

Response requested from DFA as to remit raised over Relationship between DINZ and Agresearch:

Remit #4: Relationship between DINZ and AgResearch

The Southland Branch is very concerned with the deteriorating relationship between DINZ and AgResearch and wants an explanation from the DINZ Board on this and its new research strategy. Answers are sought for the following questions:

- Why the relationship has been severed as we know it? And can it be reversed?*
- Does the Board understand how the industry benefited from that relationship?*
- What are the Board's plans to replace the lost funding and deer expertise with the possible degrading of the AgResearch deer science capability?*

Background

At the time of the presentation of the Remit at Conference 2024, DINZ Chair Dr Mandy Bell, who was also acting in a capacity as Executive Chair in the absence of a CEO, explained that various meetings have been held with AgResearch to ensure ongoing positive relationships, allowing both organisations to achieve their strategic objectives. The meetings included a November 2023 gathering involving the Agresearch CEO, and staff, DINZ staff, the DINZ chair and the chair of the Science Committee. This was followed by a meeting with the CEO, the AgResearch deer relationship manager, DFA executive and DINZ staff and Board in April 2024.

Update

On 3rd July an article appeared in the Otago Dairy Times quoting AgResearch On-Farm Sector Manager Megan Skiffington, who has looked after AgResearch's relationship with the deer industry for the past eight years.

Megan stated that she did not believe the relationship between the deer industry and AgResearch had deteriorated. She went on to state that AgResearch had put more money into deer research in the last 12 months than in the past.

This indicates that the relationship has not been severed (Remit point 1) and nor has funding nor capability been lost (Remit point 3).

The change that stimulated the remit from the Southland branch is that funding has moved from lump sum on an annual basis, to project funding which allows multi-year commitment.

Funding from the Research Trust and from DINZ itself, is now approved through the Research Committee (comprising the Research Trust Trustees) which is a Subcommittee of the Board. Involvement of the Board proves the importance of research to DINZ, and answers remit point 2 – yes the board understands the importance of the AgResearch relationship. The Board also understands the value of the elite breeding herd at Invermay and, in Megan's words "Deer Industry New Zealand has committed to funding the

"spectacular, well characterised genomic" deer herd at Invermay next year". In reality, the commitment is for longer than 12 months, and AgResearch is pleased with the change.

Furthermore, the change to project funding allows alignment with DINZ strategy. The Research Committee receives recommendations from the Research Advisory Panel consisting of two members appointed by the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association, two members from the wider industry appointed by the Research Committee and two members of the DINZ executive (currently the CEO and the Research and Policy manager). This means that DFA, industry experts and DINZ are working together to identify the projects that will achieve the outcomes needed.

The move away from bulk funding and from the previous Innovation Steering Groups was stimulated by (a) the new DINZ strategy and (b) an independent report and facilitated workshop which suggested that the groups were not achieving what had been anticipated.

In summary, Agresearch, like all CRIs, has been asked by the Government to make considerable budgetary savings and it will be affected by the Science System Review that is currently underway nationally. DINZ is continuing to support deer research-to ensure that deer farmers are in an improved position in future. Strategic investment with partners is key, and the partnership with AgResearch remains strong.