



Natural Resources Centre

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Dear Minister Joyce,

The Northern & Yorke Natural Resources Management Board (N&Y NRMB) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the *Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper*. The Green Paper provides a clear direction to ensure the future of the Australian agricultural sector in world markets.

Agricultural enterprise, particularly dryland cropping, exists across 80% of the Northern & Yorke NRM Region, making it one of the most productive areas in South Australia. The Agricultural sector is the region's economic mainstay and the N&Y NRMB have been active in the development and extension of sustainable farming practices, across all aspects of the industry.

The N&Y NRMB commends the approach taken by the Green Paper in placing an emphasis on achieving increased productivity, while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sector and the resources that underpin it. The strategies outlined in the Green Paper will provide a solid policy framework, within which the N&Y NRMB can ensure its progress towards attaining the primary soil protection, soil condition, and water management targets within the Regional NRM Plan.

I have included five suggestions that the N&Y NRMB consider may lead to improved efficiencies in the delivery of the Green Paper's goals.

1. The N&Y NRMB considers that the Green Paper contains a lack of recognition for the disparity that can occur between current farming technologies and practices, the layout of infrastructure on many farms, and the influence this can have on farm productivity. For example, the production and biodiversity benefits of rotational grazing (a.k.a. cell grazing) have been known for a considerable period of time. Although farm productivity and income can be significantly increased with this practise, there is still a relatively low uptake rate because of the need to re-align fences and water points. Consideration should be given to the assistance that may be required by many farmers to overcome historical farm designs and adopt new technologies and innovative practices.
2. The N&Y NRMB agrees with the Green Paper's position on improving access to water resources and better managing existing resources (pages 73-76), particularly in the Clare Valley and on the Northern Adelaide Plains. However, the N&Y NRMB would recommend a two-pronged (macro/micro) approach to this issue, rather than focussing on the development of major water

infrastructure. Much of the Australian continent is given over to the pastoral industry, which relies significantly on underground and surface water resources, and would be difficult to service through major water infrastructure projects. Water security for the majority of the Australian pastoral industry could be achieved through the development of farm-scale water management initiatives; e.g. sheeted catchments. Such projects would improve water security and reduce the effects of extraction on underground and surface water resources, thereby providing multiple natural resource outcomes.

3. The N&Y NRMB recognises the contemporary level of expectation placed on farmers through increased levels of legislative requirements regarding the management of their lands (page 79). The N&Y NRMB agrees with the Green Paper's proposition that public assistance may be required to enable farmers to implement required changes, particularly when mitigating the effects of historical land use practices. The N&Y NRMB actively works with landholder groups to address natural resource issues on their lands (e.g. weed infestations), reducing their impact to a point where the landholders can take on ownership of ongoing maintenance activities. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide this assistance in the current economic climate. Consideration should be given to the significant benefits and value of this approach and the possibilities of increasing support for this function within the Nation's NRM authorities.
4. The N&Y NRMB agrees with the Green Paper's position on the significant negative effects of weeds and pests on the environmental, cultural, social and economic values of the land and our natural resource base (pages 80 & 83). However, the Green Paper fails to recognise the efficiencies of managing weeds and pests at a large-scale. Such programs are generally required at a scale larger than that covered by Landcare (or similar) groups and require a degree of coordination to achieve cost-effective results. While the planned increase in investment in pest management to compensate for drought conditions (page 81) reflects a current and real need for this assistance, it also highlights the shortcomings in Australia's weed and pest management programs. With an increased and sustained effort to manage weeds and pests, the peaks in population abundance of these species would be significantly reduced, resulting in a smoothing in annual costs to agricultural production and more predictable future farm productivity/income projections. The agricultural benefits of large-scale weed and pest management programs are manifold, with productivity gains far surpassing investment input, and consideration should be given to increasing support for the Nation's NRM authorities to facilitate and coordinate such programs.
5. The N&Y NRMB is concerned by the absence of any reference, policy direction or policy initiatives on soil salinity and soil acidity, which continues to have a substantial impact on agricultural production, particularly for dryland farming.



Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper*. We look forward to working with the Australian Government in ensuring the competitiveness of our agricultural sector and the sustainable use of the resources that it is dependent upon.

Yours sincerely,

Eric Sommerville
Interim Presiding Member
Northern and Yorke Natural Resources Management Board