

Organic Horticulture RD&I Working Group – Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Organic Horticulture RD&I Working Group?

The Working Group is an independent body that will provide ongoing governance, strategic oversight, and annual review of the Organic Horticulture RD&I Strategy 2026–2035. It is the mechanism by which the sector's research and investment priorities are kept current, funded, and accountable.

Why is AOL establishing this Working Group?

The Organic Horticulture RD&I Strategy 2026–2035 is a 10-year roadmap — not a one-off exercise. To ensure it stays relevant, attracts investment, and delivers measurable outcomes, it needs an independent, sector-led body providing strategic oversight. The Working Group ensures the Strategy remains a living document, driven by the people it is designed to serve.

Who is eligible to apply?

We are seeking expressions of interest from individuals with expertise and passion for driving evidence-based, sector-led innovation in organic horticulture. We are looking for representation across growers and producers, certifiers, research institutions, funding bodies, industry and retail, and government. If you are passionate about the future of certified organic horticulture in Australia, we want to hear from you.

How large will the Working Group be?

The Working Group will comprise 8–12 members, alongside a Chair. Membership will be staggered across different term lengths to ensure continuity as the group evolves.

Do I need to be from the certified organic sector specifically?

Not exclusively. While members with direct certified organic horticulture experience are a priority, we are equally seeking individuals with broader horticulture RD&I, research governance, funding, or policy expertise who can bring valuable external perspective. The Strategy is designed to benefit the whole horticulture sector, and the Working Group should reflect that breadth.

What is the time commitment?

The minimum commitment is attendance at quarterly Working Group meetings, held online or in person. Members may also be invited to participate in sub-groups or working streams, which

would involve additional time. The total time commitment is expected to be in the range of 1–2 days per quarter for general members.

Is the position paid?

Working Group members will serve in a voluntary capacity. Reasonable out-of-pocket expenses (such as travel to in-person meetings) will be reimbursed in accordance with AOL's expenses policy. The contribution of Working Group members is deeply valued — we are seeking people who are genuinely motivated by the opportunity to shape the sector's future.

What happens after I submit my EOI?

All EOI submissions will be reviewed by AOL following the closing date of 30 June 2026. We aim to confirm the founding membership of the Working Group by August 2026, with the inaugural Working Group meeting planned for early 2027. All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application.

Can I apply if I have a conflict of interest?

Yes — but you will need to declare any real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest in your application. Working Group members are required to manage conflicts transparently in accordance with the Terms of Reference. If you are uncertain whether a conflict of interest is relevant, we encourage you to declare it and let AOL make an assessment.

Where can I read more about the Strategy?

The full Organic Horticulture RD&I Strategy 2026–2035 and the Strategy-on-a-Page summary are available to download from austorganic.com. We encourage all applicants to familiarise themselves with the Strategy before submitting their expression of interest.

Who do I contact if I have further questions?

For any questions about the Working Group or the EOI process, please contact Kristy Banks, AOL Horticulture Project Lead, at Kristy.Banks@austorganic.com.

Organic Horticulture RD&I Working Group - Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

Australian Organic Limited (AOL) is establishing the Organic Horticulture RD&I Working Group (the Working Group) to provide independent, ongoing governance and strategic oversight of the Organic Horticulture Research, Development and Innovation Strategy 2026–2035 (the Strategy).

The Working Group will guide investment prioritisation, oversee annual review of the Strategy, and provide expert input and accountability to ensure the Strategy delivers measurable outcomes for Australia's certified organic horticulture sector.

2. Background

The Organic Horticulture RD&I Strategy 2026–2035 was developed through the project RD&I Strategy for the Australian Organic Horticulture Sector (LP24001), funded through Hort Innovation Frontiers with co-investment from Southern Cross University (SCU), AOL, ACO Certification Ltd (ACO), Bio-Dynamic Research Institute (BDRI), Organic Food Chain (OFC), Southern Cross Certified (SXC), and contributions from the Australian Government.

The Strategy was formally launched at Hort Connections 2026 in Adelaide on 2 June 2026, following an extensive 11-month consultation process engaging more than 100 industry participants through 8 national workshops and 41 one-on-one intensive interviews.

The Working Group is the next critical step — translating the Strategy from a roadmap into funded, coordinated action.

3. Objectives

The Working Group will:

- Provide strategic oversight and governance of the RD&I Strategy 2026–2035, ensuring priorities remain relevant, evidence-based and sector-driven
- Oversee the annual review and public release of updated Strategy targets, priorities and investment recommendations
- Advise on the development and scoping of fundable RD&I propositions aligned to the three priority areas: Consumer Awareness, Pest & Disease Management, and Knowledge Sharing
- Facilitate cross-sector collaboration between growers, researchers, certifiers, funders, and industry partners
- Monitor progress against the Strategy's overarching goal of doubling the value and impact of certified organic horticulture by 2035
- Ensure the benefits of organic horticulture RD&I extend to the broader Australian horticulture sector as a pathfinder for sustainable production

4. Membership

4.1 Composition

The Working Group will comprise 8–12 members, with representation across:

Sector / Expertise	Minimum Representation
Grower / Producer	At least 1 certified organic horticulture producer; diversity of scale and region encouraged
Certifier	At least 1 representative from a DAFF-registered certification body (ACO, SXC, BDRI, or OFC)
Research Institution	At least 1 representative from a university or research organisation with horticulture / agricultural research expertise
Funding Body	At least 1 representative from a levy body or other agricultural funding organisation
Industry / Retail	At least 1 representative from the supply chain, retail or horticulture industry
Government	At least 1 representative from a relevant state or federal government agency

4.2 Tenure

Members will serve rolling 2–3 year terms, staggered to ensure continuity of institutional knowledge. A maximum of two consecutive terms applies. All members will be appointed through an Expression of Interest (EOI) process coordinated by AOL.

4.3 Independence

The Working Group operates independently of AOL's Board, providing objective strategic direction on RD&I priorities. AOL's role is secretariat support — coordinating meetings, maintaining records, and facilitating communications — not holding decision-making authority over Working Group deliberations.

5. Governance & Decision-Making

The Working Group will operate by consensus where possible. Where consensus cannot be reached, decisions will be made by simple majority vote of members present at a quorate meeting. Quorum requires a majority of members (50% + 1).

The Working Group Chair has a casting vote in the event of a tie. All decisions and the rationale behind them will be recorded in meeting minutes.

6. Meeting Cadence

The Working Group will meet a minimum of quarterly, with the option for sub-groups or working streams to meet more frequently as required. Meetings may be held in person or online, with an annual in-person meeting recommended to coincide with an industry event (such as Hort Connections).

7. AOL Secretariat Responsibilities

AOL will provide secretariat support to the Working Group, including:

- Preparing and circulating agendas at least 5 business days before each meeting
- Preparing and distributing meeting minutes within 10 business days of each meeting
- Maintaining Working Group records and correspondence

- Coordinating the annual Strategy review process
- Managing the EOI process for incoming members
- Providing the Working Group with relevant sector data, funding intelligence, and partner updates

8. Reporting

The Working Group will publish an Annual Report following each year's Strategy review. The Annual Report will be publicly released and timed to coincide with the annual Hort Connections event or another major industry moment. The report will capture:

- Progress against the Strategy's priority areas and key performance indicators
- Updated investment priorities and recommendations
- Funded projects and outcomes achieved during the year
- Sector engagement and participation highlights

9. Conflicts of Interest

All Working Group members are required to declare any conflicts of interest — real, potential or perceived — at the time of appointment and at the commencement of each meeting. Members with a material conflict of interest in a specific agenda item should not participate in deliberations or votes on that item. AOL will maintain a Conflicts of Interest Register.

10. Review of Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed by the Working Group at its inaugural meeting and updated as required. Subsequent reviews will occur every two years, or earlier if material circumstances require.