

## **Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper**

### **Submission Prepared by Western Australia**

In response to the Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper, the following submission has been prepared on behalf of the Western Australian Government.

Any assessment of competitive influences on Western Australian agriculture should include an assessment based on the balance of traded exports and imports. While a number of smaller industries have a predominately domestic focus, the majority of Western Australian agriculture is driven more directly by developments in export marketplaces. Consequently, when considering the competitiveness of Western Australian agriculture a much greater emphasis is placed on the standing of local farm and subsequent supply chain businesses contrasted with their international competitors.

The emphasis adopted in this submission, therefore, is on considering how Australian Federal Government policy or action can act to enhance local business and industry's competitive position against major international competitors.

A significant issue in responding to the issues paper is its seemingly loose definition of competitiveness. The document refers to "efficiently use.....resources to achieve sustainable improvement in the standards of living for all Australians and growth in profit for our businesses." Elsewhere, the document refers to our competitive position relative to international suppliers, which is perhaps a more readily analysed and argued definition of competitiveness.

The constraint with adopting a broad definition is that it allows for a wide variety of issues to be covered including some issues, albeit important in their own right, which have only a peripheral relation to competitiveness. Western Australia considers that a more precise definition of competitiveness would provide for a more informed response and more effective policy formation.

Comments are offered under the nine headings included in the Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper which are considered from the perspective of Western Australian Government policy, actions and what course, if any, it is proposed the Australian Government pursue.

#### ***Issue 1: Ensuring Food Security in Australia and Globally.***

##### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

While this is a significant global social, political and economic issue, with the vast majority of Western Australia agricultural produce being exported, the question of food security is not a priority policy concern for the State. Western Australia is focused on contributing to the food security of major export destination countries. International competitiveness will be a greater driver of the contribution made by this

State to world food production, although Australia is a minor exporter in many markets. At the same time, the State has sought to maximise sales of local produce on the Western Australian market, by programs such as the Buy West Eat Best campaign, as a means of hedging against vagaries of the international markets for some products.

### **Western Australian Actions.**

Productivity is influenced by climate, management practices and land characteristics. The Western Australian Government assists agriculture adjust to variable climatic conditions and address resource limiters, such as soil acidity and compaction, through research and development (R&D) and encouraging the adoption of best practice management regimes which aim to sustain or increase local agricultural output. The impact of physical production constraints on competitiveness receives limited attention in the Issues Paper however this is an area in which significant productivity gains could be achieved.

The Western Australian Government has taken steps to secure increased water supply for irrigation purposes, including projects conducted under the Royalties for Regions program, in areas such as the Ord River and Carnarvon irrigation areas. This could increase agricultural production available for export purposes however infrastructure constraints in supply chains may be limiting competitiveness of food production for export. For example, there is a need to improve the reliability of the transport network in flood prone areas through flood mitigation strategies and developing port and logistics capability to support the expansion of Northern Australia, improving the efficient movement of freight as well as the capacity and reliability of infrastructure.

### **Australian Government Priorities.**

It is recommended that the Australian Government attach greater priority to assisting farm businesses adapt to variable climatic conditions, which may require transformational change for some businesses. In addition, action on land based production limiters, such as soil acidity and compaction and water repellance, offers the potential for considerable improvements to competitiveness.

## ***Issue 2: Farmer Decisions for Improving Farm Gate Returns.***

### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

The Western Australian Government is committed to policies which enhance farm productivity and preparedness and which protect the resource base and limit adverse impacts of on-farm decisions on neighbouring businesses. The agricultural sector is not assisted by Government intervening in business decisions, or acting as a lender of last resort.

The Western Australian Government has a regulatory regime for genetically modified (GM) food crops, with GM canola approved for production, and now a major crop.

## **Western Australian Actions.**

The State Government has a number of initiatives which act to enhance both our broad understanding of the financial situation and land based production constraints within the sector and increase farm business preparedness for difficult seasons and market fluctuations. The Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) has analysed the effectiveness of drought preparedness training, using farm consultants' data, to determine the impact of training on farm business performance and conducts a regular Farm Finance Health Check to determine trends in farm finances and profitability. Projects investigating novel business structures and farm finance sources are also being supported.

In addition, a project has commenced to consider the benefits and costs of extending Doppler radar coverage to the agricultural region of Western Australia. The climatic data derived from these radars, when combined with data from the extensive automatic weather station network, will enhance outcomes from key farm business decisions such as timing of sowing, the application of inputs and marketing strategies.

DAFWA has recently released a Report Card on Sustainable Natural Resource Use in Agriculture which identifies areas where land constraints, such as soil acidity and compaction, are limiting production. Work is being undertaken to address these and other issues identified in the Report Card, including soil carbon and nutrient run off.

Within livestock industries, DAFWA partners with industry organisations, such as Dairy Australia and Meat and Livestock Australia, to establish benchmarking processes which encourage, among other things, market performance comparisons and improved genetic scoring systems (ASBV's).

## **Australian Government Priorities.**

Agreements reached under the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) on National Drought Program Reform should be fully implemented by the Australian Government. Consideration should be given to extending the provisions of the Farm Management Deposit scheme to more accurately reflect income fluctuations that occur in contemporary farm businesses.

GM crops will assist in overcoming production constraints and enhancing quality however there is need for further work at a national level to facilitate timely access to approved GM technology that is available to competitors. The Australian Government should continue to work with industry to develop more positive attitudes to the safety and benefits of GM food crops. This would complement the recommended increased effort to address land based production constraints, such as soil acidity and compaction.

### ***Issue 3: Enhancing Access to Finance.***

#### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

The Western Australian Government is committed to promoting innovation in business structures and financing and welcomes domestic and foreign investment across the agricultural supply chain.

#### **Western Australian Actions.**

The analysis of consultants' and bank data, and the Farm Financial Check being regularly conducted by DAFWA are important in identifying trends in financing and capacity to service debt. In addition, consultants have been commissioned to undertake a study of innovative business structure options and financing to inform future decision making by farm businesses and investors.

As part of the State's capacity building program for farm businesses, which complements programs conducted by the Commonwealth, emphasis is placed on financial management including accessing of optimal sources of finance. (More information on DAFWA's farm business capacity building program can be found at: <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/farm-management> )

The State is also fostering international and domestic investment into Western Australian agriculture through the work commenced under the Invest West Agribusiness Alliance.

A major Royalties for Regions funded initiative "Open for Business" will support a range of strategies to improve investment readiness of WA agrifood businesses and facilitation of increased domestic and international investment. "Open for Business" seeks to provide the first point of Government contact for businesses wanting to establish, relocate, diversify or expand their operations in Western Australia.

#### **Australian Government Priorities.**

It is important for the Australian Government to maintain financial stability and policy consistency to ensure the rural sector confidence to underpin investment and business planning.

The Australian Government should not tighten foreign ownership rules relating to agriculture, the future growth of which will be heavily dependent on international investment and trade growth.

## ***Issue 4: Increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and its value chain.***

### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

The Western Australian Government is actively pursuing options to reduce regulatory impositions on the agricultural sector to enable businesses to become more efficient and competitive, and to expand market opportunities that provide the local agricultural sector with opportunities to broaden its market base.

### **Western Australian Actions.**

Competitiveness will depend, amongst other things, on Australian farm business cost structures contrasted with our major competitors. The Western Australian Government has initiated action to reduce the impact of unnecessary regulation on cost structures and has programs directed at increased efficiency, such as the use of available water, and enhanced productivity, through improved varieties and control of pests and diseases.

In addition, the Government has sought to expand market opportunities for local companies through business to business relationship development. Under the Government's Royalties for Regions program, a number of major initiatives are being undertaken to bring about greater penetration of local produce in key, premium Asian markets. For example, through "Seizing the Opportunity", the State government has allocated \$300 million over four years to assist Western Australian agriculture and food sector capture market opportunities in Asia.

### **Australian Government Priorities.**

The Australian Government has the opportunity to enhance the presence of Australian agricultural and food products in export markets through the coordination of export efforts and negotiation of trade agreements that place agriculture as a priority inclusion.

The Australian Government could consider mechanisms to reinvigorate research into factors which can enhance physical efficiency and productivity gains, such as varietal development and control measures for pest or disease infestations.

The national Agriculture Minister's Forum has a critical role to play in fostering more successful collective, coordinated and consistent policy and action to support international trade and investment. In particular, transport costs and transport investment are critical drivers of competitiveness of the agricultural supply chain, with cross jurisdictional responsibilities. The Australian Government is encouraged to adopt a more active role in investigating opportunities for long term efficiency gains.

## ***Issue 5: Enhancing agriculture's contribution to regional communities.***

### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

The State Government's \$300 million "Seizing the Opportunity" Royalties for Region program has been targeted at improving the competitiveness and economic contribution of the community and economic infrastructure for regional communities. A total of \$300 million will be invested in agriculture over five years to provide an environment in which the sector can undergo transformation, creating growth and prosperity in regional communities. Key areas of focus include agricultural research and development, land and water availability, infrastructure investment and trade and skills development. Significant investments have also been made in important infrastructure projects such as Carnarvan flood works, livestock saleyard development and work to progress the Ord expansion.

### **Western Australian Actions.**

The State Government has placed the well-being of regional economies and communities as a high priority. Measures to improve business, supply chain and industry sector competitiveness will build buoyant regional communities, which will in turn bring with them many positives for farms and other regional businesses.

The Regional Mobile Communications Project (RMCP) received an allocation of \$40 million from the Royalties for Regions program to improve mobile telecommunications coverage in regional Western Australia which will enhance community and business well-being as well as assisting state emergency services. In partnership with Telstra, the project is delivering 113 new communication sites along major roads and highways across the state as well as several regional communities. Significant gaps remain, however, in mobile services available to farm businesses.

Western Australia is moving towards creating a number of new irrigated agricultural precincts of commercial scale where suitable soil and water resources as well as supporting infrastructure exist to grow the food and fibre export industries and contribute to building northern Australia.

### **Australian Government Priorities.**

The Australian Government needs to focus substantial resources on measures that will enable broad scale business benefit across agricultural industries. This should encompass increased local value adding and production of final food products which would reduce reliance on commodity exports.

Pervasive, reliable mobile phone and data access would provide a step-change in business efficiency, opportunity capture (eg. grain marketing), risk reduction and overall competitiveness. Substantial savings from delaying rollout of fast broadband to urban households could be applied to underpin rapid growth in the economic contribution of agriculture.

To assist the expansion of agriculture in northern Australia, The Australian Government should consider supporting native title resolution and making investment in key national infrastructure, such as a new bridge over the Ord River on the national highway alignment and increasing the storage capacity of Lake Argyle.

### ***Issue 6: Improving the competitiveness of inputs to the supply chain.***

#### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

The Western Australian Government has committed approximately \$300 million to funding projects under its Royalties for Regions Program which will have a positive impact on the competitiveness of local agricultural business inputs.

Western Australia is committed to a coordinated and efficient grain supply chain which utilises both road and rail as well as to targeting higher value markets and customers for Western Australian agricultural and food products and to supporting supply chain adjustment and transformation.

#### **Western Australian Actions.**

Proposals currently being advanced or under development include the availability of mobile phone and Doppler radar services in the agricultural region of Western Australia which are intended to provide greater information to assist key decision making for crop planting and marketing. These will improve the efficiency of use of inputs such as fertiliser and chemicals, reduce cropping risk and improve marketing returns. It will also greatly improve the connectedness of families and communities which will deliver significant benefits for personal, family and community well-being.

The State Government is also devoting considerable funding to training for farm business skill development to assist business preparedness and decision support tools to enable more informed decision making. This includes more efficient use of farm inputs and adoption of modern risk management techniques.

#### **Australian Government Priorities.**

The Australian Government needs to partner closely with State/Territory Governments in defining the most serious (hard and soft) infrastructure limitations to supply chain efficiency. There are substantial needs for Australian Government investment in industry infrastructure, but not limited to:

- Mobile phone/data and broadband access
- Road and rail infrastructure improvements and extension
- Improved port infrastructure across Western Australia, especially for grain and livestock exports
- Supporting the State Government to build enhanced air-freight and sea-freight based cold chain infrastructure to rapidly and reliably deliver premium, fresh produce to Asia and the Middle East

- Irrigation developments in northern Western Australia and contribution to improved utilisation of southern water resources subject to evolving multi-use demands.

Key transport requirements for encouraging economic development of regions within northern Australia, in the context of traditional Federal funding responsibilities include:

- Placing greater emphasis on enabling projects in smaller population centres in northern Australia by adopting broader, longer term evaluation criteria.
- Improving the reliability of the transport network in flood prone areas through mitigation strategies.
- Developing port and logistics capabilities to support the expansion of northern Australian agriculture.
- Developing marine supply bases and maintenance precincts at selected locations.
- Constructing heavy vehicle bypasses at selected locations on the Auslink national network to improve transport efficiency, such as in Karratha and Kununurra.

On the basis of analysis supporting a conclusion that research and development generates productivity gains and positive net financial returns to the economy, the State Government argues the case for the Australian Government to devote increased funding to agricultural research and development, commensurate with the resources being committed by the State Government under its Royalties for Region program, and to ensure that, at a minimum, CSIRO is funded to continue this aspect of its program. Such increased R&D resources should be lightly focused on strategies to improve the adaption and adoption of R&D findings to deliver commercial benefit within 5-10 years.

While farm business skills development is being well managed at a state level, declining enrolments and availability of tertiary training in agriculture continued to be of concern as agriculture will have to increasingly adopt advanced technologies and new business structures to remain competitive. Given its broad responsibilities in the tertiary education sector, the Australian Government should be placing greater emphasis on encouraging enrolments in tertiary level agricultural studies including the provision of innovative educational programs.

Greater progress is required by the Australian Government in agricultural sector labour policy reform and improved access to foreign workers. Labour availability and competitiveness, including access to foreign skilled and unskilled workers under provisions such as 457 visas, as well as industrial relations reforms which provide greater business flexibility, will be key drivers of supply chain competitiveness into the future. The process of recruiting skilled workers from overseas for employment in agriculture should be simplified and conditions surrounding working holiday visas should provide greater flexibility in the agricultural sector, such as permitting semi-skilled or trained seasonal labourers to be employed on multiple occasions.

The extensive transport of livestock and grain crops produced in Western Australia require effective transport infrastructure for timely delivery to port and regional



storage and aggregation centres. Strategic investment by the Australian Government in road and rail infrastructure is required to achieve an appropriate balance between industry requirements for an efficient network and social expectations.

Australian Government intervention should continue to require bulk wheat port operators to have access undertakings in place with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) or a mandatory industry code of conduct, or other arrangements that will enable competition, efficiency of infrastructure use and reduced operating charges.

### ***Issue 7: Reducing ineffective regulations.***

#### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

The Western Australian Government is committed to creating a better business environment to enable businesses across the State's export-focused sectors to compete more successfully against overseas competitors. The Government is committed to review of relevant legislation and processes.

The State Government has commissioned targeted reviews of ineffective, inefficient and unnecessary regulation and inefficient agency processes, with a view to removing those which impose administrative or financial burden beyond adequate benefits. This work will identify inefficiency and business impacts across all levels of government, and will include provision of specific recommendations for improvement to relevant Ministers and agencies.

#### **Western Australian Actions.**

The Western Australian Government has committed significant resources to reducing red and green tape, and associated business and community costs being driven through the Ministerial Taskforce on Approvals, Development and Sustainability (MTADS). A supporting Director General taskforce includes a focus on reducing business costs across the agriculture and food sector, and reducing impediments to new business development.

Some important reforms have already been achieved, such as amendments to clearing permit regulations. In addition, the Economic Regulation Authority has recently released a draft report on its enquiry into Microeconomic Reform.

#### **Australian Government Priorities.**

Rapid implementation of regulatory reforms identified in the ABARES Review of Selected Regulatory Burden on Agriculture and Forestry Businesses needs to be a priority for the Australian Government.

The Australian Government is encouraged to also review all elements of non-agriculture legislation impacting on agriculture within its jurisdiction particularly those imposed from other areas, such as industrial relations, environmental management (Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999), export certification permit rules and changing food regulation and water management Those elements that impact unnecessarily on competitiveness should be removed. State, Territory and Commonwealth governments must continue to co-operate in

streamlining environmental approvals by eliminating duplication in assessment and approval and through bilateral agreements. Other elements of regulations requiring urgent redress include native title and security of land tenure.

The Government needs especially to review those regulations and processes which impact on export costs, such as export certification and inspection, and that place exporters at a competitive disadvantage. For example, the Western Australian Government encourages the Australian Government to consider aligning Australian organic standards with those of our major export trading partners in regards to the threshold for the accidental presence of genetically modified material in certified organic / biodynamic products.

At the same time, it is imperative that the Australian Government monitors our biosecurity defences and strengthens these when risks arise or auditing highlights potential weaknesses which could expose the agricultural sector to imported threats. Western Australia has a unique status in terms of freedom from certain major diseases and pests and there is scope for greater State/Federal government engagement to protect the significant export base of Western Australian agriculture. In particular, with shipping intensity increasing significantly over the last decade, associated with the resources boom, port biosecurity remains a critical issue in protecting the integrity of agricultural exports from this state.

Labour force regulation reform should also be considered from the perspective of markedly improving workforce opportunities for seasonal business, such as agriculture.

The Australian Government is encouraged to review agency processes as well as regulation quantity and complexity, as Western Australian work has indicated that substantial reductions in business cost can be achieved by improved regulatory process without any change to legislation or regulations.

The Australian Government is also encouraged to partner strongly with State/Territory Governments through the Agriculture Minister's Forum and inter-agency processes, particularly to address:

1. Opportunities for State/Territory and Local government regulation and process reform identified during the White Paper consultation phase. This collaboration should begin immediately, rather than wait for White Paper publication, so that businesses can capture earlier benefits.
2. Shared learnings and cooperative strategies to reduce business costs and delays due to regulation and bureaucratic process. Significantly faster and greater benefits can be delivered to Australia's agriculture and food business through such a collaborative approach, this avoiding the mistake under the "National Food Plan" which was constrained to be an "Australian Government Food Plan" devoid of meaningful engagement of States/Territories through the Standing Council of Primary Industries (SCOPI). This decision to constrain engagement across the Australian federation has cost the nation's agricultural businesses significant delays in capturing opportunities that could have flowed from joint strategies under SCOPI. The need for integration and close cooperation between the States and

Commonwealth should also apply to recent Commonwealth initiatives such as the relaunch of LandCare and the Emissions Reduction Fund.

### ***Issue 8: Enhancing agricultural exports.***

#### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

The Western Australian Government is committed to securing premium, stable export markets that provide a greater, more reliable revenue stream in return for providing consistent supply of high quality agricultural produce. Western Australia is committed to developing close relations with Asia and Middle East nations that are the current and target destination for the State's agriculture and food exports.

The State Government recognises that our farm businesses cannot compete on price alone so the focus is on improved quality and opening premium markets with consumers prepared to pay for quality, which is enhanced by the State's strict biosecurity regime and food quality assurance system.

#### **Western Australian Actions.**

The State Government has a number of initiatives to promote Western Australian agricultural produce into markets in which they compete with other exporting countries. Royalties for Regions funds will be devoted to the development of new and higher value markets for a range of agricultural products. The WA Trade and Investment Offices are promoting an increased presence for Western Australian products in China and the Middle East, and are being strengthened by targeted employment of additional staff focused on agriculture and food.

The State will also continue to capitalise on its outstanding biosecurity status to secure preferential access to premium markets, and sustain production and product integrity advantages through maintenance of clear, effective and scientifically defensible biosecurity measures.

Western Australia, through its Department of Agriculture and Food and overseas Western Australian Trade and Investment Offices, is increasingly focused on:

- Targeted market and trade development strategies where step-change improvement is needed and considered to be achievable (eg. live cattle to China, live sheep to Saudi Arabia, lupins to Indonesia, fresh and extended shelf-life milk to Asia)
- Cooperation with industry and government partners to coordinate strategies and minimise market-place confusion and inefficiency (eg. WA-NT-QLD- Meat and Livestock Australia and Western Australian Livestock Exporters Association/Australian Livestock Exporters Council cooperation for Indonesian live cattle market re-development).

## **Australian Government Priorities.**

Free trade agreements or multinational trade negotiations continue to be a priority for an export-oriented state such as Western Australia. The Australian Government is encouraged to pursue the inclusion of substantial early gains for agriculture in these agreements with immediate application, rather than under a long term, phased approach. The Australian Government should also re-assess its approach to full cost-recovery for export inspection and certification to both re-establish some funding support and improve efficiency of operations. It is arguable that assisting exporters through reducing Australian Government charges would provide greater assistance to Australian farmers than some current assistance measures directly targeting farmers.

The Australian Government should also encourage increased collaboration amongst industry representative bodies to consolidate effort in marketing endeavours and to reduce areas of potential conflict which could be damaging in markets for Australian produce.

## ***Issue 9: Assessing the effectiveness of incentives for investment and job creation.***

### **Western Australian Government Policy.**

The Western Australian Government has a clearly articulated policy stance on the need for external investment into the agriculture sector, a significant share of which will need to come from overseas, based on:

- International investment has been, and will continue to be essential for development of the State's mining, gas, agriculture and tourism sectors
- Investment and trade flows are closely linked
- Asian and Middle East countries have substantial capital funding capability to grow supply chains (including on-farm production) to meet business and food security needs
- There are sound arguments that investment coming from major market regions for Western Australia agricultural exports is equal to or superior to any other source of investment
- It is not sensible, nor generally practical, for the consolidation and growth of the State's agricultural sector to be funded from debt finance
- Relatively few Australian investment institutions and agri-food companies have the financial capacity and experience necessary to fund the scale of development needed; Australian investors are likely to bring in overseas investment partners
- It is rarely appropriate for an Australian Government to stand between an Australian farm business or land owner and an overseas buyer prepared to pay more than an Australian buyer.

The Western Australian Government has a clear policy position in support of drought preparedness and is opposed to government being a lender of last resort. The Western Australian Government generally does not favour government intervention

into the financial arrangements for agriculture and food or other businesses. Interventions, such as interest rate subsidies, generally distort markets and are as likely to deliver longer term disbenefits as benefits.

The Western Australian Governments sustainable policy position has been clearly articulated through the national drought policy reform process under SCOPI.

### **Western Australian Actions.**

The Western Australia Government is creating the appropriate environment to encourage foreign investment as a source of much needed capital. The Government has established significant initiatives in support of measures already in place under the Departments for Agriculture and Food, State Development and Regional Development, including:

1. Establishment of the InvestWest Agribusiness Alliance involving over 60 organisations involved in facilitating successful international investment into the State's agriculture and food sector.
2. Introduction of the "Open for Business" initiative under the Royalties for Regions "Seizing the Opportunity" process, with almost \$20 million expected to be invested in the initiative over the next 5 years.
3. KPMG have recently been engaged via competitive tender to complete a detailed report on "Financing and Business Structure Options for Agri-Business"
4. Other "Seizing the Opportunity" initiatives including "Boosting Farm Business Skills" and "Building a Positive Future for the Agriculture Sector" (working title), will make substantial contributions to the preparedness of the sectors' businesses to utilise investments and the awareness of the many positive attributes of the State's diverse agriculture and food sector.
5. Close government-industry partnerships are being established to better develop and promulgate strategies to improve the capability and confidence of the sectors' businesses to attract, retain and develop the skilled labour force needed for current and future success.

### **Australian Government Priorities.**

The Australian Government should retain the existing Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) processes and limits, which are demonstrably sufficient to address national interest needs in relation to international investment into the agriculture and food sector.

The Australian Government should establish clear, consistent policy messaging in support of international investment, as the current vacillation and mixed messaging is confusing potential investors (and customers for Australian agricultural produce) to the short and long-term economic detriment to rural and regional Australia. The Australian Government should also pursue programs which educate the broader community on the benefits of investment into agriculture.

The Australian Government should, in consultation with States/Territories, establish major infrastructure investment plans for which international investment would be deliberately targeted. This should be extended to include broad encouragement of Australian institutional investors, such as superannuation funds, to consider agriculture as a preferred investment destination.

Significant new capital investment and the development of innovative business/investment models are critical and northern Australia should be promoted as a preferred place to do business and foreign investment promoted. Given the Australian, Western Australian, Northern Territory and Queensland governments' focus on developing northern Australia, the development of major investment plans targeting foreign investment should be central to achieving that vision. Support for the Northern Agricultural Development (AgNorth) CRC linking business to innovation would be a positive investment.

The Australian Government should strengthen and focus the work of Austrade in promotion of conceptual, proposed and investor-ready projects to international investors.

National policies to improve labour availability, particularly those with priority skill sets, remain essential for Western Australian agriculture, and should be a priority for this Australian Government.

The Western Australian Government considers that assistance to agriculture in additional research and development funding should be a priority investment, underpinning the work already completed in establishing National R,D&E Strategies for all major agricultural industries.