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Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Chair

Re: Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

Thank you for the opportunity for Bland Shire Council to provide a brief submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper.

Bland Shire Council recognises the significant importance of the agricultural sector and the Bland Shire is one of New South Wales largest cereal-growing areas producing wheat, barley, oats, triticale, cereal rye, chickpeas, field peas, lupins, canola and sorghum.

As mentioned in your issues paper <https://agriculturalcompetitiveness.dpmc.gov.au/> Agriculture has played an important role in Australia's history. In the first half of the 20th century it accounted for around a quarter of the nation's output and between 70–80 per cent of Australia's exports (Productivity Commission 2005). In recent decades, agriculture's share of Australia's national income and exports has declined, consistent with that of many other developed countries. This is in part due to the strength of the services and mining sectors.

Population growth, increasing prosperity in our region and changing consumer diets and preferences are creating consumer demand for food and fibre. Worldwide, demand for food is projected to rise by around 75 per cent in the first half of this century, with three quarters of this growth in Asia (ABARES 2013a). Australian agricultural production will need to expand significantly to take advantage of these opportunities. This is likely to require opening up new areas of agricultural production, including in northern Australia, with the possibility of doubling production by 2050.

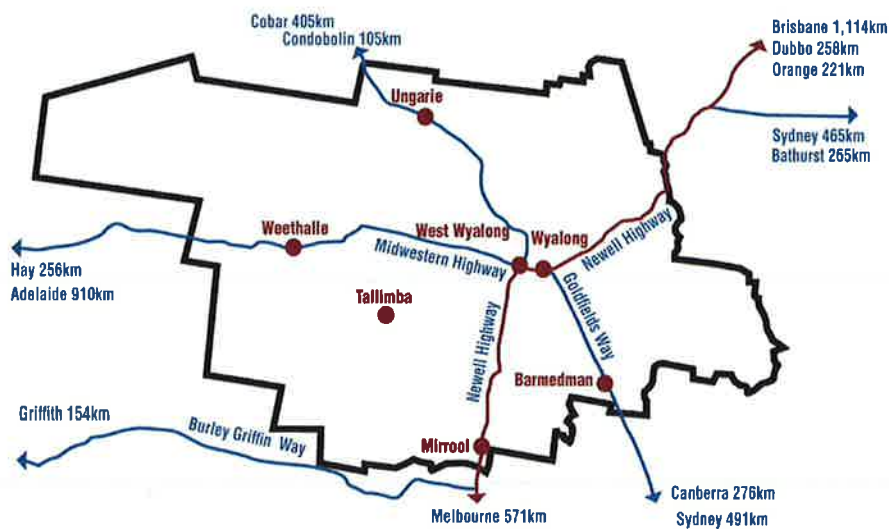
A vibrant, innovative and competitive agriculture sector will create jobs, encourage investment and help build stronger rural and regional communities, and, in turn, a stronger Australia. Australia cannot afford not to have vibrant rural and remote townships and a vibrant, healthy and profitable agricultural sector.

Background

The Bland Shire was proclaimed on 6 March 1906. The Bland Shire, West Wyalong is centrally located in regional New South Wales.



The Bland Shire and West Wyalong central location



The Bland Shire

The Bland Shire has a population of 5,865 and covers an area of 8,558 square kilometres. Towns and villages in the Bland Shire include West Wyalong, Wyalong, Barmedman, Mirrool, Naradhan, Tallimba, Kikiora, Ungarie and Weethalle.

The Bland Shire is surrounded by the Shires of Lachlan, Forbes, Weddin, Young, Temora, Coolamon, Narrandera and Carrathool.

The Bland Shire's history is deeply engrained in agriculture and gold production which continues through to today. The Barrick Cowal Gold Mine commenced construction in 2004 with gold production in 2006.

The Bland Shire is one of New South Wales largest cereal-growing areas producing wheat, barley, oats, triticale, cereal rye, chickpeas, field peas, lupins, canola and sorghum.

Eucalyptus oil production started in 1907 and the West Wyalong area has become one of the major world exporters of Eucalyptus oil in Australia.

Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

5. Enhancing agriculture's contribution to regional communities

- **What impact does the growth of populations in regional centres and the decline in more rural or remote townships have on farming businesses and the agriculture sector?**

The following table contains ABS Census population figures for the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the Riverina, and surrounding LGAs:

LGA	Area sq KM	2001 Census	2006 Census	2011 Census	2001-2011 Change	2001-2011 Avg Yearly Population Change	2001-2011 Avg % Yearly Population
Wakool	7,521	4,806	4,362	3,692	-1,114	-111	-3.0
Carrathool	18,933	3,320	2,820	2,587	-733	-73	-2.8
Balranald	21,700	2,770	2,440	2,283	-487	-49	-2.1
Hay	11,326	3,574	3,383	2,956	-618	-62	-2.1
Jerilderie	3,373	1,790	1,640	1,496	-294	-29	-2.0
Urana	3,356	1,332	1,260	1,159	-173	-17	-1.5
Lockhart	2,896	3,397	3,179	2,998	-399	-40	-1.3
Murrumbidgee	3,507	2,519	2,501	2,261	-258	-26	-1.1
Lachlan	14,965	7,188	6,670	6,476	-712	-71	-1.1
Narrandera	4,116	6,486	6,013	5,902	-584	-58	-1.0
Bland	8,560	6,439	6,102	5,865	-574	-57	-1.0
Deniliquin	143	7,786	7,429	7,120	-666	-67	-0.9
Forbes	4,718	9,707	9,360	9,170	-537	-54	-0.6
Tumbarumba	4,393	3,551	3,533	3,358	-193	-19	-0.6
Wentworth	26,257	6,984	6,780	6,609	-375	-38	-0.6
Lecton	1,167	11,469	11,112	11,037	-432	-43	-0.4
Temora	2,802	5,972	5,857	5,776	-196	-20	-0.3
Tumut	4,567	11,228	10,801	10,934	-294	-29	-0.3
Cowra	2,809	12,462	12,474	12,147	-315	-32	-0.3
Gundagai	2,457	3,726	3,692	3,662	-64	-6	-0.2
Weddin	3,409	3,656	3,641	3,665	9	1	0.0
Harden	1,869	3,574	3,581	3,584	10	1	0.0
Parkes	5,955	14,455	14,280	14,592	137	14	0.1
Greater Hume	5,749	N/A	9,731	9,815	84	17	0.2
Griffith	1,640	23,805	23,800	24,364	559	56	0.2
Boorowa	2,578	2,333	2,296	2,399	66	7	0.3
Cootamundra	1,524	7,132	7,313	7,334	202	20	0.3
Berrigan	2,066	7,709	7,994	8,066	357	36	0.4
Coolamon	2,431	3,911	4,026	4,099	188	19	0.5

Junee	2,030	5,585	5,779	5,878	293	29	0.5
Wagga Wagga	4,826	55,056	57,015	59,458	4,402	440	0.7
Young	2,693	11,300	11,985	12,236	936	94	0.8
Conargo	8,738	1,417	1,673	1,540	123	12	0.8
Albury City	306	42,458	46,281	47,810	5,352	535	1.1
Murray	4,344	5,907	6,417	6,957	1,050	105	1.5
Corowa	2,329	8,257	10,975	11,000	2,743	274	2.5
Yass Valley	3,998	9,708	13,135	15,020	5,312	531	3.5

Yellow – Bland Shire surrounding LGA's

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

The Bland Shire has seen a -1.0% average decrease in population from the 2001 to 2011 census periods with the population decreasing by 574 residents from 6,439 in 2001 to 5,865 in 2011.

This decrease in population has had a major impact on the Bland Shire and with a reducing residential and rural rate base, it is more difficult for Councils to provide and maintain the facilities and services for the agricultural sector in the rural and remote townships. Some of the flow on effects are:

- Reduced services, less competition and increased costs;
- Reduced labour pool;
- Ageing population;
- Ageing infrastructure;
- Maintenance of roads;
- Increased costs;
- Leakage to larger centres etc.

This reduction in the Bland Shire population has seen the withdrawal of our aerial regular passenger transport (RPT) services to West Wyalong, and it is without doubt that by West Wyalong not having a regular RPT service has a major negative economic impact on the Bland Shire, and the value of having a regular and reliable RPT service cannot be overstated. The Bland Shire is 491km or 5hr 41min from Sydney by road and is not on a direct passenger train service. West Wyalong is serviced by a nine hour XPT train from Sydney to Cootamundra, then a Country Link bus from Cootamundra to West Wyalong. The XPT departs Sydney at 7:32am and arrives in Cootamundra at 12:46pm, with the Country Link bus arriving in West Wyalong at 4:40pm.

Government, businesses and residents of the Bland Shire have to travel to the following centres to access RPT services:

Griffith:	154km, 1hr 52min
Wagga Wagga:	155km, 1 hr 58min
Parkes:	138km, 1hr 43min
Leeton / Narrandera:	143km, 1hr 42min

The additional time and costs to existing businesses in connecting to these RPT services is quite substantial and adds to the bottom line of conducting a business in the Bland Shire. Research has also shown that whilst accessing these RPT services, there is a lot of revenue leakage from the Bland Shire as a result of these businesses taking the advantage of accessing services and supplies at these locations.

Past studies have shown that a location with a regular and reliable RPT service will grow faster than a location that does not have a regular and reliable RPT service. Past studies have also showed that the likelihood of sustaining or attracting new enterprises, services or business without a regular and reliable RPT service is dramatically reduced.

It is also noted that there is a significant disparity between airfares inter-capital and airfares into the regional NSW. This generates disincentives for air travel to regional NSW. Besides the economic impacts, airports and RPT services also play an important social role in connecting individuals, families and communities with the rest of the state, country and indeed the world.

- **How can the agriculture sector best contribute to growth in jobs and boost investment in regional communities, including indigenous communities?**

As can be seen in the following table, the 2011 ABS Census data shows that in the Bland Shire, Agriculture, forestry and fishing industry by occupation is the largest employment sector employing 762 or 28.3% of the Bland Shire's workforce followed by mining at 252 and 9.3%.

ABS 2011 Census Industry By Occupation	Total	%
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	762	28.3
Mining	252	9.3
Retail trade	243	9.0
Education and training	188	7.0
Accommodation and food services	163	6.0
Health care and social assistance	161	6.0
Transport, postal and warehousing	151	5.6
Public administration and safety	147	5.5
Construction	111	4.1
Manufacturing	93	3.4
Other services	93	3.4
Wholesale trade	85	3.2
Professional, scientific and technical services	63	2.3
Administrative and support services	37	1.4
Financial and insurance services	27	1.0
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	19	0.7
Arts and recreation services	14	0.5
Information media and telecommunications	10	0.4
Rental, hiring and real estate services	9	0.3
Inadequately described/Not stated	68	2.5
Total	2,696	

A vibrant and progressive rural community is vital to support the agricultural sector where they can have access to educational facilities, purchase supplies, access services including banking, mechanical, engineering, medical and allied health, agricultural machinery companies, car dealers, tyre and exhaust services etc.

Rural and regional communities may also benefit from the investment and development of competitive alternative energy projects, e.g. bioenergy projects.

- **What community and policy responses are needed in rural and regional communities to adapt and change to new pressures and opportunities in the agriculture sector?**

Vast improvements and access to the internet, telecommunications and social media need immediate investment in infrastructure to improve the coverage, speeds and reliability.

Support of a regular and reliable aerial RPT services to rural and remote townships.

Greater political representation in rural and remote townships.

Better and improved air, road, rail and telecommunication infrastructure.

Greater Federal and State infrastructure funding for rural and remote townships.

- **How do we attract the next generation of farmers?**

Improve the image of the agricultural sector and the rural and remote townships with the urban communities.

The National school curriculum should contain a subject and made mandatory for all young students on 'where does my food comes from' so that the urban residents know that milk comes from dairy cows and not out of the refrigerator. The division and discord between city and country is growing further and further apart. Young Australians are the future, if we want a prosperous society, we must educate early on where food and fibre comes from and that Australian farmers help feed and clothe them and the world.

Also look at the cost and barriers to enter the agricultural sector and the issues to securing finance to enter.

6. Improving the competitiveness of inputs to the supply chain

Governments need to ensure that the cost of doing business in Australia becomes competitive with the rest of the world, i.e. on a level playing field.

- **How can land, water and other farm inputs be more effectively deployed to better drive agriculture sector productivity, while maintaining or enhancing the natural resource base?**

One project that is on the drawing board is the Drought Master project that will see the installation of a water pipe line from Grong Grong through to Tallimba, which will supply stock and domestic water to over 150 farms without water security over a 2,000 square kilometre area.

- **What skills including specialised skills and training, will be required in the future and how can these be delivered and uptake encouraged?**

The current funding for Charles Sturt University agricultural programs must be maintained and increased to provide an educated workforce for the agricultural sector and rural and remote communities.

- **How can we attract workers to agriculture – particularly in remote areas?**

The National school curriculum should contain a subject and made mandatory for all young students on ‘where does my food comes from’ so that the urban residents know that milk comes from dairy cows and not out of the refrigerator. The division and discord between city and country is growing further and further apart. Young Australians are the future, if we want a prosperous society, we must educate early on where food and fibre comes from and that Australian farmers help feed and clothe them and the world.

Improve the image of the agricultural sector and the rural and remote townships with the urban communities. Vibrant and modern towns with services, facilities and transport connections are one of the important factors to assist with attracting workers to agriculture.

- **What irrigation, transport, storage and distribution infrastructure are required to support the food and fibre production systems of the future and how should this be funded?**

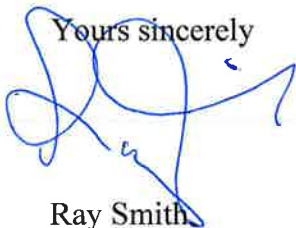
Where once transport costs made long distance trade uncompetitive to the local product, this is rapidly changing to where world markets can source product from anywhere in the world and have it delivered quick and cheap.

Investing in the regional road and rail network would be of great benefit to all of Australia’s rural and remote townships, hard and soft commodity production, including mining and agricultural production now and into the future. This investment in the road and rail networks will increase the productivity of the agricultural sector with flow on effects to the broader community.

The Bland Shire allocates an annual expenditure of \$8.8 million to maintain a road network of 3,237 kilometres of which 866 kilometres are sealed, 1,742 kilometres of gravel and 629 kilometres natural which is vital to the agricultural sector in the Bland Shire.

Once again thank you for the opportunity for Bland Shire Council to provide a brief submission to the Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper.

Yours sincerely



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