

17 February 2022



**The Rice  
Marketing  
Board**  
FOR THE STATE  
OF NEW SOUTH  
WALES

Dear Growers,

**Appointment of Mr. John Bradford and Mr. Ian Mason  
as RMB nominees on SunRice's Board**

The purpose of this letter is to address a range of comments that have been made to the media by a small number of NSW rice growers in relation to the Rice Marketing Board's (RMB) recent decision to nominate Mr. John Bradford and Mr. Ian Mason as its nominees on SunRice's Board.

On 24 April 2021, I wrote to all NSW rice growers to explain that because the RMB had agreed to assist SunRice in its efforts to reduce the size of its (SunRice's) Board, only two of the three Members elected to the RMB would be nominated to also sit on SunRice's Board. In my letter, I reminded growers that the primary purpose of an RMB election is to elect grower representatives to the RMB and encouraged people who might be primarily interested in joining SunRice's Board to consider standing for direct election to that board. I further indicated that once the 2021 RMB election was finalized, the three Members that were elected would be required to participate in an interview process to identify which two would also become RMB nominees on SunRice's Board – a copy of that letter, which included the selection criteria that would be applied, is on the RMB's website (go to <https://www.rmbnsw.org.au/news-article/46845> ).

**All of the assertions that have been made to the media in relation to the RMB election and nominations process are without foundation.** There have also been some additional assertions made, less publicly, that also warrant a response from the RMB.

Assertion No. 1: that NSW rice growers' votes have been disregarded. The fact is that the three candidates that came 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the RMB election (Ms. Melissa DeBortoli, Mr. John Bradford and Mr. Ian Mason respectively) are in the process of being appointed to the RMB by the NSW Government and they are already participating in RMB business activities (albeit as observers until such time as the Government appointment processes have been concluded).

Assertion No. 2: that the candidate that came 1<sup>st</sup> did so by a "significant margin" and that the candidates that came 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> should have, by virtue of "tradition", automatically gone onto SunRice's Board. The facts are:

- The election was conducted by the NSW Electoral Commission not the RMB.
- The Commission advised that there were 709 eligible votes counted and the margin between the candidate that came 1<sup>st</sup> versus 3<sup>rd</sup> was 17 votes (for further detail, go to <https://www.rmbnsw.org.au/news-article/46845> ).

- Tradition does not dictate the nomination of RMB elected Members to SunRice’s Board – the nomination of RMB Members to SunRice’s Board was formally agreed as a condition of the Sole and Exclusive Export Licence issued by the RMB to SunRice.

Assertion No. 3: that the selection of Mr. Bradford and Mr. Mason was a “Captain’s pick” (with the captain presumably being a reference to the RMB Chair). The facts are:

- The decision to move to a selection process to determine which two elected Members would be the RMB nominees on SunRice’s Board was a decision taken by the RMB after detailed consideration of a range options (including first-past-the-post) by the RMB’s Governance Committee and subsequently the Board.
- The composition of the selection panel was determined by the RMB, less Mr. Bradford and Mr. Mason (who were excluded from the related decision because they were candidates in the election).

Assertion No. 4: that the selection process was “corrupt”. In the absence of any supporting detail, the RMB assumes that the person/s making this assertion is inferring that the outcome of the interview process was in some way pre-determined, or that the process favoured Mr. Bradford and Mr. Mason because they were already on the RMB and serving as RMB nominees on SunRice’s Board. The facts are:

- All three elected Members were provided with the same opportunity to put their case to be an RMB nominee on SunRice’s Board.
- The questions put to the three elected Members related directly to the selection criteria.
- It is not unusual for incumbents to be interviewed for senior roles – indeed, it’s commonplace in both the private and public sector. In such situations, the challenge faced by incumbents is that their claims regarding their attributes, experience and readiness for a role are more readily able to be tested by the interview panel. Interview panels may also expect incumbents to provide more detailed responses. The challenge for non-incumbents is to convince the selection panel that their experiences and attributes can be readily applied in a new circumstance.
- At the end of each interview, the selection panel had a general discussion on the elected Member’s performance during the interview and the related views of the panel members were very consistent. When all three interviews had been completed, I asked the two other panel members to identify which two elected Members should be recommended as the RMB’s nominated members on SunRice’s Board – once they had done so, I indicated the order of merit as I saw it. Again, there was unanimous agreement that Mr. Bradford and Mr. Mason be recommended to the RMB as its nominees.
- The selection panel consisted of Ms. Victoria Taylor (RMB Deputy Chair), Ms. Gillian Kirkup (retiring RMB Member and outgoing RMB nominated Member on the SunRice Board) and myself (RMB Chair). Given that Mr. Bradford and Mr. Mason were candidates, that left only Ms. Barbara Clark and Ms. Su McCluskey to consider the selection panel’s recommendation and they subsequently agreed the panel’s recommendation.

Assertion No. 5: that the RMB missed the opportunity to address the gender imbalance on, and add to the diversity of, SunRice’s Board. The facts are:

- Gender balance and diversity on SunRice’s Board is fundamentally a matter for SunRice, not the RMB.
- Four of the RMB’s seven Members are female (and that has been the case for a number of years).
- Two of the three Members on the RMB’s selection panel were female.
- Four of the five RMB Members who were eligible to, and did, consider the nominations issue were female.

Assertion No. 6: Growers are losing control over their board and the RMB is comprised of “faceless bureaucrats”. The facts are:

- Unlike the RGA and SunRice, the RMB is not a grower-controlled entity. The RMB is a NSW Government statutory body that exists to regulate the marketing of NSW-grown rice – for further detail on the responsibilities and activities of the RMB, go to <https://www.rmbnsw.org.au/about-the-board> .
- The four appointed Members of the RMB are experienced directors with considerable backgrounds in governance, finance, regulation and agriculture – they too must now come through a selection/interview process (conducted by DPI but with RMB representation).
- The RMB is not “faceless”. Board members go to considerable lengths to attend many industry activities; the Board is a co-sponsor of many RGA activities, including its leadership development programs; and the RMB is a non-voting member on the RGA’s Central Executive.

In sum, the RMB hopes that the above facts will provide most growers with confidence that it has acted in the best interests of the NSW rice industry in relation to the nominations issue and that its associated processes and decisions bear no resemblance to the descriptions and views being publicly aired by a small number of rice growers.

Should you wish to discuss the nominations matter with me, please contact Ms. Carol Chiswell (RMB Secretary) on (02) 6953 3200.

Yours sincerely,



John Culleton  
Chair, Rice Marketing Board for the State of New South Wales