**Message from Australian High Commissioner to the Regional Conference on Conservation Agriculture for Smallholders in Asia and Africa,**

**Mymensingh, 7-11 December 2014**

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research – known as ACIAR – operates as part of the Australian Aid Program. Australia’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, has describe ACIAR as a ‘diamond’, highlighting its years of work sharing its expertise, technologies, and management methods with developing countries, notably the countries of our region, the Indo-Pacific.

Australia and the countries of South Asia share similar challenges to agricultural productivity growth, including drought and water management, and face many similar food grain and livestock production constraints. Australian expertise therefore has much to offer the region – especially as land and water resources come under increasing pressure from growing population and expanding disposable income.

This is certainly true in the case of Bangladesh, where ACIAR has been working since the mid-1990s. ACIAR has helped improve the productivity of food crops like pulses, wheat and maize, and is also improving farming systems in order to support broader food security – an approach encompassing conservation agriculture, farm mechanisation, saline land management and adaptation to climate change, particularly in rice/ wheat and rice/ maize systems.

As a long-standing partner for Bangladesh on food security, Australia proudly supports this Regional Conference on Conservation Agriculture for Smallholders in Asia and Africa. ACIAR experts are joined by representatives from Australia’s Murdoch and Charles Sturt universities, and from the Western Australia Department of Agriculture and Food. We’re grateful for the hospitality and contribution of our friends in the Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh.

The conference is a timely exercise in sharing what we know about the effects of conservation agriculture on smallholders, identifying the obstacles to its further adoption around the world, and considering how we might engage smallholders, researchers and the private sector in surmounting these obstacles. Joining their colleagues from Bangladesh and other countries, the Australian representatives look forward to sharing Australia’s experience in conservation agriculture.

I wish you a very productive meeting. Australia’s support for agricultural productivity and food security in Bangladesh is an integral part of our wider development assistance in Bangladesh, valued at over A$90 million this financial year and among the largest country programs Australia runs. It’s a reflection of Bangladesh’s importance to Australia. Recalling our Foreign Minister’s praise for ACIAR, I look forward to showing her its work when she visits Bangladesh.

**Greg Wilcock**

**Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh**