

Submission to Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper. April 2014.

Comments following Summary of questions for consideration.

1. Ensuring food security.

We need to take more seriously the questions of compromise when we import from countries whose produce does not have the same high standards of disease and food produce safety.

We need to be able to respond as an industry to supply opportunities without interference from extreme animal groups eg northern territory cattle disaster. Promotion of all the good things Australian producers do should be a priority to be promoted to the media.

We need to consider very seriously the amount of country we allow to be purchased by foreign ownership, and balance this against how much we need the foreign capital injection. This needs to be balanced, so that we do not become reliant on other countries for food security in an extreme situation.

2. Improving Farm Gate Returns.

The bottom line for most farmers is always the main driver for adopting alternatives. We are struggling continually against a narrow margin against costs and it is becoming more narrow. We are the most efficient in the world and still we are mostly at the bottom tier for personal income. Most farmers will undertake improvements whenever they can, eg pain relief for mulesing, which most of us do. However it increases costs but does not increase returns. We are constantly competing against producers in other parts of the world who do not have our costs, but are continually subsidised.

Perhaps we need a different taxation system for primary production, eg a larger zone allowance for remote or regional areas, also including other people living in those areas to also encourage residence and work availability. Farm Management Deposits could be under a different level of tax when brought out, or if then used to restock, little or no tax. Transport of stock to sale or slaughter should always be subsidised in remote areas.

Drought support needs to be a regular system; we live in a country of drought.

The changes to farm family support and access to refinancing debt were good but with an asset level still too high for many people to access.

This refinancing, however, is only helping those at least 1.5 million out in debt, otherwise it is of little benefit; so does this actually help the longterm sustainable as opposed to a means tested interest subsidy- I don't think so.

Access to water improvement infrastructure subsidy should be available always under a means tested system, so as to leave little need for emergency water infrastructure rebates, listing 'no paddock water' declarations.

Does Australia really need to produce water heavy crops such as cotton and rice? Not really, this is not recognising the reality of our water resources.

New farmers will not be attracted to agriculture without constant access to specific low interest loans to access capital.

3. Enhancing access to finance.

Continual low interest loans specifically for agricultural business, non-corporate.

Change tax and use of FMDs.

Change taxation level for farmers and those living in remote areas.

Support and recognition of family farming as businesses and succession planning.

4. Increasing competitiveness of agricultural sector.

Allow us to compete without interference from extreme groups.

Very publicly push the image of the Australian farmers in a positive light, this campaign should be supported by state dpi.

Promote accountability of organisations such as MLA and AWI who collect levies and produce what?

5. Enhancing agriculture's contribution.

It is difficult for agriculture to contribute to the regional economy, apart from local purchase, as long term employment for people is difficult whilst Australian agriculture remains at such a low margin of income produced.

6. 7. and 8.

I can only answer these in general terms, and some of my replies are in the above responses.

Agriculture has to be respected again in the Australian community as a necessary industry, one worthy of government support in attitude and regulation.

It needs to be recognised that Australian farmers are first and foremost always looking to be sustainable and maintaining their environment. They cannot produce if they do not do this. They look to future generations being able to produce on the same land as a matter of course. Their animals cannot produce if not husbanded to keep them healthy and content. They recognise the conservation of the natural elements of their land, vegetation and water as absolutely necessary.

WE are conservationists, environmentalists and animal protectors, as a matter of our survival, though we are certainly not recognised as such.