Agricultural Competitiveness: a submission on energy supply constraints and implications for Australian agriculture. Green paper submission:

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In my submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper submission, IP285 entitled: Agricultural Competitiveness: a submission on energy supply constraints and implications for Australian agriculture I raised the issue of oil supply, depletion and the implications for Australian agriculture, rural communities and food security.

I would argue that this will present one of the most significant challenges for Australian society and specifically for Australian agriculture with ramifications possibly manifesting themselves this decade.

Whilst this issue is not specifically referenced in the Green paper I note a small reference to Energy Security on page 109, being:

Energy security: The Government will consider Energy Security, which may impact on Australia's food production, in the context of the Energy White Paper. An Energy Green Paper was released on 23 September 2014.

That consideration of energy security as it would impact upon Australia's food production is cited is encouraging, however it is noted that in the Green paper no reference to the form of that consideration is set out nor is there any discussion of the issue of energy security as a matter for consideration that could have facilitated recommended action moving into the White Paper phase, such as a format, structure and pathway for any research and evaluation.

It should be noted that the Energy Green Paper whilst referencing Australia's declining domestic oil supply capability does not discuss global supply or potential constraints. In such it has no capacity to address the issues raised in my submission either a national supply issue or more specifically in relation to agriculture and food security. It would therefore be impossible for the issue of oil vulnerability as set out in my submission to be adequately considered and responded to if the key high level policy document has an almost complete lack of reference to it as an issue for consideration. This represents significant policy failure and I would argue a failure of duty of care.

Until appropriate signals for research and policy development are available, Australia will be at increased risk of risk management failure in regards to this event and its ability to effectively implement timely mitigation and adaptation measures.

In order in part to address this the government could implement the following:

The Green paper, page 91 points to the development of:

"… a 10-year plan for agricultural science: In July 2014 the Government announced $500,000 for the Australian Academy of Science to develop 10-year plans for chemistry, agricultural science and earth sciences. The plan will be developed in consultation with industry, academia and the education sector to identify future needs and investment priorities for agricultural science."

Recommendation: that that 10 year plan actively consider Australian agricultures dependency on fossil fuels, its vulnerability and possible mitigation and adaptation measures as a research priority.

In line with Policy idea 20—strengthening the RD&E system, both (a) and (b) below, that

a. Updating the rural RD&E priorities to better align with community needs…to provide targeted direction for all rural research funders and providers. This update will help align public RD&E spending with national science and research policy and ensure rural RD&E focuses on raising productivity and profitability.

Recommendation: that any update be based upon research and recommendations based upon an enhanced understanding of Australian agricultures dependency on fossil fuels, its vulnerability and possible mitigation and adaptation measures as a research priority.

And further that any consideration also consider issues 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 via the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices that.;

and

b. Establishing a new body, or tasking existing research bodies, to coordinate cross-sector research—A new or existing body could be tasked with promoting agricultural research, ensuring research was focused on the rural R&D priorities, encouraging R&D activities across disciplines and identifying the next big potential transformational research areas to encourage research, development and extension.

Recommendation: that any new body, or tasking existing research bodies, to coordinate cross-sector research and recommendations should be based upon or feature as a key research component an enhanced understanding of Australian agricultures dependency on fossil fuels, its vulnerability and possible mitigation and adaptation measures as a research priority.