

AFF - Senate Estimates opening statement

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Thank you, Chair.

Budget measures

In our first year in office, the Albanese Government has done a lot of listening to our agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors; a lot of collaborating with them, and a lot of acting to protect and grow these vital sectors.

Our core focus remains to protect and grow Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry, and support industry's aim to become a \$100 billion sector by 2030.

Currently Australian agriculture is booming and already worth \$90 billion. If you add fisheries and forestry, the figure grows to \$93 billion.

Our key priorities to take the sector even further include biosecurity, sustainability, workforce, and trade.

Backing Australia Biosecurity

Our May Budget delivered a game-changer for Australian biosecurity – over \$1 billion of additional funding, including \$845 million to support operations across the country.

A strong and efficient biosecurity system—without a doubt—protects our producers, export markets, animal and human health, and our environment.

But Australian biosecurity had never been funded appropriately—until now.

With our current budget we fulfilled a key election commitment by locking in a secure and steady source of funding for our biosecurity system. Something that the National Farmers' Federation and many others had called for, for many years.

Everyone has a role to play in strengthening Australia's biosecurity system, including contributing to its cost. That's because biosecurity is a shared responsibility.

We are delivering a fairer system to pay for biosecurity that shares the cost fairly between taxpayers, importers, international travellers and producers.

Supporting sustainability

We're also partnering with industry to build a more sustainable future, protect against the impacts of climate change, and grow by reaffirming our trusted position in the global trade market.

When I'm on-farm, speaking with farmers, they proudly tell me what they are already doing to become more sustainable.

And most tell me they want to do more to adapt to climate change.

This is why we have allocated \$302 million to a Climate-Smart Agriculture package under the next five-year phase of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT).

The next round of the NHT will provide \$40 million to establish a network of Sustainable Agriculture Facilitators.

Facilitators will support farmers with access to trusted advice on climate-smart agricultural practices, and carbon and biodiversity markets informing critical investment decisions for their future sustainability.

\$56 million over 5 years will go to support efforts to better manage soil.

A further \$35.7 million will ensure regional delivery partners and peak land care organisations maintain capacity and are primed to deliver sustainable agriculture initiatives—efficiently and at scale.

ABARES will receive \$38 million to expand and continue their work in helping prepare farmers and the broader industry for the future. We know that reliable data from ABARES on agricultural production and an understanding of international markets with prices and policies—as well as the implications of our own climate on agricultural production—is critical to enabling agribusiness' to make sound decisions.

Expanding Trade

Trade is central to industry achieving its \$100 billion goal.

So I'm very pleased the Prime Minister recently reached agreement with his UK counterpart that the Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement will come into force next week.

This is a phased process for increasing our market access and within 10 years, tariffs on all agricultural goods will be eliminated.

Deepening our agricultural trade links with India is also a high priority for the Albanese Government—and I note and welcome the visit of India's Prime Minister Modi to Australia this week.

The interim trade agreement with India—which entered into force in December—eliminated Indian tariffs on more than 85% of Australian exports.

Negotiations are also ongoing to secure a new FTA with the EU. We are pushing hard to gain strong access to what would be a very lucrative market for Australian producers.

And we continue to work with China to remove trade barriers—you may have noted that Beijing lifted trade sanctions on Australian timber imports just last week.

Overall, the value of our agricultural exports is set to reach a record of \$75 billion in 2022-23 and the Albanese Government wants that to grow even more.

Traceability

A lot of these measures are underpinned by our work on improving national traceability systems. Assisting farmers to have the ability to track their produce's origins, growing conditions and movements helps them to demonstrate their sustainability, biosecurity and other credentials.

This morning I announced another \$11million in grants towards traceability initiatives—and that brings us to \$55 million invested in traceability this year.

Australian farmers will be assisted to prove the premium quality, sustainability and First Nations credentials of their produce through the grants program.

Traceability helps Australia to access valuable international export markets which are increasingly demanding evidence of clean, sustainable, climate-smart practices.

It also assists our biosecurity systems through detailed data and tracking of produce and livestock, and supports the move to cleaner, greener agriculture.

Workforce issues

Unfortunately, for many years, the ag industry has struggled to find the workforce it needs to grow. Like many other industries, this struggle was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic.

That's why we established a tripartite working group - involving farm employer groups, unions and government - to pursue solutions to better skill, attract, protect, and retain workers in the agriculture and processing sectors.

The Working Group meets monthly and is collaborating across government to ensure the agriculture sector benefits from announcements made across multiple portfolios, in relation to skills, migration and worker protections. Already we've:

- secured 13,200 fee-free TAFE places across the country;
- seen over 18,000 PALM workers arrive since June 2022, with over 38,000 PALM workers currently in Australia (as at 30 April 23);
- influenced the outcomes of the Migration Review;
- agreed on a set of labour hire principles for the sector, which we have provided to Minister Burke.

Conclusion

Agriculture, fisheries and forestry are central to our economy, jobs, growth, rural, and regional communities across Australia.

I commend the extremely good work of my department and the RDCs to administer and drive positive change.

Most of all I thank the women and men in this country who grow and produce the food and fibre we all need to survive.

Thank you.