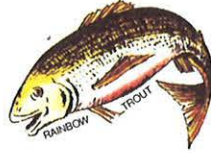


# WALCHA COUNCIL

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8 November 2014.

Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
PO Box 6500  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

## **AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS GREEN PAPER –SUBMISSION**

Council at its meeting held recently considered the Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper and resolved to make a submission on it.

The submission is in line with the issues raised in the Green Paper:

### **Infrastructure:**

- Consideration to be given to upgrading the rail network to reduce the impact of road freight transport on the road network. This would include upgrades to access roads, loading and unloading facilities.
- Improvements to the rural road network to be made to assist movement of produce and stock is essential.
- Improvements to water harvesting, storage and distribution that will increase the opportunities for landowners to develop and produce agricultural products are to be developed and implemented (the Apsley Dam project will be discussed later in the submission).
- Accelerated improvements to communication systems to rural communities are needed.
- Consideration of an electricity support network that would enable wind generated electricity produced in the Northern Tablelands region to be connected to the grid.
- Access to ports (the last mile) to be developed to reduce the bottlenecks and enable a more efficient collection and dispersal of goods.

WHEN REPLYING PLEASE QUOTE WO/2014/02432  
WHEN MAKING ENQUIRIES PLEASE ASK FOR GERRY MORAN

### **Working with the States and Territories:**

- Council would support the push to reduce unnecessary “red tape” that duplicates requirements, eg the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.
- A “One-Stop-Shop” concept for environment approvals needs to be considered. It is important that for this to be introduced the appropriate assessment is still to be undertaken on land use proposals and that the process is to be transparent.
- Consideration be given to reviewing and improving the efficiency of Native Title legislation.

### **Education skills and training:**

- Council supports the concept that young people, especially those in rural and remote Australia, should have access to a comprehensive education system. It must include a clear pathway for agriculture education and training from high school to tertiary level, to training opportunities for lifelong learning for those in the industry.
- Existing stakeholders need to become more business focused and market orientated. Appropriate educational programs needs to be established and made available and easily accessible to landowners. A section of these programs need to reflect sound financial planning concepts and also to assist landowners to plan, prepare and recover from drought events and not rely on bank debt.
- Particular attention should be directed to assist children from isolated areas enabling them to have access to educational opportunities similar to children in metropolitan areas.
- 

### **Drought:**

While drought occurs with some frequency it is important to recognise that drought is what it is. It has an immediate impact on individuals, families and communities and it is important to have available suitable mechanisms or programs to minimise these impacts.

This section is closely related to education and improving the ability of rural people to acknowledge that drought is a reoccurring feature of the Australian farming landscape and the need for skills to plan, prepare, manage and recover from drought events.

The mix or range of support will not be the same across the landscape and landowners are in the best position to suggest the range and level of support that is needed.

Specific programs that need to be continued/enhanced include:

- Opportunities for landowners to have access to mental health support
- Rural Health – this is a big issue for rural communities especially with the need to access specialist care
- Encouragement to landowners to reduce farm debt – see comments under education.

### **Water and Natural Resource Management:**

Council supports the concept that the future of Australian agriculture is dependant upon the sustainable use of our land, water and soil resources. Improving harvesting, storage and distribution of our water in particular is considered essential for the continued growth and development of our agriculture sector.

Council is supportive of the inclusion of the Apsley Dam proposal in the Green Paper. To have this listed as “likely to be suitable for further consideration for possible assistance to accelerate feasibility studies, cost benefit analysis or design” is welcomed by Council.

With Walcha strategically located between Sydney and Brisbane and the abundance of highly productive soils this proposal has the potential to transform this region into a very highly productive region.

### **Biosecurity:**

The Green Paper is strong on the government’s commitment to maintaining a science-based biosecurity system that allocates biosecurity resources based on the level of risk. The system must facilitate the safe movement of animals, plants, people and cargo to and from Australia, and conform to our international obligations.

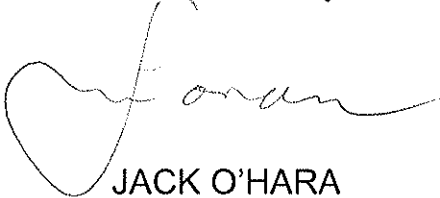
Council’s concern is that while this is happening at a national level it does not appear to be happening at a state level with the difficulty being experienced in having proposed legislation passed. This needs to be addressed.

**Communication:**

It is vitally important that rural and remote regions have the opportunity of accessing the latest forms of communications. For agriculture communities to grow it is imperative for them to have access to the latest technology and this can only be gained through the latest communication networks. It is seen as discrimination by the agricultural community not to have the same levels of communication as people in metropolitan areas.

Council would be happy to expand on these comments if required.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J O'Hara', written in a cursive style.

**JACK O'HARA**  
**GENERAL MANAGER**