PULSE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

A. Background

Pulse Australia was tasked by GRDC to initiate an industry consultation to explore the opportunity to establish a grain classification system, similar to that which exists for wheat and barley. The intent is that Grains Australia will develop and implement the pulse classification system.

A number of drivers have underpinned the interest in a pulse classification system. These were detailed in a discussion paper circulated widely in June 2022. The drivers were listed as:

i.   Market confusion through use of old/obsolete variety names
ii. Loss of EPR collection through misdeclaration
iii. Disconnect between breeder and end user
iv. Imprecise market signals to growers

The fundamental principle in formalising a pulse classification system as detailed in the paper is being that any classification system must be anchored in the end use/application of the grain.

The scope of the consultation was limited to lentils, chickpeas, faba beans, field peas and lupins

B. Consultation Process

The Pulse Classification Discussion Paper was provided to 2063 pulse industry stakeholders in June, 2022. Stakeholders included breeders, growers, advisors, processors, brokers, traders and exporters. Interested parties were provided with two weeks to prepare a response, although Pulse Australia did accept responses beyond the two-week time frame.

Eight written responses were received together with a one verbal response. Responses were received from the following organisations: Australian Grain Export Pty Ltd, DPIRD, Exports of Australia Pty Ltd, GIWA, Grain Growers Ltd, IDB Communications, InterGrain, NSW DPI, and PB Seeds.

C. Industry Feedback

I. Common Themes:

There was broad recognition that the existence of a classification system for pulses was warranted and would provide greater clarity for the market.

The need for an objective classification was also well recognised.

The benefit of providing clarity and understanding for the broader industry stakeholders of which class a specific variety would fall at the outset of a variety release of was also accepted.

There was also a recognition that strong technical support and testing methodologies will be required to underpin a robust classification. NSW DPI, Agriculture Victoria and AEGIC (through GGL) were proposed as being able to assist with technical support.

Finally, there was acknowledgement that the introduction of any pulse classification system will require extensive consultation and communication through the value chain.

II. Differing Themes:

The current practice of the utilisation of 'heritage' variety names to describe a class of pulses (such as 'Nipper' or 'Jimbour' type) was viewed by some as an important aspect that needs to be strongly considered/retained as the buyers in traditional markets (India sub-continent, Middle East) are familiar with these terms and use these terms as the common 'language' by which Australian pulses are identified and traded.[1]

Conversely, some respondents[2] viewed this aspect as out-of-date and reflecting only qualitative aspects of the varieties, tailored for existing markets, rather than an objective measure which may enable access to new markets (such as the plant protein market).

III. Commodity Specific Themes:

Two responses[3] challenged the rationale for lower ranking of lupins and suggested that this commodity be elevated in the priority listing.

GGL proposed that the priority ranking of chickpeas be elevated due to the higher value of this crop, while recognising that lentils should remain the first priority.

Three responses [4] made specific reference to lentils, two citing the issues that had arisen with "PBA Hallmark XTA" and PBA Highland XT" where there was some market confusion as

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[1] AGE, PB Seeds
[2] GGL, GIWA
[3] GIWA, DPIRD
[4] GGL, PB Seeds, Exports of Australia

to the appropriate class into which these varieties fell. These responses acknowledged that the development of a classification system for lentils will assist in preventing this sort of issue reoccurring. The other response identified classifying lentils as presenting the 'greatest challenge'.

PB Seeds provided an extensive list of key points to consider in developing a classification system for lentils, providing supporting data to many of the points raised.

IV. Challenging Themes:

Caution was provided in one response[5] in relation to identifying too many quality traits within a classification system and the impact breeding for multiple traits will have on yield.

One response[6] highlighted that lentil seed size and grain weight will vary within a variety according to season, geography and time of sowing and that consequently, there will be overlap of varieties between classes. As a result, a lentil classification system will need to account for these variations.

There was also recognition that with lentils, there is a need to have alignment with the Canadian class and grading system.

D. Next Steps

The following is envisaged as the next steps in developing a classification system for pulses.

1. Seek agreement from those providing submissions for their submissions to be made publicly available through the Pulse Australia and/or Grains Australia websites;
2. In conjunction with Grains Australia and relevant stakeholders, review the priority ranking for development of classifications by commodity, acknowledging there was broad consensus that lentils should be prioritised as No 1.
3. Grains Australia to constitute a steering group to develop an overarching pulse classification framework.
4. Establish a broad-based reference group with expertise in lentils to apply the pulse classification framework to establish a lentil classification system. It will be expected that the Lentil Classification Panel will be drawn from this initial broad-based reference group.
5. Develop the Lentil Classification System during 2023 for existing varieties with the intent that new varieties planned for introduction in 2024 will be classified according to the Lentil Classification System.
6. Draw on the extensive learning by Grains Australia developed through the lentil classification process to commence classification of other pulses in 2024.

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[5] InterGrain
[6] PB Seeds