

SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THE  
PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET ON THE  
AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS GREEN PAPER



THE COUNTRY  
WOMEN'S  
ASSOCIATION  
OF VICTORIA  
INC.

TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS BY COMMUNITY SERVICE MORE ESPECIALLY AS THEY  
AFFECT THE WELFARE OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

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The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc.  
3 Lansell Road  
TOORAK  
Victoria 3142  
Telephone: 03 9827 8971  
Email: [cwaadmin@cwaofvic.org.au](mailto:cwaadmin@cwaofvic.org.au)  
Website: [www.cwaofvic.org.au](http://www.cwaofvic.org.au)

## THE COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC

The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc. is part of the largest women's organization in Australia. It is a non-party political and non-sectarian organization for country and city women. It aims to improve conditions by community service more especially as they affect the welfare of women and children. Members work for the welfare of all women and children through representation to all levels of government, undertaking fundraising events, providing networking opportunities and teaching life skills.

The Association assists in crises and administered funding provided by the Federal Government to assist people in drought. Continual support has been given to those affected by the fires and floods through provision of goods and financial support. Emergency and welfare support is provided continually.

The Association continues to lobby Government for improved services and has made submissions on foreign ownership of land regulations, transport, education and medical services, food labeling laws, importation of product regulations and much more.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc. believes that improved funding and policy directions are required to enhance growth and health of the agricultural sector. This would then maximize benefits to rural business, farmers, families, individuals and communities. Our government needs to create growth and health in the sector to strengthen its capacity to capture global market share both national and international across a range of agricultural domains.

## OUR RESPONSE TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET ON THE AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS GREEN PAPER

The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc. (CWA of Vic) has through its Agriculture and Environment Committee chosen the following policy responses for consideration and action. CWA of Vic believe it is imperative that government improve the health and future of Australian agriculture immediately across all the identified policy principles and address the key issues to build a strong agriculture sector therefore building our rural communities and improving job security, food security whilst maintaining Australian owned, grown and produced. CWA of Vic has a focus in responding to the Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper in areas where it brings rural community to prominence.

CWA of Vic appreciates the opportunity to make a submission into the green paper on Agricultural Competitiveness and would appreciate the opportunity to be included in further consultation over these matters.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### POLICY IDEA 1—BUILDING NEW TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE:

CWA of Vic fully supports key stakeholders suggestions and submits that:

- The Minister ensures our agriculture competitiveness is developed through improved transport infrastructure in rural areas and required links into Victoria's East/West link.
- It is imperative that government moves to **expand transport affordability and infrastructure** to extend entry into markets whilst ensuring/enabling agricultural producers to be more productive and competitive.
- Rural areas need infrastructure to grow and support the sector through **improved economic opportunities** (Barnawartha, Victoria, logistics centre is an excellent example of employment and growth in a small rural area).

### POLICY IDEA 2—IMPROVING EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT REGULATION:

This submission urges:

- The removal of transport regulations that are penalizing and devaluing to rural productivity;
- Increased funding to repair and maintain **rural roads**;
- That existing infrastructure in disadvantaged areas such as the **Port of Geelong** be considered for development to fill recognised gaps as proposed within the Green Paper; and
- The Federal Government commit funding to standardize the freight rail network in Victoria, in order to provide increased supply chain efficiencies and improved interstate access from the north-western network to the South Australian ports.

### POLICY IDEA 3—ENHANCING COMMUNICATIONS:

Many rural areas are still without mobile phone and internet coverage or have limited reception compared to urban areas. Both major parties have promised to tackle this problem and there has been limited evidence to be seen in terms of improvement. We submit for urgent action that:

- More towers for reliable mobile coverage in rural/remote areas be constructed and satellite communications further technologically advanced, as it currently lags behind conventional Wi-Fi;
- It is critical the NBN is rolled out to rural and regional areas as a priority to ensure the agricultural sector have the communication resources to operate as any **business** should and to be able to fully access **developments** in agriculture and research;
- The **quality of broadband** becomes a policy priority and ensure broadband technologies are available to rural areas; and
- Urgent development is required to ensure the **download speeds** can be achieved across **each platform**.



**POLICY IDEA 4—STATE GOVERNMENT DEREGULATION:**

CWA of Vic submits that:

- State and federal laws need to be **non-invasive and minimal** to ensure they are not restrictive to farmers;
- Laws need to avoid legal jargon so as to be **understandable**;
- Farmers need to be able to clear land for **fire prevention and fencing purposes**, including being able to remove regrowth and bush where it is vital to their farm practices;
- State exemptions for clearing native vegetation should **apply consistently** across all local government areas and not be overridden by local rules and overlays;
- Native vegetation rules must give equal weight to economic, social and environmental factors;
- Proposals for regulation should only be implemented if it results in a positive cost-benefit outcome;
- Economic considerations are incorporated into permit applications for clearing native vegetation, particularly the costs of retaining paddock trees in the cropping zone;
- Any improvements to native vegetation quality or quantity desired by the community must be achieved through market based approaches/incentives;
- Governments should transition away from a regulatory approach to biodiversity outcomes on private land, toward a more comprehensive set of incentives to encourage voluntary management of native vegetation.

**POLICY IDEA 5—PROTECTING THE RESOURCE BASE:**

This submission requests the Minister to:

- **Propose legislation** to protect agricultural land from mining companies accessing land for surveying and industry and to prevent other areas in retrospect from being targeted;
- Implement policy for **preventative action and compensation** to be awarded to those farmers who have already been infringed upon by mining;
- **Establish an inquiry** into the increasing impact of mining on agriculture production;
- Provide farmers with the **right of veto** over mining and petroleum activities on their land;
- Landowners must receive appropriate **commercial payments** for all mining and petroleum activities on their land;
- There must be no long-term adverse off-site impacts from mining and petroleum developments eg on water supply or quality and independent studies undertaken to measure this;
- Farmland must be rehabilitated to its previous productive use at the end of the life of a mining or petroleum development;
- The rights of landholders must be protected in minerals and petroleum legislation.

#### POLICY IDEA 6—STRENGTHENING FARM BUSINESSES:

CWA of Vic submit the following key concepts in conjunction with stake-holders proposals:

- Strengthen farm business through financial support; farmers who have accumulated large debts should be able to access **help and information** and not just be sold up;
- Implement legislation to assist farmers with a range of options to prevent **sell-up and bankruptcy**;
- Commit to **strengthening laws** to prevent animal activists and protesters putting at risk the animals they are trying to save and transmitting disease into these areas;
- Review/develop a consistent national approach to regulation and **enforcement of** animal welfare legislation.

#### COMPETITION AND REGULATION

#### POLICY IDEA 7—IMPROVING MARKET COMPETITION:

We fully support the stakeholder options and submit further improvements to improve market competition. These are:

- Improve R&D partnerships to ensure quality outcomes that provide a **premium market position** to our agricultural exports;
- Ensure the productivity and affordability of agricultural products through **co-operatives, partnerships, key investment and cross government departments** activity;
- Develop and support **small and niche market** development;
- Fund the expansion of markets through **Targeted investment** and commitment by government;
- Encourage high quality production and ensure the **Branding of Australia** produces the high quality sought;
- Ensure producers have access to specific, realistic timely and **accurate information** to create opportunities to meet national and international needs;
- Improve **marketing skills** are required within the agricultural sector (this links to the education policy).

#### POLICY IDEA 8—STRENGTHENING COMPETITION LAWS:

CWA of Vic supports the stakeholders' suggestions and makes no further submission.

#### POLICY IDEA 9—IMPROVED REGULATION:

CWA of Vic supports the stakeholders' suggestions and further urges the government to **implement policy and regulatory frameworks** that support and emphasize a focus on agriculture. Government policy has major impact on agriculture and will influence the growth of the agricultural sector. There should be greater enforcement of country of origin labelling (CoOL) which has often been low on most governments' agenda. **Regulatory changes** need to **promote** and address key issues and improve the following areas:

- Governments commitment to ongoing funding;
- Australia's international relations and trade;
- Finance and banking investment in agriculture and food production.

#### FINANCE, BUSINESS STRUCTURES AND TAXATION

#### POLICY IDEA 10—IMPROVING ACCESS TO FINANCE:

CWA of Vic submit the following key concepts in conjunction with stake-holders proposals:

- Create criteria that enables women on farms to be eligible for maternity leave payment and other working entitlements;
- Provide **low interest loans** for farmers to improve infrastructure and drought proof farms;
- Provide **interest free 5 year loans** for first time farmers with **financial planning and assistance** to guide new farmers towards becoming productive farmers of the future;
- Enable Farm **superannuation** to support people attempting to acquire their first farm.

Implement a national co-financing model to assist new farmers enter and progress in the agricultural industry. The co-financing model should include the following elements:

- Available to new entrants, not just young farmers;
- A net worth test;
- An assessment of the farmer's business and training plan;
- An incentive scheme;
- Two methods of financing the scheme; and
- Controlled by farmers, supported by government and managed by existing lending institutions.

#### POLICY IDEA 11—IMPROVING TAX SYSTEM EFFICIENCY AND EQUITY:

We fully support the stakeholder options and submit that we support the following improvements to the tax system to be implemented:

- Improve favorable depreciation rules, including the deductibility of identified capital expenditures. These to include:
  - Constructive depreciation periods;
  - Advantageous depreciation for capital, farm machinery and equipment;

- Approved preferential tax policies to attract investment into agriculture, bringing about an increase in farm output.

#### POLICY IDEA 12—FARM BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT:

CWA of Vic submit the following key concepts in conjunction with stake-holders proposals:

- Develop industry frameworks to monitor farmers and inform them where they are at risk of financial ruin. If unregulated, however, this classification could be used by banks and finance companies to determine unviable loans and consequently increase interest on loans to ‘at-risk farmers’;
- Implement constructive taxation and planning to ensure private Australian capital farm investment providing the benefits of that investment is underpinned by long-term Government investment;
- Provide commitment to the development of competitive access to markets;
- Promote local investment by Government through improved policy and incentives;
- Ensure Australian Government’s agricultural policy improves scientific and business research data, access to sound communication and IT, new practices and technology and ongoing dialogue with partners and producers.

## FOREIGN INVESTMENT

#### POLICY IDEA 13—IMPROVING THE TRANSPARENCY OF FOREIGN INVESTMENT

CWA of Vic has a long standing submission which is clearly **against selling agricultural land and assets to foreign parties** particular holdings which have vital infrastructure eg water.

CWA of Vic submits that:

- Australian Government develop a **clear foreign investment policy** including foreign state investment and ownership;
- A **full review** of foreign investment and ownership be undertaken;
- A register of ownership be established and transparent;
- Foreign investment and ownership be managed with **transparency, and fully regulated with substantial penalties applied when required for breaches;**
- Foreign investment be encouraged whilst establishing guidelines and boundaries in regard to exactly what Australia still owns including water rights and defining what is maintained through Australian sovereignty.

**POLICY IDEA 14—STRENGTHENING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION:**

CWA of Vic fully supports key stakeholders suggestions and submits that:

- There be an increase in opportunities and access to education for farmers and their families especially **women on the land**;
- **Increased funding** be provided to support both metropolitan and regional universities, and the VET sector to encourage and provide education in situ;
- Rural students are more likely to remain in rural areas to work so respond to this and fund the education sector to provide **rural education**;
- Opportunities in training in **financial, exporting, marketing and practical** education components for farmers be provided;
- The increasing education costs be **reduced** particularly for rural/remote students (students studying at regional universities face greater costs than city students in attending university);
- A reduction is needed targeted at HECS/funding to qualified **agricultural graduates** and agricultural workforce requirements to reduce the financial burden and increase opportunities for those wishing to train in the agricultural sector;
- Government increase incentives, **opportunities and scholarships**.

**POLICY IDEA 15—STRENGTHENING LABOUR AVAILABILITY:**

CWA of Vic supports the stakeholders' suggestions and further urges the government to:

- Ensure that labour costs and policy directions do not to eliminate local workers. This is happening in rural areas; women working for just a few months extra cash at Christmas have now been replaced with cheaper labour with foreign working visas.
- Provide incentives to attract new and younger workers, especially women, to the sector and to ensure an alignment between the skills of our workforce and the needs of our industry going forward.
- Ensure that the rural labour market and Australia's workplace relations legislation and application are conducive to farmers/producers needs for workforce and increased growth in conjunction with their financial and market realities.

### POLICY IDEA 16—INCREASING DROUGHT PREPAREDNESS:

CWA of Vic submit the following key concepts in conjunction with stake-holders proposals:

- Provision of government grants for activities, projects and infrastructure considered to decrease the impact of drought;
- Policy and funding should be fully committed to supplying water to agricultural production;
- Develop funding models and R&D activities to ensure efficient use of water reserves and supplies, improved incentives for water conservation technology and water infrastructure; and
- Support partnerships through funding and legislation to provide the sector with improved climate and weather forecasting to enable productivity improvement and growth utilising rain and irrigation.

### POLICY IDEA 17—IN DROUGHT SUPPORT:

CWA of Vic submits the following points as an opportunity to fully express our knowledge and expertise from a group who continues at state and through representation on National CWA to fund and support families and communities affected by drought. We urge the government to:

- Provide support funding/activities in areas that are currently affected by drought;
- Utilise the CWA across Australia to provide community and individual support as the organisational structure is excellent for education, and support at local, state and national level;
- Address the long term effects of drought including the long term health and well-being of all members in a rural community affected by drought needing to be addressed. The focus should be specifically on mental and physical health relating to financial issues;
- Implement strategies to address financial stress as the underpinning cause of mental health;
- Revise the current financial drought relief policy to a more effective long term solution.

## WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

### POLICY IDEA 18—IMPROVING WATER INFRASTRUCTURE AND MARKETS:

CWA of Vic fully supports the proposed policy ideas in the Green Paper and submit the following ideas:

- Laws need to be reviewed and addressed and the impact of them reduced in regards to **dams on farms**;
- Policy is required that ensures a focus upon the efficient use of rural **water resources**;
- Implement a rural constructed approach to rural use of **water, conservation technologies and infrastructure**;
- Ensure the maximization of Australian investment and ownership of water infrastructure and markets;
- Ensure **water management** at a local level;
- Investigate other funding models for water infrastructure capital investment where risks and costs are managed;
- Increase investment for research into irrigation water to protect our food security.

### POLICY IDEA 19—NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES:

CWA of Vic fully supports a more targeted approach to pest and disease management and control. We submit that there is a requirement for an emphasis on **employing** farmers to spray weeds in their areas. It is imperative that **detection, awareness and managements** of pests and disease should become a **funding priority**.

## RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND EXTENSION

### POLICY IDEA 21—IMPROVING THE RURAL RDCS:

CWA of Vic fully support the stakeholders proposals and urges the Minister to fund and develop major **Research and Development (R&D)** opportunities to maintain and enhance agricultural growth and competitiveness. We submit that a key role for Government is to expand and develop **Agricultural Research and Development** programs and regulatory environment to allow farmers and businesses to improve their own competitiveness. The importance of **R&D** is in providing innovation and growth and we urge the government to match funds to build a more robust and effective system that attracts industry support.

## BIOSECURITY

### POLICY IDEA 22—IMPROVING LEGISLATION:

CWA of Vic recommends that the Federal Government continues to develop and improve the responses to our biosecurity in both **current threats and the risk management** of these threats to Australian agriculture. This would apply to crops, including fruit, animal health and welfare and current regulations. These responses need to be **evidenced based** and create easy market access and reduce layers within the process. Protection of the integrity of the Australian industry should be the utmost priority.

## ACCESSING INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

### POLICY IDEA 24—STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIA’S OVERSEAS MARKET EFFORTS:

CWA of Vic supports the stakeholders’ suggestions and urges the Federal government to:

- Invest in market research that considers current and emerging trends in markets, to assist farmers make appropriate decisions about their resource allocation;
- Ensure that any funds invested in further market research consider not only current trends, but also includes market forecasts, so that farmers can plan ahead and make the best decisions about their products and the markets;
- Deliver industry specific export resources so farmers can increase their understanding of overseas markets and how to gain access.

### POLICY IDEA 25—IMPROVING AUSTRALIA’S EXPORT AND IMPORT SYSTEMS:

CWA of Vic supports the stakeholders’ suggestions and recommends that there are safeguards and it is guaranteed that export systems do not impose an unnecessary burden on farmers by simplifying certification systems and investing in ICT to improve access to information on international markets.