



# Report of the Executive Director

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GLOBAL LEADERSHIP: PUSHING  
COTTON'S BOUNDARIES  
Brisbane, Australia

2-5 December 2019  
Tour: 6-7 December



***I acknowledge the traditional owners of this country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. I pay my respects to them, their cultures, and to their elders both past and present.***

Honourable Chairman, (Minister of Agriculture), your excellencies, distinguished delegates, observers and ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity to address this, the 78<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the ICAC.

I am especially delighted that this year's Plenary Meeting is in Australia because for one it is warm and as a Brit that is always a very big plus but also because, from a cotton point of view, Australia is one of the few countries in the world that is at the cutting edge of cotton research. Therefore, it is very apt and appropriate that we should be discussing global leadership and pushing cotton's boundaries here in Australia, a country that has taken the lead in this area in so many ways.

But let me be clear; that doesn't and shouldn't mean just taking the lead in cotton research but in every aspect of our business from the way we grow or spin our cotton to the way we manage our farms, mills or factories and the way we treat and engage our people and communities. And now, with so many global challenges to the future wellbeing of cotton covering climate change, water usage, sustainability, traceability, competition from synthetic fibres etc etc now, more than ever, is the time that we need to show global leadership as an organisation and community to tackle these issues.

Last year we held our Plenary Meeting in Cote d'Ivoire, in Africa where average yields are among the lowest in the world averaging about 450 kg of lint per hectare in West Africa and 350 kg per hectare in East Africa compared to a global average of just under 800 kg per hectare. Today, we are in Australia where yields have at times exceeded 2,000 kg of lint per hectare and where water efficiency is amongst the best in the world. But even so as you will no doubt see, Australia has not been spared the effects of climate change and this highlights the need for us to put climate change at the top of our agenda moving forward as well as research into developing drought resistant varieties.

I have continuously talked about the fact that research is the lifeblood of cotton and those countries that have an effective and strong research base have the most successful cotton industries. Australia is no exception to this rule. It's Cotton Research and Development Corporation or CRDC is well renowned for the quality of its research and aims to invest \$20m Australian dollars across 300 projects involving 100 partners in 2019-20 alone. But this investment will aim to bring in about \$2b gross value in additional cotton production by 2023. The impact of this level of investment over the years can be clearly seen from the statistics on the CRDC website. What strikes you when looking at the website is not just the vast array of projects or the fact that yields have been increasing by 3% year on year but the level of engagement between CRDC and local farmers. In comparison, countries in Africa suffer from little investment in research and development and in many countries, there are few researchers. As part of the ICAC strategic plan, we will start next year to set up a regional research network for West Africa but perhaps now is also the time when we should be

exploring creating a research institute to service African countries or looking at how research organisations in developed countries can collaborate and assist those researchers in Africa in particular.

A lot has happened over the past year, most of which has been touched upon by the Chair *ad interim* but I would like now to take this opportunity to take a look at our aspirations for 2020 as well as expand on some of the successes from the past year.

First of all, staying on the theme of research. Between 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020 the ICAC and the ICRA – the International Cotton Researchers Association - will be holding their World Cotton Research Conference in Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt. This conference is held every four years and promises to be very successful.

And on the theme of conferences, it would be very remiss of me not to mention the ICAC International Seminar 2019 which is held in Taipei every two years. This year the focus of the Seminar which was held in May was on innovation in cotton and textiles and whilst research may be the life blood of cotton, without innovation we will not be able to create new markets and additional demand for our cotton and textiles. So this is a hugely important area which needs to be developed for the future.

#### Communication

Last year, I highlighted the importance of the ICAC being a central point of information on cotton issues and how we must improve our use of information technology and social media to reach more people, more effectively. Since then, we have seen a steady increase in social media followers on Twitter and LinkedIn. We released our monthly newsletter 'Cotton Matters' which is available to our stakeholders and as you have heard we have now published our first Annual Report where you will now be able to benchmark our performance. In addition, we are revamping our numerous publications to produce a few, key flagship publications and the first of these – The ICAC Cotton Data Book 2020 – has just been released and I highly recommend it to you.

I have continually stated that there are three themes critical to the future success of the ICAC: communication, partnerships and adding value.

The ICAC now has a solid base to communicate its messages backed by a sound Communications Strategy. As we move into 2020 we will continue to promote demand for cotton by combating negative reports and publicity through our #TruthAboutCotton campaign as well as building on the success of World Cotton Day. Next year, we will have greater autonomy on what we can and cannot do and early in the New Year we will be engaging with governments, international and national associations, NGO's, brands and retailers, in fact any organisation that anything to do with cotton to encourage them to celebrate World Cotton Day on the 7<sup>th</sup> October in a unique and interesting manner. That can be anything from a cotton party, a campaign to raise awareness in schools and colleges or perhaps just a simple special discount on cotton clothing. The idea is not that we tell you how to celebrate World Cotton day but rather you do something special and unique and we will provide the platform to share those stories and promote them globally. By raising the profile of cotton with a joint global effort on just one day a year we can raise awareness of the benefits of this beautiful natural product and hopefully encourage demand for it. This will also ensure that for at least one day

cotton will always have the advantage over synthetic fibres, so start thinking of ideas and we will be contacting you in the new year to help you develop your initiatives.

Developing strong and long-lasting relationships with key partners will stand us in good stead for the future and enable the ICAC to develop an even stronger leadership role within the cotton industry — and most importantly, to add value to all its members.

No better examples of this are our partnerships with Cotton Incorporated based in the United States and GIZ – the German Corporation for International co-operation based in Bonn who have both contributed to two innovative products developed by the ICAC that have the potential to have a significant impact on the lives of farmers, particularly illiterate farmers from countries in Africa and Asia. You will have a chance to witness and play with both of these projects during the World Café session but more importantly, we want your views and suggestions on how we can further develop these ideas to give even more value to farmers as well as enabling the ICAC to collect data on a global scale.

The first of these projects is a Soil and Plant Health App, developed by Dr Kater Hake from Cotton Incorporated and Dr Keshav Kranthi from the ICAC. This app is unique and has been developed for use by illiterate farmers and speaks to them in their own language or dialect. It is a diagnostic tool and through continually monitoring the weather and calculating the amount of heat units it is first of all able to monitor the growth and progress of the cotton plant and should a plant not be growing as predicted the diagnostic programme will allow a farmer to know what additional inputs are required to rectify the problem. In addition, by sending photos of possible pests and possible diseased leaves, the app will be able to ascertain, using Artificial Intelligence, whether an insect is harmful or beneficial and what action the farmer needs to take or to diagnose whether a plant has a disease or not and how to deal with it. The App also allows us to communicate with farmers and to send out warning messages for example. This App will be given free to all ICAC members for use by their farmers and we will be using the World Café session to explore other functions that we can add to further develop the App and provide even greater value to the farmer.

Another project that has created a stir is the ICAC Virtual Training programme. Two modules are being developed. One on Pests and Diseases and the other on Increasing Yields. Through this medium of immersive learning we will be able to transport a farmer virtually to a field to show him best practice plant management techniques or to show him in detail pests and diseases and advise on practical ways to deal with them. The beauty of such a training programme is that it can be used anywhere at any time and it creates an experience that is memorable and is literally ‘wow’.

Moving forward, the ICAC’s Expert Panel on the Social Environmental and Economic Performance of Cotton or SEEP Panel will also be working with our partners at BCI, the International Coffee Organisation and ISEEL to revisit sustainability with a view to developing a global set of indicators that can be applied across different commodities. We are also developing unique programmes for African countries such as highlighting the importance of seed development or how to increase a plant’s harvest index for example which we believe will ensure that a country’s yields will significantly increase within a period of 5 years.

It is initiatives and programmes such as these that bring added value to ICAC members and which I hope will not only retain our current members but also attract new members in the

future. Increasing our membership is incredibly important for the future success of the ICAC, as the larger we are in terms of numbers the stronger we are financially and the more capacity we have to provide information and to help and advise governments and farmers. The Chair ad Interim mentioned the recent addition of Nigeria as a member and also that a further 11 countries have expressed an interest in finding out more about what membership could mean for them. Some of those countries have sent delegations to this Plenary Meeting to observe and I would strongly urge you to speak to them about your own positive experiences with the ICAC so they will be encouraged to either join, or return to, the international cotton community.

However, there is sadly one group of countries that are missing in numbers from the ICAC membership and that is those consuming countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia. To assist in attracting consuming countries to the membership we will be consulting with our ICAC members who have spinning industries to establish how we can add value to consuming nations. We will also be recruiting a full-time member of staff with expertise in textiles to develop this position, once we have a clear understanding on what is required.

Another area which we plan to develop further is around policy analysis. Today, perhaps more than ever before, a country's trade or internal cotton policy decisions can have huge impacts on the trade of cotton in other countries and it is important that we monitor this, raise awareness of emerging trade related issues and be able to provide appropriate assessments for governments to use.

Internally, we will be conducting a major review of the ICAC Rules and Regulations and Staff Regulations, both of which have not been reviewed for over 20 years and also developing a whole suite of policies to cover such areas as travel, maternity and whistleblowing procedures etc. But perhaps the most important review that will take place will be that of the ICAC's membership structure to ensure that there is a meaningful engagement with key organisations, international and national associations and in particular the private sector. In this respect the revamped Private Sector Advisory Panel or PSAP, led by Mr Peter Wakefield, will be taking a key role in developing proposals and recommendations for further discussion by ICAC member governments.

Finally, I would like to talk about the changes to the Plenary Meetings. You will have noticed that the Plenary Meeting this year is one day shorter and the First Plenary Session is also considerably shorter timewise. Whilst of course it is nice to be able to hear from each and every one of our members about the state of their cotton crop, it was agreed at the Standing Committee to change the emphasis of this session to concentrate only on policies or issues in countries that could have a global or regional impact. This provides for a more focussed session and also helps towards us being able to shorten the Plenary Meeting by one day thus reducing the overall costs for the hosts and the delegates.

To end, I would like to acknowledge the work of the ICAC committees and my staff who service those committees, and who have contributed so much to the work and visibility of the ICAC. In particular, I would like to formally recognise the commitment and dedication of;

Mr James Johnson, Chair of the subcommittee on budget

Mr Peter Wakefield, Chair of the Private Sector Advisory Panel

Mr Allan Williams, Chair of SEEP – the Expert Panel on the Social Environmental and Economic Performance of Cotton

Mr Andrew Macdonald, Chair of the CSITC - The ICAC Task Force on Commercial Standardisation of Instrument Testing of Cotton

And the outgoing Chair, Mr Mark Mesura, and committee members of the International Forum for Cotton Promotion – IFCP – which disbanded earlier this year.

My thanks must also go to the members and officers of the Standing Committee who have continued to support me in my efforts to put so many new initiatives in place and to manage the huge changes associated with that.

Finally, my thanks must go to the government of Australia for hosting this 78<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting and to its organising committee. It is perhaps easy to forget that in a short meeting of less than a week, the enormous amount of work that has gone on behind-the-scenes to ensure that we have a Plenary Meeting that is both memorable and productive and where every detail is correct. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome delegates from non-member countries who are participating as observers as well as members of international organisations.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would remind you once again of the three themes that are critical to the future success of the ICAC and will be at the heart of everything we do; communication, partnerships and adding value.

Last year, I promised to personally meet with as many members as possible so that I could talk to you about the ICAC and its future plans and also to hear your views and understand the issues affecting you so we could be in a better position to help or advise and add value to your membership of ICAC. It is planned to visit each member at least every three years and I am pleased to report that since the last Plenary Meeting I have managed to visit 11 ICAC members in country and meet with their ministers.

Thank you Honorary Chairman, I know that we are going to have a truly memorable event characterised by that truly unique and famous Australian hospitality and I now look forward to a successful and productive Plenary Meeting.