



Tuesday 15 April 2014

Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

PO Box 6500

CANBERRA ACT 2600

To the Committee Secretary

RE: GRIFFITH CITY COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS WHITE PAPER

Griffith City Council would like to congratulate the Federal Government in developing a White Paper on the Competitiveness of the Agricultural Sector, to boost agriculture's productivity and profitability and drive long-term agricultural policies.

To provide some context in relation to agriculture in our local government area which is directly related to our submission, Griffith City Council is located in south-western NSW and occupies 1,600sq km. Griffith's industry base is more diverse than that of its surrounding shires with food and beverage manufacturing the largest industry for employment and more valuable even compared to agricultural produce which is grown here.

Rural land is predominately used for irrigated agriculture; including intensive horticulture, citrus, almonds, prunes and viticulture, rice, canola, vegetable, cotton, wheat with some sheep and cattle grazing, irrigated wheat, barley, maize and canola and dry land cropping.

Irrigable land is predominant in the Griffith City Council area of the 1,437 properties, 1,322 are irrigable, and in 2005-05 irrigated land made up 68% of the gross value of agricultural production (\$225m). The value of agriculture production increased in aggregate for Griffith from \$280 m in 2000-2001 to \$340m, in 2005/06.

The main industries in Griffith are food and beverage and metal manufacturing, agriculture and retail trade. Manufacturing accounts for 20% of the area's job market and employs up to 2000 people, particularly during vintage season.

Manufacturing includes Baiada—the largest chicken producer in Australia. Baiada Poultry have gone through an aggressive growth phase and will have invested more than \$160 million dollars into the

Griffith economy and increased staff numbers by an extra 600 people. Griffith has 12 wineries of which five are in the top 10 largest wineries by volume in Australia. Casella Wines, De Bortoli Wines, McWilliams Wines, Calabria Family Estate and Warburn Estate are all large family owned operations, contributing enormously to Griffith's economy as well as jobs growth. The wineries in Griffith export more than \$800 million dollars a year worth of wine to international markets including the US, UK, China among others. The MIA area supplies 75% of NSW wine grapes and 70% of NSW citrus production. Griffith is home to three large citrus juicing operations; Real Juice, Summertime and Harvey Fresh.

Despite media perception, the Griffith City Council area and Riverina region in general is not in drought. In some respects the area is still able to produce food in drought conditions depending on water allocations. The primary producers in the area are constantly looking for opportunities to produce high value crops with less water, but there is a requirement for resource management in relation to research and development across the board, a challenge that the Government must step up to the plate.

As a result of the type of agriculture conducted in the Griffith region – our producers have more capital intensive operations including rice, intense horticulture such as prunes, hydroponic tomatoes, cotton, vegetables, melons and viticulture.

Griffith has 12 wineries, 14 fruit packing sheds with 6 export sheds and 3 processors. Griffith is centrally located in terms of markets and close to major transport routes.

Challenge for the region	Solution driven action by government
Questions have arisen over water security with the MDBA process and the challenges this process has wrought on communities in particular in terms of viability of irrigation systems and businesses, maintaining balanced communities, industries and associated employment and sufficient rate base for local governments to meet service expectations of emerging communities.	Provide certainty on water supply and limits to enable the MIA to feed the nation and support the Federal Government's push to feed the Asian markets. Provide more business confidence to invest in improvements and the value add sector.
Transport infrastructure – more efficient and cost effective supply chain.	Critical infrastructure assistance for delivery of vital supply chain infrastructure i.e. The Western Riverina Intermodal & Logistics Hub
Human capital and skilled workers – this continues to be a struggle for the farming sector.	Improved flexibility on 457 visa's, permanent visas and an overhaul to the National Harvest Labour Information Service.
Emotional capital.	Improved access to Rural counselling services including financial counselling and mental health.
The high cost for young people to enter the agriculture industry (land acquisition, plant and equipment).	Concept of a Government auspiced start up bank.
Improved market access for export driven industries.	Reduce the cost of freight on board (FOB). Collaborate with commodity organisations to

	capture a greater market share in overseas markets. Capitalise on FTA (Free Trade Agreements).
Improved communications.	Mobile coverage and broadband, more effective communication and more advocacy with urban communities and State and Commonwealth politicians.
Biosecurity threats.	Integrated and effective control measures with zero tolerance.

Whilst Agriculture is not the largest employer in Griffith (Manufacturing and Retail Trade employ more), when farming coughs the region sneezes – the region is very heavily reliant on agriculture.

Griffith City Council would like to acknowledge the recent consultation meeting which was held by officers from the Department in Griffith with key stakeholders to draw out some of the issues in relation to the White Paper. As one of the most productive areas and a food bowl of the country, the Riverina, in particular the Western Riverina is an important and key area in developing the framework for a White Paper on Agriculture to gain the support of key commodity groups and food and fibre producers.

Griffith City Council would appreciate the opportunity to be kept involved in the process as the Government endeavours to develop a White Paper on Agriculture which will form the basis of one of the most important plans for Agriculture that Australia is likely to embrace.

For more information, please contact me on 02 69628 100,

Yours Sincerely



Neil Southorn

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Griffith City Council