SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

# Agribusiness Council of Australia

#### **SUBMISSION TO**

#### THE SENATE EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS COMMITTEES

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BY

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The fledgling Agribusiness Council of Australia (ACA) was instigated at a meeting of Australia's agribusiness leaders held in the Senate Hearing Room, Parliament House Canberra on 12 May 2011. Following that meeting, a steering committee was formed principally to work towards launching the ACA as a new peak industry body for Australia agribusiness early in 2012. Western Australian agribusiness leaders re-affirmed the intent of this national initiative at a WA-version of the meeting held in the Legislative Council Chamber of the Western Australian Parliament House on 16th September 2011.

As the ACA is in its formative stages, the steering committee has decided to refrain from public comment on any issue until such time as the ACA is formally constituted, its Council members are duly elected, and the organisation sets about establishing its modus operandi and priorities for the advancement of Australian agribusiness. This is to ensure that ACA garners widespread industry support for its establishment, without controversy, and becomes successfully established before initiating an allinclusive, solutions-oriented, professional, apolitical, agribusiness industry lobby and advocacy group (for its members). At its core, the ACA will have a widely agreed and clear vision for the future development of agribusiness and make a positive contribution to the Australian and global economies.

This inquiry should be aware that behind-the-scenes, those instigating the ACA also undertook an activist role in instigating this inquiry, and we acknowledge the sponsoring efforts of Senator Chris Back to help those involved to bring some of Australia's foremost agribusiness leaders together to consider and solve the key strategic issues and challenges facing agribusiness today. The original proponents would wish that the ACA will never lose sight of its core concern; the genesis role that education plays in driving industry productivity.

Accordingly, this submission is primarily to extol the virtues of the formation of the ACA and the undoubted benefits its creation will bring to Australia's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest industry – one that is crucial to the very nourishment of human life. Agribusiness in Australia today is highly fragmented and many industry-wide intentions 'fail at the gate' because of a lack of an agreed peak industry body to represent this major sector of the economy. In Australia today, with over 4,000 agricultural organisations, and even more agribusiness organisations, there still exists no single representative voice for the agribusiness sector. As a result, even the best intentions of government are weakened because there is no economy-of-scope or scale when dealing with the sector. Thus, government-industry interfaces can be fractious and adversarial at times given the past history of some representative groups. The ACA's intent, is to move to a professional 'solutions-oriented' approach, with the intention of advancing the cause of the industry: a fresh start, with focused strategic paradigms.

Fortunately, there is already growing industry enthusiasm to consolidate new strategic approaches in not currently available to established organisations stooped in traditional approaches. The ACA will be inclusive at all times – but it can only do that once successfully established. In a very real sense, one solution to a key problem facing this inquiry is in fact provided by the benefits that will inevitably follow the creation of the ACA. The ACA will provide more effective and efficacious strategic industry structure, one that 'reforms'

agribusiness in the Australian economic and political landscape. The ACA will facilitate improved economies-of-effort and scale at the highest levels – nationally & internationally.

#### 3 TERMS OF REFERENCE

Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia.

The terms of reference relate to the provision and content of higher education and skills training for agriculture, the adequacy of current educational arrangements in meeting the Australia's agricultural labour market needs, and the impact of any supply and demand discrepancies on business, research, and the economy more broadly.

Specifically, the committee will consider during the course of this inquiry:

- 1. the adequacy of funding and priority given by governments at the federal, state and territory level to agriculture and agribusiness higher education and vocational education and training;
- 2. the reasons and impacts of the decline in agricultural and related educational facilities;
- 3. solutions to address the widening gap between skilled agricultural labour supply and demand;
- 4. the impacts of any shortage on agricultural research;
- 5. the economic impacts of labour shortages on Australia's export oriented agricultural industries;
- 6. the incorporation of animal welfare principles in agriculture education; and
- 7. other related matters.

#### 4 ABOUT THE AGRIBUSINESS COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

The fledgling Agribusiness Council of Australia (ACA) was instigated, discussed, and endorsed at a meeting of Australia's agribusiness leaders held in the Senate Hearing Room, Parliament House, in Canberra on Thursday 12 May 2011. A copy of the resolutions from the meeting is at Section 6.1 on page 8.

Immediately following that meeting, a steering committee was formed to progress the wishes of the meeting, and principally to work to establish the ACA as a new peak industry body for agribusiness in Australia.

A Western Australia version of the agribusiness leaders meeting held in Canberra re-affirmed the intent of the national initiative and further considered a range of WA Sate specific agribusiness issues. That meeting filled the Legislative Council Chamber of the Western Australia Parliament House with WA agribusiness leaders on Friday 16 September 2011. A copy of the proceedings of that meeting is at *Section 6.2 on page 10*.

The NSW agribusiness leader's meeting is currently being organised and proposed for the NSW Parliament.

The ACA proposes to launch in 2012, and conduct a rigorous Council election process under the guidance of the Australian Electoral Commission to ensure the entire agribusiness industry, (including educationalists) to represented in such a way that no one part of the industry can unduly dominate another. The whole idea is to ensure industry representation and governance achieves optimal coordination along the value-chain, from production to consumption and onwards to recycling; and further, to include all the supporting industries crucial to enabling the agribusiness value-chain to operate in the most efficient and effective ways possible.

The ACA also proposes to actively create, an industry advancement trust fund to address "industry attractiveness" issues currently hampering the industry's ability to attract the talent it needs to grow and prosper. We will learn from those before us and if appropriate our success will be similar to the model used for fundraising by the University of Southern California where they had the vision to address the issues around academic vision and macro priorities. They have already raised US\$1Bn on their way to their target of US\$6Bn in 7 years. Our proposal is to initially build an A\$1 billion capital-protected trust fund. As the fund will seek government co-contributions, a separately elected Board of Trustees will be elected to administer it. It is proposed that the ACA will make recommendations to the "Agribusiness Advancement Trust (AAT)" Board of Trustees consistent with a comprehensively developed, all-inclusive, national agribusiness strategy.

The *national agribusiness strategy* will maximise Australia's competitive advantage when operating within its global agribusiness market: the world's largest industry. The ACA will also ensure its *modus operandi* will:

1. Ensure a whole-of-industry systems-based approach improves agribusiness productivity relentlessly to the ultimate benefit of society.

#### AGRIBUSINESS: THE BUSINESS OF FOOD, FIBRE, & RENEWABLE FUELS - PERPETUALLY

- 2. Actively influence international bodies to maximise multi-lateral agribusiness advancement negotiations (e.g. UN, FAO, WTO, GPA, etc.);
- 3. Utilize new virtual-organisation and networking technologies to extend its global reach for the benefit of Australian agribusiness;
- 4. Adopt best practice ethical standards, and create an Australian lobbyist professional development organisation to focus upon it; and,
- 5. Oversee the development of the agribusiness industry and its perpetual professional development;

#### SUBMISSION ADDRESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia.

The terms of reference relate to the provision and content of higher education and skills training for agriculture, the adequacy of current educational arrangements in meeting the Australia's agricultural labour market needs, and the impact of any supply and demand discrepancies on business, research, and the economy more broadly.

The Agribusiness Council of Australia (ACA) will change the agro-political landscape for the best with a range of reforms designed to rejuvenate the Australia agribusiness sector (inclusive of farming, fishing, forestry, and their many supporting industries).

The ACA will retain as its highest priority, a relentless focus upon the key driver of agricultural and agribusiness productivity in the Australian context – the development of the education and training needs of 'industry-ready' graduates, and the supply of them in a timely way to meet the needs of industry.

This Senate Inquiry arose because of the decline of all things that flow from the supply of skilled graduates to meet industry needs; namely, a sustainable community of academics within Australia's higher education institutions (mainly universities), thence an optimal output of research and development for the industry, and the continued increases in industry productivity that inevitably arises from matching the needs of industry.

The decline of graduate rates, the decline of agricultural scientific and agribusiness academics, the decline of

Aq-sector research and development levels, and the slowing in the rate of ag-productivity increase are all well-know and documented. Juxtaposed against this are the ever-increasing world population to feed. The world's population hit 7Bn this month and is expected to hit 15Bn by 2100. The ever increasing demand for resources, including food, will mean that we have to address the issues now, because the crisis has already begun. [see (Cribb, 2010)].

**Key point:** The ACA observes that the trends above are 'all in the wrong direction", and yet have occurred over some 40 years, slowly but relentlessly. These adverse trends, crucial to the well-being of our society, have occurred despite the existence of all lobby groups and government agencies – some 4,000 of them in agriculture alone. Thus means that the existing ag-industry structure has been unable to arrest these adverse trends, brining into questions the very effectiveness and efficacy of that structure, and the efforts of those within it. Without throwing the old structure away, it logically suggests that new approaches are necessary. The ACA arises from this need – the industry needs new approaches and new solutions, and the ACA is one of them.

The ACA will adopt new approaches, using successful and proven contemporary methods, but remain inclusive and retain the existing industry structure on the basis of "keeping the best of the old as the foundation to building the new". The ACA is envisaged as an new peak industry body acting as an umbrella group of the entire Australian agribusiness industry, and focused upon a few key industrywide productivity enhancement issues, and thence acting as a 'honest broker' contracting existing industry organisations to take a lead role on issues within its expertise.

Thus, the creation of the ACA is part of the overall solution posed by this Inquiry, since it provides a means of addressing all issues underpinning the core of the Inquiry, which is in turn, focused at the core of Australia's agriculture and agribusiness industry productivity. In that sense, the ACA addresses all the terms of reference of the Inquiry as a proposed solution, one that better enables the effective implementation of many others solutions that will Inquiry will undoubtedly action in due course.

Since agribusiness is currently Australia's second largest industry, its continued efforts to improve industry productivity are crucial to the economic well-being of the Australia economy, and all that flows from it. Its successful establishment is therefore a wise, cost-effective investment for the Commonwealth to make, since it ensures an improved economy-of-effort between the policy development needs of Government consultation processes, and the industry capacity development needs of agribusiness.

The creation of the ACA is not about capacity building (as a substantial industry infrastructure already exists), rather it is about capacity development (building upon and maximizing what already exists). Capacity development is a legitimate role for the all governments to play – particularly with regard to a perpetually sustainable industry that is a major part of the economy.

Therefore, one key solution to all the problems arising from this Inquiry is:

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

That the Commonwealth Government financially supports and actively assists the establishment of the Agribusiness Council of Australia (ACA), until such time it is self-sustained by the industry, and that financial support is 'without strings attached'".

The successful establishment of the private sector-based ACA will be best be enhanced if the Commonwealth also establishes a public-sector-based mirror of the ACA, with the suggested working title of "The Australia Agribusiness Productivity Council (AAC). In time, the AAC would also have equivalent State and Territory-based Agribusiness Councils (such as those that already exist in South Australia and Victoria).

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

That the Commonwealth Government establishes "The Australian" Agribusiness Council (AAC)" to advise the Prime Minister on all matters to improve agribusiness productivity/capacity in Australia".

The ACA proposal, that the AAC work with new and existing program initiatives and advise and report to the Prime Minister on their impact and integration into regional and rural Australia. This underscores the fundamental importance of the sector to the Australian economy.

#### AGRIBUSINESS: THE BUSINESS OF FOOD, FIBRE, & RENEWABLE FUELS - PERPETUALLY

Some examples of existing government initiatives include, Skills to promote increased participation; A new partnership with industry; Reform of the National Training System; Better Futures for Jobless Families (Opportunities for People with Disability); very Long Term Unemployed; Investing in our Young People; Greater participation in Higher Education; Supporting Small Business to drive economic growth; Helping Indigenous Australians achieve their potential; Investing in Regional Productivity and Participation; Rewards for Great Teachers.

#### **6 ATTACHMENTS**

#### 6.1 AGRIBUSINESS LEADER'S RESOLUTIONS (CANBERRA 12-MAY-11)

# Agribusiness Leaders' Convocation Thursday 12 May 2011 Senate Committee Room, Parliament House

#### Recommendations

#### FOR GOVERNMENT

There is a serious gap in supply and demand with thousands of graduate jobs in agribusiness and agricultural research unfilled. Part of the reason is the high cost of educating these graduates compared to Arts or Commerce graduates. In addition these students graduate with a high HECS debt.

- Provide "HECS" relief for students studying at regional universities needs to be provided as well as providing the youth allowance/living away from home allowance for any student attending a regional campus
- Provide "HECS" relief for agricultural/agribusiness/horticultural graduates working in regional areas (for say 5 years or more) should be a national priority
- Make Apprenticeship /Certificate/Diploma Schemes a high priority Increase number and quality

#### **FOR INDUSTRY**

Industry needs to fund programs designed to increase the numbers of students wanting to study agribusiness/agricultural science

- Start in Primary Schools to attract industry interest
  - o Focus on curriculum from early age
- Need to capture student interests at Yr 10 level
  - o Career Path Mapping Lack of clarity about entering Agriculture
  - Options in Tertiary sphere
  - o Opportunities in Apprenticeships
- Fund Training programs to broaden experience of Graduates entering Industry
- Fund a Media Campaign to boost image of Agriculture

#### **IMMIGRATION - Government**

- Migration Occupations in Demand List (MODL) to include agribusiness professionals.
- 457 Visas –Very difficult process (Urgent need for Agronomists from South Africa)

Government campaign in Ireland, the UK, Canada, the USA, and southern Africa, to increase number of agricultural graduates applying to migrate to Australia (as done with police and nurses) and support regional training / bridging course be developed to assist in preparation for Australian condition (through matching grants from Industry)

#### **IMMIGRATION** - Industry

- Industry to offer matching funding for work-place training of overseas graduates.
- Recommend qualifications/credentials that industry would accept from an agribusiness professional that would form recommendations to Department of immigration for inclusion on skilled migration list.
- Focus immigration debate on Agricultural sector and required skills

#### **INDUSTRY**

#### Establishment of the Agribusiness Council of Australia

- Need for a peak body representing key stakeholders (focus on industry)
- Industry funded and led (similar to the Minerals Council of Australia) reflected in the Board of Directors;
- Foundation would manage the activities of the ACA;
- Large Capital Fund with capacity to make change in the Industry
  - o Enabling the whole Agricultural Industry to have capacity and ability to make change
  - o Media Liaison would be a very important factor for such a Peak Body
  - Promote image of Agriculture
  - o Significant funding would be required to start such a peak body
  - Long-term sustainable funding important
  - o Support mechanism for youth in the agricultural sector
- Help set up the National Food Security Agenda Strategic Industry Decision-making
  - o Focus on manufacturing capacity in Australia

The Agribusiness Leaders' Convocation made an Urgent Call for a Senate Standing Committee Inquiry – (Standing Committee on Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations) on all the matter marked for action by the Government.

Meanwhile a Steering Committee is being set up to work for the Establishment of the Australian Agribusiness Council by September 2011.

#### 6.2 WA AGRIBUSINESS LEADER'S SUMMARY (PERTH 16-SEP-11)

# Western Australian Agribusiness Leaders Convocation

Friday, 16 September 2011 **Legislative Council Chamber** Western Australian Parliament House 2 Harvest Terrace West Perth WA 6005

**Looming Crises in Tertiary Agribusiness Education** & Implication for Food Security Policy

## SUMMARY OF WORKSHOPS AND PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

## Sponsored by:

**Agribusiness Alumni Association** Inc. (AAAInc)



The Muresk Old Collegians' **Association Incorporated (MOCA)** 



Senator Dr Christopher Back Senator for Western Australia



Agribusiness Council of Australia



Future Directions International (FDI) Pty Ltd





Hon. Philip Gardiner MLC Agricultural Region



Hon. Jim Chown MLC **Agricultural Region** 



Hon. Matt Benson MLC Agricultural Region



Hon. Mia Davies MLC Agricultural Region



Hon. Brian Ellis MLC **Agricultural Region** 



Hon. Max Trenorden MLC **Agricultural Region** 

# **Setting the Scene**

On behalf of the Speaker of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Barry House MLC, The Clerk of the House, Mr Malcolm Peacock welcomed participants to the WA Agribusiness Leaders Convocation.

Representing the six members of the Agricultural Region, the Hon. Philip Gardiner MLC then welcomed the participants to the meeting and underscored the importance of the issue at hand.

Three speakers then gave further information additional to the pre-meeting reading previously provided on the looming crises in tertiary agribusiness education and its profound implications for declining industry productivity rates and national food security outcomes. They were:

- Mr Ian Joseph, Convenor, Agribusiness Association of Australia (ACA)
- Major-General John Hartley, CEO, Future Directions International (FDI)
- Dr Ian Fairnie, President, Agribusiness Alumni Association Inc. (AAAInc).

# Crisis in Agribusiness Education & Looming Food Security Issues Open Forum Discussion

- Mining industry job offers are taking all staff, even low-skilled jobs
  - o Can wages be capped in the northwest to reduce the incentive to move?
  - o Price of students going to Muresk vs. going north?
- Make agriculture 'sexy' Marketing, Showcases, Spread the word
  - o Great technology in the agriculture sector
  - o Create an industry voice in the city
  - Look at and adapt marketing strategies of mining
  - o Market the 'lifestyle' aspect of agriculture
- Consider the farmers' point of view and how they apply the technology and knowledge to their farming in order to convey the complexity of educational needs
- Farming and Agriculture industries need to be sustainable and look at reducing their cost of production as well as reducing their capital at risk
  - o Barriers to entry need to be reduced
  - o If cost of production etc. is improved then this will make the industry more financially attractive
- Continuing decline in the number of farmers as those still around are age and retire
- Strengthen the relationships between industry and students, i.e. offer scholarships, internships, cadetships, etc.
  - Start around Cert 4 Level
  - o Through to Associate Degree and Full Degree level
- Focus on attracting graduates and skilled workers that fit the skills that are required by industry
  - Also focus on attracting those studying other fields of study and encourage them to move into agriculture, e.g. IT, Economics
- Foreign investment from importers/trade partners to invest in agricultural education, technology improvement and focus on increasing wages in the industry

# Group Discussion on action that must be taken (Most Important Issues)

#### Group 1

- Agriculture needs a blueprint going forward; developed with consultation between industry and political leaders:
  - o Address issued raised by FDI on education, food security etc.
  - Funding availability and sustainability taking into consideration the climate variations and industry factors (this should be addressed in the blueprint)
- Marketing to young people. Build confidence in parents to guide their children into agribusiness education
  - Sell the positives of the agribusiness sector
- Sustainable, long-term funding for regional universities
  - Must be sold through the food security issue to secure long-term funding
- Universities and education providers need to be more flexible because they are not meeting industry needs
  - o Multiple entry and exit points for both young and mature age students
  - Urgent need to provide clarity on the future of Muresk, particularly important for the future of tertiary agricultural education nationally

#### Group 2

- Take a strategic approach to the issue of food security
  - Need for structures and actions to ensure preparedness for the impending food security issues in 5-10 years (given lead times, we must start this preparation now)
  - o Aligned with achieving economic goals
  - Educate young people about this issue, e.g. in schools, focus on how they can help in terms of a potential career
- Influence the WA Government to provide a 'lead agency' approach in terms of alignment of education, research, food security, bio-security, etc. Need to interconnect their multiple agencies to optimally industry (Note: ACA should play a major role here)
- National agribusiness body should be the political group speaking to the politicians, creates one body of opinion expressing 'one voice'
- Focus on the multidisciplinary nature, including a practical dimension of training for students, as this is the focus of their main employers.

#### Group 3

- Issues:
  - o Discourse between city and country people in terms of education on food supply
  - o Farming is perceived as old fashioned
  - Universities running agricultural campuses on cost focus, rather than differentiating out industry actual needs
- Solutions:
  - Develop positive profile for marketing to city and country
    - Liaise with all governments

- o Continue focus on sustainability in agriculture and business (i.e. agribusiness)
- o Protect leakage into other industries via education (more than a job, a career)
- o Tapping into Gen Y, what do they want, meet their needs
- o Industry-funded national/international Centre for Agricultural Excellence
  - Focus on industry information systems
- o Professional Agribusiness Body i.e. ACA to identify constraints in the systems

#### Group 4

- Focus on productivity increases and the profitability of farming
  - Land values (trend to separation of ownership and operations of farms)
  - o Increasing productivity is particularly important if food is going to get cheaper (the rate of increase in productivity is slowing due to cuts in research funding)
  - o Human Capital and Technology drivers are missing
  - Facilities available to this sector of the economy to encourage people to stay there and work, e.g. schools, hospitals, parks etc.
  - Build confidence in farmers and those operating in their sector both in terms of their own role, the industry's role, and its governance (by creating a great public profile for the industry)
- Type of education needs to change
  - Multiple entries/exits/pathways
  - o Diverse and skilled learning environment
  - o Explore potentially for a double degree between Mining & Agriculture
- At Muresk, there will be no tertiary course in 2012, it is essential that pathway options are available
- Marketing of Agriculture as a Career:
  - Not on par with efforts/creativity of other sectors of the economy
- Ag-lobbying interests should be aligned with the mining sector (on political and industrial fronts)
- ACA is an effective way to improve the public profile of Agribusiness and the outcomes
  - o It is also up to industry to participate in the role that ACA plays in the sector
  - ACA must have a very clear charter, the how and what it intends to do and how it will work with agribusiness

# Leaders committed to progress the "Lead Agency" issue

- Gary Kleyn Future Directions
- Greg Caust Commonwealth Bank of Australia
- Chris Moore Westpac
- Scott Weir WAMMCO
- Ken Sevenson Corporate Agriculture Australia
- MOCA/AAAInc As required

#### **WORKS CITED & FURTHER READING**

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Existing government initiatives being supported include, Skills to promote increased participation, A new partnership with industry, Reform of the National Training System, Better Futures for Jobless Families (Opportunities for People with Disability), very Long Term Unemployed, Investing in our Young People, Greater participation in Higher Education, Supporting Small Business to drive economic growth, Helping Indigenous Australians achieve their potential, Investing in Regional Productivity and Participation, Rewards for Great Teachers.

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