

December 11, 2014

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Comments on Green Paper from the Tractor and Machinery Association

Dear Sir,

The farm mechanisation industry is a vital sector for Agriculture and if it were not for this industry Agriculture would grind to a halt.

Mechanisation has arguably done more for productivity and profitability of agriculture over the last decade and a half than any other sector and this, in our opinion, will continue, but at a greater rate in the future.

Machine guidance has been the main driver in changing the methodology of many agricultural pursuits and this is catered for well by satellite but for increased accuracy Reference Stations are required. These are made available by a combination of Government (CORS) and many privately funded RTK (Real Time Kinematic) installations.

Increasing development is in the area of 'Telematics'. Telematics allow for the transfer of data to and from machines, between machines and are a means of monitoring performance and initiating machine adjustments from remote locations. Using Telematics machine diagnostics enables the service technician to keep an eye on machine efficiency and adjustments can be effected if required. Again from the local supplier or from the other side of the country or even overseas.

Now Agronomists are able to vary rates of input from an office computer or smart phone to the seeder, sprayer or any other machine. Telematics are crucial for enabling the traceability of products and to record the many operations required for production. Application of fertilisers, herbicides and insecticides are examples.

The above examples of the contribution technology plays in modern agriculture paints a positive picture which bodes well for the future for Australian agriculture. However there is a downside to employing this technology. The major concern is with the mobile/cell phone service.

Development of telematics technology relies heavily on the mobile network but outside the cities in Australia, the network is inadequate and in many cases unavailable. We are told that the Australian network is good for 98% of the population (a Telstra claim), but most of these people live on the coast where little agricultural production is carried out.

If this situation continues, we in Agriculture, will be unable to use the technology available to our overseas competitors and will be left behind in production, and also out of some markets where accurate records for food production are required.

We need some urgent and long term planning taken to enhance the availability of a good mobile network and although satellite availability is good we still need reference stations to allow the sub 2cm accuracy for guidance.

In the not too distant future we will see the introduction of autonomous (driverless) agricultural machines and this is where the satellite enabled RTK network will need to be up to scratch. The telematics enablement will be even more crucial as we get these 'operator less' machines running around which require remote operation.

Kind regards,

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