



**Murray Bridge
Head Office**
PO Box 2343
MURRAY BRIDGE SA 5253
Tel 08 8532 9100
Fax 08 8532 5300
ABN 14 305 414 800
www.samdbnrm.sa.gov.au

Thursday, 24 April 2014

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

Dear Sir/madam,

RE: Response to the Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

The South Australian Murray-Darling Natural Resources Management Board (the Board) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper (Issues Paper). The Board is the key statutory authority for the management of natural resources in the SA Murray-Darling Basin Region. Our region has many environmental, economic and social attributes that are extremely valuable to South Australia's and Australia's agricultural sector, being the state's premier horticultural region, increasing intensive livestock industries and home to the Mallee grain belt.

The Board operates under the auspices of the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* (The Act) and is a major investor in innovative agricultural production, natural resources management and community engagement programs that build the skills, knowledge and confidence of our region's farmers and land managers. The Board works closely with the primary producers within the South Australian Murray-Darling and recognises the initiative of this Issues Paper as an important step towards ensuring a long term, prosperous and resilient agricultural sector.

The Board recognises that the agricultural sector is facing many challenges that impact on its ability to remain viable, competitive and sustainable. However a vibrant agricultural sector cannot remain competitive in the global market without the contribution of a region's natural resource capital (healthy soils, good quality water and healthy bush) as a key component of competitive and productive agriculture. In Australia, history has shown us that unsustainable practices only enhance competitiveness in the short term, if at all. They create costs in the longer term. We are also increasingly aware that Australian producers need to compete through well-marketed quality produce, rather than bulk commodities that can be produced cheaply across the globe.

The Board would like to focus our submission on the risks to our region's agriculture which will result from poor natural resources management practices, variable and extreme climate events, and community perceptions of the agricultural sector's level of social responsibility. The Board would encourage the use of bold policy to address these risks and to promote the long term resilience and therefore productive capacity of our natural resources. This future thinking approach is key to the Board's own delivery of agricultural policy, such as the installation of devices to secure low water flows for the environment within the Marne River catchment as part of an effective

Water Allocation Plan. Although bold this policy has been developed with strong community collaboration, enabling greater volumes of water to be allocated to water users within the catchment, whilst ensuring a healthy catchment for long term productivity and profitability.

The Board's responses to the Agricultural White Paper comments are as follows –

1. Ensuring food security in Australia and Globally

The Board is able to provide excellent services to the agricultural sector in the protection, improvement and sustainable use of natural resources. For example the Board's statutory responsibility to work with industry, community and all three levels of government to determine the utilisation, sharing, trade and transfer of water resources, for all stakeholders, and to ensure water security into the future.

The Board sees opportunities for further programs in climate adaptation, risk management and mitigation projects, improved innovations enabling greater productivity and profitability while using the same or less resources and the development of strong "clean, green and safe" message surrounding Australian agricultural products and practices.

2. Farmer decision-making for improving farm gate returns

The Board has an extensive history in assisting primary producers make informed and timely on-farm decisions which support the profitability of our region's agricultural enterprises. The region's automatic weather station network, the farm planning program, the development of nrmFarm to enable real-time and in-paddock smart phone farm record keeping and an extensive network of farming systems groups and young farmer networks are just some of the projects that the Board is currently sponsoring.

Opportunities have been recognised, within the Issues Paper, to continue this important work and to bring innovative farm thinking, planning and action to an even wider audience, ensuring that biosecurity, risk management, the ability to have resilient enterprises that can withstand weather events, encourage diversification of production and support opportunities to connect to new players in Australian agriculture and overseas markets.

Previous learning's from the millennium drought in South Australia show that for best practice decision-making it is vital to have local leadership that the community can connect with, that making good decisions early will lead to an early recovery and that it is critical to support and build community and industry capacity and skill around managing risk prior to events. The Board being a local organisation comprising local business and community leaders with extensive connections within the regional agricultural sectors was, and will be again, very well placed to support our region through challenging events such as drought, flood, fire, locusts and mice plagues in the context of global markets.

3. Enhancing access to finance

The Board would encourage and support the further development of programs that link accessing finance to best practice management and protection of natural resources, for example –

- Working with banks and financial institutions to ensure that Farm Business Plans address land management risks and protection of the natural resource base as a key element for securing finance.
- Investigating stewardship programs and the potential payment for producers of ecosystem services, such as improved water quality and increased soil or vegetation condition.
- Supporting cooperative farming models, through farming planning programs, where two or more farmers can share equipment or livestock.

4. Increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and its value chains

The Board is enthusiastic about the Issues Papers identification of the need for an agricultural sector within Australia that can be promoted and widely accepted as “Clean, green and safe” for products and practices. Increasingly to enter consumer markets, from the international stage to the local farmers market in a regional town, a clean and environmentally conscious product is a highly valued product. In a global arena, where Australia will have difficulty competing on price and quantity, we can ensure we can compete on quality and consumer confidence.

The Board has a number of programs designed and delivered in association with industry and community which contribute to improving the quality of our region’s produce, including irrigation infrastructure projects, confinement feeding for livestock, native grass pastures, farming planning, biosecurity projects and the improved soil moisture monitoring for broad acre cereal, irrigation crops and horticulture.

5. Enhancing agricultures contribution to regional communities

The Board is a community-based organisation, which strongly believes in the principles of co-design and strives to ensure that the community is at the centre of its programs.

By supporting innovation, investment and sustainable returns from agricultural production, we are in turn boosting the productivity and profitability of our rural communities. The Board, as a local organisation, is keenly aware of the need for local level programs that involve and empower farmers and the wider community. Some examples of where our Board’s regional focus could be leveraged to improve the connection between agricultural and our regional communities, include;

- Technical advice and support to farmers
- Farm planning
- Indigenous farming programs (such as the Board’s current program with the Raukkan community)
- Mentoring, training and traineeship opportunities that cover natural resources management and agriculture
- Championing the great farmers and celebrating sustainable land and water management that protects our natural capital
- Involving the regional development boards and local government in agricultural and natural resources management programs and policy such as water resource allocation planning, water monitoring, salinity management and biosecurity.
- Working with and supporting sustainability programs in most of the regions schools.

6. Improving competitiveness of inputs to the supply chain

The Board’s role is an enabler, and we recognise the enormous expertise with the agricultural sector that is and could be further harnessed to drive innovation and competitiveness. Ensuring that research and skill development is fit-for-purpose, transferrable to the paddock and well resourced into the future is a priority for the Board. Opportunities exist such as;

- Development of new web technologies, mobile applications and methods of improving timeliness in decision making
- Ready and easy access by farmers to high integrity information natural resources, weather and scientific information
- Promotion of the “Clean, Green and Safe” image
- Improving practices and promotion regarding biosecurity controls on farm
- Improving the recognition of standards and regulations that Australian agricultural producers currently operate under to enable clean, green and safe products, and to ensure that issues such as animal welfare, environmental damage and human ethics are managed at the highest calibre.

7. Reducing ineffective regulation

The Board sees regulation as an important tool available to governments for management and to ensure a common understanding of acceptable practise within an industry. It is the Board's experience that helpful regulation is wanted by innovative and responsible farmers, but can at times be railed against by some who do not operate to contemporary standards, eg soil management, biosecurity, water sharing, chemical trespass and animal welfare.

The Board, as a community-lead organisation, works with farmers and others to understand the objectives of regulations, the processes and the exemptions that may be available. We feel that regulation is an important component of enabling a common understanding, particularly in areas where not everyone subscribes to a particular shared value, for example water use. There are certainly examples of ineffective regulation at national, state and local scale.

The Board would welcome an opportunity to participate in the review of regulatory policies and to enable the ownership and improvement of such regulation by our local community.

8. Enhancing agricultural exports

We see broad opportunities for promoting our clean, green and safe credentials for market access and advantage in international and local markets.

9. Assessing the effectiveness of incentives for investment and job creation

The Board strongly supports the creation of jobs within agricultural sector, the value-adding chain and all of its related services. Through programs to encourage investment into agricultural and the development of best practice natural resources management there are many opportunities for job creation such as supporting roles for farmers, technical advisors, traineeships and new farmers.

The Board has a strong history of working with schools, aboriginal groups and youth, three areas that could be harnessed for building the future of farming within our region.

The South Australian Murray-Darling Natural Resources Management Board is pleased to have had the opportunity to provide input into the Issues Paper and to provide suggestions of where the Board, as a regional and well-known existing organisation, can continue to support and encourage the agricultural sector. Should you have any further queries on these comments from the Board please feel free to contact Mr Hugo Hopton, Regional Manager, Natural Resources SAMDB on (08) 8532 9100.

Yours sincerely,



Sharon Starick

Presiding Member

South Australian Murray-Darling Natural Resources Management Board