

**NRM Regions Australia - Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper
submission by
Cape York Natural Resource Management Ltd.**

Policy Idea	Detail	Response
Policy idea 3— Enhancing communications	Views are sought on areas of focus for future government and commercial investment in communications infrastructure, as well as options to assist farmers and regional communities to best use the communications infrastructure currently being deployed.	While we do not have specific suggestions for new areas of focus, we would like to reinforce the need for investment in communications, engagement and participation strategies based on the IPA2 framework. Regional NRM bodies such as Cape York NRM have established such communications and engagement infrastructure because of the contribution it makes to landholder participation, sustaining their agricultural businesses, building resilient communities and their supporting services.
Policy idea 4— State government deregulation	<p>Deregulation is a priority for COAG, with governments already looking at ways to reduce red tape and duplication and improve the performance of regulators.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Removing excessive native vegetation laws b. Removing excessive work health and safety requirements (a national scheme?) c. Improving the efficiency of the native title system 	<p>We note that native vegetation regulation is generally a State responsibility and there is considerable community debate as to whether these regulations are excessive or not strong enough. Cape York NRM supports flexible arrangements that recognise the ecosystem services provided by native vegetation and biodiversity and genuinely deliver triple bottom line outcomes. In that regard Cape York NRM sees a communication, planning and advisory role for Queensland’s Regional NRM Bodies</p> <p>Cape York NRM recognises the need for clearing in some instances and finds itself in a position significantly different to much of Australia which has been over cleared at the cost of land degradation, declining water quality and biodiversity loss. Cape York NRM would propose a sub-regionally (locally) based “no net loss” policy for Cape York, allowing for both clearing and restoration that will improve both productivity and landscape health</p> <p>On Cape York, Cape York NRM could play a role in “localising” native vegetation management given the role it is already undertaking in the way of planning and implementing the management of natural and its understanding of the needs of farmers and the local community as well as the ecosystems within the region and its sub-regions.</p>
Policy idea 5— Protecting the resource base	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Limiting the adverse impacts of mining on the agriculture sector (access to land and minimise damage on water resources) b. Providing opportunities for farmers to convert leasehold land into freehold c. Ensuring greater consistency in biosecurity regulations between Australian jurisdictions (e.g. consistency of approaches across jurisdictions on issues such as fruit fly) d. Quarantining prime agricultural land 	<p>The importance placed on dealing with different land uses that threaten land and water assets, and in particular the way in which the Green paper draws attention to adverse impacts of mining (an issue on Cape York in terms of land clearing) is welcomed.</p> <p>For Cape York, recognition also needs to be given to the issues impacting on the market chain and the viability of its primary industries and as a result their ability to contribute financially to the protection of the resources on which their enterprises rely. Whilst these are similar to the challenges being experienced across Northern</p>

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	<p>from mining activity</p>	<p>Australia, including distance to markets and, for the grazing industry, low cattle prices and the downturn in live cattle export, another significant impact on the protection of resources on Cape York has been the transfer of large areas of land formerly under management as pastoral lease to Aboriginal Freehold and CYPAL (Cape York Parks created over Aboriginal land). Cape York NRM agrees with and has adopted the United Nations Charter on the Rights of Indigenous People as its framework for engagement of Indigenous people on Cape York, and supports the return of land to them, however the impact of this initiative on management of the natural resource base (and the economy of Cape York) needs to be acknowledged.</p> <p>Cape York NRM also agrees with the sentiments expressed by Senator Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, following the recent review of the IBA and ILC, when he said that “It remains my view that there is opportunity to generate prosperity for Indigenous Australians by linking land to economic development and jobs to cut through the cycle of Indigenous Australians being “land rich, but dirt poor.”</p> <p>Whilst CYPAL tenure does limit opportunities for Indigenous people in terms of business development on some lands, we are hopeful that under joint management arrangements between Traditional Custodians and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service, the State Government will allocate funding for protection of the resources of those areas.</p> <p>The greater challenge is in relation to the lack of funds for protection of the resources across the remainder of the Aboriginal Freehold lands. Indigenous people stand strong in their desire to care for the cultural and natural values of their country, and look to being able to generate an income from their recently returned homelands to provide the resources to protect those values.</p> <p>Some aspire to do that by re-establish grazing, or setting up other agricultural business enterprises (such as development of more intensive agriculture related uses such as horticulture, orchards and the production of fodder for feed lots and the live export trade). Establishing an agricultural enterprise, however, is not an aspiration for all Indigenous people. Others are looking to opportunities including sustainable use of plant products, tourism, conservation management (including gaining expertise in soil and water conservation and establishing plant and machinery operations) to support improved land management, and also the provision of environmental services, all of which would contribute to protecting the Region’s resource base for the future and contributing to the advancement of their people whilst adding to the diversification and strength of Cape York’s economy.</p>

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		<p>In relation to support for establishment of agricultural or other business enterprises by Traditional Custodians on their land, there is an opportunity on Cape York for IBA and ILC or any future amalgamation of the two bodies to support those aspirations as well as addressing a number of other policy issues discussed in the paper, by providing funding and support for that purpose. Cape York NRM is in a position to facilitate such initiatives, and to assist landholders by supporting engagement with government, governance support, planning, extension and, mentoring to Cape York’s Traditional Custodians of land as they establish agricultural or other enterprises on their land. Examples of what Cape York NRM could do to assist both Indigenous and non-Indigenous landholders improve the viability of their enterprises, contribute to their competitiveness on both national and international markets, and protect their resource base include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Our Primary Industries Sector Director could help advocate for and facilitate collaboration between the Region’s pastoralists around the opening up of opportunities for live cattle export such as through Weipa. This would have relevance for Policy idea 7— Improving market competition. 2. Cape York NRM and its partners also have the expertise, experience and relationships and with additional resources is able to extend provision its current, Commonwealth Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries funded range of extension services to all of the Region’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous agricultural sector landholders. These supports are integrated with resource protection focussed activities such as weed and pest animal management activities funded by the Commonwealth Depart of the Environment, and include comprehensive mapping of resources and infrastructure, resource protection and enterprise (including financial) planning, as well as support for implementation of best management practice. <p>It is contended that any approach to improving Australia’s agricultural competitiveness and protection of the agricultural resource base will have a greater chance of success if it is holistic. Based on our insights into the effectiveness and efficiency of joint management arrangements on a smaller scale during National Heritage Trust 2, efforts would also benefit from cross Departmental support and collaboration, and integration or at least joint design of relevant Programs supporting land uses and protection, and economic support for businesses which contribute to such competitiveness and protection. Such an approach should also give due recognition to the economic value of environmental, cultural and human resources (capital) and their role in managing and protecting Australia’s agricultural resource. A policy shift in this direction would also contribute to Policy idea 19—</p>

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		<p>Natural resource management initiatives.</p> <p>Freeholding of leasehold land is a form of privatisation of public assets and there should be a transparent, competitive process to maximise community benefit from the sale of public assets.</p> <p>Biosecurity is an important issue for regional NRM organisations and in some of this work the national agenda very strongly drives what we do. There are issues with different State based approaches and it is important that these differences be articulated, understood and aligned where appropriate.</p>
<p>Policy idea 6— Strengthening farm businesses</p>	<p>There are a number of State and Territory policy changes that could be made to allow farm businesses to operate more effectively. These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Implementing a nationally consistent and mandatory approach to farm debt mediation b. Subsidising farm energy audits c. Streamlining development application processes (e.g. senior level case managers to support businesses undertaking significant and complex projects) d. Enforcing animal welfare legislation, as well as strengthening laws to stop trespass on farms. Options could include encouraging industries to develop proactive measures to develop quality assurance programmes to demonstrate that on-farm practices reflect good farming practice for management, animal welfare, food safety, biosecurity and traceability. e. Adopting the Co-operatives National Law 	<p>Strengthening farm businesses could also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the importance of resilience approaches and the triple bottom line • The value of increasing awareness of biosecurity and other threats to the productive use of natural resources and facilitating collective action to address these threats • Industry led quality assurance programmes which can also promote good NRM practices Opportunities for farmers/graziers to generate renewable electricity as an additional form of income • The replacement of current disaster (e.g. fire, flood, drought, cyclone) relief or support regimes with a HECS style framework which Loan repayment contingent on income/revenue. How: Loan not grant paid back on farm revenue at 2-5%, managed by the ATO. Farmer can't default on loan so doesn't contribute to debt stress (and possible farm loss) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government can put more funds into it because certain of return and the money can be recycled (87% return in 7yrs) • This type of loan can interact very well with the current Farm Management Deposit where you save from good times for poorer time, RCL are borrowing from good times in bad times. It is a sliding scale. • Can be adapted to other situations such as public good/environmental works /improvements • NRM Bodies could assist in determining use • May get some as loan and some as grant dependent on public/private good ratio • It is not a pure economics tool but it is a risk management tool for government/society (eg Medicare/Heacs) operated through the tax system. • It is suggested that it be based on revenue because all businesses put in BAS statements and these are not manipulated by accounting to decrease profit.
<p>Policy idea 7— Improving market</p>	<p>Facilitate and support a regulatory environment that allows agricultural</p>	<p>Restoring balance of power to producers could be assisted by requiring imported products to demonstrate</p>

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competition	<p>markets to operate efficiently and transparently</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Introduce options to increase price transparency throughout the domestic supply chain (e.g. ABARES to develop and provide weekly reports on price indices for agricultural products that more reliably reflected the range of market transactions. ABARES could also be asked to report regularly on comparable input costs in major competitor countries). b. Introduce new marketing mechanisms which might restore balance of power to the producer c. Facilitate greater use of cooperative structures—Cooperatives are a type of business structure that can assist farmers to increase their bargaining power 	<p>that they meet the same health and environmental standards as is required of Australian producers (for example farmed fish has to meet high standards in Australia but we import from countries with little or no standards).</p>
Policy idea 9— Improved regulation	<p>Unnecessary red and green tape is removed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. AgVet chemicals regulation b. Country of Origin Labelling for food 	<p>Cape York NRM supports reduction in red tape and Country of Origin labelling for food, and agrees that the AgVet chemical regulations re are complex however we need to exercise caution. We would not want to lose Australia’s great reputation for judicious chemical use and traceability, it is part of our marketing advantage.</p>
Policy idea 12— Farm Business Improvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Farm businesses need to consider the most appropriate business structures for their circumstances b. Business advice (e.g. extend the existing Entrepreneurs’ Infrastructure Programme to the whole of the agriculture sector) c. Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS)—The Government is interested in stakeholder views on expanding the support services role of the RFCS - RFCS could act as a first point of contact and referral service for all agricultural businesses, including to promote learning and extension activities and provide links with mental support services. d. Collaboration programme (The Government could encourage collaboration by providing a networking service that brought interested parties together. It could also include helping businesses find collaboration partners at different points in the supply chain to help realise benefits from vertical integration). 	<p>As part of our quadruple (environmental, social, cultural and economic) bottom line focus, Cape York NRM organisations deliver extension services to farmers. These services focus on improved production and NRM outcomes and recognise that holistic business planning is a critical aspect. Some of our projects incorporate this in their delivery.</p> <p>Generally though we regard extension as a specialist role and not something that would fit easily with current RFCS arrangements - RFCS is well skilled to deliver business and financial planning support, whilst NRM organisations are best placed to deliver the management of the natural capital base. We see the challenge more as one of collaboration across organisations at the regional scale where we support each other in the delivery of our programs. Such an approach would enable leveraging of current Government investment as well as ensuring healthy farming businesses.</p>
Policy Idea 14— Strengthening agricultural education	<p>Ensuring the availability of comprehensive education for an agricultural career at secondary and tertiary level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Working with States and Territories to provide specialised learning in 	<p>Cape York NRM supports all initiatives that improve the attractiveness of agriculture as a career and builds the capacity of people entering into an agricultural enterprise. We work with primary and secondary schools within our Region, promoting the importance of</p>

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	<p>agriculture in the future</p> <p>b. Establishing a young farmers mentoring and networking programme</p> <p>c. Increasing financial support for regional education</p> <p>d. Creating national agricultural tertiary centres of excellence</p>	<p>the natural resource base to agriculture and regional economic development.</p> <p>To ensure that the proposed policy ideas deliver relevant outcomes, we would like to see these initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking to regional NRM organisations extension efforts • Linking to industry perhaps through development of centres of excellence. Cape York NRM had developed a ‘Healthy Country Knowledge Place’ concept which could be used to cost efficiently and effectively implement and/or support all of these policy initiatives at a local scale
<p>Policy idea 16— Increasing drought preparedness</p>	<p>a. Introducing accelerated depreciation for new water and fodder infrastructure</p> <p>b. Encouraging multi-peril crop insurance (and removing stamp duty on insurance)</p> <p>c. Improving climate information through farm decision support tools</p>	<p>Cape York NRM suggest the following areas for further consideration in relation to drought preparedness/management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the landcare tax offset to include additional works associated with stock containment, watering and other climate variability and adaptation works. • Australia’s relatively small market for multi-peril crop insurance is likely to limit its applicability and we understand this has been investigated before • Build resilience to drought in other ways using NRM as part of the solution – e.g. promotion of pasture management, sound water management, water efficient farming practices • Promoting to farmers the climate change information being developed by regional NRM organisations as part of the Australian Government’s NRM Planning for Climate Change initiative. • Regional NRM Organisations’ role in both preparing for and responding to drought – advice on stock containment is one area common to most regional NRM organisations but in the past some have participated in drought response by assisting governments in providing employment opportunities for drought affected farmers.
<p>Policy idea 17— In drought support</p>	<p>a. Additional mental health support in times of drought</p> <p>b. Provision of additional assistance for prolonged and severe drought (What makes a drought event ‘beyond the reasonable capacity of farmers to prepare for’, is it the severity, the length or a combination of both?)</p>	<p>Cape York NRM works with farmers and graziers and their peak bodies and communities to enable them to build their resilience (including mental well-being) – NRM Regional bodies such as Cape York NRM play an important role in this regard, as do other organisations in direct contact with producers. We all need to be cognizant of the personal health challenges faced by landholders under stress and need to know about and have the ability to refer people to appropriate support services – this is part of Cape York NRM’s role across our relatively isolated small rural and Indigenous communities and properties.</p> <p>Underlying this approach is the need to develop relationships with the Region’s health, mental health, and other organisations with direct contact with farmers. Cape York NRM staff work with these target groups, have skills in building regional partnerships, and</p>

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		<p>can assist Government’s or other agencies with linking to its constituents .</p> <p>In the longer term, initiatives such as our response to Policy Idea 6 (The replacement of current drought, relief or support regimes with a HECS style framework which utilises a Loan arrangement with repayment contingent on income/revenue should be considered as a risk management tool for government/society) and should go some way toward reducing the need for such services.</p>
<p>Policy idea 18— Improving water infrastructure and markets</p>	<p>Stakeholders suggested some ideas to improve water infrastructure, markets and administration. These included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dams and water infrastructure (he Government is seeking to identify new dam and infrastructure projects that can deliver Australia’s water supply needs in the future, including options for moving water from northern catchments to southern and from eastern to western). b. Taxation concession for water reticulation infrastructure c. Water markets (more efficient water trading markets and by examining options for counter-cyclical temporary trade of environmental water) 	<p>Cape York NRM recognises the importance to Australian, and the world generally, of increasing our agriculture productivity, and the contribution of water and water infrastructure to achieving this.</p> <p>Cape York Region has a very small intensive ag footprint, and relatively little water infrastructure. We believe that in the first instance priority needs to be given to maximising productivity within existing irrigation areas (the Lakeland and Endeavour Valley areas) where most farmers are currently located. If new areas are to be developed for irrigation then Government should utilise the vast knowledge and learnings from past water infrastructure developments including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The environmental implications of siting dams; • The environment’s need for a share of the water captured; • That investment decisions should be influenced by the suitability of available land and the environmental impact of its use for irrigated agriculture (eg current agricultural land is situated in GBR catchments) • The demand for the water (rather than build the dam and hope the water can be sold) • Planning for new water storages needs to accommodate climate change risk • Ensuring that a new dam does not lead to a loss of water for other water dependent industries such as fisheries. • Drainage of developed areas needs to be incorporated into the infrastructure planning.
<p>Policy idea 19— Natural resource management initiatives</p>	<p>Environmental legislation provides important protections for our natural assets. However, regulation needs to appropriately recognise the interests of rural landowners. Ideas included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Amending the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999 (removal of onerous on-farm conditions, such as certain excessive flora and fauna caveats); b. Ensuring that national transport and infrastructure goals/corridors have right of way). c. More targeted pest and disease management and control (for established pests and diseases) – e.g. 	<p>Cape York NRM has raised its concern that the Issues Paper did not give appropriate recognition to management of Australia’s natural assets/resources and welcomes the recognition the Green paper gives to this issue. We are still concerned, however, that that “Policy Idea 19” focus on a limited range of NRM issues.</p> <p>Soils, for example, are essential to agriculture and have the ability to unlock future productive capacity or to result in productivity declines if not managed well. Soils deserve more focus in research, policy and extension opportunities, particularly in the context of the Government’s Direct Action policy for meeting Australia’s international emissions reduction targets – soils are a potential source for carbon sequestration.</p> <p>As a Regional NRM organisations we play a role in</p>

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	<p>investing in management where there is a broader community interest.</p>	<p>comprehensive mapping of property soil and water assets, and provide information about soil management to landholders. We could also play a greater role in the extension of soils knowledge and information using data generated by the RDC's.</p> <p>In relation to the Policy Ideas raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not believe that removal of onerous on-farm conditions in relation to the EPBC Act. A “one size fits all circumstances” approach will work. We acknowledge that within the range of State and Territory jurisdictions there are different rules and within communities there are different values attached to flora and fauna assets. The challenge is to make the assessment processes more flexible to incorporate regional issues and this could be achieved by aligning the EPBC conditions with regional NRM plans. • Caveats are often associated with investment of Government funds. Where the government investment is substantial we believe that it is appropriate that there is some security that achieves the long-term outcome sought • Our experience on Cape York indicates that caveats can also be voluntary, and as a Regional body we have supported the decisions by farmers and others to apply a caveat on the land to protect its natural resources assets • All infrastructure projects should be subject to a “quadruple bottom line” assessment. The challenge here is in making this assessment as efficient as possible and this includes identification of areas of environmental and cultural heritage significance where detailed scrutiny of infrastructure (road, rail, power, communications) proposals will be required. We see a substantial risk of policy conflict for government if on the one hand they are investing in protection of flora and fauna whilst at the same time devaluing the importance of those assets when it comes to infrastructure project. <p>Pest and disease management is not only a threat to agriculture but also to our native wildlife and vegetation. The Policy Idea suggests that primacy should be given to controlling pests and diseases that impact on agriculture. It is our experience that there are positive environmental and economic outcomes from pest animal or weed management, regardless of the primary purpose of that activity.</p> <p>We also contend that the priorities should be determined at a regional scale based on the economic, social cultural and environmental benefits of specific programs and that the level of government effort be proportional to the public benefit derived from that action.</p>
<p>Policy idea 20— Strengthening the</p>	<p>a. Updating the rural RD&E priorities to better align with community needs –</p>	<p>Cape York NRM welcomes the emphasis on aligning research with community needs and notes that one of</p>

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RD&E system	<p>priorities already identified include advanced technology, to enhance innovation of products, processes and practices across the food and fibre supply chains—through technologies such as robotics, digitisation, ‘big data’, genetics and precision agriculture;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • biosecurity, to improve understanding and evidence of pest and disease pathways to help direct biosecurity resources to their best uses, minimising biosecurity threats and improving market access for farmers; • soil, water and natural resource management, to manage soil health, improve water use efficiency and certainty of supply, sustainably develop new agricultural areas and improve resilience to climate events and variability; and • adoption of R&D, with a focus over time on increasing private delivery of extension services <p>b. Establishing a new body, or tasking existing research bodies, to coordinate cross-sector research</p> <p>c. Enhancing access to the R&D Tax Incentive</p> <p>d. Promoting the development of extension services (The Government is seeking stakeholder feedback on ways to promote the development of the market for extension services—such as expanding RDC efforts or specific funds being made available to facilitate the development of extension markets).</p> <p>e. Decentralising Government agricultural research functions (such as RDCs and agencies of the Department of Agriculture) to regional areas, as appropriate</p> <p>f. Regular five-yearly assessments of the RD&E system</p>	<p>the priorities in the current Rural Research and Development (R&D) for Profit programme is “to help producers manage natural resources in an integrated way at enterprise or regional level for long-term use and profit”.</p> <p>There is an opportunity for governments to leverage an existing range of such investments and we regard linking with, recommending landholder focussed research, and applying the results as a key part of our role and as a result we link closely with researchers and their institutions. We also often co-invest in appropriate RD&E projects.</p> <p>As well as recognising the importance of integrating NRM considerations into industry based research, we are also aware that across Australia over half of the Nation’s farmers run mixed enterprise operations, with two or more types of produce or with produce as well as livestock. A cross sector research capacity will ensure that the needs of these farms are met efficiently and reduces the risk of industry RDCs undertaking similar research, and we would welcome the opportunity to assist with identifying Cape York’s cross sector research needs. Some examples of those needs on Cape York include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&D on feral animal control • R&D on soil biology to look at climate response, acidification and fertility enhancement needed for sustainable systems (e.g. research on a landscape scale response to the impact of Cape York’s soil phosphorus deficiency on livestock fertility and weight gain) • A lack of extension capacity on Cape York impacts on delivery of research findings to farmers and graziers. As noted above, Cape York NRM does have some extension function and could effectively and cost efficiently expand its capacity to contribute to this critical need. <p>In relation to decentralising agricultural research functions we welcome any move that brings these functions closer to Cape Yorks producers. It would also be welcome if the research could focus on tropical agriculture. This approach is consistent to the ideas we put forward in our response to the paper on development of Northern Australia .</p>
Policy idea 21—Improving the rural RDCs	Administrative changes to the RDC model to increase transparency and reduce costs, including giving RDCs a targeted set of objectives	Cape York NRM welcomes the continued commitment to RDCs and propose that one of targeted objectives relate to sustainable NRM and cross sector themes.
Policy idea 23—Improving the biosecurity system	<p>a. Increased information and intelligence gathering tools, supported by increased investment on high risk areas and priority pests and diseases</p> <p>b. Enhanced onshore monitoring, including by developing reporting tools and establishing a public Biosecurity</p>	<p>Cape York NRM supports this concept however we contend that there needs to be collaboration and integration between Commonwealth and State, Local Government and Regional NRM organisation approaches and that it needs to be delivered regionally.</p> <p>Cape York NRM has the capacity to assist with this and</p>

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	<p>Information System to share information</p> <p>c. Collaborating with industry associations to extend traceability systems to better facilitate responses to outbreaks</p>	<p>would welcome the opportunity to do so..</p>
<p>Policy idea 24— Strengthening Australia’s overseas market efforts</p>	<p>a. Undertaking further trade research</p> <p>b. Improving exporter services and our understanding of overseas markets</p> <p>c. Providing more exporter readiness training</p> <p>d. Accelerating the development of technical, market access country and commodity strategies to prioritise market access efforts</p> <p>e. Developing national promotion efforts (such as through a national brand)</p> <p>f. Increasing Australian Government positions overseas, and considering options for industry funded positions to underpin increased focus on agricultural market access</p> <p>g. Increasing engagement bilaterally, and in multilateral forums, to promote use of international standards in food regulation</p>	<p>We draw attention to Australia’s “clean and green credentials” as a factor in strengthening our access to overseas markets, particularly as rapidly growing middle classes of India and China (and recent FTA’s) are increasingly demanding safe, clean food that meets and exceeds minimum standards.</p>