

POLICY IDEA	BCA POSITION
1. Building new transport infrastructure.	Efficient transport infrastructure is critical to the competitiveness of the broader agrifood sector. The challenge is to build, and use, our infrastructure efficiently and reduce supply chain costs.
2. Improving existing infrastructure and transport regulation: (a) linking public and private freight lines and port infrastructure (b) investigation into all-weather access roads that may increase productivity of interstate freight movement, including sealing a third east-west continental road through Central Australia (c) identifying air freight hubs in regional Australia as potential opportunities to significantly reduce transport times to markets (d) examining infrastructure for 'greenfield' developments that may support growth in new areas and open up new opportunities for Australian farmers.	This requires a long term view of sector's infrastructure needs and the best means for its provision. Long-term policy frameworks should encourage private investment in infrastructure underpinned by regulatory frameworks that promote efficient investment and use of the asset. User pays should be the preferred source of funding. Any decisions to commit public funds to infrastructure provision should be linked to a long term strategic urban, metropolitan, or region plan and follow a proper and transparent evaluation of the costs, benefits and risks involved. The Business Council supports steps already taken by the government to encourage investment in infrastructure that will in some cases be of benefit to the agrifood sector, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the asset recycling initiative which provides incentive payments for the States and Territories to sell assets and recycle the sale proceeds into new productivity-enhancing infrastructure • the new governance arrangements for Infrastructure Australia to provide greater accountability and clarity of roles and responsibilities • the tasking of Infrastructure Australia to undertake 5-yearly evidence-based audits of Australia's infrastructure asset base, develop a 15-year infrastructure plan and evaluate proposals for nationally significant economic infrastructure • the government's plan to use the 15-year infrastructure plan commissioned from Infrastructure Australia to inform future infrastructure investment.
3. Enhancing communications.	The Business Council strongly supports the government's plans to deregulate the coastal shipping sector and the implementation of unfinished national competition policy reforms in transport, including those in road and rail transport and ports.
4. State government deregulation: (a) removing excessive native vegetation laws (b) removing excessive work health and safety requirements (c) improving the efficiency of the native title system.	The Business Council believes all governments should be committed to improving the regulatory environment and welcomes the high priority the government is giving to improving regulatory efficiency. The Business Council supports initiatives to better manage native vegetation on private land. The Commonwealth should examine using market based approaches to managing native vegetation. The Business Council supports the government's proposal to establish a one-stop shop for environmental approvals and encourages the Senate to approve the proposed amendments to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999. The Business Council supports the work being undertaken to improve the efficiency of model work health and safety laws in preventing workplace injuries. The Business Council would encourage COAG to move quickly in identifying those laws which would improve workplace health and safety and lower compliance and enforcement costs

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<p>5. Protecting the resource base:</p> <p>(a) limiting the adverse impacts of mining on the agriculture sector</p> <p>(b) providing opportunities for farmers to convert leasehold land into freehold</p> <p>(c) ensuring greater consistency in biosecurity regulations between Australian jurisdictions</p> <p>(d) quarantining prime agricultural land from mining activity.</p>	<p>The Business Council supports further investigating providing farmers with an opportunity to convert leasehold land into freehold. It is understood that one of the barriers to converting leasehold land to freehold is native title. The Business Council would support increased awareness within the industry around options available to manage native title as part of the tenure conversation process.</p> <p>The Business Council notes that some of the potential benefits of allowing farmers to convert leasehold land to freehold land would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging greater investment in agricultural real estate as some investors, particularly foreign investors, are concerned about tenure that is less secure than freehold tenure, particular where significant capital expenditure on infrastructure is required. • Making it easier for farmers to gain access to financing on better terms, particular towards the end of their leases. <p>Stamp duty, native title and state probity (relating to disposals of Crown land) considerations will be relevant to any conversion of a Crown leasehold interest to an outright freehold interest.</p>

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5. (continued)	<p>The Business Council does not support measures to quarantine prime agricultural land from mining activity. The Business Council supports the Multi-Land Use Framework that was endorsed by the Standing Council on Energy and Resources in December 2013. It is a tool that supports land use decisions based on merit and underpinned by community consultation. It aims to reduce delay and community division. The framework recognises that development of many Australian industry sectors is reliant on access to land, inclusive of multiple stakeholder needs covering economic, environmental, heritage, societal and cultural values.</p> <p>Australia needs an approach to energy policy which strikes a balance between promoting our economic growth, energy security and environmental sustainability.</p> <p>Safe, environmentally responsible and timely development of Australia's gas resources requires a stable and efficient regulatory regime. Any regulatory regime should be risk based and informed by science.</p> <p>Stability provides investors with the confidence they need to make long-term capital-intensive investment decisions in new gas developments. Without a stable investment environment, decisions to invest will not occur and new gas supplies will not come into the market.</p> <p>A stable and effective regulatory regime should also provide the community (and indeed business) with confidence that activities have the appropriate safeguards to manage multi-land use and minimise the risk to the environment.</p> <p>The Business Council supports the removal of moratoriums on exploration and fracking following community consultation and based on scientific evidence.</p> <p>There is significant concern from some sections of the community about the risks associated with gas developments. Some of these concerns may be based on misinformation.</p> <p>There is a need to increase the engagement of independent authorities with the community in relation to gas development. The Business Council recommends that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments should seek to further engage independent authorities, on the science and safeguards supporting coal seam gas development, and how our environmental and economic aims can best be met. This includes consulting with gas and land use commissioners, the independent scientific committee and CSIRO as well as affected communities. • Gas producers should actively engage with affected communities early, to understand their concerns, and explain the science and precautions taken to ensure the safe and environmentally responsible development of gas resources.

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<p>6. Strengthening farm businesses:</p> <ul 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 (d) enforcing animal welfare legislation, as well as strengthening laws to stop trespass on farms (e) adopting the Co-operatives National Law. 	<p>The Business Council is supportive of efforts to work with farmers to give them the tools to continue to improve their productivity. The Business Council supports extending the Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Program to cover agriculture. Such a move will assist primary producers to improve their performance and work towards addressing significant issues before they become a problem.</p> <p>The Business Council does not support a mandatory approach to farm debt mediation. The White Paper should look at ways that the Rural Financial Counselling Service could provide early advice to farm businesses before mediation becomes necessary.</p> <p>The Business Council does not see that there is a case for subsidising farm energy audits beyond current measures. Funding for such activities was provided under the Energy Efficiency Information Grants program, some state governments already offer such audits, and some energy companies will work with customers on improving energy efficiency. Additionally business evaluations undertaken as part of the Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Program can look at a business' energy use.</p> <p>The Business Council supports the adoption of the Co-operatives National Law or consistent law by the States and Territories, in light of the reduced registration costs for co-operatives operating across multiple jurisdictions and consistency of regulatory requirements across Australia.</p>
<p>7. Improving market competition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) introduce options to increase price transparency throughout the domestic supply chain (b) introduce new marketing mechanisms which might restore balance of power to the producer (c) facilitate greater use of cooperative structures. 	<p>The Business Council recognises that competitive and efficient markets are a key to encouraging innovation and lifting productivity.</p> <p>The Business Council does not support measures that force the public disclosure of information contained within private contracts or introduce additional administrative workloads for businesses.</p> <p>The Business Council believes that business owners are ultimately the best determinant of business structures. Government policy should not favour one business model over another, nor unnecessarily restrict a model (for example scale). For example, the adoption of co-operative principles may not suit the business objectives of all agribusiness participants.</p>

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<p>8. Strengthening competition laws:</p> <p>(a) revisions to the CCA</p> <p>(b) reviewing competition laws to consider whether there are any barriers to greater consolidation among agribusiness firms</p> <p>(c) increasing the resources of the ACCC</p> <p>(d) creating a supermarket ombudsman with penalty powers and a mandatory code of conduct for supermarkets (across all commodities) backed by direct financial penalties.</p>	<p>The Business Council considers that the current Competition Policy Review is already assessing options to ensure robust and vigorous competition, including the effectiveness of our competition laws. The Business Council strongly supports any legislative changes meeting the government's requirement for a Regulatory Impact Statement that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of a problem to be fixed. • An explanation of why government action is needed. • An assessment of the costs and benefits of the proposed change against other changes, including the option of no change. <p>The Business Council's submissions to the Competition Policy Review can be found here: http://www.bca.com.au/publications/submission-on-the-competition-policy-review-draft-report</p> <p>The Business Council supports encouraging wherever possible, non-legal approaches to resolving disputes between businesses of all sizes, to reduce the cost of legal action. If there is a problem with existing approaches, such as small business commissioners, ombudsmen and industry codes, it is better to address these before considering additional industry ombudsmen and codes. The Productivity Commission's recent report on Access to Justice should be considered as it includes recommendations to improve the efficiency of existing dispute resolution mechanisms.</p> <p>The Business Council notes the industry has agreed to the Food and Grocery Industry Code of Conduct, and has agreed that the Code should be "prescribed" under the Competition and Consumer Act. The Business Council welcomes this initiative and believes the Code should come into operation and its effectiveness tested before the government considers appointing a supermarket ombudsman and establishing a mandatory code of conduct.</p>
<p>9. Improved regulation:</p> <p>(a) AgVet chemicals regulation</p> <p>(b) Country of Origin labelling for food.</p>	<p>The Business Council welcomes the commitment to accepting trusted international standards and risk assessments in the Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda .</p> <p>The Business Council notes the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Legislation (Removing Re-approval and Re-registration) Amendment Act 2014 gives effect to the government's commitment to remove the requirement for AgVet chemicals to be periodically re-approved and re-registered.</p> <p>The Business Council notes the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry has undertaken a review of Country of Origin Food Labelling and believes the government's response to this review is the appropriate place to address this issue.</p> <p>The Business Council notes that any changes to Country of Origin Labelling should be fact-based, taking into account actual consumer purchasing behaviour and be subject to the proper process for developing new regulation, in particular the undertaking of a Regulatory Impact Statement.</p>

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10. Improving access to finance: (a) permanent concessional lending (b) incentives for institutional investment in agriculture.	<p>The Business Council believes the policy focus should be on building the capabilities of farm businesses. Policy ideas should focus on enhancing the take-up of existing initiatives such as the Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Programme and the Rural Financial Counselling Service.</p> <p>The Business Council shares the Productivity Commission's concern that the Farm Finance Concessional Loans Scheme does not build capabilities and may risk delaying adjustment in the sector.</p>
11. Improving tax system efficiency and equity: (a) non-commercial loss rules (b) increasing thresholds for the Farm Management Deposits Scheme (c) depreciating farm plant and equipment (d) Zone Tax Offset (e) tax loss trading (f) income tax averaging (g) Wine Equalisation Tax.	<p>Improving tax system efficiency and equity is a desirable objective which should be pursued through a comprehensive process to drive broader tax reform. The White Paper should refer any tax recommendations to the Tax White Paper in the same manner as the Financial System Inquiry.</p> <p>The policy ideas put forward in the Green Paper are primarily about providing financial support for the agriculture industry, rather than promoting broader efficiency and equity in the taxation system which, if done well, will benefit all sectors.</p>
12. Farm business improvement: (a) business advice (b) rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) (c) collaboration program.	<p>The Business Council supports the expansion of the Entrepreneurs Infrastructure Programme to cover the agriculture sector as it will build the capabilities of business owners in the sector. Any additional funding requirements for this should come from reprioritisation of funds from other programs.</p> <p>The Business Council notes that while the Rural Financial Counselling Service is well regarded the policy priority for government should be to work with farm businesses to address any issues before they fall into financial hardship.</p> <p>Improving collaboration outcomes is critical to improving our innovative capacity. However, the Business Council does not support the establishment of a further collaboration program. There are already a range of programs designed to drive collaboration in the sector. In particular, the government has already committed to establishing a Food and Agribusiness Industry Growth Centre. An important role of this body will be to encourage collaboration across the sector.</p>
13. Improving the transparency of foreign investment.	<p>Investment, including foreign investment, will be critical to developing the sector's productive capacity. Before any moves are made to expand the register of foreign ownership, any proposals should be subject to a comprehensive regulatory impact statement and be well justified.</p>

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<p>14. Strengthening agricultural education:</p> <p>(a) working with states and territories to provide specialised learning in agriculture in the future</p> <p>(b) establishing a young farmers mentoring and networking program</p> <p>(c) increasing financial support for regional education</p> <p>(d) creating national agricultural tertiary centres of excellence.</p>	<p>The Business Council made a series of recommendations in its 2013 <i>Action Plan for Enduring Prosperity</i> aimed at improving the foundation skills of young people, lifting the quality of instruction and ensuring more equitable education opportunities. The Business Council continues to believe that these actions are vital to the wider economy, including the agriculture sector.</p> <p>These recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that literacy and numeracy deficiencies in school students are addressed early by requiring, as a condition of Commonwealth funding, that state governments make sure primary students meet minimum standards before entering secondary school • reforming the funding arrangements for all schools to a new 'per-student' funding model that is appropriately weighted to account for the increased costs associated with teaching disadvantaged students; and separate the budget allocation decision from the funding model implementation • encouraging and supporting excellence in school teaching. <p>The Business Council notes the efforts undertaken by Dairy Australia through the broader 'People in Dairy' initiative to address the human capital needs of the dairy sector through programs such as Employer Starter Kit, Stepping Stones, DairySage Mentoring, and the Young Dairy Farmers Network. Other RDCs should consider adopting similar programs tailored to their sectors' specific needs.</p> <p>The Business Council also notes that programs such as the Primary Industries Education Foundation have proved a successful model for engaging young people around agricultural issues.</p>

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<p>15. Strengthening labour availability:</p> <p>(a) expand the Working Holiday Maker (417) visa</p> <p>(b) broaden skills coverage of the Temporary Work (Skilled) visa (subclass 457)</p> <p>(c) expand the Seasonal Worker Program</p> <p>(d) streamline application processes</p> <p>(e) provide clear pathways to residency.</p>	<p>Ensuring that businesses have access to sufficient labour to address fluctuating output levels and/or skills shortages will continue to be an important issue in the agriculture sector. The Business Council is supportive of measures which provide business with additional flexibility.</p> <p>Australian businesses prefer to hire local workers, but where demand cannot be met from within the domestic labour force the option of accessing external labour is important for the ongoing viability of businesses.</p> <p>The Business Council notes that the stated purpose of the Working Holidaymaker (417) programme is to “foster closer ties and cultural exchange between Australia and partner countries”, rather than to address skills shortages. Furthermore, the Working Holidaymaker Visa program already allows for a second application.</p> <p>The Business Council notes that changes to 457 Visas were proposed in the Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda and the Business Council encourages the government to implement this proposal as quickly as possible.</p> <p>A study by ABARES found that seasonal workers were, on average, significantly more efficient than working holiday makers¹. The Business Council notes that a three year trial of the use of seasonal workers with accommodation providers, aquaculture ventures and cotton and cane growers is taking place in selected locations across Australia. The Business Council supports waiting for the trial to be completed before agreeing to expanding the Seasonal Worker Program to cover more agricultural industries.</p>
<p>16. Increasing drought preparedness:</p> <p>(a) introducing accelerated depreciation for new water and fodder infrastructure</p> <p>(b) encouraging multi-peril crop insurance</p> <p>(c) improving climate information.</p>	<p>Matters relating to stamp duty and depreciation rates should be examined as part of the Tax White Paper process.</p> <p>Improving the management practices of farm businesses will assist in ensuring they have a better understanding of their risks and the measures required to reduce them, including taking out insurance. The Business Council does not support providing grants to farm businesses to take up insurance.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Droughts are a regular and fundamental part of the risk and volatility associated with farming the land. There are however instances whereby it would be unreasonable to expect an individual or business to have foreseen the extent of the impact.</p> <p>Consideration of assistance measures should be informed by the Productivity Commission’s 2009 inquiry into Government Drought Support.</p>

¹ Measuring the efficiency of horticultural labour: Case study on seasonal workers and working holiday makers, ABARES (2013)

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<p>18. Improving water infrastructure and markets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) dams and water infrastructure (b) taxation concessions for water reticulation infrastructure (c) water markets. 	<p>The Business Council supports the need to explore various models, including user pay systems and public-private partnerships like Tasmanian Irrigation, to fund the necessary investment in water infrastructure.</p> <p>Taxation measures, such as taxation concessions, should be considered as part of the Tax White Paper process. Any measures considered should be consistent with the government's broader objectives detailed in the Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda. Measures to introduce taxation concessions for water reticulation infrastructure do not appear to be consistent with these objectives. Decisions to allocate public funds to infrastructure investment should be linked to a long term needs assessment and follow an assessment of the costs and benefits.</p>
<p>19. Natural resource management initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) amending the <i>Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999</i> (b) more targeted pest and disease management and control. 	<p>The Business Council supports the government's proposal to establish a one-stop shop for environmental approvals and encourages the Parliament to approve the proposed amendments to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999.</p>
<p>20. Strengthening the RD&E system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) updating the rural RD&E priorities to better align with community needs (b) establishing a new body, or tasking existing bodies, to coordinate cross-sector research (c) enhancing access to the R&D Tax Incentive (d) promoting the development of extension services (e) decentralising government agricultural research functions (such as RDCs and agencies of the Department of Agriculture) to regional areas, as appropriate (f) regular five yearly assessments of the RD&E system. 	<p>The Business Council supports undertaking a process to update the rural RD&E priorities. The rural RD&E priorities should be aligned with the science and research priorities being developed by the Commonwealth Science Council. Engagement with industry will be critical to ensuring that the research priorities reflect the needs of industry and can positively contribute to improving the competitiveness of the Australian agriculture sector and supporting our competitive advantages.</p> <p>Improved co-ordination of cross sector research was one of the key issues identified in the Productivity Commission's review of RDCs. The Business Council notes that the Rural Industries RDC's Corporate Plan 2012-2017 identifies "collaborating to respond to cross sector RD&E needs" as one of its nine priorities.</p> <p>The R&D Tax Incentive will be examined as part of the Tax White Paper process. Any measures to enhance access to the program should be considered as part of this broader review.</p> <p>The Business Council does not support the deliberate decentralisation of agricultural research functions. Government interventions to shift agencies to regional areas have a poor track record of delivering benefits and can have unintended consequences. Research functions should be located where they can best access skilled researchers and stakeholders. The location of such functions must not be a political decision.</p> <p>The Business Council supports five yearly reviews of the RD&E system. Any review should seek to assess the effectiveness of the system, including identification of significant gaps or duplication as well as consideration of the efficiency at which it delivers outcomes.</p>

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<p>21. Improving the rural RDCs:</p> <p>(a) administrative changes to the RDC model to increase transparency and reduce costs, including giving RDCs a targeted set of objectives</p> <p>(b) increasing the flexibility of levy arrangements.</p>	<p>RDCs play a crucial role in the innovation ecosystems for their respective sectors. There is however, a considerable degree of variation in the structures and objectives of each of the RDCs.</p> <p>RDCs should have stated and transparent objectives. These objectives should reflect their respective industry specific priorities. These objectives should be derived from engagement with key stakeholders, in particular industry.</p> <p>Research and development is a time intensive process that requires continuity. It cannot be turned on and off. This needs to be considered in relation to any proposals that may undermine the funding availability of individual RDCs.</p> <p>Consideration of the operation of rural RDCs should also be informed by the Productivity Commission's 2011 inquiry into Rural Research and Development Corporations.</p>
<p>22. Improving legislation.</p>	<p>The Business Council supports the Biosecurity Bill 2014. The Business Council supports reviews of the Export Control Act 1982 and the Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry Act 1997 examining the extent to which they reduce regulatory and export costs and achieve their legislative objectives.</p>
<p>23. Improving the biosecurity program:</p> <p>(a) increased information and intelligence gathering tools, supports 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 Information System to share information</p> <p>(c) collaborating with industry associations to extend traceability systems to better facilitate responses to outbreaks and expand market access.</p>	<p>The Business Council supports a modern biosecurity system that protects Australia and maintains Australia's reputation as an exporter of high quality safe food. Any changes to the system should not increase the administrative and compliance costs of Australian food and agriculture businesses.</p>

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<p>24. Strengthening Australia's overseas market efforts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) undertaking further trade research (b) improving exporter services and our understanding of overseas markets (c) providing more exporter readiness training (d) accelerating the development of technical, market access country and commodity strategies to priorities market access efforts (e) developing national promotion efforts (such as through a national brand) (f) increasing Australian Government positions overseas, and considering options for industry-funded positions to underpin increased focus on agricultural market access (g) increasing engagement bilaterally, and in multilateral forums, to promote use of international standards in food regulation. 	<p>The Business Council reiterates its support for undertaking research to better understand consumer preferences in key markets and believes coordinating this work is an ideal role for the Food and Agribusiness Industry Growth Centre.</p> <p>The Business Council notes there are a range of government and non-government services available to assist businesses to become export ready, including the Entrepreneurs' Infrastructure Programme and TradeStart. There is a role for the Food and Agribusiness Industry Growth Centre to play in ensuring these services meet the needs of the food and agriculture sectors.</p> <p>Trade agreements should focus on both tariffs and non-tariff measures as reducing tariff barriers is only one part of the free trade equation. The BCA notes non-tariff measures often involve cooperation between governments to establish protocols, and this requires resources and commitment on each side. Australia needs to commit resources to such activities and Free Trade Agreements need to provide mutual commitment to ensure these protocols are agreed to quickly.</p> <p>The Business Council also encourages the government to establish implementation plans for all Free Trade Agreements.</p> <p>The Business Council supports the development of a national food brand that better positions Australian products in key international markets. The Business Council notes that a brand is more than a logo. It should clearly articulate a product's attributes and the environment it comes from. Any national food brand needs to drive the overarching positioning of Australian products in international markets. It should also allow room for state and regional provenance attributes to be promoted and for product managers (such as Meat and Livestock Australia, Dairy Australia and Wine Australia) to promote their product to local market preferences.</p> <p>The Business Council believes the services offered to exporters by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments should be better coordinated. The RDCs also have a role in sharing their "lessons learned" with new players to international markets. Once established, the Food and Agribusiness Industry Growth Centre can also play a key role in this space.</p> <p>The Business Council supports efforts that increase the use of international standards in food regulation. The Business Council supports the government's commitment in the Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda to accept trusted international standards and risk assessments where appropriate.</p>

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24. [continued]	<p>Australia's reputation for food safety is well known and fundamental to the value proposition of our exports.</p> <p>The Business Council would encourage the government to establish exchange programs between Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and Biosecurity Australia and their equivalent bodies in the region. Building a mutual understanding of regional food safety and biosecurity arrangements would assist in breaking down some of the non-tariff barriers to trade. Exchanges with Biosecurity Australia could be focused on the programs associated with exporting food. For example, exchanges associated with Australia's Export Meat Program would assist regional biosecurity and food safety bodies to better understand how the program works and build confidence in the quality and safety of Australian meat exports.</p> <p>The recent agreement reached between China and New Zealand on food safety demonstrates such arrangements are possible and are highly regarded in the Asia-Pacific region.</p>
25. Improving Australia's export and import systems.	<p>The Business Council supports the review of Australia's export and import systems to improve their functionality and reduce compliance costs.</p> <p>The Business Council supports the review of biosecurity cost recovery arrangements especially looking at new ICT investments to improve efficiency.</p> <p>The Business Council supports changes to accessing the Manual of Importing Country Requirements database that would enable companies that are not yet exporting to research potential market opportunities.</p>