

## **Submission to the Federal Inquiry into the Competiveness of Australian Agriculture**

My Submission to the Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce regarding “the Competiveness of Australian Agriculture”.

I appreciate both the opportunity to make a submission and the fact that the Federal Government is investigating the matter.

Australian agriculture is often disadvantaged by various factors for example government legislation e.g. Native Vegetation and Threatened Species Conservation Acts, restrictions placed on private land, mismanagement of public land, impacts of mining and coal seam gas, resource restrictions, the list goes on.

The ever expanding national parks and the buying of private land for national parks. Agricultural land being bought and taken out of production and planted back to trees as a carbon credit, or used as an off set for a development here or another country elsewhere in the world.

Australia can produce significant tonnages of quality product if given a fair go. There is a huge potential for further increases in production. However the continuing rise in cost of production and interference from various activist groups will continue to restrict our competitiveness along with the cheap imports.

### **Pest Animal Control**

I welcome the Government contribution of \$10 million to reduce wild dogs and feral pig numbers. However I believe the money could be more effectively spent.

Currently there is a lot of money flowing from grower levy funds via AWI and MLA. If these various funding sources could be spent to greatly reduce wild dog numbers it may stop the slide of sheep numbers being reduced and replaced by cattle in traditional wool producing areas only to see calving percentages reduced as the dogs predate the calves.

A lot of money is being spent on facilitators and workshops as well as dog proof fencing. In the meantime the dog numbers continue to increase. The \$10 million must be used to kill dogs!

In the south east of NSW trappers attached to the LHPA system and financed by NPWS have been very successful in reducing wild dog predation. This is in the Monaro South Coast region which is more than 50% public land.

The farmers have gained confidence working with the trappers. Aerial baiting is then planned as part of a coordinated program. The combined Aerial baiting and trapping program has proved to be most successful.

### **Native Vegetation Legislation**

The protection of native vegetation and so called “threatened species” by legislation must be the major deterrent to productive agriculture in NSW.

I farm in the Purlewaugh district east of Coonabarabran just east of the Newell highway. As a young man, due to family financial and legal arrangements, I found myself with a major debt on a largely undeveloped property consisting mainly of undulating shallow stony terrain, considered at that time as grazing land only. Throughout the seventies and eighties I gradually cleared, rock raked and contour banked the property, leaving patches of shade and shelter and developed a crop/pasture rotation. As a result of my experience I have a keen interest in sustainable land management which has come to the fore since the imposition of native Vegetation legislation in 1995.

A major area of concern in NSW is the western edge of the wheat belt in localities such as Nyngan, Walgett and west of Moree. These areas have been later developing as the advantages of minimum tillage have allowed these areas to be sustainably farmed. Such areas will always vary greatly in gross production dictated by the rainfall. The current drought is a stark example. However be certain that Walgett will again deliver record tonnages to its grain receival centre.

However the effect of such legislation is not confined wholly to north western NSW. I have served as an Executive Councillor on NSW Farmers Association for 12 years. In that time I have travelled extensively throughout the State investigating pest animal control issues and at the same time observing native vegetation regrowth and private property management.

What the vast majority of politicians and bureaucrats don't understand is that every district can be a little different in its management due to soil type, invasive plant species, climate and lots more. As a result farmers across the State need flexibility in managing their individual properties.

Commodity markets and a farmer's passion and experience in producing a certain product dictate the need for change of land use.

I have seen the sorry mess of the negative social aspect of this legislation. Younger members of farming families have had to go and seek an alternate career path when the farm could not be further developed. Had SEPP 46 been imposed 20 years earlier I would not be writing this submission as I would have been one of the above casualties.

In my own district there are tens of thousands of acres of good arable land gone back to native grass. This country grew wheat extensively in the 70's and 80's, and then due to commodity prices it was allowed to go to grazing Lucerne and eventually grass for beef production. The owners realise they have lost livestock carrying capacity and fattening ability. They are wary of farming the country back up to restore a crop/pasture rotation due to legislation.

On the tablelands and eastern fall country I have seen regrowth taking back over productive grazing country, especially where sheep were replaced by cattle in the 90's.

Down on the Monaro and South Coast invasive species such as African lovegrass and Fireweed have taken over much of their traditional native pastures. Again the legislation is currently preventing many landowners from returning the land to productivity.

Farmers must have flexibility in management and change of land use is necessary to maintain and increase their productivity.

### **Export Trade**

I recently had a two week holiday in the south island of New Zealand. I enjoyed looking over the fence and observing their intensive productive agriculture. I watched a dairy farmer friend milk 560

cows in a couple of hours in a rotary dairy. Milk production is going gang busters over there for export, compared to our struggling industry here. I am not a dairy farmer but it is pretty obvious they have something in their trade agreements which we are missing out on.

I am disturbed by the tough deal we get out of a lot of our Free Trade Agreements. The FTA with South Korea dictates we won't get the whole tariff lifted off our beef on a sliding scale for 15 years. What a joke?

The existing New Zealand – China FTA places Australia at a competitive disadvantage. Looking at current figures on lamb exports to China we get a lot of cheaper cuts into China (eg this year 51.4% breast and flap).

China takes over 70% of our wool exports. It's obvious we rely greatly on China and that raises two issues. While its great having access to such a huge market I believe we need to continue to cultivate alternative markets. If for some reason, political or economic, Chins shuts its doors on our exports the result would be devastation.

This was exemplified by the closure of live cattle exports to Indonesia. The influence of Animal Rights Activist Groups and also Human Rights will continue to be a problem, especially in such developing nations as China.

### **Employment**

It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain experienced staff. It appears some just want to sit on their tail on the dole and others bypass agriculture to earn more money in the mines. Our production is often limited due to shortage of trained staff.

### **The Use Of Our Water Resources**

In my own area we have been very fortunate to have received recent substantial rain. Prior to this every dam on the property had been fenced off due to livestock becoming bogged. They were completely dependent on reticulated water supplies form underground sources. Without our underground stock and domestic water supplies every head of stock would have to be sold at drought prices

It is tremendously important to maintain our long term production of quality produce, that our water supplies are protected from rash short term exploitation. This is why many landholders do not trust mining companies pursuing quick short term gains from CSG or mining.

Projects such as our Snowy Scheme should not be interfered with from its original aim of water supply for irrigation and secondary need for generation of electricity. Many of our horticultural industries originated from the supply of irrigated water. Many of these industries are finding it very hard to compete against cheap imports due to cost of labour and processing.

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