

1st December 2022

Submission to Inquiry on Food Security in Australia

Food security is an important issue. Sadly, not everyone has enough food to eat in Australia (or not enough nutritious food). The high cost or low availability of foods can lead to people skipping meals. This can be especially damaging for children or young people, affecting their nutrition, energy for learning and other activities, and even their self-esteem.

One opportunity for innovation is promoting and learning from Indigenous food knowledge and bush food. Indigenous people have lived in Australia since time immemorial, perhaps some 65,000 years ago. They have developed intricate knowledge about the ecology and food sources across Australia. This traditional and local knowledge provides a resource for bolstering Australian food security.

We need to learn more about the Australian environment and how we can grow food in tune with it. The degradation of topsoil (with some estimates that we will lose productive topsoil within seven decades or so), is a frightening prospect – and indicates that we are often not producing food with a mind for sustainability or the needs of future generations. There are opportunities for more organic and sustainable agriculture. Farmers getting carbon credits for regenerating their land or pursuing other sustainable activities, for example (where this is done and accredited properly), can be an opportunity both for the farmers & getting environmental benefits. Finding ways to develop food in tune with the land means that we can keep doing so, sustainably, for many years to come.

Climate change is an immense challenge for Australia. Extreme weather events and natural disasters (though “natural” is becoming somewhat of an oxymoron for new climate extremes) such as drought, bushfires, cyclones and floods can all impact on the environment, agriculture and human habitations. In the wake of natural disasters, there are often tragic stories about people losing their farm or livestock and having to recover (if they can). There will need to be much more disaster resilience and adaptation for communities and Australian agriculture to

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2

prepare for the impacts of climate change. When done well and using the typical resilient Australian spirit, Australian agriculture can continue to thrive and be an essential resource for food security in Australia and the broader world (who buy and rely upon Australian food).

Our water resources, such as in the Murray-Darling Basin, are already been stretched to, or beyond the limit. Water faces competing pressures from commercial or agricultural uses, household or social uses and environmental needs. Typically, the environmental needs are given the last priority, but over time this will simply lead to more environmental degradation and weakening of the river ecosystem. This has various impacts, such as on Indigenous cultural activities or on recreational fishing, for example. Many people rely on the river and there needs to be a balance for the river to flourish, especially with increasing pressure coming from climate change and resulting droughts.

Food policy seeks to provide a balance between farmers, our natural environment and the food needs of the community. Ideally, we should promote policies that promote the flourishing of all of them.

Thank you for considering my submission.

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