



ABFA IPA: RD&E project investment and management via ABFA strategic plan 2014-2020

Australian Barramundi Farmers Association

January 2021

FRDC Project No 2014-408

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2014-408

2021

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In submitting this report, the researcher has agreed to FRDC publishing this material in its edited form.

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Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the Australian Barramundi Farmers' Association Industry Partnership Agreement (IPA) with the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation for the period 2015-2020. The primary objective of the IPA was to coordinate research and development funded through the FRDC, and to support leverage of funds from other sources.

Through the IPA ABFA committed to a strategic and formalised approach to investing funds. This is particularly important in this industry with a need to generate industry benefit as a whole, across membership from all mainland states and the NT, who utilise a range of production methods (ponds, sea cage, flow through and recirculation systems) in varying salinities (fresh, brackish and salt water).

In addition to providing the structure for investment that delivers benefits to the Australian barramundi farming industry, the IPA provides an excellent vehicle by which industry funds are leveraged to increase value. The FRDC can match industry funds to a maximum of 0.25% of the average GVP from the past three financial years, less a FRDC management fee.

Over the period covered by the IPA a total of \$641,222 was available for investment in R&D. ABFA invested \$348,491 of industry funds, and an equivalent amount of matched funds, less an 8% administration fee, was made available through the FRDC.

\$548, 669 of IPA funds was invested in contracted projects during the period.

An estimate \$2,440,000 of industry in-kind support has been invested by industry to support the strategic planning, research design and evaluation, and facilitation of on farm trials.

Seven projects have been commenced and completed; three projects are active and continuing; and one approved project is yet to commence.

Over the life of the IPA the ABFA has invested less than 60% of maximum matchable industry contributions each year. In 2019-2020 COVID19 the ABFA board determined a conservative approach to funding due to the impacts of COVID19 on food service markets. Consequently R&D funds have been foregone.

This project has been led by the ABFA executive officer, and in achieving its objectives has drawn on the advice, expertise and guidance of the ABFA Management Committee members, ABFA R&D Committee members, the research provider community, government agencies and other industry bodies.

Keywords

Barramundi, Lates Calcarifer, research management, industry partnership agreement, RD&E

Acknowledgments

The ABFA recognises the commitment of the following organisations and people who have contributed their time, energy, and advice in pursuit of an effective and efficient research program that advances the collective goals of the Australian barramundi farming sector.

As industry sponsors, Ridley Aqua Feed, Skretting and Biomar play a crucial role in the ongoing performance of the industry, enabling a flow of funds to the ABFA, and close engagement with members in industry-wide discussions on strategic direction, and research and development.

The research teams and institutions who have partnered with us over the period 2015-2020. To them the industry offers a sincere acknowledgement.

Alongside the scientists there are the farm owners, managers and staff who give their time, knowledge and resources freely, for the benefit of the industry. They are also offered a debt of gratitude.

Marty Phillips, Scott Hayward and Ken Chapman - ABFA Presidents over the period of this project and the members of the management committee.

Justin Forrester, Chair of the ABFA's R&D Committee and all the members of the committee.

Chris Calogeras and Jo-Anne Ruscoe - ABFA Executive officers over the period of this project.

The FRDC Board, management and staff and members of the FRDC's aquatic animal health and biosecurity group, who all contribute their expertise to ensure investment delivers results for industry. In particular Wayne Hutchinson, who has contributed much valued knowledge and understanding of the aquaculture sector.

Introduction

The Australian Barramundi Farmers Association (ABFA) is the peak representative organisation for the Australian farmed barramundi industry. Our members farm in all States except Tasmania, and in the Northern Territory. The ABFA has a leadership role to promote and undertake, as necessary, research and development in the Australian barramundi farming industry.

Prior to this project, the ABFA had coordinated its RD&E portfolio through the Seafood Cooperative Research Centre (SCRC). With the SCRC ending in June 2015, in 2014 In 2014, the ABFA endorsed an industry Partnership Agreement (IPA) with FRDC as the best investment vehicle to maintain cohesive and strategic direction of ABFA research, development and extension (RD&E) to achieve the goals of the ABFA's 2015 – 2020 Strategic Plan.

During 2013-2014 the ABFA undertook an inclusive process to develop a strategic plan for the period 2015-2020. In doing so the ABFA had developed a clear understanding of its purpose and aims from a member's perspective. This process involved identifying the organisations Vision, Mission and Values and then determining the Key Strategic issues that required the ABFA's attention.

This process involved three industry workshops, individual face to face meetings with all members and culminated in an independently facilitated industry workshop held in Townsville in March 2014, with a series of follow up action across and between members.

An industry partnership agreement between the FRDC and ABFA was signed March 2015, and this project formally commenced mid 2016 with the signing of the project agreement.

It was anticipated at the time of planning that industry would need to contribute and invest at least \$100,000 in RD&E per annum.

The Strategic Plan outlined seven strategic goals for industry:

1. Market differentiation for Australian produced aquaculture barramundi
2. Consistent high-quality product to meet consumer preferences
3. Effective regulatory frameworks to support barramundi farms
4. Effective management of biosecurity risk
5. Better awareness of farm productivity issues and options
6. Sustainable barramundi production systems
7. A well-resourced national body that delivers industry outcomes.

The IPA was established to provide the resources, rigour and structure to:

- identify and prioritise the research and development activities needed to achieve those industry goals
- allocate resources – including identifying funding partners
- call for, and evaluate applications
- oversee and manage projects – including, at times, negotiating variations to project direction to ensure the projects delivered the required outcomes, and
- provide for extension and communication on project progress and results.

Objectives

The four objectives for the IPA were:

1. Project development and management between ABFA members, service providers and funders
2. Maintain cohesive and strategic direction of ABFA RD&E in line with the ABFA 2014-2020 Strategic Plan
3. Develop and maintain communication and extension across members, service providers, funders and other key stakeholder groups.
4. Project funding identified - with a focus on additional leveraging, cash and in-kind contributions.

Methods

The IPA is an agreement between the FRDC and the ABFA.

The objects of the FRDC, deriving from section 3 of the PIRD Act, are to make provision for the funding and administration of:

- (a) fisheries RD&E with a view to:
 - a. increasing the economic, environmental and social benefits to members of the Australian fishing industry and to the community in general by improving the production, processing, storage, transport or marketing of fish and fish products;
 - b. achieving the sustainable use and sustainable management of Australia's fisheries resources;
 - c. making more effective use of the resources and skills of the community in general, and the scientific community in particular;
 - d. supporting the development of scientific and technical capacity
 - e. developing the adoptive capacity of primary producers
 - f. improving accountability for expenditure on fisheries RD&E activities.
- (b) marketing relating to products of primary industries.

The FRDC achieves this through coordinating government and industry investment, including stakeholders to plan and invest in fisheries research, development and extension (RD&E) activities. This includes providing leadership and coordination of the monitoring, evaluating and reporting on RD&E activities, facilitating dissemination, extension and commercialisation.

Each year the Australian Government matches complying industry contributions to FRDC up to 0.25% of the AGVP.

Through the IPA, the FRDC confirmed its intention to:

- a) recognise the RD&E priorities for the ABFA as outlined in the ABFA Strategic Plan
- b) invest in projects addressing these and other priorities that will provide direct and indirect benefits to the barramundi farming sector;
- c) match ABFA industry contributions up to a maximum of 0.25% AGVP over a five-year rolling period less an 8% service fee;
- d) evaluate RD&E applications supported by ABFA out of cycle, subject to ABFA establishing the appropriate planning and evaluation processes for applications
- e) in the event that it is not satisfied with an application, consult with ABFA prior to reassessing the application
- f) in the event that it rejects an application, provide written explanation for the rejection to ABFA
- g) FRDC will provide program/project management services to ABFA which may include:
 - (i) evaluating services, including independent expert advice;
 - (ii) contract management (including auditing);

- (iii) promoting and supporting ABFA in developing relationships with other government agencies; and
- (iv) liaising with third parties and managing funds provided by them.
- h) spend any funding provided by ABFA in excess of the amount specified above on approved projects and not impose on ABFA any service fee.

The ABFA is the peak representative organisation for the Australian farmed barramundi industry. Its purpose is:

- a. To promote and support all aspects of the Australian barramundi farming industry,
- b. To provide a unified voice for the barramundi farming industry in representations to governments and other bodies,
- c. To promote and undertake, as necessary, research and development in the Australian barramundi farming industry,
- d. To promote the development of barramundi farming as an environmentally sustainable industry,
- e. To foster and promote goodwill amongst the members of the Association in the furtherance of its objects.

Through the IPA, the ABFA confirmed its intention to:

- a) develop, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, and the FRDC a Strategic RD&E Plan (the Strategic Plan)
- b) submit the draft Strategic Plan to the FRDC board for its input
- c) develop programs in line with the Strategic Plan
- d) deliver the planned outcomes of the Strategic Plan
- e) each year deliver an Annual Operational Plan that includes current priorities, detail of expenditure against the Strategic Plan strategies, and, where requested by the FRDC, individual investment proposals for FRDC board's evaluation
- f) annually review the Strategic Plan to generate the next year's proposed RD&E investment proposals
- g) support RD&E activities with respect to making appropriate commitments to planning, investing in and managing RD&E, and adopting RD&E results
- h) facilitate contribution to the FRDC at least 0.25% AGVP (GST exclusive)
- i) recognise FRDC as the lead agency for the management of funds sourced from the Australian Government
- j) recognise the FRDC's RD&E Plan and the relevant RD&E priorities of the Australian government.

The ABFA has an elected board with authority to make investment decisions on behalf of the membership of the ABFA members. The ABFA makes decisions on expenditure of funds aligned with industry RD&E strategic priorities.

RD&E investment planning and project realisation was undertaken through a collaborative process between ABFA members and research providers, with priorities developed and agreed at Annual General Meetings (AGM) and half yearly conferences.

The role of the R&D Committee is to provide advice to the CEO and the ABFA Management Committee on matters relating to turning R&D priorities into outcomes. The role involves:

- Providing advice on priorities
- Contributing information relating to industry opportunities and risks
- Providing advice to progress R&D needs – this may involve participating in small teams to help articulate and drive activities, and recommending others to assist
- Assisting in identifying expertise to deliver on R&D priorities
- Reviewing R&D applications, and help shape advice to applicants
- Reviewing progress reports and providing advice
- Supporting extension and adoption of R&D outputs

Meetings of the R&D Committee are generally held 3-4 times a year, and scheduled according to ABFA strategic priority setting, funding rounds, and monitoring of progress of high risk/high priority projects.

This project provided the ABFA with a moderate budget of \$80,000 over the period of the IPA for operating and management costs required to develop, manage, deliver, and communicate projects.

Results, Discussion and Conclusion

The IPA has been an important vehicle for the ABFA to plan and invest in RD&E. The support provided through the IPA has enhanced the ABFA decision making and delivery on its R&D. Project 2015-228 'IPA Australian Barramundi Farmers Association - ABFA RD&E investment model' provided an evidence-based approach to prioritisation decision making.

This project has contributed to resources available to manage the RD&E portfolio. Additionally, the development of the ABFA RD&E Committee, to identify and develop key RD&E needs for the whole of Industry from a farm and production perspective was a pivotal step for the ABFA. The group made up of on farm managers and workers who have a hands-on understanding of farm operation needs, with members from all farm production types. The Chairing of the group has now shifted from an Executive member of the ABFA to one of the group. This has significantly increased expertise within the ABFA to manage RD&E.

Industry members have an enhanced understanding of the RD&E process and overall industry benefits. This builds in the work undertaken to develop the ABFA Strategic and Research, Development and Extension Plan 2015 to 2020 under CRC Project 2013-752, Setting Directions for the Australian Barramundi Farmers Association, and the development of the 2020-2025 plan 2019-028 'Setting strategic directions for the Australian barramundi farming sector 2020-2025'.

Industry support and in-kind contribution to this project has been estimated at \$2.4M. Each member farm has contributed to the development of priorities, research has been conducted at, or with, six of the eight members' farms. ABFA members have attended the annual half yearly workshop and General Meetings to assess RD&E projects and review existing projects. The majority of members have participated in project-specific zoom updates and discussions during 2020.

During the four-year period covered by the IPA, the ABFA has successfully secured funds from organisations other than the FRDC to add an additional \$800,000 for R&D aligned with its strategic priorities.

In the ABFA's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, ABFA members agreed to deliver seven strategic goals by July 2020:

1. Market differentiation for Australian produced aquaculture barramundi
2. Consistent high-quality product to meet consumer preferences
3. Effective regulatory frameworks to support barramundi farms
4. Effective management of biosecurity risk
5. Better awareness of farm productivity issues and options
6. Sustainable barramundi production systems
7. A well-resourced national body that delivers industry outcomes.

The ABFA's strategic intent in terms of Research, Development and Extension (RD&E) for the 2015–2020 strategy was to focus discretionary research funding in four critical investment areas:

1. Differentiation:
 - a. naming
 - b. branding
 - c. certification

2. Consistent high quality:
 - d. quality scheme
3. Effective regulatory framework
4. Management of biosecurity risk.

This following section summarises the industry's performance against the strategic goals during the period covered by the IPA (2016-2020) in a top line performance review, with a focus on the R&D investment delivered and managed through the industry partnership agreement with FRDC, and additional leveraged funds.

Goal 1: Market differentiation for Australian produced aquaculture barramundi

Some progress has been made toward differentiation of Australian farmed barramundi product from wild-caught and imported product, although naming rights have not been secured and efforts to address disjunct between Australian Fish Name Standards (FNS) objectives and outcomes have failed to date.

The ABFA has lobbied heavily alongside other representative bodies for mandatory country of origin labelling (CoOL) to be extended to food service sectors. The consumer research conducted by industry has provided the data to support lobbying and has informed a strategic media campaign that has resonated with the Australian public and media, resulting in extensive national coverage and engagement.

Efforts to encourage the Australian Government to pursue a Geographical Indicator for the name 'barramundi' to be used exclusively for Australian fish have commenced.

An ABFA Australian Farmed Barramundi branding and promotion program has been established, funded through voluntary contributions (IBC). High quality promotional material has been developed (imagery, video, website, point of sale material, media releases, digital recipe book) and the inaugural National Barramundi Day was launched on October 2019.

A Supply Chain Integrity Service to support differentiation of Australian Farmed Barramundi throughout the Australian Supply Chain is due for implementation mid-2020.

Goal 2: Consistent high-quality product to meet consumer preferences

Good progress has been made towards developing an industry quality scheme. Research has been completed to understand consumer and trade buyer values, perceptions and experiences. A major project, due for completion 2021, is underway to develop proprietary ABFA quality standards, and incorporate these into a Certification Program.

A Supply Chain Integrity Service to support the quality framework and assure integrity of Australian Farmed Barramundi throughout the Australian Supply Chain is expected to be implemented by mid 2020.

Contributing R&D:

2014-708 SCRC: Stamping quality across the Australian Farmed Barramundi Industry (completed through the IPA)

2017-169 Nutritional values of farmed barramundi (IPA)

ABFA Market Research 2019, Understanding Consumer and Trade Buyer Values (FIAL funding)

Project 2015-702 A Final Seafood Omnibus: Evaluating changes in Consumer attitudes and behaviours (completed through the IPA)

2016-503 Digital documentation of Australian Barramundi and Prawns Farms Across Australia (IPA)

2019-003 Harvest and slaughter methods for farmed barramundi to minimise fish stress and achieve premium market quality meeting improved fish welfare outcomes' is underway. (IPA and FIAL funding)

2018-140 Quality Framework for Australian Farmed Barramundi

Antimicrobial resistance surveillance project (DAWR funding).

Goal 3: Effective regulatory frameworks to support barramundi farms

Planned actions are in place to document state/territory/national operational regulatory programs

impacting barramundi aquaculture. This work entails identifying overlaps and impacts of the regulatory burden on productivity versus the environmental and other benefits. This work has not yet been actioned.

In Queensland, the ABFA has worked with the prawn farming sector to promote science-based regulatory policy and has unsuccessfully lobbied Government to prevent new regulatory burdens being imposed on operators in Great Barrier Reef catchments.

The majority of ABFA members (six) have implemented the ABFA Eco-efficiency Certification Program. While this third-party audited program has led to improved practice, the industry can do more to position it to gain market traction.

Goal 4: Effective management of biosecurity risk

Through project 2016-147 'Development of sector-specific biosecurity plan templates and guidance documents for the Australian farmed barramundi industry' there are resources to assist farms to implement biosecurity plans.

Progress has been made to better understand biosecurity risk. Biosecurity risks associated with importation of *Lates calcarifer* have been assessed and documented through Project 2015-040 'An assessment of the risk of exotic disease introduction and spread among Australian Barramundi farms from the importation of Barramundi products', however, to date this evidence base has failed to convince Government to enact an import ban on high risk imported fish products.

FRDC project 2019-126 'Assessing compliance and efficacy of import conditions for uncooked whole and eviscerated barramundi and grouper in relation to exotic viruses' is well advanced.

ABFA has worked to improve engagement with the DAWR biosecurity policy branch, lobbied both sides of parliament and supported Seafood Industry Australia and the National Aquaculture Council in pursuit of improved biosecurity outcomes.

ABFA has worked with state and national regulators, and other aquaculture/seafood sectors (where mutually beneficial) to address off label treatments and MUPs.

Goal 5: Better awareness of farm productivity issues and options

Through project 2015-228 'ABFA RD&E Investment Model' members were engaged to jointly design and build an Excel spreadsheet model and User Manual for operational, financial and RD&E investment analyses purposes. Users may adopt and adapt the model to suit their individual farm needs to identify key productivity issues and where best gains can be made across farms. Revisiting the uptake and use of the model and potential for benchmarking is overdue.

Productivity gains have been made through project 2017-170 'Real time monitoring of water quality and mechanisation of pond management to boost productivity and increase profit in Barramundi (Lates calcarifer) farming'.

Research in development , that was paused during 2019-20 due to COVID 19 include: 2018-100 'Optimisation of treatment of *Cryptocaryon irritans* in Barramundi aquaculture', 2019-097 'A longitudinal investigation of enteritis in juvenile barramundi Lates calcarifer, L. in North Queensland', and Determination of the causative factors of lordosis of the spine in juvenile Barramundi. ABFA is due to make a decision on whether to pursue these January 2021.

Goal 6: Sustainable barramundi production systems

While individual farms have continued to invest in remediation and technology to improve their sustainability credentials, the intent is to develop a national approach to defend against unnecessary red/green tape and lobby governments to reduce or remove unnecessary regulatory burdens. This work has not been progressed.

The Barramundi Farming Certification Program 'Green Tick' provides a 3rd party audited process to highlight the sustainability credentials of the industry. The program has yet to have pull through in the supply chain, and there is opportunity to build meaningful consumer awareness. Work undertaken through 2016-502 IPA SRL and IPA ABFA: 'Conducting a gap analysis of Southern Rock Lobster and Australian Barramundi Farmer Association industry accreditations against the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative benchmarking scheme' provides options for continual improvement of the program.

In conclusion, this project has delivered the following benefits to industry:

- Increased expertise within the ABFA to manage RD&E
- RD&E has been commissioned, managed and 'commercialised' aligned with ABFA' strategic priorities
- More effective industry coordination and understanding of farmed barramundi RD&E
- Improved RD&E efficiencies

- Enhanced cost/benefit arising from efficiencies of industry driven and co-ordinated investment according to highest identified priorities.

The following performance indicators have been achieved:

- Projects developed in line with ABFA Strategic Plan objectives.
- Funding identified from industry, FRDC and other sources.
- Level of industry and stakeholder awareness of RD&E meets ABFA members' expectations.
- Reviewed project milestones and management of relationship between service providers, the ABFA and FRDC
- Undertake roles, responsibilities and activities as part of agreed I PA management responsibilities.

SUMMARY TABLE: PROJECTS FUNDED THROUGH THE FRDC IPA

PROJECT TITLE	PROJECT BUDGET	STATUS
2019-126: Assessing the biosecurity risk of uncooked whole and eviscerated barramundi and grouper in relation to exotic viruses	64,279.00	Current
2019-098: Setting strategic directions for the Australian barramundi farming sector 2020-2025	90,000.00	Complete
2019-003: Harvest and slaughter methods for farmed Barramundi to minimise fish stress and achieve premium market quality and improved fish welfare outcomes	124,230.90	Current
2018-140: Strengthening the ABFA Quality Framework	70,000.00	Current
2017-170: Real time monitoring of water quality and mechanisation of pond management to boost productivity and increase profit	17,960.00	Complete
2017-169: Assessing the nutritional value of Australian Barramundi	16,000.00	Complete
2016-503: Digital documentation of Australian Barramundi and Prawns Farms Across Australia	19,799.89	Complete
2016-502: Conducting a gap analysis of Southern Rock Lobster and Australian Barramundi Farmer Association industry accreditations against the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative benchmarking scheme	5,000.00	Complete
2015-228: IPA Australian Barramundi Farmers Association - ABFA RD&E investment model	20,000.00	Complete
2015-040: ABFA IPA: an assessment of the risk of exotic disease introduction and spread among Australian Barramundi farms from the importation of Barramundi products	20,000.00	Current
2014-708: Seafood CRC: stamping quality across the Australian farmed Barramundi industry.	21,399.40	Complete
2014-408: ABFA IPA: RD&E project investment and management via ABFA strategic plan 2014-2020	80,000.00	Complete
	548669.19	

Recommendations

1. In January 2021 the ABFA Board accepted the recommendation of the PI/ABFA CEO to seek a new IPA with the FRDC and to invest an increase quantum of funds in 2020-21 (62% of maximum matchable).
2. Work with FRDC to seek efficiencies to reduce time to turn R&D needs into outputs.
3. Ensure adequate resources available in a new IPA management project to support effective engagement with the R&D committee – ideally with a minimum of one face to face meeting annually.
4. Enhance the ABFA, and or FRDC ABFA-IPA website to extend R&D outputs to industry.

Extension and Adoption

While each project has maintained its own extension and adoption pathway, the following mechanisms have been used to engage industry to develop priorities, to communicate R&D progress and extend R&D outputs.

- Annual RD&E Workshops
- Annual general meetings
- Email and newsletters as required. Recipient list includes govt. representatives, researchers, industry members and their staff, marketing and promotions teams.
- Annual report to industry
- Each project developed under this IPA has included an industry focussed extension plan including attendance of PI's at ABFA gatherings.
- FRDC has been advised of activities and invited to all industry gatherings and as a member of the R&D committee.

FRDC FINAL REPORT CHECKLIST

Project Title:	ABFA IPA: RD&E project investment and management via ABFA strategic plan 2014-2020		
Principal Investigators:	Jo-Anne Ruscoe		
Project Number:	2014-408		
Description:	<p>This report provides a summary of the Australian Barramundi Farmers' Association Industry Partnership Agreement (IPA) with the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation for the period 2015-2020. The primary objective of the IPA was to coordinate research and development funded through the FRDC, and to support leverage of funds from other sources.</p> <p>This project has delivered the following benefits to industry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased expertise within the ABFA to manage RD&E • RD&E has been commissioned, managed and 'commercialised' aligned with ABFA' strategic priorities • More effective industry coordination and understanding of farmed barramundi RD&E • Improved RD&E efficiencies 		
Published Date:	N/A	Year:	N/A
ISBN:	N/A	ISSN:	N/A
Key Words:	Barramundi aquaculture, barramundi farming, Lates calcarifer, industry partnership		

Please use this checklist to self-assess your report before submitting to FRDC. Checklist should accompany the report.

	Is it included (Y/N)	Comments
Foreword (optional)	N	
Acknowledgments	Y	
Abbreviations	N	
Executive Summary	Y	
– What the report is about		
– Background – why project was undertaken		
– Aims/objectives – what you wanted to achieve at the beginning		
– Methodology – outline how you did the project		
– Results/key findings – this should outline what you found or key results		
– Implications for relevant stakeholders		
– Recommendations		
Introduction	Y	
Objectives	Y	
Methodology	Y	
Results	Y	

Discussion	Y	
Conclusion	Y	
Implications		
Recommendations	Y	
Further development		
Extension and Adoption	Y	
Project coverage		
Glossary		
Project materials developed		
Appendices		
EXTENSION		
Extension plan developed?		
Extension undertaken?		
If extension was undertaken, who was it undertaken with and was it successful? (Detail answer in comments section)	Y	
If No, then is further extension necessary? With who? How? (detail answer in comments section)		