



**RASC Next Generation  
5<sup>th</sup> Understanding & Assistance Mission  
Papua New Guinea  
October 2015**



*This report is intended as an update and should be viewed as an interim/internal RASC report. The full report is to be presented at the 27<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Agricultural Conference in Singapore 2016 in a 20-minute session, along with a document collating the daily diaries of the group.*

**RASC Next Generation Delegates**

**Tom Green** – AUSTRALIA – Mission Leader

*Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales /Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales*

**Cassie MacDonald** – AUSTRALIA – Mission Leader

*Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales /Agricultural Societies Council of New South Wales*

**Will Hyde** – ENGLAND

*Royal Bath & West of England*

**Michael Halliday** – SCOTLAND

*Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland*

**Aled Jones** - WALES

*Royal Welsh Agricultural Society*

**Emily Craven** – ENGLAND

*Royal Bath & West of England Society*

**Hayley Bass** – AUSTRALIA

*Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland*

**Ori Mela** – Papua New Guinea

*Morobe Province Agricultural Society*

**Crystal Artango** – Papua New Guinea

*Morobe Province Agricultural Society*

**Arthur Roberts** – Papua New Guinea

*National Agricultural Research Institute*

First and foremost, we are most pleased that the mission to PNG in 2015 was a great success. This was due to an excellent group of delegates who actively participated in the concept of the mission through gaining understanding and offering assistance throughout the trip. The group fitted in well with each other and everyone got along and worked together extremely well, this is a strong testament to the RASC and its member organisations in the calibre of people that are being selected at various levels to become involved in the organisation.

Our trip really began as we landed in Mt Hagen, deep within the highlands of PNG. After a day of transiting various flights from Brisbane, Australia it was a relief to arrive with all boots on the ground and on schedule. On exiting the airport compound it was another huge relief to see Michael Dom's big smile awaiting us amongst the crowd at the gate, ready to accompany us on the next leg of our Journey.

The three nights spent around the Tambul area, approximately an hour's drive from MT Hagen, were quite different to what many of us expected. The temperature and of course the humidity were much lower than expected, actually requiring a fire to be lit each night within our accommodation area. These days allowed the group to be thrown straight into the trip with real hands on and eye opening visits. These visits included a number of small and larger farms within the surrounding villages. These operations ranged from family piggeries of just 5-10 pigs through to one that had up to 50 breeding sows.



The big issue at the time had been the devastating frosts that had occurred in the weeks prior to our visit, these had been a result of the current El Nino weather event in the southern hemisphere. This had killed many of the sweet potato crops. We saw not only how important the sweet potato crop is as a part of the staple diet but also how important it is to food security and how the balance is a knife's edge as many areas were requiring food aid to be delivered. This point I personally found very important, having participated on the first RASC NG Mission to PNG in 2009 where Michael Dom had been developing and delivering information advising how to make sweet potato silage as a source of pig feed. It was something we had helped show farmers in the Goroka area back then, so it was great to see that information had made its way up to the Tambul region. One farmer had taken a lot of convincing by Michael and his colleagues but had eventually silaged around half of his frosted crop. Upon our arrival at his farm, we saw first hand the result in that silage was being used as the pigs only current source of feed and the crop he had left behind that had been frosted had rotted away within 1-2 weeks of the frost event.

This highlighted the importance to all of us how on the ground research and extension is vital in providing solutions and efficiencies within agriculture. It also showed how critical agriculture is to the survival of individuals and families in these remote and developing communities.



From Tambul we were to fly back via Mt Hagen to Goroka. However, due to the flight being cancelled in the weeks leading up to our trip it had been organised to drive down the long and very rough road with Mike Quinn accompanying us. This was a great opportunity for each of the delegates to get to know Mike as well as begin to ask the many questions with resulting discussions instigated by our experiences in the area.

The road was certainly very rough and highlighted to everyone the challenging logistics of transporting goods to and from the highlands and in fact, all around PNG. After a long day of driving we reached Goroka where Grant Jephcott gave us a quick tour of his coffee exporting facility and an insight into the PNG coffee industry.

Next stop was down the mountain into the Markham valley, which provided spectacular views down through the large valley. Our stop for the day was at Ramu Agri-Industries for tours around their Palm Oil, Sugar and Beef operations. At the beef operation I was happily surprised to see past NG delegate and friend John Mock working as one of the managers at the feedlot. This stop was the group's first taste of a large commercial farming operation in PNG. All the staff were interested in what our visit was all about and were fantastic hosts in the tours and the night we stayed at the guesthouse at RAMU.



We then continued further along the Makham valley east towards Lae, calling in for several visits along the way. The highlight of these visits was to Ori's farm. Ori was participating in the mission and sponsored by the Morobe Show Society. Here we were treated to lunch by his family before touring his family's property which included beef and coco. Finally before leaving the group's vets Cassie and Emily inspected some of the horses his family planned to compete on at the Morobe Show.

Arriving in Lae signified the end of our daily travelling through PNG as we would now be based there for the most part of our remaining trip.

After the forced cancellation of the 2009 Morobe Show the last time the RASC NG mission was in PNG, it was a real highlight for myself personally to have finally made it back to experience the Show.

Show day was a day that many were looking forward to. We were all ready to assist wherever we could at the 54th Morobe Show. As a diverse NG group we were all able to play to our strengths, the vets provided veterinary cover, our beef experts did the cattle judging and Will Hyde judged the flower tent.

For Emily and Cassie, it was a great chance to view all the competing horses. They spent most of their time in the mounting yards. They were pleasantly surprised to find most horses in remarkably good condition, only attending to a small leg injury at the end of Day 1 of the show. One of their highlights was of course the opportunity to ride in the main arena and do a quick round of show jumping. Interestingly, this had a much larger impact than just providing both Cassie and Emily with bragging rights on "International Show Jumping" at Morobe Show. Afterwards we were made aware that many of the young local women involved in agriculture were inspired by what they had seen Cassie and Emily do and are now hopeful that such an event may come about in the future in which they are able to compete as PNG women have not competed in the horse events in the past.



Meanwhile, others were quite busy in the cattle sheds judging with past NG delegate John Mock. They had been asked to provide explanations and commentary on their reasoning for their decisions in each section including conformation and type. This proved to be a major hit, with our fellow NG delegate Arthur representing the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) in PNG and sponsored by RASC, providing translation into Pidgin English, the questions kept pouring in. Interestingly, many of the farmers stated they would have brought other animals if they had a better understanding of the criteria. This had a lasting impact on our group, as it was clear to see the huge impact they were providing to the small-scale exhibitors present at the show.

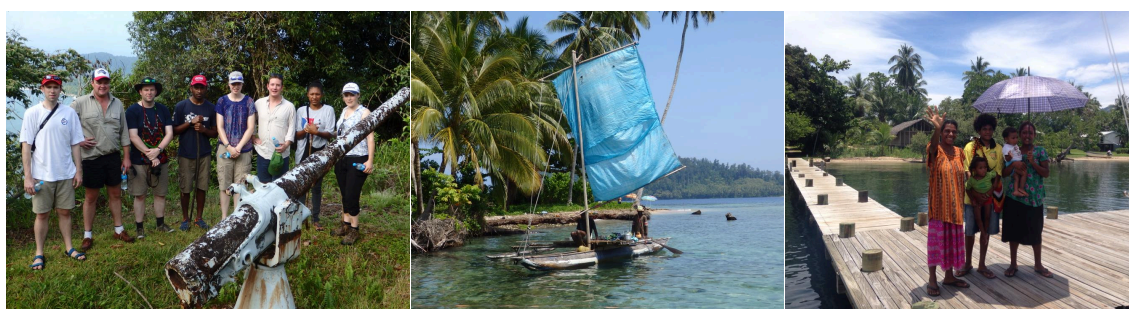
In the meantime, we also manned a stall set-up by us to promote the RASC's interests and answer questions about our trip to PNG. One of the real highlights was the different ring entertainment provided in the main arena including a display of guard dogs where small skits were played out in front of the crowd resulting in the guard dogs being used to diffuse situations and catch the "criminals". This was to the great delight of a cheering crowd.



However, our time at the Show was just as much about learning ourselves as educating and sharing our experiences. We all managed to find some time to have a good explore of the show and I know we all took home interesting observations that could be implemented into our own shows; 'Understanding' and 'Assistance' both given and received in the truest sense of the words.

The hospitality provided by the show committee was faultless and we were able to debrief and share ideas and observations after both days of the show in an informal setting over food and drinks and then on our last night we attended a final farewell and thankyou dinner.

After the show we took some time out to regroup and reflect whilst at the same time still immersing ourselves into understanding the wonderful and diverse country that is PNG. We spent two days in Salamoua, arguably one of the most beautiful and undisturbed areas in the world. It has very important history and was one of the key areas that acted as a turning point in World War II. We were able to fully grasp the enormity of the area's history as Morobe Show President Phil Franklin and his wife Louise had many maps and artefacts from the war and took us walking to see many of the lookouts where several old guns are still mounted.



We were able to snorkel and go out on the water, experiencing some of PNG's untouched coral and beaches. From spending the early part of the trip in the mountains and then moving progressively to lower ground and then to the coast, we really did see much that PNG has to offer and appreciate the diversity and thus independent challenges that the different areas face.

This diversity of staple foods in PNG was more than evident when we bartered for a yellow fin tuna for our dinner from local fishermen out in the ocean. The final trade: two cans of coke and three packets of beef biscuits in return for the fish.

These two days were also key in allowing us the opportunity to really reflect on all that we had seen and compare ideas and thoughts whilst still operating as a group. We all valued this opportunity as a chance to compare observations, especially as we all had taken different points out of every visit and sight seen, so it really tied together any loose ends and enabled us to see the whole picture by collaborating together.

Even though for some of the group this was a second or third mission with the RASC, this PNG visit was considered by all of us a once in a lifetime trip. It also showed how important it is to have great people locally on the ground to assist in organising and being integral to our positive experience.

As a group we tried to appreciate everything that we were seeing over the course of the trip and all took John Bennett's wise words on board that you have to regularly pinch yourself to avoid sensory overload, as there is just so much to see; but ultimately one didn't nor couldn't fully appreciate all that we had seen until reflecting afterwards. We were fortunate to see a wide variation in land and farming, from the highland regions (subsistence farming), to lower ground (larger enterprises such as Ramu) and the coastal areas (the hub of the coffee trade) and meet a wide range of people along the way.

However, despite that variation, one overwhelming and consistent feature was the generous hospitality of our hosts along the way. We were allowed to fully engage with all aspects of culture, and treated to traditional food, a sing sing, taken to schools, farms, shows and industries. The mission was a wonderful opportunity to see Papua New Guinea in all its glory. We saw the challenges - and in an El Niño year, there were many challenges, but we also saw the smiles and a nation that was determined to survive and thrive with whatever Mother Nature sends. We were given so many opportunities to see and learn and most of all understand, and in developing that understanding I know we were able to assist. However, I know it wasn't one way traffic and I hope all of those that we met took understanding from us, because they certainly assisted us. We all face challenges and we all address them differently and that communication is an invaluable opportunity for all of us.

**Tom Green, Australia**  
NG Team Leader

