 unofficial members and the objectives were stated as:

- To maintain and improve the standard of agronomic advisory services in the cotton industry.
- To facilitate information exchange between all sectors of the cotton industry, with the aim of improving the profitability of cotton growers.
- To provide an organisation to present the consultants' view to industry and Governments.

(Source: Cotton Consultants Association (1988))

What's in a name?

The Association, known by its new name the ***Crop Management Consultants Association (NSW)*** elected its first President in 1986 – Mr Maurie Fay. By 1988, the NSW association had changed its name to the ***Cotton Consultants Association*** to better reflect the core industry in which its members were working. In May of that year, it gained Incorporation in NSW, becoming the ***Cotton Consultants Association Incorporated***, and again changed its name in August of 1993 becoming ***Cotton Consultants Australia Incorporated***. The final, and most recent name change, was made in October 2008 and saw the association now acknowledging the broader crop base in which its members worked, becoming ***Crop Consultants Australia Incorporated***.

State of origin

While the NSW and QLD associations had initially opted to remain separate, since 1988, a number of members of the Queensland organisation who had more of a cotton focus, had begun to attend the NSW meetings. In 1996, a group of NSW members travelled to Biloela to meet with the Queensland group to again discuss the prospect of merger. After some negotiations, it was resolved that the Queensland and New South Wales group would become one.

The key Industry factors and CCA involvement

The history of the Cotton Industry in Australia and the development of the role of Consultants is well documented in the video [“A Life in Cotton: The Birth of the Modern Cotton Industry in Australia”](#) (*Paper Moose (2014)*) The video highlights many of the challenges that were faced by growers and industry to establish the industry over the years.

CCA's role within industry has been shaped by the critical external factors that have influenced its members, and the part that it could play at the time to minimise the impact of these factors.

Stand out issues for many long term members are Heliopsis resistance and management, irrigation practices, spray drift (particularly in the 80's) crop rotation, plant breeding and the roll out of Ingard technology.

In the 1980s and 1990s (until the introduction of Ingard technology), cotton growers and industry were in the spotlight due to the perceived and real social, economic and environmental factors that affecting the communities in which cotton was produced. Consultants were at the forefront of these issues as was their recommendations to growers that were dictating their practices. This in itself exacerbated the need for Agronomists to maintain their professionalism and undertake ongoing education. The role of CCA in this process was vital.

For most however, the stand out external issue throughout the existence of CCA, and into the future is the management of water allocations for the irrigated sector and mitigating impacts of climate change.

While the ravages of drought and flood are difficult to mitigate, an understanding and application of the latest research into pest management, agronomy and predictive management technology are essential tools for crop managers, and CCA has a key role to play in the upskilling and education of its members.

While CCA is not a lobby group per say, over the years it has provided a necessary unified voice for its members at a State and National level on industry groups and forums. As recognition of CCA and its member Consultants within industry has grown, CCA has been invited to participate formally as members of steering committees and guiding councils in groups such as the development of initial BMP guidelines in cotton, TIMS (Transgenic and Insect Management Strategy Committee), A.C.I.C. (The Australian Cotton Industry Council) and the bi-annual Australian Cotton Conference.

Membership

Over the years, CCA member numbers have fluctuated dramatically. Membership has been influenced not only by seasonal conditions (and resultant economic conditions), but also by organizational policy. In 1991, the inaugural membership directory for the Cotton Consultants Association listed 35 Full Members and 28 Associate Members who had no voting rights. By 2005, these combined numbers had swelled to 350, but dropped again substantially in response to an extended drought period and by 2009 had only 71 members.

As CCA celebrated its 30th Anniversary in 2016, it did so with almost 200 members in the association and strong corporate involvement.

Staffing

In 1994, the Association, now known as the Cotton Consultant's Association Australia, recognised that it required administrative and bookkeeping support to service its growing membership. Previously staffed by volunteer Board members, CCA appointed its first Executive Officer, Mr Allan Williams in September of that year, and established a formal office in Narrabri.

Over the years, the Executive Officer role has been retained, and has been subsequently filled by numerous people. Jon Marie Baker took on the role in a part time capacity in 1997 – a position that

she went on to hold for the next ten years. In July 2007, Amber Diamond then took the reins, still working from the Narrabri Office.

In July 2009, CCA took a new approach to staffing and administration. In a somewhat brave move, they closed the Narrabri office, and appointed an Executive Officer team, being Fleur Anderson and Fiona Anderson, to work 'remotely' to service the needs of members. Fiona filled this position solely since 2012.

Today CCA contracts a three-member Executive Team (including Fiona along with Leisl Coggan and Liz Todd) who work remotely to deliver seminars, projects, surveys and support to the membership and broader industry.

Seminars

As a professional organisation for Agronomists, one of CCA's key functions has become the delivery of timely and tailored upskilling and professional development opportunities to its members. These events are generally delivered in the form of two day Seminars held in a variety of centres in Queensland and NSW.

The concept of the Seminars was developed by founding member Anne Tuart, who recognised that consultants of the day were becoming time poor due to having to attend information days held by each of the individual chemical companies to gain information on the products available each season. Anne developed an agenda, hosted by CCA, which enabled CCA to 'sell' timeslots to a two-day agenda, to each of the companies, therefore bringing all of companies in one place, to CCA members. Soon researchers also were invited to present to update members. It was noted by one founding member that this was often requested prior to research being completed to enable CCA members to trial concepts themselves before the season came to an end. According to this member, these requests challenged some of the researchers as they were not accustomed to disclosing early results of research. Today the researchers are key partners in the delivery of Seminar content.

While CCA is exploring online delivery of information provision, these Seminars are bound to remain a key part of CCA culture due to the additional networking, social and support opportunities that they provide to a profession that can be quite solitary.

Survey

In 1988 CCA commenced a long term survey of its members (then all cotton consultants) to produce quantitative market and production data reports for the cotton industry. Funded by the industry, it provided a timely snapshot of industry production practices, chemical use patterns and consumption. In 2000, in response to ongoing requests by corporates and researchers to expand the scope of the survey, CCA commenced its annual qualitative survey. Funded by CRDC, these two surveys are still conducted annually each year by CCA and the cumulative data, is showing medium to long term trends in agronomic practices and decision making in the Cotton Industry. These survey

projects are integral to CCA's annual funding but also informs industry of research gaps/strategic direction, provides evidence for industry reporting to external audiences, and provides the industry with data to inform internal discussion.

The CCA history project

As part of its 30-year history celebrations, CCA undertook a small project to document and preserve its history. The collation of this short history document is part of a larger project, which included the development of a CCA Organizational Video. This video, which captures the history and ethos of the organisation, can be viewed [here](#). Additionally, a number of photos spanning the history of the organisation have been collated into a photo story to celebrate 30 years of CCA friendships. This video can be accessed [here](#).

This history has been collated using archived CCA materials and documents, but our most valuable source of information has been its members. CCA would like to thank all of the past and present members, Associates and friends of CCA who have been part of this project, and have given their time, energy and archived memorabilia. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Mr Matt Holding who developed the idea for the project, and Mr Dallas King and Mr Doug McCollum who in conjunction with Matt gave time to guide the project.

Compiled by Leisl Coggan August 2016

REFERENCES

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