

The Federal Government Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

A Submission by Nicola Bussell
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Addressing Agricultural Competitiveness into the Future
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“We can’t solve problems using the same thinking we used when we created them.”
Albert Einstein

“Agriculture is the litmus test of whether we deliver economic justice to our own.”
Barnaby Joyce

Australia has traditionally been built on our agricultural production. It has been a significant part of our economy, and so too our history and national identity, as we underwent the transformation from aboriginal settlement and convict colony, to the modern, multicultural, democratic society we are today. However agriculture, as an Australian economic keystone, is changing. Today there are clear threats and opportunities in our evolving agricultural landscape. Regardless of which industry is being discussed or measured, there remains a common truth. Australia must continue to produce a lot more, for a lot less, in order to remain competitive and viable in today’s world economic marketplace.

In 1901 around 14% of Australia’s population worked in the agricultural industry. This figure peaked in 1911 with almost 33% of Australia’s population being employed in agriculture. By 1996 this figure had fallen to 4.3% and today it is below 1%. During this same period, our population has moved house, significantly. In 1906 33.6% of Australia’s population lived in the major urban areas. This increased to 62.7% of people living in these areas in 1996 and today it is around 89.2%, with Australia regarded as one of the most urbanised countries in the world (ABS data). Little wonder then that some of the potential threats and opportunities for our agricultural production systems stem from this increasing disconnect between producer and consumer in a world of ‘connectivity’ based around population centres.

Threats, risks & reality:

- A Widening gap & knowledge base between agricultural producer & consumer within Australia & internationally
- Increasing strength & voice of anti-agricultural movements such as the Greens political party & animal activists
- Competition for limited resources from other sectors such as mining, gas & the environment
- Global competition for markets
- The mixed double edged sword of fluctuations in our currency: from the high Aussie dollar, meaning input costs are more expensive and agricultural products command a higher price;

to a lower Aussie dollar, meaning reduced costs of inputs with lower prices for commodities achieved.

- Sparse population base discrimination – though both logical and accepted (Ex. in telecommunications & connectivity, transport infrastructure & costs, family options for schools, buses, etc)
- Too much 'red tape' & large delays of years in adoption of significant animal health products and agricultural chemicals overall, into Australia (refer to the Australian Pesticides & Veterinary Medicine Authority issues later in this submission)
- The red tape, interference & often general hindrance of local government & government department bureaucracies that ensure you are constantly fighting to maintain your business enterprise & protect your infrastructure, in addition to operating the 'day to day' business of the enterprise itself. Areas such as planning & zoning, fencing, vegetation laws and decisions of administrations are especially vexed arenas.
- Too many agricultural 'advocacy' groups with no effective 'voice' for the most part
- Increasing cost structures in Australia (wages, professional fees & charges, fertilisers, diesel, etc) in a country where input costs for production are high with soils in general, relatively poor.
- Lack of government protection & subsidising of agriculture here, as compared to other world players where tariff protection and subsidies are much more common (the issue of having a significantly smaller population base to draw on for our national wealth and taxation in comparison to other world players)
- Current farm debt levels
- High costs of business establishment in the traditional farming models
- Lack of incentives & rewards for new players to take on food production (in terms of financially lower wages, negligible low cost entry/ start up options, lack of security, lack of general services overall for the rest of the family members)
- Significantly ageing workforce & land/business ownership across the industry overall.
- Lack of consistency & large variation in the knowledge levels, education & experiences of food producers
- Consistently highly variable climate & weather patterns
- Australian country of origin and other food labelling laws
- Lack of effective investment into realistic R&D that increases productivity in a timely manner.

Opportunities for investment, growth, change & innovation:

- Traditional animal & plant breeding for better performance
- New technologies that allow the ability to effectively select higher performing livestock more quickly (through genomics, DNA genetic mapping & trait selection)
- New technologies for more efficient measurement & production models using less labour units (For example, in Livestock = Electronic Identification used in ear tags across all livestock breeds, walk-over-weighing, Bluetooth, automatic drafting / in Broad acre Cropping = GPS auto steer tractor systems, precision sowing & harvesting equipment)
- Effective country of origin food labelling laws that then returns 'power' to consumers and Australian producers in the globally competitive and undercutting world of food production.
- Education of consumers across all age groups on positive, factual agricultural messages covering products, health benefits & production methods of agricultural products (Using key

communicators such as The Wiggles & Playschool for small children, to teens mediums, to mum & dads mediums, to retirees)

- Removal of 'charity' tax concessions for animal activist groups operating in Australia
- Encourage & support key advocacy groups to undertake the work to counter the negative and often misleading messages relating to agricultural production pedalled by animal activists & the greens movement, replacing these messages with positive, grassroots, factual stories of commercial primary production occurring for the benefit of Australia (economically), benefit of consumers (cheap & healthy food), benefit of animals (animal welfare), benefit of landscapes & the environment (management of weeds, pests, water, salinity, erosion & general stewardship)
- Establishing key Centres of Agricultural Excellence across each State (in Victoria they could be located in Rutherglen, Dookie, Longerenong & Hamilton), to showcase & teach best practice and new technology in private/ government partnerships for primary producers and hobby farmers (& potentially for school/ tafe/ university education experiences). Run as working, commercial farm enterprises.
- Identified strategic positive discrimination towards rural populations who otherwise suffer from decisions made on population grounds.
For example reliable connectivity (mobile, satellite or otherwise) is critical to rural regions to address current & future business, health, education and other requirements. This should be a priority despite low population levels that potentially make this technology unviable in a commercial marketplace relying on a user pays system of return.
- Identify & invest in key 'Selling Centres' for livestock around each state (saleyards remain critical to livestock sales in Australia, but infrastructure must be improved from a productivity, technological, OH&S & animal welfare perspective).
- Encourage the many diverse domestic marketing opportunities (Farmers Markets in particular perform the role of bringing producer & consumer together & so can bridge the city/ country divide)
- Enable abattoir investment into the EID supply chain system through the use of electronic gambles which will enable true traceability along supply chains (This is a critical issue for quality assurance, effective producer feedback & true paddock to plate marketing)
- EID's (Electronic Eartag Identification) – Should be 'sold' for the gains to be achieved for producers now having a much better ability to manage livestock – also an industry insurance policy against Emerging Animal Diseases – Can we, as a country/govt/industry afford NOT to have EID's as a means of tracking livestock when we do have an outbreak of an EAD (Foot & Mouth, etc)?
When this happens the ramifications across animals, livelihoods, people, industries, communities, governments & our 'clean/green/safe' world trade will be enormous. Can we afford **not** to have EID's as a compulsory method of reliable tracking?
- Agricultural producers must be able to protect their own infrastructure investments, including against actions (or lack of actions) from government bodies & local councils.
- Australian Pesticides & Veterinary Medicine Authority needs radical reform, increased efficiencies, reduced red tape and a significant amount of common sense in its decision making processes.

I would like to make several points as my reference for this submission, before expanding on the key issues above.

- 1) ***Agriculture in Australia needs to produce more & better for less.*** It is that simple. While Free Trade Agreements and other changes in tariffs, or openings in markets, can bring significant benefits to the Australian agricultural industry in the future, these can never be relied on to 'support' this industry. Our agricultural industry must remain competitive and profitable in its own right.
- 2) Whilst a capitalist framework allows and protects the freedom of individuals to take risks, work hard, own and operate businesses and industries, and be rewarded for their effort, in the form of profit. It remains that ***a role of government*** within this capitalist society ***is to ensure*** that a countries generated wealth is redistributed, to bring about ***a more equitable and fairer society for everyone.***

In my own mind this translates that sometimes decisions are warranted that allow for services or infrastructure to be built to service rural areas, whose otherwise minimal population would not allow these decisions to be economically feasible otherwise.

New Technologies:

Being innovative with the many new technologies available today is a key component of ensuring our agricultural sector can produce more, and better, for less. Technologies are rapidly advancing that allow this crucial innovation to occur on two individual fronts concurrently. When used together the ability to significantly boost productivity becomes greater still.

- Firstly, it is new technology in the fields of **breeding and selection for both plants and animals.** Genomic research and DNA mapping allow trait selection to occur more accurately, faster, and potentially with enhanced outcomes, across plant and animal species. These advancements allow important traits to be identified and pursued (such as footrot resistance in sheep) which in turn allows producers to more quickly and accurately breed a better animal before marketing that breeding animal for the benefit of their own business, the breed within Australia, and potentially for the betterment of the breed and people around the world. Currently not all of this work occurs within Australian universities or research institutions, though it is available to Australian producers in the world marketplace.
- Secondly, it is new technology **in the fields of electronics, computers, GPS mapping, data & performance recording.** Electronic eartag identification of animals opens up a rapidly progressing world in which physical work can be done more efficiently, accurately, safely and cheaply by machines, saving the operator time, energy & costs whilst allowing the animals to be handled with less stress and negative consequences to weight gain, fertility, etc. Walk-over-weighing and automatic drafting are part of this area of technological advancement. In broad acre cropping enterprises it is precision sowing and auto steering. Whilst in a market yard of 500 cattle up to 40 people could be required to handle these animals currently, using available technologies this can be reduced to just 3 or 4, in addition to the job being completed in a more timely & efficient manner, with less stress on the animals themselves.

Food Labelling Laws:

Effective, clear labelling of country of origin, in addition to accurate labelling of contents on food labels gives power back to producers and consumers. This is particularly important and relevant in Australia where a strong supermarket duopoly too often plays a significant role in determining prices of food for the Australian consumer and producer alike. In an increasingly 'homebrand' price driven marketplace, effective food labels also reduce the ability for multinationals to profit through using cheaper, imported subsidies in place of quality Australian food products that inevitably cost more to produce, but are of higher, (and often safer) quality.

Governments can't stop the import of food into Australia, but consumers can. Give our consumers back their freedom of choice, and empower them with the ability to make healthy choices, with full knowledge and disclosure of what is in the food they eat. Food labelling needs to be effective to fulfil its real purpose.

I realise the Coalition Government has launched an enquiry into Country of Origin Food Labelling – as of 27th March, 2014 – through the Standing Committee on Agriculture & Industry. However in truth the issue of food labelling goes beyond Country of Origin, though if this issue IS effectively tackled it will be a very good beginning!

Consumer Education:

The widening gap between food producer and consumer is well documented. Australia's significantly urbanised population base, (ranking 16th in a list of over 200 countries, with over 89% of our total population living in urban environments), makes this a particularly acute issue.

The agricultural industry in this country is diverse, geographically widespread, regularly based on individuals, operating in a free market economy, with tight profit margins. In summary, an environment not conducive to people meeting together, under a united, strong, common message. Given that it is estimated that no fewer than 4000 producer representative groups currently operate to further the cause of farmers throughout Australia, (figures from the Agribusiness Council of Australia), the confusion and general 'noise' without targeted, key messages, is not perplexing.

Misinformation will always prosper where the agricultural industry itself fails to adequately or accurately inform consumers. Radical ideologists with extreme agendas recognise these weaknesses and information voids, opportunistically exploiting them to fulfil their own mission statements and agendas. They do so with increasing effect and thus with an increasing economic base and consumer following to continue to do so in the future.

Consumers already exist in an 'agricultural vacuum'. How, where, and to a degree, why, our food is produced by those who produce it, is in large part hidden from them. Whereas in the past up to 33% of Australia's population worked directly in agriculture, today it is less than 1%. Consequently, for consumers, any contact with an animal is through their 'pet', or through the media.

From a very early age we expose our children to TV where the characters are regularly animals with human feelings, emotions and lifestyles. Peppa Pig, Angelina Ballerina, The Wiggles (Henry the Octopus, Wags the Dog, Dorothy the Dinosaur), Playschool and so the list goes on! It is surely little

wonder then that **anthropomorphism**, as this tendency is called, affects the way consumers, including adults, view and react to agricultural industries, particularly those based on livestock production systems.

Realistically, if we want to create opportunities, growth, innovation and investment in agriculture we **need to address this complete lack of factual information easily and readily available** in the world of our urbanised consumers, of all age groups. Failure to do so will increasingly see others do this on our behalf, commonly with information that is at best divisive, and more often totally inaccurate or wrong, without any scientific research or data on which it is based. We can hardly blame consumers, supermarkets, or even animal welfare organisations, for 'getting it wrong', if we continue to have a quiet, fragmented voice.

As a start, I have investigated establishing an agricultural portal 'Through the Farm Gate' that would link the many individual blogs written by those operating within agriculture to the consumer, media and government agencies, in addition to other producers. This idea is based on the premise that farmers are knowledgeable business people, often passionate about what they produce and how they produce it and why, and many already write blogs. Providing an online platform in the form of a portal would collect their individual blogs into one access area, building bridges and developing relationships between producer and consumer on a larger 'one stop shop' front that could still link back into individual producers own websites. This would empower people to network and access firsthand information that will help improve information outcomes and debunk inaccuracies that exist about agricultural production today. This could be done elegantly for an investment of around \$7,000 by those I have approached with the idea.

Realising the centrality of the internet as a tool for the sharing and accessing of information and funding, I see much more potential than this. Utilising a front built around the Know Your Farmer/ No Farmer/ Now...Buy/Eat/Cook/Live idea, separate portals could be linked together to form a united whole. This could include a site based around raising farm financing funds (similar to Pozzible, but dedicated entirely to agricultural fund raising activities, large or small), could be one area. A portal that takes people to the Australian Farm Institute's agricultural and information analysis and research papers could provide the more in depth, accurate and topically relevant sections. Industry organisations (such as MLA, VFF, NFF, etc) could be linked into an area. Finally the whole could be advertised and promoted via 'Industry Cards' – based around the Woolworths Taronga Zoo Cards or the Footy Cards concept – colourful, quality, gloss cards that could be produced displaying all sorts of industry 'facts' and truths that would help inform our consumers of various age groups, teachers, schools, etc and also be 'swapped' and collected amongst children. These are just some ideas to take our agricultural industry into the Australian community.

Realising today that every mobile phone is a camera, in a world where information is instant but unmeasured, it is a beginning at the task of engaging the consumer in a more meaningful and knowledgeable way for the purpose of advancing the agricultural industry and building its brand in Australia.

Agricultural Centres of Excellence:

Productivity increases do not come without innovation, research & development and learning! Just as the measureable difference in productivity in individual animals within breeds is often greater than

that between breeds, so too is the knowledge gap between producers within an industry regularly a chasm!

Producers are often very 'hands on' practical people who learn through seeing and doing more than by reading or listening. For producers to take up new technologies, particularly in areas of computer programmes & electronics, participating will likely provide greater results than simply listening, or watching a PowerPoint presentation.

Research must also be geared towards practical, relevant, commercial productivity gains, not simply measuring data because it is possible.

Agricultural Centres of Excellence could be developed as working, commercial farms, where those instructing have been chosen because of their own practical applications, experience and success 'on farm' in a specialist area? **Teachers** would not have the qualifications for employment without **having operated independently in the industry beforehand. They must be able to demonstrate how they have significantly made changes to their own business over the last 10 years in order to maintain their competitiveness** and adapt to the changing market conditions and environment. Nuffield Scholars may lecture to students on returning from their own glimpse of world agriculture.

Attending forums where professional, lifelong academics lecture on research that is expensive with limited practical commercial application just doesn't cut it.

Modelled on **private/ government partnerships that private companies must tender for**, these Agricultural Centres of Excellence would model best practice, latest technologies, specific animal & plant breeding that addressed issues relevant to tomorrow's agriculture in Australia, and they would all be **run on a commercial basis**, which should mean they pay their way!

Companies such as CSIRO, RIRDC & MLA could pay for research to be undertaken on their behalf, under their specifications. Universities, TAFE's, schools and interest groups could also pay to attend, or could offer student labour for activities relevant to their interest or curriculum at the time. Whatever it takes!

Victoria is in the fortunate position of already having a number of key locations where agricultural innovation and teaching was held in the past. Rutherglen, Dookie, Longerenong & Hamilton could all be brought into service for this purpose.

Addressing Inbuilt Inequality:

Logically, limited resources are usually allocated on a population basis. Using this model enables a capitalist approach to have the greatest chance of success in what traditionally becomes a user pays system. It also allows the most benefit to be had by the greatest number of people, again often a reasonably fair and equitable approach to finite resources. However, being the 16th most urbanised country in the world (from more than 200 countries), Australia runs the **real risk of creating a 'sub class' in rural and regional areas**, as these areas increasingly have a diminishing population and so constantly get given the smallest slices of pie, if any is still available at all!

Unfortunately, this can become a self-fulfilling spiral that continues until the rural community has effectively been decimated. The footy club is long gone, the oval overgrown, the school closed, and the CFA shed empty. As the area declines so too do the mental health statistics regularly rise.

There are no quick fixes or easy answers. However rural and regional business and industry can't afford to be coming from behind! Returning profitability to overall agricultural production is a necessary way forward. It is when our regions are strong, that our regional cities and our capital centres will also be strong.

The most critical issue of inequality in rural areas today is [access to reliable, reasonable mobile and internet coverage](#). This is an issue that I believe warrants a serious rethink of any model based solely on population figures. Please see my submission attached "The Need to Address Real Issues & Vision for Rural Australia: Specifically in terms of Technology and Connectivity. A Submission by Nicola Bussell, 27 February 2014" for a full discussion on this critical issue of connectivity infrastructure.

More information on the subject of inbuilt inequalities is also discussed under the next heading, below.

All Care but No Responsibility Taken!

Just as the voting power of the nation is held in our capital cities, so too is the voting power of our regional areas increasingly held in our regional centres. Another reflection of our urbanised population base in Australia, this reality often translates to local government decisions being written and enforced by those with little understanding, knowledge or awareness of the needs of the rural areas of production that surround them. This reality is then regularly exacerbated by the hiring of 'consultants' based in cities around the world, who are contracted to write or interpret policy for local areas. Little wonder our regionally based local councils have too often become a battleground.

Rural Land Strategies, Population & Housing Strategies, Roadside Vegetation Laws, Council Planning and Regulations so often impede, rather than enable, rurally based businesses to operate. Emotive terms such as 'right to farm' ; 'responsible and sustainable'; 'landscape amenity' can become fronts behind which legislators, planners, councillors and administrations choose to hide, while enacting local laws that impede the very areas they are purportedly seeking to protect.

Roadsides have become nature reserves, rather than having a purpose to allow the safe and timely passage of people, animals and goods under many and various circumstances and conditions, including in emergencies. Farmers are expected to pay \$10/metre on fencing without being allowed to protect this infrastructure from the inevitable dangers of falling limbs and trees (unless again they pay for the careful lopping of roadside trees by arborists, despite the trees not being located on the farmer's land).

Adequate planning for the expansion of rural communities needs to be a priority. Evidence based on information such as mental health data and existing infrastructure of small towns (such as schools, shops, police stations, post offices, hotels, health centres, petrol stations and historic buildings) needs to be considered alongside the cost benefits of contracting services and restricting future planning outside of major town centres in which Councils are located and decisions are made. Too often decisions are made that further entrench already identified areas of disadvantage, rather than freeing

up regulations that could encourage, rather than banish, future population and business growth and investment. We need to encourage prosperity, not bankruptcy. We need to set an economic framework that rewards hard work and enterprise, providing people with opportunities, not stop signs. It is only in seeking to pursue benchmarks such as these that we will succeed in restoring economic viability and prosperity to rural Australia. **There is little point in preserving all the farm land, if in the end you have destroyed the farmer, the rural communities and the rural towns, all of which provide the heart and soul of our regions, as well as often the employers, employees, income and services.**

Strategic Livestock Selling Centres: A Critical Infrastructure

What other industry makes purchases without the necessary information on the product beforehand? Then provides this information to purchasers AFTER the event is concluded? Given the significant infrastructure costs involved, why don't our livestock markets operate more frequently, rather than selling huge quantities of animals once or twice a week? Critically, have the real threats to this industries 'social licence' to operate been identified by stakeholders? Are they being adequately addressed?

Traditionally, Livestock Saleyards remain dotted around our rural landscapes, so often the places of networking, socialising and R&R for our rural communities. Regularly owned and controlled by local Councils they supplement Council incomes, but often remain underappreciated in their 'townie' neighbourhoods. When requiring overdue upgrades they burst into local newspapers briefly while a debate ensues between Councils strapped for cash, and rural ratepayers who feel they get little else for their significant quarterly rate payments! So each battle begins.

Today there are many options available for the buying and selling of livestock, each with strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless the **physical saleyards remain as a significant instant market indicator for livestock values around the country.** They sell from just one animal in a lot, to 10,000's of animals on any given day. Anyone can sell any quantity of animals there for the market price on the day. Saleyards remain a critical infrastructure for rural and regional Australia.

However, in pursuit of greater profitability & innovation in agriculture, saleyards must be revisited.

The Victorian Livestock Exchange Pty Ltd recognised the requirement and benefit of designing state-of-the-art livestock saleyards that were purpose built for animal welfare, OH&S and environmental considerations, in addition to incorporating EID (Electronic Eartag Identification) and accompanying software. After establishing the company in 1997 the first saleyards were opened & operating in Pakenham in 1999 & then in Leongatha in 2006. These facilities clearly demonstrate that by improving animal welfare you improve the farmer's bottom line, with consumers also the beneficiary of a better product. Today a further competitor has also entered the state-of-the-art, purpose built, livestock selling centre marketplace in Victoria. However what these companies have recognised, is really just the beginning.

Animal welfare is rightly a significant issue in maintaining producers 'social licence to operate' around Australia today. This issue cannot be underestimated in its importance and reach throughout communities whereby most only interact with animals in a 'pet' situation at best. Saleyards must be brought up to speed as quickly as possible for reasons of animal welfare, operator OH&S, agent &

client benefit, and overall industry advancement, if our urban based communities are to allow this selling method to continue.

Identifying strategic Selling Centres located in key geographical areas would enable private industries, or private/ public partnerships, to invest the necessary funds to build new Centres, or upgrade existing ones with appropriate infrastructure and technology that would guarantee future patronage, whilst also maintaining the Livestock Industries 'social licence to operate' using this system of trade.

We live in a free market economy. Current livestock markets, large or small, always have the opportunity to identify and market their individual 'point of difference' to ensure they remain as a viable competitor in this selling system. Effective competition will always provide a better overall result for farmers, rather than creating an effective livestock selling centre monopoly in any geographical region, unless measures that guard against exploiting this position were put in place to protect producers in the levies paid, etc.

With today's EID technology there is no reason why correct animal weights cannot be electronically displayed PRIOR to the selling of the animals. Saleyards should always be undercover for animal welfare reasons anyway, and so electronic equipment such as flat screens can be clearly visible and accessible as information displays, and/or information transmitted via internet or mobile phone to participants. Increasing the transparency and accessible, accurate knowledge and information in the market yard, on which purchasing decisions are made and industry prices set, can only aid fair competition for buyer and seller alike. Bidding on actual weights, rather than estimates, (or on agreements made between agents prior to the sale), can only aid in obtaining the real value of the animals on the day. **Producers would be immediate beneficiaries of this transparency and accuracy.**

Government's role is to lay a solid platform from which industries can operate. **Legislating that it is mandatory for all saleyards to display individual animal weights PRIOR to the sale of animals is one of the keys** to an efficient and effective saleyard system that will immediately benefit the seller.

With saleyards providing such a regular gravitational hub for primary producers, other strategic services could also be provided at these times. Health checks, blood tests, doctors, social workers, mental health experts, Emergency Animal Disease information workshops, best practice demonstrations or teaching, or any other identified requirement for this otherwise solitary and isolated consumer group, could be incorporated into strategically located, state-of-the-art, Livestock Selling Centres.

There are so many competing stakeholders in this area, gutsy government leadership is required to set the benchmarks and standards that will move the industry forward in a fair and progressive manner for everyone concerned. Additionally, industry bodies such as MLA (Meat & Livestock Australia) have a significant financial pool of resources gained from producers at point of sale, that could arguably be drawn on to ensure future sustainability and industry advancement here.

Privately or publically funded, state-of-the-art saleyards provide a profitable resource for Australian agriculture, primary producers, agents and buyers, and must be further enhanced for the benefit of everyone operating within the livestock industries, and importantly for the animals themselves.

The Importance of the Electronic Identification of Animals through the whole supply chain:

The electronic identification (EID) of all animals is a critical step forward to ensure Australian livestock production continues to advance.

EID has key benefits for producers, government agencies and consumers:

- EID is the most efficient way of measuring animal performance currently. Allowing producers to identify, record and cull animals who do not contribute to the enterprise's profitability in an efficient and effective manner on a myriad of measurable traits. EID enables the use of labour saving technologies that save time, labour units and effort (which also allows females to undertake work as effectively as their male counterparts in physical environments). There are many immediate benefits to a producer's bottom line, though upfront costs can be significant on initial implementation.
- Enabling efficient and effective tracking of animals through the entire supply chain, EID's are ultimately **an insurance policy for government** and the broader livestock industries overall, in the event of the identification of a serious biosecurity threat occurring. Australia's Quarantine and Emergency Animal Disease agencies know it is **a matter of 'when' not 'if' Australia will be impacted** by one of these critical events, (Foot & Mouth, Blue Tongue, Mad Cow, etc). When this occurs, it **will only be through the effective tracking** of every livestock movement in the affected species that the potential **damage** to animals, individuals, industry, government, and our international trade and reputation), **will be able to be mitigated**. The impact of an EAD occurring, even if this 'freight train' can be effectively pulled up, will be enough to bring down a government and significantly change our world trade. It will cost billions of dollars in lost revenue, biosecurity measures and compensation, with each additional day's delay in tracking animal movements resulting in many millions of dollars of loss.
- The ability to track livestock through the supply chain is critical for consumer, producer and industry advancement. True traceability through livestock production chains ultimately provides consumers with the power to influence meat eating qualities and animal welfare requirements using empirical methods. Efficiently tracing 'paddock to plate' also provides real feedback to producers, most of whom are never able to access this feedback for their product, even if they sought to.

As a tool used in this manner it is the most efficient way to improve the quality of Australia's meat products, and to advance further research into this area. Thus using EID traceability through the entire supply chain allows Australia to maintain its competitive advantage as the supplier of premium meat products, for the domestic and international marketplace, that can stand up to scrutiny.

Why would we want to hold this industry, and our own future back?

Animal Welfare in Australia:

Examining the role and efficiency of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority is critically important. For much too long Australia's animal welfare has been compromised while this body has blocked permission to import well known and highly regarded vaccines, medicines & drenches, among other chemicals & pesticides.

Australia was 3 years late in receiving the latest drench for worms in sheep. Today we still allow our animals to be killed, or to have their udders rot off, rather than prevent the infection occurring in the first place by using a well known vaccine available & widely used for years overseas for mastitis. Mastitis & Footrot, are two common & debilitating animal health issues for which preventable vaccines have been long available for the rest of the world.

We expect our agricultural producers to compete in today's global marketplace, yet we then give them significant handicaps by reducing access to effective, mainstream, animal health treatments and chemicals often available for years in the countries of our competitors!

In Conclusion:

Despite less than 1% of Australia's population still working within agriculture, this industry is worth \$43 billion in gross value to Australia every year. It provides 370,000 jobs and some of our largest exports. We do need a competitive and productive agricultural sector as this will provide Australia with strong regional communities, employment, investment and ultimately economic growth. In order for our agriculture to become more profitable, we must expand the business, reduce the costs (become more efficient), & make sure we've got our insurance 'policies' in place!

This submission addresses many areas where all three of these critical steps can be implemented, many giving immediate, tangible benefits to producers, and so the country overall. Please give this submission, and the ideas and attachment, your full consideration.

Thank you

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Please NOTE:

My Attachment on the Critical Importance of 'Connectivity' (NBN, Satellite & Mobile Coverage) for Rural Australia Follows -

To The Select Committee on the National Broadband Network
& also To The Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

**The Need to Address Real Issues & Vision for Rural Australia:
Specifically in terms of Technology and Connectivity**

A Submission by Nicola Bussell – Carboor – North East Victoria

27 February 2014

Fibre To The Premises (FTTP), Fibre To The Node (FTTN), ADSL, VDSL, ISDN (or ISDL)...acronyms abound as the debate continues and the only thing known is that our connectivity has become a battleground of very large numbers! Symbolising costs, download/upload speeds and bandwidths, the public are assured that while possibly only 50% of telephone exchanges will be reached by the FTTN rollout, this will cover 90% of Australia's population. Figures not surprising given that 89% of Australia's current population live in urban environments (ABC Radio National 2011). The remainder are those living in 'remote' parts of Australia.

A point of mutual agreement so obvious it is almost never stated, is that E Commerce, internet and connectivity (by whatever means), is the current and future way of interacting for all of us. Shopping online, downloading information, learning online, watching video or listening online – we have created a global system seemingly without limits, yet completely limited by the size of the 'waterpipe' through which we deliver it!

Historically, much of the debate has been taken up arguing the merits over the FTTP vs FTTN equation, yet I will write a reality check for you, as I put this 'remote' part of Australia – its rural and regional core – in context and back into the centre of the debate, at least briefly! This is a sector for which the FTTP / FTTN debate is completely meaningless.

Agriculture and its ancillary industries contribute around 12% of Australia's GDP (or about \$155 billion). In comparison, the total mining sector makes up about 19% of GDP. Unlike mining however, agriculture is a fully sustainable and renewable industry and one that is recognised as being able to potentially double its current performance and profitability. Currently it contributes some of our largest exports and provides around 370,000 jobs, despite less than 1% of Australia's current population working within it. But that is a crucial point. 'Remote' Australia is rural and regional and has a relatively small population base in comparison, however *it is this region that produces significant economic wealth for our communities and our country overall, and that will be required to do so increasingly in order for Australia to continue to prosper economically*. For this reason, **reliable, consistent, effective connectivity is critical to this industry and its future in Australia**. It is only through the continued uptake of technology that producers remain able to compete globally with others whose input and labour costs are a fraction of that in our first world economy.

A micro example: I am a primary producer living, working and operating an expanding agricultural business in Carboor, North East Victoria. Part of that business is online sales of 'Paddock to Plate' boxed lamb. My animals carry EID's (Electronic Eartag Identification). Their performance is tracked

and recorded regularly using computers and I can provide full traceability for my products throughout the supply chain. I use online national databases to record, measure and manage my genetic gains. I use 'virtual' online auction selling systems to trade livestock. Through the internet I access critical weather and market forecasts, research information, and advertise my business. I am less than 2km from the exchange, 50km from Wangaratta, 1 hour from Albury Wodonga, or 3 hours from Melbourne's CBD. A location hardly 'remote' but well outside any FTTN promise.

Currently my internet is reliant on an NBN satellite connection. This becomes almost useless in school holidays, or after school hours, when the network is totally overloaded and even downloading emails, or simply connecting to the internet, can prove impossible! Mobile coverage on farm is scratchy to non-existent, not surprising given the hilly topography of the region. However it is this very topography that attracts tourism and swells the population base over long weekends and throughout the festivals and snow season – another very real source of significant revenue for many regional businesses in the area, and one that also demands reliable mobile coverage for businesses and customers alike. I am within 'line of sight' to a Telstra tower on Mt Stanley, but this still renders a handheld mobile ineffective for the most part.

How many corporate or international businesses would expect to be able to trade reliably during school hours only? How many are effectively expected to close over school holidays? So why am I expected to?

My immediate neighbours include: a large dairy milking around 1000 cows; a niche small industry employing up to 25 people at any one time, that made canoes for the Australian Olympic team in 2000, and currently exports plastic BMW bike fuel tanks across the world; an engineering company that invented a unique method of laser welding steel pipes in line, that has now exported that technology, and a Senior Mining Consultant who could easily work from home, were the connectivity more reliable. None of these small businesses expects to drive a Ferrari when it comes to internet and mobile coverage. However all of them require reliable, reasonable, consistent connectivity to undertake their current operations and to expand these operations (and their economic contribution to the country) into the future. None of these businesses would have begun, had their location been anywhere other than rural. It is this rural setting that enabled each of them to use agricultural production as a base, on which they were subsequently able to build, either a much larger agricultural enterprise, or a dynamic and responsive business in another field of their specialty.

Using current data sourced from the Rural City of Wangaratta, agriculture in my local area is worth \$166.4 million to the region. It places 5th from the top in terms of income generated in this region for the Australian economy per year. Manufacturing generates \$895.6 million a year locally and the Council estimates 5% of this is based in rural locations, outside the Wangaratta town limits. Tourism is worth \$98.7 million a year and at least 50% of this is regarded as being generated outside the main town, again in the rural surrounding areas.

In terms of population, the Rural City of Wangaratta encompasses about 26,000 people. Around 70% of these people live within Wangaratta itself and 30% (or about 8,000) live rurally. This is your 'remote' Australia – people generating wealth, employment and opportunity through innovation and technology, just 3 hours drive from Melbourne's CBD. These are the businesses, industries and individuals that create real wealth for our country through innovation, the uptake of technology and critically, through the use of reliable connectivity. Yet it is this same group that is in danger of being

completely overlooked, and under serviced, in what is arguably the most important economic, cultural and occupational driver of change in our world today – our communication and technology revolution.

North East Victoria & Southern NSW burst with potential, but sit underutilised and requiring band aids to address social issues such as suicide, drug dependency and unemployment. Boasting an abundance of water; natural beauty; land resources; proximity to Melbourne, Wagga & Canberra; numerous airports; high quality educational and medical institutions; and a location on one of Australia's key freeway and rail corridors, there should be no reason for this region not to be an Australian pace setter. Instead, the reality remains that just as the mountainous topography is one of the regions great assets, so too does it present one of our largest challenges, as reliable, reasonable connectivity remain elusive, and the population is labelled as 'remote'.

As I recently read on an NBN Committee Senator's website, I trust you will all commit to "making the critical decisions today, that will ensure the prosperity of tomorrow", not just for the majority of Australia, but in this case also for the minority, that feed and in so many ways generate the wealth, for the majority! If we do not support agriculture and industry in our regional and rural areas, they will not be able to support us, in providing employment and sustainable economic growth for the country overall.

Thank you.

Nicola Bussell

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'Paddock to Plate' Lamb



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