

RG/GRA Structure – Report of the Review Group

1. Introduction and background

The GRA is currently structured around a Council, Research Groups, Networks and Flagships. The rules applying to these are set out in the GRA Charter. See Annex 2 for the current structure.

At the 2024 Extraordinary (online) Council Meeting, the GRA Council agreed to review the structure of the Research Groups and Networks to help ensure that the current structure is appropriate for delivering to the expectations of the current GRA Members and Partners with the focus and activities of the Groups and Networks being well aligned to the GRA’s strategic priorities. To undertake this review, the GRA Council agreed to establish a Working Group, comprising Council and Research Group representatives to produce a report for discussion at the 2025 Council meeting in Ireland.

Activities of the Working Group	
Working Group Meetings	30 October 2024 12 December 2024 30 January 2025
GRA Survey (open to all)	11 November -17 January
Letter to Partners	Sent 14 February 2025
Stocktake of relevant organisations	Completed by Secretariat and shared to the WG
Analysis of participation	Completed by Secretariat and shared to the WG, 10 December
Consultation with RG Co-Chairs	LRG, 7 February IRG, 20 February PRRG, 26 February CRG, 28 February

This report presents the findings of this work and makes a series of recommendations which the GRA Council should examine and take decisions on.

2. Recommendations

A- Research Groups (RGs), Networks and Flagship structure	
1.	Review the Structure of the Paddy Rice Research Group to better support the co-chairs and align the group with existing activities and initiatives such as the International Rice Research Institute, Africa Rice and the Global Methane Hub. Identify key work areas the group should focus on by rice production systems rather than region.
2.	To better reflect the activities of the Croplands Group, it should be renamed the Crop and Land Use Group.
3.	<p>To address the issues around overlap, duplication and the emergence of a large number of networks, it is recommended that some networks of the Croplands and Integrative Research Groups are merged, while others that are inactive or too far removed from the core mandate of the GRA be considered for closure. These changes will reduce the number of networks from 19 to 8. (see Annexes 2 and 4)</p> <p>The proposed changes are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Soil Carbon Network , currently under the Integrative Research Group, should be moved to the Land Use Group and merged with the Peatland Network. It would be named the Soil and Peat Carbon Network. This would offer synergies between these two groups (very similar pool of researchers) and reduce the risk of duplication. • The Landscape Management and Farm to Regional Networks could be merged and retitled as a Farm Systems Network, sitting under the Integrative Research Group. Merging these would bring synergies and offer an opportunity to examine these areas from a more holistic, systems perspective. • Relevant elements that are active in the Conservation Agriculture Network should be moved to the Soil Carbon Network and/or the Nitrous Oxide Network, again to ensure synergies and avoid duplication. • The Inventories and NDC Network and the Indigenous Research Network should be taken out of the IRG and established as stand-alone ‘Groups’ (Not Research Groups) reporting to the Council (see diagram 2). This would address concerns raised that they don’t fit well under the IRG structure. • The Integrated Crop Livestock Network is not active and so it should be closed and any interested members incorporated into other relevant networks. • The Agroforestry Network should be closed (noting there is an agroforestry flagship in any case). The activities of the network are not sufficiently aligned with the core mandate of the GRA to warrant a standalone network. • The Circular Food System Network should be closed, as it is an area too far removed from the GRA Charter (para 1), there are a wide range of existing global initiatives in this area, and the hosts do not have a desire to continue with it.

4.	<p>Acknowledging the Integrative Research Group will look very different from these changes, with only one network contained within it, a more in-depth consultation should take place to determine what areas of activity it should focus on. It is considered that the GRA does need a cross-cutting group which examines research areas that cross several domains, and which need to be investigated from a systems perspective. It could be that such a group would not be standalone and could straddle the other three groups, but this needs to be considered in more detail.</p>
5.	<p>Should the recommendations outlined above in relation to the changes proposed for the current Croplands Research Group and the Integrative Research Group be approved by Council, it will be necessary to consult with the current Co-Chairs of those groups to determine their willingness or interest in continuing in those roles, and also to review the membership of those groups given their changed structure and activity. This consideration is also required given the USA, who have been a co-chair of the Croplands research group, have now withdrawn from the GRA.</p>
6.	<p>The new proposed structure of the Crop and Land Use Group will be quite different and therefore it is recommended that this be trialled for a period of 1-2years and then reviewed. It is also noted that the co-chairs of this group may wish to expand the networks beyond the two proposed.</p>
<p>B- Guidelines to be developed for the establishment and closure of Networks</p>	
1.	<p>GRA Charter states (para 24) that Research Groups may establish sub-groups, may promote networks and may encourage regional networks. The Charter (para 10) also states that the Council governs the overall framework, procedures, and activities of the RGs.</p>
2.	<p>Considering the above, the Secretariat should prepare guidelines on the establishment, operation and closure of networks to bring more clarity.</p> <p>The guidelines should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Groups may agree to close a network if it no longer supports the Group work plan. • The Research Group Co-Chairs have the power to close a network. If a member of the Research Group doesn't agree with the decision, it can be put to a vote of the members of the Research Group with a simple majority required to confirm or reject the decision of the co-chairs. • If a Research Group wishes to establish a new network, this must be brought to Council for approval. • Conditions that could apply for closing a network (is it active, is it succeeding in its ambitions)
3.	<p>Consideration should be given to amending the GRA Charter, para 24, under points a, b, and c, to ensure that Council maintains an over-arching view of the structures that exist within each of the Research Groups and will minimise the risk of overlap.</p>
<p>C- Research Groups' workplan</p>	

<p>1. The Research Group Co-Chairs should develop an action or work plan which should be considered by Council at its annual meeting (see para 22 of the GRA Charter). This will enhance dialogue between the Research Groups and the Council, allowing the Council to provide more guidance and direct resources to work of the Research Groups. The Research Groups will be able to take into account the views of Council where relevant, practical and implementable.</p>
<p>2. The Research Group Research Groups should provide Council with a report on that work plan at the subsequent annual Council Meeting.</p>
<p>D- Regional activities</p>
<p>1. Research Group Co-Chairs should consider whether any regional activities (e.g. workshops, region specific meetings, exchanges, etc) are required within their group, noting the appetite for these in some geographical areas.</p>
<p>E- Flagships</p>
<p>1. The Secretariat should develop guidelines for the establishment, operation and closure of flagship projects. Elements to be included in the guidelines include, <i>inter alia</i>, describing the role of flagships, what they are and, more importantly, what they are not, how they function, that they are time-bound, and that they are under reporting control of Research Groups.</p>
<p>2. The Feed Additives (soon concluding), RUMEN Gateway, and Satellite Monitoring to Improve Livestock Management flagships should report to the LRG.</p>
<p>3. The Agroecology and Agroforestry, and the Reducing N2O flagships should report to the Land Use Research Group (former CRG).</p>
<p>4. The Economics of Cattle GHG Mitigation flagship should report to the IRG.</p>
<p>F- Joint research calls</p>
<p>1. Scope the possibility for joint research call(s) between GRA members in areas where Research Group Co-Chairs and networks have identified gaps in research questions / data sharing and for which there are no readily identifiable funding mechanisms available. Research Group Co-Chairs should describe to Council where there are such gaps, focusing on identifying specific research topic(s) which require a global funding instrument. Council should then consider this request.</p>

3. Main conclusions

1. The structures (Council, Research Groups, Networks, flagships) need to be simplified and streamlined. There is merit in retaining the Research Group, Network and flagship model, but too many Networks in particular have emerged, with significant overlap in places.
2. The LRG generally works well but the other Research Groups have issues that need to be addressed. The LRG could be used as a case study to support other groups in coordinating activities.
3. Below are some key success factors for a Research Group:

- having the necessary support of Council,
 - having the leading research scientists involved, that those scientists have passion and dedication and see a value in the group,
 - having clear research questions of common interest and which are relevant/pressing,
 - having flagship(s), or other identifiable research activities, and being able to source funding to progress them,
 - working on areas that are connected in with other international initiatives.
4. Develop guidelines and mechanisms for the establishment, review and closure of Networks.
 5. Create activities enabling regional involvement may be necessary (e.g. workshops / visits) to help increase engagement by those members who are not currently active.

Annex 1 – Results from Consultation

Below are the key elements of feedback received from the consultations that have taken place.

- Integrative and Croplands Research Groups need reviewing.
- Create two new groups - Agri soils – Farm Systems.
- Inactive groups should be wound down.
- Structures are currently over complicated. Everyone needs clarity on roles of Council, RG's, Flagships, Networks and how they interact
- RG's and Flagships need to be reconciled.
- More interaction needed between some groups such as collaboration on grant applications.
- Circularity group in theory should tie everything together.
- Need more joint annual meetings of RG's.
- Lots of countries are members but not actively participating.
- Need to look at the methods of operation – Data Platforms, AI, Meeting modalities – time zones an issue.
- Work on areas that can be implemented at scale.
- Industry engagement is an important dimension that needs work – Berlin meeting good example.
- Networks that are good tend to have funded projects.
- Council meeting needs a scientific conference alongside.
- Researchers often not clear about expectations of Council – Is it papers? Training? Cliff-Grads?
- LRG success – Had the key researchers involved especially in the networks, were passionate, saw value, structure has worked.
- Barrier – it is all voluntary, networks especially, leaders of these need to be supported by their institutions or government.
- Can't have networks without RG's, would be unwieldy.
- A Horizontal, cross cutting structure should work on areas like science to policy, utilising material expertise from across groups.
- INDC network doesn't know where it fits.
- Examine whether some structures fit best under RG's and others directly under Council.
- Also need flexibility – some issues don't need a group or network.
- Look at short lived cross network activities for some issues.
- Need to look at regional groups – organise meetings in same/similar time zones.
- What to do about inactive networks?
- Do we need guidelines on what a network needs to have for support?
- For RG's, the co-chairs should have control over continuation, formulation of networks – not clear who has this power at the moment.
- RG's are setting up networks themselves, leading to some overlaps – need procedures.
- Need guidelines for dissolving – Charter (para 26) says the RG's decisions are made by consensus. Para 27 also says the RG co-chairs can take decisions on behalf of the group when authorised to do so by the group
- Not enough central coordination of networks.

- Should mandate RG co-chair to conduct periodic reviews of networks, their performance, then report to council – is already done?
- Flagships are important for getting heavy hitting researchers involved.
- Need to better explain what is and what isn't a flagship – lot still think its funding, lot of confusion, could be distracting people in networks and RG's.
- Networks do well when working on a hot topic and connected to other international initiatives.
- Co-chairs don't get enough support from Council.
- Examine whether RG co-chairs could present an outline of new plans for year ahead to council.
- Review flagships. RG's have no control of these.
- Need a cross-cutting group on soils.
- Need to integrate across scales and sectors, farm scale, regional scale.
- IRG co-chairs struggling with all the networks – this group and its networks gone way too broad.
- IRG not aware CRG working on soils, not ideal.
- Five networks in IRG are active.
- Definite scope creep in IRG – need to re-focus, what is in the value proposition, reduce overlap, go back to charter.
- IRG most successful when had funded projects.
- Examine if national research agencies could run funded calls in some areas to help a RG get stuff done.
- Indigenous network and science to policy network – need to reflect on where they fit best.
- Hard to ask RG's to have and report on deliverables in a voluntary situation with no funding.
- If RG's are left in science realm, will be discussions among scientists but this may not be entirely useful to government.
- Drop circular economy from IRG, Indigenous also. Inventories - may not be needed, national experts work on these as much as scientists but former not involved, NDC's policy
- IRG – soil scale, farming practice, economics, carbon markets - check there aren't other international initiatives better placed to do economics.
- Clearly no system for replacing co-chairs or allowing them to stand down and find replacement.

Secretariat Analysis:

- While some regional meetings were held (APRRG met with partners in February 2024), the paddy rice Research Group itself didn't meet in 2020, 2021, 2023 and 2024
- Only 7 of the 16 networks across all four Research Groups are considered active: animal health, feed and nutrition, manure management, peatlands, inventories and NDC, circular food systems, animal breeding and rumen microbial network, and indigenous research network.

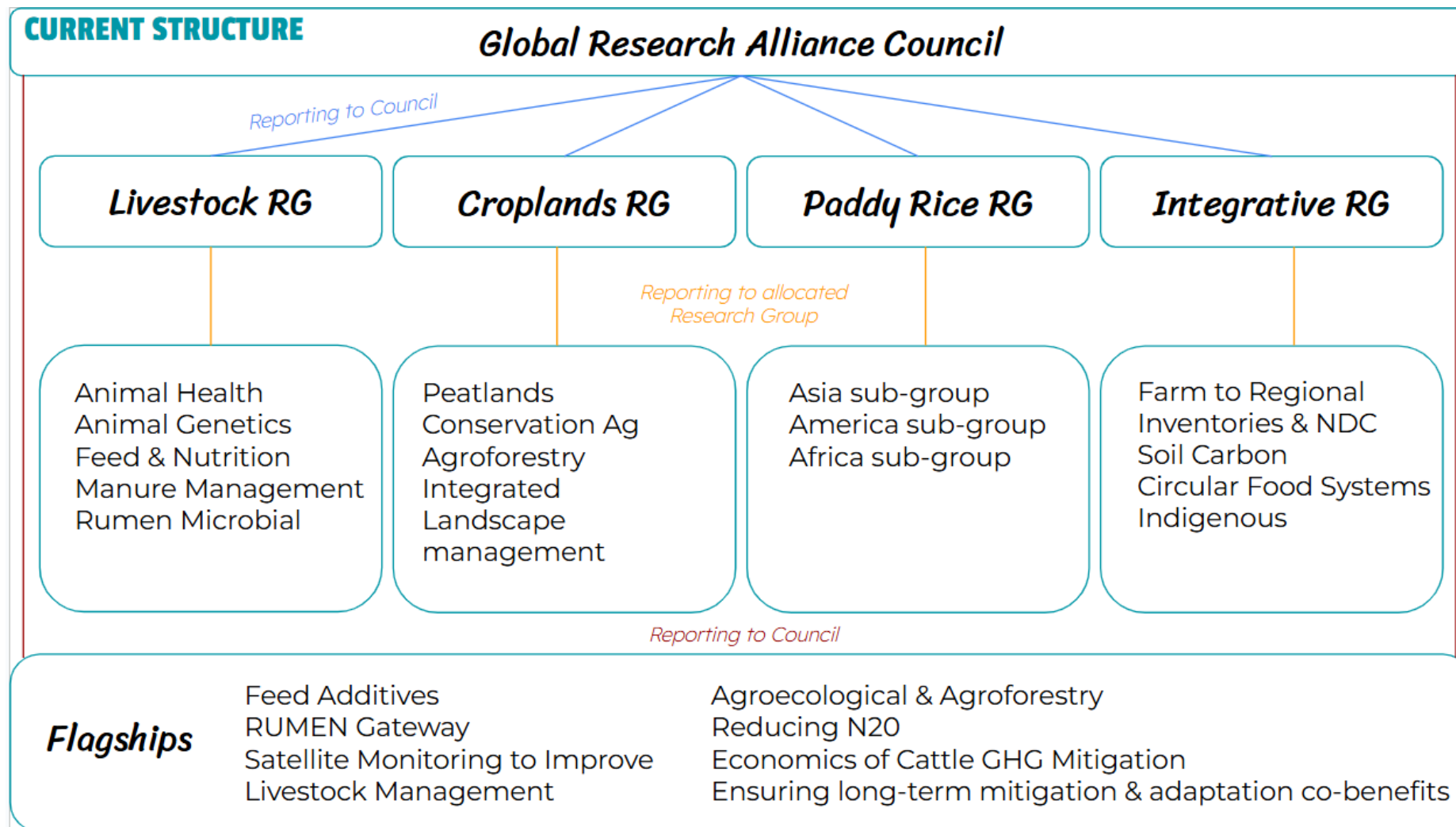
Feedback from Partners:

- The inventories and NDC network could consider working more closely with the FAO (who have expressed an interest in this)

Survey:

- The survey results indicate different levels of awareness and engagement across GRA groups and activities. The fellowship programmes are the most recognised and participated in. Awareness of Council activities was surprisingly low, at only 33% among Members and Partners.
- Overall, Flagship Projects, Webinar/Training programs, and Networks have moderate awareness, while Conferences/Symposia, Science-to-Policy communication efforts, and other research collaborations are less well-known.
- Need guidance on how to participate in activities. Some suggested refreshing focus areas, ensuring the right people are involved, and clarifying intended goals and outcomes
- Respondents identified strategic communication, sustainable financing, and clearly defined goals and expectations as critical for a successful council, Research Group, or network. They emphasized the importance of defining responsibilities and clarifying each Research Group's contribution to the broader goals of the GRA, highlighting the need for structured guidance in these areas

Annex 2 – Present GRA Structure

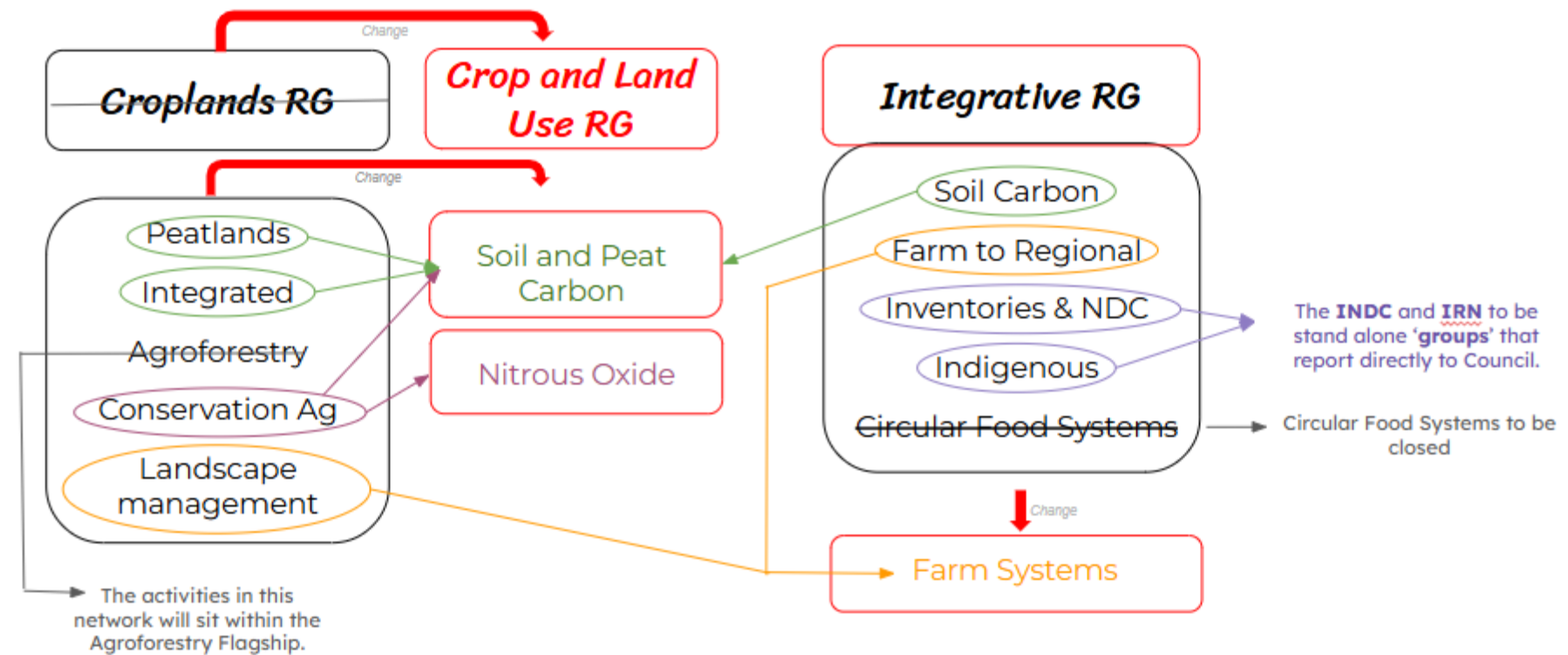


Annex 3 – Proposed Changes

Restructure Networks across the Croplands and Integrative Research Groups

Rename Croplands to '**Land Use Research Group**', and combine some of the following networks to focus on '**Soil Carbon**' and '**Nitrous Oxide**'.

Consolidate Networks under the **Integrative Research Group** to establish a '**Farm Systems Network**'



Annex 4 – Proposed Restructure

