The implementation of the Research Quality Framework is already influencing the conduct of research in Universities. The Australian RQF will be unique in that it will attempt to measure both the quality and impact of the research being undertaken in Universities. The assessment of the quality of research has been undertaken for many years in the UK Research Assessment Exercises, and for even longer by the peer review process, but the measurement of impact is not as well understood.

It is very important for the evaluation of the CRC Programme and for the evaluation of individual CRCs.

Tom Spurling
Chief Executive Officer

Measuring the impact of research

The Research Quality Framework Development Advisory Group issued a paper in September 2006 with recommendations for the optimal methodology for assessing research impact. This document can be found here.

It made 13 recommendations including:

- The impact to be assessed for the RQF will be that impact which occurs during the six-year assessment period, but may be based on original research conducted earlier, and

- The basis of assessment for a Research Grouping will be an Impact Statement of no more than ten pages, which includes a statement of claims against impact criteria, up to four case studies illustrating those claims, and details of end-users who may be contacted as referees

The CRC Association has recognised that for the RQF and for other assessments, CRCs need to monitor their performance effectively and efficiently and articulate this performance to a range of stakeholders. To this end, Deloitte Insight Economics have published ‘Impact monitoring and evaluation framework: background and assessment approaches’ for the CRCA. This document is widely available, including on our website:

http://www.crcwood.unimelb.edu.au/

We intend to use this framework in evaluating the impact of the work of our CRC. The information so gathered could be very useful to our University colleagues in preparing their RQF submissions.
The hardwood drying project

As foreshadowed last month the Steering Committee for this project met on June 28 to discuss the results from the calibration trials. Timber from three species, *E. pilularis* (blackbutt), *E. regnans* (Victorian ash) and *E. obliqua* (messmate) was first subjected to a range of microwave treatments, then kiln dried according to the individual company schedule and finally compared for quality with a control.

The results showed that, in general, the quality of the microwave treated timber was not significantly different from the controls. The one exception was for backsawn messmate, in which case, the quality of the microwave treated timber was significantly better than the control material.

In the original plan, the next stage of the experiment was to be an industrial trial using the optimum microwave schedule. The meeting decided to proceed with this for the backsawn messmate, but to go straight to the accelerated drying phase for blackbutt. The next phase of the Victorian ash work will be decided in due course.

The Chair of the Committee, Dr Glen Kile, thanked the team, and notably Gerry Harris, Phil Blackwell and Grigori Torgovnikov, for their efforts in completing the first stage of this large and logistically complex project.
ACAWP

In his contribution to the 2006-07 Annual Report Professor Peter Vinden has commented that our investment in the pilot scale equipment at the Australian Centre for Advanced Wood Processing is paying dividends.

It is enabling the CRC to demonstrate to our commercial partners that all of the technical issues associated with the scale-up of laboratory research can be solved systematically by having access to pilot plants.

The good news is that we now have access to additional equipment. The high pressure preservative treatment vessel that we acquired second hand last year has been completely renovated and will be in use for a softwood project in a few weeks. The three experimental kilns that we need to complete the accelerated hardwood drying project will be installed by August and will be first used in the blackbutt experiment. The installation of both a dust extraction system for the workshop area and an emergency evacuation siren has been completed.

Finally

I have been spending most of my spare time in the past few months chairing PMSEIC Working Group on “Water for our Cities”. The report is available here.