

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Summing up and the way forward

Dr Wendy Craik AM

Board member, The Crawford Fund



The message that came out of the conference, particularly the individual talks today, is very clear. I think the message is very well encapsulated in Uday Nidumolu's talk on his project in southern India on climate adaptation, where the locals had such a degree of ownership of the research findings that they made it into a street dance! I think that is quite extraordinary. And they didn't just dance it once, they danced it 200 times! I think that is absolutely amazing, and it shows how effective that partnership was.

We are facing a world where climate change, food security, loss of biodiversity, health challenges are threatening and are presenting all sorts of interlinked challenges to us. Today it was pointed out that there won't be a single technical solution, given the nature of the problems that we're facing. We need systems solutions, and we need local and regional approaches, and we need not just one solution but a diversity of solutions. And we need transformational solutions.

I think everyone would agree we have had a series of absolutely excellent talks, last night and today, illustrating the issues that we are facing. And we have heard a number of versions of the message that has come through, and it's all about partnerships and focusing first on the partnership: making sure that the researcher has a really good relationship with the people they are working with.

Quoting what people have said:

- The researchers' role is to listen, to have fun, and to be nice to people.
- A research project should be assessed against relevance, legitimacy, credibility, effectiveness, all those things, before it is started.
- Research should invest in the partnerships from day one.
- Put the locals at the centre of what you're doing.
- The things that need to be considered are co-design of the projects, communication, collaboration, inclusivity – gender and disability for example – and also local policy people.
- Think about scaling right from the beginning of the project, rather than leaving it till the end of the project.
- Question your accepted wisdom. You should embrace local constructs of relevance: for example, how local farmers operate in drylands (described as 'resilience from below').

We heard also about partnership approaches to capacity development, and I think that is another important part of research projects. People gave some very interesting talks about that today.

One of the fundamental questions was: Partnerships are all very well, but what about the time, the cost and the effort that you have to put into them, to make them work?

I think it is like a friendship. You cannot expect it to work immediately. It does take time. It does cost money. It certainly takes effort. But I think if you want transformational change it is really worth making those large

investments, because we know – and we know by default from the talks today – that everybody, based on the partnerships that they had – regarded the success as worth the time, cost and effort. I did not hear a single person say ‘This cost us too much’ (in whatever way) ‘when we got a transformational result’.

In summary, I would say that solving these global challenges does require multifaceted transformational projects. And we really need to start investing right from the very beginning with the partners that we are going to work with, if we are going to achieve those transformational changes.

Dr Craik has over 30 years’ experience in senior roles in public policy. She has been a Commissioner of the Productivity Commission, Chief Executive of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Executive Director of the National Farmers Federation, and Executive Officer of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. She has been on a range of boards including as President of the National Competition Council, Chair of the Climate Change Authority, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, NSW Marine Estate Management Authority and the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation. Board member roles include the Reserve Bank, Australian Institute of Marine Science, Australian Farm Institute and Dairy Australia. She was Deputy Chancellor of the University of South Australia. She is currently Chair of the OneBasin CRC, and a board member of the Crawford Fund, the Ocean Earth Foundation, the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility of the Pacific and Chair of the Advisory Board of the Royal Australian Mint. Wendy was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 2007 for service to the natural resource sector of the economy, particularly in the areas of fisheries, marine ecology and management of water reform, and contributions to policies affecting rural and regional Australia.