

Submission

7/11/2022

To the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture

Re-The Strengthening and Safeguarding food security in Australia.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity of lodging this submission. I am a fifth-generation farmer and grazier in Australia as well as a former Senator.

I have serious concerns about the ability to produce enough food in future years, especially given that the global population was 2.5 billion in the year of 1950 and if the world population continues to grow at 1%, as is the current rate, this will mean that the global population will be 10.25 billion by the year 2050, an increase of fourfold in just 100 years.

Australia's population was 8.2 million in 1950 and has grown to 26.2 million this year. That population growth is expected to continue and by 2050 we will have a population of 40 million people. These people will have to be fed, and Australia will not only have to feed the increased population here but many millions of people around the world will be reliant on Australia for their food, as is the case now.

The big concern I have is the loss of food producing country.

Shrinking the National Farm.

Over several decades we have seen large areas of land simply locked away for political reasons. When Bob Carr was elected as premier of NSW he promised that his government would be the 'greenest' government NSW has seen. Hence more National Parks were created or expanded, much of which is unmanaged due to staffing and budget problems, and has now become a serious fire hazard.

The current treasurer of NSW, Matt Kean, as the NSW Environment minister, locked up almost 400,000 hectares of grazing land in the western areas of NSW around the Broken Hill to Tibooburra region. This area of land is capable of running 100,000 breeding ewes or 10,000 cows. Now it will be a large region for the breeding of wild pigs and feral goats, not to mention the fire hazard after the recent wet weather, combined with the poor management of

reducing fuel levels on the ground through hazard reduction burning and/or grazing livestock.

Federal Environment minister Tanya Plibersek has made it clear that she would like to see 30% of our landmass shut up for National parks. This will lead to a further reduction of food supply.

I find it amazing that so much good farming land is now being covered with solar panels. This area will only grow given the desire for governments to pursue more renewable energy, and will no doubt have a huge effect on the volume of food that can be produced.

Another issue that has reduced the farmland available is the urban encroachment, where cities and towns expand over good food producing country, once again having a negative effect on the area available food production.

Offsetting rural land is another problem. Developers, miners etc are forced to purchase land as offsets when developing their projects. This land then becomes unproductive for food.

As with our fishing industry, marine parks have grown over the decades along with other fishing regulations. So much so that our wild catch has reduced from 260,000 tons in 2004 to 160,000 tons this year. 74% of fish consumed in Australia is now imported.

The future in fish supply is clearly aquaculture which is growing in Australia. I think it is most important that the Government continues to support Aquiculture in Commonwealth waters as no doubt the Green movement will continue to attack this important food supply.

You can see where I am coming from Members-the size of the National Farm in Australia is shrinking, yet the world demand for food is, and will continue, to grow.

Labour Force

A committee of enquiry into the workforce in agriculture was launched by a previous minister for Agriculture, Senator Bridget McKenzie in 2020. It was called the National Agriculture Labour Advisory Committee. The enquiry was

chaired by John Azarius. I was one of the deputy chairs, along with Dr Ruth Nettle as the other deputy chair.

We had a detailed look at the problems of the lack of workers in the Agriculture industry, not only on the farms but right through the production line from harvest to transport to processing.

If the volume of food produced in Australia is to grow then the workforce problems must be addressed. I strongly suggest to the committee that you have a serious look at the recommendations of that committee.

I find it simply amazing that with some 500,000 unemployed Australians we can't get enough people to pick our fruit, harvest our horticulture crops or work in our dairies, let alone participate in the food processing sector including our abattoirs.

To increase our food production and reduce waste from failing to harvest food supplies, this **MUST** be addressed.

Farm Input Costs

I don't have to point out the huge increase in fuel costs to the committee. I am sure your constituents have done that.

Diesel fuel is the major source of energy used to grow, harvest, and transport our food in Australia. It is important that diesel fuel costs remain as low as possible for farmers by the government ensuring the excise rebate remains as well as the GST component. To add these two taxes onto farm fuel would be a disaster. Remember, when a farmer is ploughing their paddocks they are growing food, not wearing the roads out!

I am sure that the committee is aware of the price of gas. Gas is required to produce urea, the most common source of nitrogen used on our farms to grow crops. Lacking nitrogen in the soil equates to a lower yield of the crop which means less food.

Soil nutrition is very important. It is a health issue. Healthy soils grow healthy food that gives you healthy people. Lacking nutrition in the soil means a lack of nutrition in our food. Hence a rise in the health budget.

The government should work with the private sector and focus on how fertilisers can be produced here in Australia so we are less reliant on imported fertilizers. This would need to be a long-term plan to develop phosphorus mines etc to supply the bulk of our fertilizer needs. The lower Australian dollar is adding to these costs but is beneficial to our export prices.

I hope this submission has been of some assistance to your enquiry.

Best wishes,

John Williams