

Research program impact assessment

Program management

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Funding

	\$m
2006–07 actual	0.36
2007–08 estimate	0.45
2008–09 budget	0.50

Key performance indicators

- at least five impact assessment studies of completed projects published
- 2008–09 Project Leader Adoption Studies Report published
- thematic review of ACIAR forages research conducted
- impact assessment review of at least one program in one significant partner country conducted
- links established with partner-country, international centre and Australian impact assessment groups
- consistent framework for impact assessment activities introduced

Position

ACIAR has always had a significant investment in impact assessment. During the past few years there have been several reviews of these activities, and the recommendations from these external reviewers have been developed into a new set of guidelines for undertaking impact assessment studies for ACIAR. These guidelines were developed in 2006–07 and were used as the basis for all impact assessment studies during 2007–08. At the end of that period a workshop was held to review experience and finalise the guidelines. These have now been published and are used to ensure rigour and consistency in all future assessments.

This review process identified three broad levels of impact assessment which are important for ACIAR. These include the adoption studies (AS) and detailed full benefit–cost impact assessment studies (IAS) which ACIAR has been undertaking for some time. However, it identified the need for project impact assessment summaries (PIASs) which are quicker, more qualitative assessments but provide a first step in an impact assessment study and a basis for more systematically developing an effective assessment program. PIASs can serve two important functions: to focus attention on impacts (during project development, project review or after project completion), and as a useful, consistent basis for more detailed studies.

ACIAR has developed a database for systematically recording all these studies and providing important summary information to support decision-making. This continues to be developed, expanded and refined to ensure maximum use is made of the results of these impact assessment efforts.

Adoption of research outcomes is crucial to ensuring impacts from ACIAR's funding. Effective estimation of adoption is a major aspect of impact assessment studies and is why ACIAR includes adoption studies, 3 years after a project's completion, as a first stage in identifying this effect.

ACIAR has also found that the policy environment facing industries, farmers and businesses in the value chain can have an important impact on incentives for these groups to adopt research outcomes. As part of its impact assessment activities, ACIAR also funds a small program which reviews these policy environments for countries where it funds research. These analyses are used to identify possibilities for change and to influence choice of which research activities ACIAR will fund.

ACIAR has commenced the process of linking its impact assessment work to the activities of the Australian Government's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) and will strengthen this link during 2008–09.

Key priorities

Project-specific

- Publish five assessments of the impacts of completed projects in 2008–09. Measurement of economic growth, environmental, social and capacity-building impacts will be incorporated where identified as important and possible. This year we will continue the process of selecting some projects for assessment using a stratified sampling process. The stratification of projects will be based on a range of considerations such as program area, geographic location, types of research and sector of the economy.
- Review and publish the 2008–09 project leader adoption studies for the set of large projects concluded in 2003–04.

Capacity building

- Develop closer links with partner-country impact assessment groups to enhance estimation of technology adoption levels in future assessments. Training for partner-country impact assessment groups will also be included where appropriate. This training will include collaboration with the ATSE Crawford Fund.
- Develop collaboration with international CG centres in impact assessment activities, particularly of projects jointly funded through ACIAR.
- Provide feedback on the implications of impact assessment studies for research project development and management within ACIAR, through 'lessons learnt' style meetings with all staff.

- Enhance the clarification and estimation of the outcomes of new projects, by assisting project research groups during peer review of their proposals and by including impact analysis in the project design. In particular, summaries of the implications of impact studies will be provided to meetings of these groups.

Thematic studies

- Review the application and impact of ACIAR forages research activities and determine implications of the impacts for future research in this area.
- Undertake an assessment of at least one program of research for at least one significant partner country.
- Continue to develop a database of all past impact assessment studies and start a process of project impact assessment summaries (PIAS) studies, to provide a basis for and complement adoption and impact assessment studies.
- Work closely with the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) to ensure ACIAR's impact assessment work maintains close links with ODE's activities.