

DAFF ESTIMATES - MINISTER WATT OPENING STATEMENT (534 words)

- Thank you for the opportunity to make a statement before you today.
- The Albanese Government is a government that listens, collaborates and acts.
- And that's certainly the approach I have taken since becoming Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.
- Overall the industry is in a very strong position at the moment, with record production leading to record exports, despite widespread flooding in most states and territories.
- The agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries are forecast to hit \$91 billion in 2022-23, with agricultural exports forecast to hit \$72 billion.
- Of course the picture hasn't been as rosy for everyone, with natural disasters, high inflation and rising inputs having a heavy impact on production costs.
- And that's why since coming to Government, we haven't wasted a single day.
- We have been working with industry and the states and territories to strengthen our biosecurity system.
- We laid the foundations by investing more in frontline staff, detector dogs and stronger defences against Foot and Mouth Disease and Lumpy Skin Disease.
- We passed new laws with the highest ever penalties for biosecurity offences and have given officers new powers to crack down on people who do the wrong thing.
- And we are committed to sustainable biosecurity funding to protect our \$72 billion agriculture export trade, build resilience and create jobs.
- While the sector is performing strongly overall, *the nationwide skill shortage is impacting on* ag businesses and meat processors ~~are still struggling to find workers, as they have been~~ *it has* for years.
- We are taking a collaborative approach to solve workforce issues in the sector, and we have acted by;
 - establishing the Agriculture Workforce Working Group, which is actively pursuing solutions to better skill, attract, protect and retain workers in the sector.
 - securing 13,200 fee-free TAFE places across the country.
 - welcoming 17,700 PALM workers to Australia since June 2022, reaching our target of 35,000 overall 6 months ahead of time;
 - ~~processing more than 4.3 million visas~~ *slashing visa backlog*
 - lifting the migration cap from 160,000 to 195,000, including an extra 9,000 places for the regions.
 - And over 121,000 working holiday makers have now arrived in Australia since borders reopened.

- This is not an issue that occurred overnight.
- As I have said previously, it has been around for years, so it will take time to solve, but we have definitely made good progress already.
- We have also listened to farmers on sustainability issues and we know that climate-smart agricultural practices are good for business.
- The Albanese Government has proudly collaborated with the agriculture industry to put climate and sustainability front and centre of our shared agenda.
- We are working side-by-side with industry to achieve key climate goals like net zero by 2050 and undertake critical work to deliver on the Global Methane Pledge.
- For nearly a decade, Australia has been viewed as being backwards on climate change, despite the best efforts of the ag industry to the contrary.
- I was fortunate to join NFF President Fiona Simson in London and Berlin last month, to reinforce the message to my international counterparts that we are serious about climate action and sustainable agriculture.
- The message we have been receiving loud and clear from our overseas customers, that in order to continue growing our industry we need to show the world we are serious about improving our climate credentials.
- The Albanese Government is focused on rebuilding our relationships with our trading partners and ensuring Australian farmers and processors have every opportunity to export their product.
- We have worked hard to bring the UK-FTA into force, finalising a deal with more than \$850 million a year to producers in my home state of Queensland alone.
- In the Albanese Government, Aussie farmers have a government that backs them and matches their ambition to build diverse and resilient trade pathways that support the growth of the industry.
- I'd be happy to take your questions.