

# **Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper Submission**

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## **Name of Organisation/Individual**

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## **What are the top policies from the Green Paper that the Government should focus on in the White Paper and why?**

Of the 9 Key Objectives referred to in the Green Paper, I believe numbers 1,2 and 7 are the most important. Item 1 talks of improving farm gate returns to farmers by reducing barriers to productivity and profitability. The costs involved in levies, water payments are significant, even for a small farmer, but worse still is the time it takes to complete all the forms. Grazing permits, Local Land Services, Water Sharing fees, stock movements, registrations, approvals for stream works, fish passage, weed control. The list is endless. Yet, there are no payments for ecosystem services or doing the "right" thing by the environment.

Item 2 is based upon the "family farm". By far the most efficient and sustainable farms are those operated by families with minimal external assistance. The "get big or get out" policies of the past have been failures. The costs of corporate farm management with the administrative overheads cripple farming - family farms are lean and the owners are prepared to take the good with the bad. Agriculture is risky and involves patience, something that corporations beholden to passive shareholders do not have.

Item 7 alludes to the potential for sustainability - natural methods of farming are available to Australians. Less chemicals, less fertilisers based on the petro-chemical industry, more re-cycling of organics and better carbon sequestration. If we can promote Australian agriculture as health giving and capable of producing food that is more nutritious, we will have an advantage among those willing to pay a premium for quality.

## **What policies from the Green Paper don't you support and why?**

I do not support the investment in more dams. These are evaporation ponds that damage the environment, liberate salt and are never full when required in a drought. Keeping the moisture in the soil and available to plants is the best option. Further, if reservoirs are to be used for flood mitigation, they must be kept nearly empty. There is a dichotomy between dams for irrigation and their usefulness in preventing the flood disasters seen in the Lockyer Valley for example.

Australia's landscape worked on "grass covered dams" - chains of ponds and wetland systems capable of supplying permanent moisture to floodplains. Dams take water from the system and require the use of expensive irrigation pumps and the need for energy from fossil fuels. The natural system works on gravity - with slow release of water into the landscape.

## **General Comment**

Biologically sensitive farming is the way forward. Swapping spraying for tillage is a nonsense. Using the soil biota and fungi to improve productivity and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is vital to the climate and our markets. Australian outputs should be sold as an antidote to climate change - the result of high photosynthetic activity, organic production methods and minimal emissions - it will attract more interest than simply being "cheap".

It is not a matter of more food, but better food. The obesity problem has been studied and these studies show that many obese people remain "under-nourished" although overweight. Promote quality, not quantity by indicating that ethically raised animals eating pastures rather than grain result in high Omega 3s and contented herds. People like to know that what they are eating helps the planet, helps their health and is the result of good animal husbandry.