

Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper Submission
Phase 1: Submission on issues paper

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Submitting Organisation: Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Board (EP NRM Board)

The Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Region covers a significant area of the State of South Australia with an area of over 80,000 square kilometres (km²) and supports a population of about 55,000 people.

The Department of Agriculture stated in 2010 that the agricultural sector manages 61% of Australia's landmass. On Eyre Peninsula farmers manage well over 55% of the area, therefore, farmers play a very important role in managing our natural resources.

The sustainability of our natural resources is very closely aligned to the sustainability of food production and therefore both need to be considered in any future policy and planning at all Government and Industry levels.

Agriculture relies on a natural resource base that requires protection and sustainable use. An effective and efficient industry also requires support and markets to enable our regions quality produce to grow and expand

The strength and nature of the relationship between the Natural Resource Management and the agriculture sector is fundamental to achieving these goals.

As a significant portion of our region is managed by farmers, engagement of the farming community is crucial to the success of increasing and maintaining sustainable agricultural production. The EP NRM Board is very supportive of the Government's aim that agriculture 'realises its full potential through innovation, productivity, investment and trade'. The recent shift in targeted Sustainable Agricultural support by the Australian Government has been welcomed and needs to continue.

1. Ensuring food security in Australia and globally

What opportunities exist to expand agricultural production in Australia and how can we take advantage of them?

The United Nations reports that the growing world population will drive up demand for food by 70 per cent by the year 2050. (*United Nations Population Information Network <http://www.un.org/popin/data.html>*).

This increase in demand will produce opportunities for Australian agriculture with ABARES saying the 'real value (in 2007 US dollars) of Australian agrifood exports in 2050 is expected to be 140% higher than 2007.....driven by substantial increases in the real value of exports of beef, wheat, dairy products, sheep meat and sugar''

This increase in demand will require higher productivity on the same area of land, and in some areas on less land where urban development and lifestyle properties are replacing some of the high productivity primary production land. Additionally climate change is posing a major challenge to sustainable food production.

While State and Commonwealth Governments welcome the income from mining royalties and some communities welcome job and economic opportunities consideration must be given to any short term gain over the longer term (multiple generational) sustainable food production that the same land can deliver. Often mining takes farming land out of food production indefinitely, draws workers away from agricultural and supporting businesses, and on top of that land prices of surrounding farms are detrimentally affected and contamination of soil and water is a huge risk (e.g. lead poisoning in the surrounds of Pt Pirie). Eyre Peninsula and other parts of South Australia are experiencing conflict between large scale mining and agriculture for the first time as mining commences in arable areas, thus potentially impacting on food security and sustainable use of resources, e.g. one proposed mine on Eyre Peninsula is estimated to take approximately 1% of the region's arable farming land.

Expanding agricultural production must be done in a sustainable manner if Australia's food security opportunities and needs are to be long term.

- Water limitations in SA, especially on Eyre Peninsula already pose significant challenges for the future of the region's agriculture production. The increasing run of dryer than average rainfall years has severely impacted on the region's limited ground water supplies. To combat this, landholders are looking at innovative ways of harvesting rainfall for livestock production and other farm water uses, together with reducing loss by evaporation. During droughts the diversification provided by livestock in mixed farming enterprises (cropping and livestock) is not available if surface catchments dry up and there is no access to public pipe schemes as is the case in many areas of Eyre Peninsula.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry reported in their 'At A Glance 2010' Publication that the rate of productivity growth has slowed over the last decade.

- Research Development and Extension (RD&E), including that funded through the public purse as to provide a level of independency, is essential in capitalising on the opportunities to expand and grow Australian agriculture that is competitive on a world stage. Research would include development of varieties that are tolerant of testing climate conditions such as drought, flood and extreme temperatures.
- Improved plant breeding using molecular markers and approved GM crop varieties addressing specific traits and also supporting further uptake of methodologies such as no till cultivations and precision technology will assist the opportunities of intensifying and expanding production.
- To improve global food security we must also be able to produce safe food at affordable levels that the majority of the world's population can afford and want. Therefore, we need to produce more on less land and we need to produce it at lower costs.

- Producing a saleable agricultural commodity requires continued innovation in farming techniques, plant varieties, livestock husbandry and management of the soil resource whilst controlling agricultural threats including biosecurity. Biotechnology has a role to play in supporting all of these targets.

How can farm businesses, food manufacturers and the retail sector be more responsive to domestic and global food demand and better integrate into domestic and global supply chains?

Reducing the monopolies and duopolies which exist in some agricultural sectors such as grain receipt and exporting, fertiliser, supermarket purchasing power e.g. livestock, and ports would enable farmers to have greater access to domestic and global supply chains, improve returns on commodities and commence competition between bulk handling which may reduce costs of handling.

Do farmers have access to timely, relevant and accurate information to fully inform production decisions to meet domestic and global food demands?

- Improved reliable seasonal climatic predictions would assist decision making in how many hectares to plant dependent on favourability of these forecasts.
- National and global grain commodity prices, stocks, weather and planting trends are readily available through various grain marketing consultants and grain traders on a daily basis to support marketing decisions even prior to sowing.
- Access to information is reliant on farmers having access to modern technologies such as internet and mobile phone services. Much of Eyre Peninsula has no or unreliable mobile phone service. Internet access in many areas is reliant on satellite technology which is expected to improve (speed, latency) once launching of the proposed NBN satellites is realised.

What opportunities exist for exporting Australian agricultural technology, marketing skills and expertise to improve global food security outcomes?

2. Farmer decisions for improving farm gate returns

What are the drivers and constraints to farmers adopting alternative business structures, innovations or practices that will assist them in improving farm-gate returns?

- Drivers are usually economic and the need to be profitable. The majority of farmers also recognise that caring for their soils, water resources and farm environment generally is essential for the long term viability of their farming enterprise.
- This in turn provides benefits to the wider community in ecosystem services such as clean water and air and biodiversity conservation. Into the future there may be the need to consider these ecosystem services in the light of stewardship and how society as a beneficiary can support farmers to continue to effectively provide these services in a sustainable farming business.
- In 2009-10, 65 percent of agricultural businesses reported native vegetation on their property, with 55 percent actively preserving native vegetation for conservation purposes. *Australian Bureau of Statistics, Land Management and Farming in Australia, 2009-2010, Catalogue No.4627.0*
- In 2009-10, 52 percent of agricultural businesses undertook activities to protect native vegetation, 45 percent wetland protection and 49 percent river or creek bank protection. *Australian Bureau of Statistics, Year Book Australia 2009-10*

These reports demonstrate that farmers do care for natural systems and understand their importance to their production enterprises.

Constraints can also be economic – no capital to implement innovative, or even reasonably established methodologies, or to increase holdings. Lack of funds to ‘purchase’ time, knowledge/expertise, or maybe a lack of access to expertise due to a shortage of skilled people.

The ever increasing input costs relative to their returns, have placed significant stress on profitability over the last decade or so and this was particularly apparent with the supply and demand of crop and soil nutrients through fertilisers and the cost jumps we saw with these products during the last few years. Some farmers chose not to use fertilisers during this time or at least cut back significantly. However for some, this impetus drove the move to precision agricultural technology to manage their inputs, placing fertilizer much more exactly where it was needed.

Agronomic constraints also play a huge role. The lack of suitable crop varieties to cope with challenges of disease, pests, frost, soil salinity, drought/low rainfall and other soil limitations also place restrictions on improving farm gate returns.

Australia and in particular Eyre Peninsula South Australia has a distinctive range of soil types and farming practices ranging from high rainfall, intensively cropped areas to marginal cropping in the low rainfall zones. Despite rainfall being a major driver of productivity, crop and pasture water use efficiency is relatively low across much of the agricultural zone (Payne and McCord). This is due to the low inherent fertility of much of the soils in the region (particularly in sandy soils and highly weathered subsoil's) and poor soil structure (due to low organic carbon levels, high sodicity and physical compaction). These soil constraints issues result in low plant available water, shallow root zones and low soil organic carbon levels that limits agricultural production, management and land use.

What tools, skills and advice do farmers need to effectively adapt and respond to the risks they face?

Research, Development and Extension (RD&E) will be essential as food producers adapt to the changed rainfall patterns and higher temperatures of climate change.

In order to maintain the advancement and practical application of scientific research in agriculture, investment needs to be at a minimum maintained and not diminished as is occurring across the southern areas of the country. A failure to fill positions vacated by senior scientists in these institutions will not only jeopardise the capacity to meet the contractual obligations of current projects but seriously limit the capacity to attract future projects that advance agricultural development and improvement. The savings made by cutting funds to organisation such as our region's well recognised “Minnipa Agricultural Centre” on Eyre Peninsula, will likely come at a very high cost to the advancement and competitiveness of agriculture in low rainfall area. These cuts will inevitably result in fewer research and development projects being funded in the low rainfall agricultural regions of South Australia, with a subsequent flow on to other low rainfall farming areas of Australia.

RD&E also has a huge role to play in the face of increasing farm input costs, particularly herbicides, and finite supplies of nutrients. The widespread adoption of no till cropping has improved soil structure and carbon, conserved moisture, reduced use of fossil fuels and exhaust gases going into the atmosphere, and the trade-off has been a significant increase in the use of herbicides for weed control.

It will also be essential to seek ways of increasing the soils capacity to produce more to increase production, improve plant varieties and reduce the impact of sub soil constraints such as salinity to get the best value from the area of farmed land available for food.

RD & E, including that funded through government investment ensures a level of independency is essential in capitalising on the opportunities to expand agriculture.

With the average of most farmers increasing, the time is right to start engaging and developing the next generation of land managers so they move and change with the new farming systems and adjust to the increasing pressure that climate change will have on the region's farming resource base and its food security.

There is an ongoing need for access to technical farming advice as most landholders still value someone to walk with them when making these changes; it is often only the innovative farmers who will take a lead

and try something different. The majority of farmers like to look over the fence and if they see it working will invest, hence why demonstration sites work well.

However, this necessary extension support will not occur if there is a continued downturn in government support to the agricultural industry and loss of its technical staff who deliver sound sustainable agricultural resource management information and advice

Our NRM Board believes that climate change has the potential to have a huge impact on our region of Eyre Peninsula where half of our producers are farming in low rainfall areas and already factor in drought on a regular basis. We are already hearing of migration of fishing areas from our fisheries and aquaculture industries.

We believe the significant impacts and need to adapt must be given greater prominence in any future agricultural competitiveness papers. The effects of climate change will vary across regions and the entire sector and value chain will require adjustment, as regional changes in production will affect input supplies and the location of processors and other industry assets.

On Eyre Peninsula key leaders and stakeholders, under the banner of the Eyre Peninsula Integrated Climate Change Agreement, have come together to develop a Regional Climate Change Adaptation Plan using adaptation pathways for various sectors. These pathways show alternative adaptation measures on time lines.

An adaptation pathway has been prepared for the key decision of “How and when can the farming sector transition to more viable agricultural practices in the face of warmer and drier conditions in areas that are currently marginal for cropping?”

The plan observes that in the short term, further uptake of leading business and agronomic practices (e.g. stubble management, precision agriculture and soil modification) can provide immediate adaptation measures. However, while traditional breeding programs are still considered important, there is an emerging view that they will not be able to deliver new traits at a rate quickly enough to keep up with the speed of a changing climate. If this is the case, alternate options may be required such as a switch to genetically modified crops; these will have significant lead times in terms of public policy, community opinion and actual variety development. Further adaptation may require transformational change from food based to crops for fuel production or carbon sequestration enterprises.

The Plan also notes that while marginal lands may transform away from cropping, fertile lands which are often being taken over by peri-urban expansion will become ever more important to maintain agricultural output, raising a further cross-sectoral concern on land use planning.

Access to benchmarking is a valuable tool in supporting farmers to understand where their business sits relative to their peers and clearly shows areas needing attention and those that are doing well. There is limited access to this type of tool through consultants but extended access would be beneficial.

What alternative actions or measures by governments, farmers or others would result in improved financial performance at the farm gate?

Our NRM Board supports the Australian Government’s plans to strengthen Australia’s biosecurity and quarantine capabilities. Ongoing and improved bio-security measures to protect our production, and therefore farmer’s bottom line is vital, and this includes threats from within Australia and also those arriving with imports.

The current low level of disease and invasive pests provides substantial competitive advantage for agriculture. Apart from the management costs and production losses that exotic pests and diseases would impose, there would be significant loss of markets due to breaches of our biosecurity, and of product value as a result of additional management practices to address these threats.

There are already significant costs to food producers now with threats from within our country. ‘The impact and control of weeds costs Australian agriculture more than \$4 billion per year. Farmers consider weed control as one of their highest priorities in preventing long-term land degradation. The cost

to agriculture from wild dogs, rabbits, foxes, pigs, pest birds and mice is estimated at approximately \$745 million in 2009. *Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, At a glance 2010*

Changing climatic conditions pose another biosecurity concern as pests and diseases adapt, exploit and move into new areas. The Eyre Peninsula is experiencing infestations of new weeds such as Rhodes grass (*Chloris gayana*) which is making the most of unseasonal summer rainfall.

Conflict between agriculture and other land uses, such as mining and urban development, undermines the stable operating and investment environment needed for agribusinesses to enhance and grow their efficiency and value of production. This conflict highlights a need for government to develop policies that balance the needs of all sectors and manages the interface and potential conflicts appropriately.

What approaches could be used to encourage improved drought preparedness?

1. Farm Management Deposits provide an extremely useful drought proofing measure and there needs to be greater encouragement of their use rather than farmers rely on governments for support once a drought is established. Of course, in many farming enterprises the current maximum levels can be devoured by farm input costs very rapidly and long before the drought is over. An increase in farm management deposits would support larger businesses (with higher costs – not necessarily the more profitable businesses as many with large turnovers are in our marginal areas where drought preparedness is absolutely essential).
The limits placed on farm family companies with FMDs could be examined further so as to make FMDs available to more food producers.
FMDs could also be considered for those businesses directly affected by downturns in agriculture – e.g. machinery dealers in small country towns which rely entirely on local custom to retain their business and staff.
Transparency, where governments clearly state the limits of any future drought support during better times will give the message to farmers that they must be self-reliant and plan ahead
2. Ongoing R, D & E in drought tolerant varieties, better water use efficiency, higher temp tolerances, frost etc will support food producers in growing varieties capable of producing under severe climatic stresses. Access to GM crops with these traits would be very valuable
3. As mentioned in Question 1, alternative and improved rainfall harvesting would be very valuable in improving diversification opportunities for low rainfall areas. Information and incentives to carry out this work would be useful and could be delivered through Natural Resource Management Boards which already have responsibilities for Water Affecting Activities.
Maintaining sustainable ground water supplies is a challenge, where levels are impacted by drought, there is expected to be greater demand than supply in the next 5 – 10 years and climate change is expected to have an even greater impact with less winter rainfall (when most recharge occurs) and higher evaporation rates.
4. Research and evaluation of farmers on Eyre Peninsula and their management occurred during and following the last drought the state experienced, however the learnings and experiences of farmers who managed the drought well have not been extended to the greater farming community. These findings have the potential to help farmers and their communities better prepare for the next drought rather than being reactive to the situation.

During drought, what measures are most effective in supporting long term resilience?

Farmers report that the interest rate subsidy is an important measure, as many other subsidies are not paid in the state, however this measure needs to be utilised with care taking into account farm sustainability, profitability and ability to trade through and return to profitability following the drought. This drought support has been very generous in the past for those who meet the criteria. It also causes angst in the community where some are supported and others are not eligible.

How can new farmers be attracted to agriculture and how can they succeed?

1. Good Succession Planning is essential, we lose keen farmers due to poor succession planning within family farms and so further promotion and access to information to lead people down that path would be valuable.
2. Also promotion of schemes where farmers, wishing to retire without family members keen to continue the business, might explore ways to support a non family member into the business since the outlay of entering the industry as a farmer is prohibitive with high land and machinery costs.
3. Better access to information about agriculture and associated careers within the education system. We have some great schools in SA such as Urrbrae, Cleve, etc and ongoing support for them is valuable. Sadly in SA due to cost rationalisation at one of our Universities we lost our Bachelor of Ag degree and Ag diploma a few years ago and now only have bachelor of Ag Science available. This has eliminated many students who were very interested in becoming agronomists, farmers or work in less scientific fields of agriculture.
4. Mentoring programs provided by experienced farmers (preferably training in Mentoring) would provide very valuable support, guidance, knowledge and networks for young farmers.

3. Enhancing access to finance

How do we better attract private capital into farm investment?

Sadly we often hear about how tough people are doing it on the farm, and there is no doubt that many farmers are in this situation, sometimes very regularly and other times due to drought or some other act of nature.

However we have a percentage of extremely successful farming enterprises and we should celebrate these more. Just as mining talks up their exploration finds we should talk about our farming potential and achievements. And target this promotion at investors.

What examples are there of innovative financing models that could be used across the industry?

1. Investors that fund the growth of a crop (paddock identified prior to planting, checks by independent agronomists, all activities fully documented and agreed to etc) all the way to harvest in return for a percentage cut. While this means a farmer is unable to capitalise fully on a big harvest, it also means they are not out of pocket with expenses if there is failure. The investors obviously have a mix of 'safe' and 'opportunistic' areas they would finance.
2. Opportunities for superannuation funds to invest in agriculture could provide a significant injection of funds.

What would encourage uptake of new financing models?

What alternative business structures could be developed for farming that also retain ownership with farm families?

How can foreign investment best contribute to the financing and productivity growth of Australian agriculture?

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

How might existing laws and regulations be changed to address any market power imbalances in the agricultural supply chain, without limiting prospects for global-scale firms developing in Australia?

How can the agriculture sector improve its competitiveness relative to other sectors in the economy?

Which examples of overseas approaches to improving agricultural competitiveness have relevance for Australia?

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?

1. The increase in urban development encroaches on good productive Ag land resulting in loss of production. This urban – rural interface can also cause major challenges for farmers when urban dwellers have little understanding of farming practices, the hours of work, use of machinery and chemicals, and animal husbandry and the associated noises and smells. The responsibility for managing this should lie with the developer not with the established farmer
2. The decline in rural/remote townships poses a business and social challenge. The loss of agricultural and financial services that farmers access regularly for their business impose additional costs to travel further to access these. Farming families also suffer the loss of educational and health services along with the social fabric that provides a balanced happy life style such as friends, sporting clubs and other recreational activities and interactions. These losses also increase the challenges of finding full time or seasonal staff to work on farm.

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

1. Healthy, vibrant and profitable farms and those who manage them require a sustainable and seasonal workforce with varying skills. Supporting agriculture to be more profitable and sustainable will generate and contribute to the growth in jobs and healthy regional communities, including indigenous communities.
2. The agronomic and business skills now required in farming has seen the growth in the number of private consultants. This expertise in turn is improving farm returns.
3. A lot of the local agricultural agronomy development is also being filled with agency resellers. While most of these organisations provide good levels of technical support to individual farmers, advice is not always totally objective and falls short of land management at a regional landscape scale. There still remains the important need for farmers to have access to independent advice, and information to be provided by Government.
4. Farming systems groups run by growers over the last decade have seen the need to fill some of the gaps left in the industry and to continue the momentum of improved farming practices. The Groups play a very important role in supporting and extending these messages out to land managers in each of the regions, through activities such as trials, demonstrations, and workshops often backed by paid technical support. However, these groups must be supported with funding and advice to run these activities and to employ someone to ease the added time commitment required of farmers to manage these bodies successfully.
5. Development of farmer skills(business and agronomic) for growth of niche or comparative advantage branding opportunities while acknowledging that in some food commodity industries distances to markets, climate constraints and other economic factors don't support niche production.
6. Farmers are in for the long haul, most have an empathy with the land they farm and are more likely to adopt better farming practices i.e. minimum tillage, precision agriculture or changing to rotational grazing, if they are profitable. The only way they are going to continue to be profitable is with continued innovative research, development and most importantly extension of those technologies out to the broader farming community to continue to grow and develop the farming and rural economy.

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?

1. Regional NRM Plans capture the community's values and desires for sustainable use and conservation of our natural resources and provides strategies for their management.
2. Further development of Regional Climate Change Adaptation Plans using adaptation pathways for various sectors - where community is involved in and contributes to process and outcomes
3. Ongoing Government support and funding of NRM, Departments of Agriculture (or similar), Ag Research Centres and Farming Systems/Grower Groups to continue regional and localised R & D and also the very valuable next steps of Extension and facilitation of Adoption.
4. Governments, industry and communities need to support rural leadership programs to develop future leaders and build rural community capacity

How do we attract the next generation of farmers?

6. Improving the competitiveness of inputs to the supply chain

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?

Natural Resource Management (NRM) Boards understand the huge role farmers play in good natural resource protection and enhancement and our EP NRM Board considers its Sustainable Agriculture and Biosecurity programs to be an essential part of our work. We are always seeking ways to fund projects within these programs and provide support to farmers to implement or extend their own good farm management practices and pest plant and animal eradication.

Natural Resource Management (NRM) is a fundamental activity on Australian farms. In fact, 94 percent of Australian farms actively undertake natural resource management. *Australian Bureau of Statistics, Natural Resource Management on Australian Farms 2006-07*

Estimates suggest that the management of soil resources, water resources and biodiversity costs \$3.5 billion annually, or 10 percent of agriculture's GDP. For every government dollar invested, farmers are estimated to have invested \$2.60 in NRM and environmental protection. *OECD(2008), Environmental Performance of Agriculture in OECD Countries Since 1990: Australia Country Section*

1. Through Extension – taking knowledge to farmers from R & D

NRM Boards are increasingly filling this area where State Govt has reduced its services over the last 20 years.

Regional and local grower/farming systems groups are also playing a significant role in extension and support of Adoption. These mainly volunteer community based groups allow growers to learn from each other, benefit from contributions from specialist experts, and see impacts and results of localised trials and demonstrations.

Dissemination of research is fundamental to adoption of new practices and technology and is accepted and implemented more readily by the farming community when driven and delivered by local expertise.

This is highlighted by the agricultural industry improvements generated through

- The SARDI Research Centre at Minnipa, recognised as the leading research and development agency into dryland farming systems in the low to medium rainfall zones of Southern Australia

- SARDI in Port Lincoln with its leading research into canola, legume and cereal production and diseases

Therefore, support for the organisations such as these that are striving to execute these services will underpin and improve farm profitability and resilience under climate change and/or droughts.

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

- Farming has become a very cross skilled business and many farmers struggle to keep up with critical information and skills required.
- *Some of those skills which would be of huge value include;*
- Grain marketing
- Managing conflict with other land uses – urban encroachment and mining
- Farm business management
- Livestock management
- Grazing management
- Work Health and Safety Requirements on Farm
- Farm planning for the next generation / succession planning

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

How can we promote career pathways for the agriculture sector, including models to enable younger farm workers to gain broader industry experience?

1. Continue support of school based apprenticeships in farming
2. Promote the value of farmers not only in food production but also as sustainable land managers and active participants in good natural resource management etc
3. Agriculture is a knowledge intensive sector, with a strong demand for skilled professionals. Estimates indicate a potential demand for 6000 tertiary qualified graduates per year in the sector. However, the sector faces a significant under supply of graduates, with Australian universities graduating fewer than 800 graduates per year in agriculture. *Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture, Pratley and Hay 2010, The job market in agriculture in Australia*

As mentioned in question 2, due to cost limitations South Australia lost our Bachelor of Ag degree and Ag diploma a few years ago and now only have bachelor of Ag Science available. This has eliminated many students who were very interested in becoming agronomists or farmers who didn't have the desire or ability to undertake a science degree.

How can rural industries and governments better identify, prioritise and fund research, development and extension?

1. Regional Grower/Farming Systems Groups are very effective at understanding and gaining information of what issues are holding farmers back and so can be very good sources of information for Government and for bodies such as GRDC. These groups generally seen as a trusted source of information for farmers.
2. The EP NRM Board, jointly with the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR), jointly host an annual workshop of key growers, advisors, grower group representatives, Natural Resource staff, other government agency staff and NRM board members to discuss what agricultural projects are currently happening in the region, where the gaps are, and what the priorities are for further R, D & E or projects.

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?

Hard infrastructure that is able to meet the longer term needs of the industry is vital for a profitable farm businesses and their capacity to contribute to the GDP of the State and Nation. This includes transport (roads, rail, and air), storage facilities and energy infrastructure, all of which will require planning in the context of the predictions relating to a changing climate. This must be jointly funded by Government, industry and corporate interests.

7. Reducing ineffective regulations

How well do regulations affecting the industry meet their policy objectives?

Pest plant and animal declarations take some time for declarations to be legislated, whereas with a changing climate, increased movement of commodities and people the risks that pests may pose to agriculture needs to be more reactive.

What opportunities are there to reduce ineffective or inefficient regulation?

Which regulations are disproportionate to the risks they are supposed to address?

How do we coordinate across governments to reduce regulations whose costs exceed their benefits?

8. Enhancing agricultural exports

How can industries and government respond to the key challenges and opportunities to increase or enhance exports?

How can the government take best advantage of multilateral and bilateral trade negotiations (including through the World Trade Organization and through free trade agreements (FTAs)) to advance the interests of the sector?

How can engagement between industry and government on market access priorities for Australian agricultural products be improved, including to inform negotiations on FTAs?

What changes could be made to biosecurity arrangements, both in Australia and in other countries, that would enhance global trade in agricultural products?

How do we provide the appropriate biosecurity controls at minimum cost?

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

How well is the current set of government programmes and incentives directed at the agriculture sector meeting their objectives, in terms of both effectiveness and efficiency?

Are government visa arrangements and programmes like relocation assistance, the Seasonal Worker Programme and Harvest Labour Services effective at channelling workers into the agriculture sector and what other approaches should be considered?

What have other countries done to inspire agricultural investment?

What has Australia done in the past that has had best effect?