




Additions to the submission by *Australian Women in Agriculture Ltd* to the Inquiry into the role of government in assisting Australian farmers to adapt to the impacts of climate change

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Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Primary Industry and Resources
PO B0x 6021 House of Representatives
Parliament House CANBERRA 2600

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Dear Committee Secretary

Australian Women in Agriculture Ltd (AWiA) is pleased to make these written additions to our submission to the Inquiry, following the evidence given to the Committee on September 3rd 2009 at the Melbourne hearings.

CPRS and Climate Change – the Bigger Picture

In reality the public sphere is not the equal playing field that we might hope. And while it is in all of our best short and long term economic interest to respond to climate change, there are powerful interests (namely the coal, petroleum and auto industries) who stand to lose. Thus one of the most powerful barriers to our social change is the demonstrated ability of these groups to hijack the public process through public misinformation campaigns.

Quote from Kari Marie Norgaard, (2009) Cognitive and Behavioural Challenges in Responding to Climate Change, Whitman College, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 4940

It is not possible to consider adaptation to climate change without understanding the global and national regulatory frameworks that will underpin efforts to curb global warming. There needs to be a clear and consistent message from all tiers of government on the official response to climate change, if there is to be any cohesive and concerted effort on the behalf of the community, or any positive change in investment strategies by business.

The response needs to build on positive stories of success, encourage and integrate efforts at community, state and federal levels and provide specific opportunities to engage in realistic planning and action around climate change at a business and regional level. The plans must be realistic in order to be deemed credible and should highlight doable changes at the same time as they encourage significant action. In order to elicit a response, farmers must be given not only information, but something to do, and they must feel that their efforts will be effective in bringing about lasting change, as well as achieving other social and economic benefits e.g. improving energy efficiency, enhancing biodiversity, building social capital etc.

In addition, there is a good argument, along both equity and food security lines, for allocating a significant proportion of revenue raised from the CPRS, and other climate adaptation funding, to regional areas and to those primary industries most at risk from, and therefore needing to adapt significantly to, climate change.

Training and Dissemination Models

To have effective practice change and adoption, climate change programs need to allow for on-going training of farming groups – facilitated learning style rather than the seminar style approach. The role of consultants and farm service providers needs to be recognized, The GRDC estimates that 60% of grain producers use a private consultant for advice. They are the drivers of change and adoption as they work with the farmers one-on-one and assist with direct change on the farmer's property.

Research needs to be targeted locally, and principally with and through the farming groups, so people can see the change in their local area. For farmers to be able to manage all the risks and opportunities posed by climate change, each business needs to consider all farm risk, then look at strategies across all business areas and have the right skills to decipher the broader climate change policy and determine what can be done on an individual farm to manage that risk and maintain a sustainable triple bottom line.

Good examples of farmer- and agribusiness-based organisations active in local research, promotion and solutions focused are as follows:

FREE Eyre www.free-eyre.com.au

Australian Alpine Valleys Agribusiness Forum www.alpvalleys.com.au

Riverine Plains Group www.riverineplains.com.au

Birchip Cropping Group www.bcg.com.au

Risk Management Schemes and Scenarios

As a community, Australians need to consider whether we wish to continue to be self sufficient in food production and maintain valuable export markets and if so, at what cost? There are sound arguments for public risk sharing based on national food security. Government could support expansion of innovative risk sharing schemes, at low cost through research and innovation and seeding grants. There are good examples of both investor (e.g grain co-production in Western Australia http://www.aacl.com.au/grain_co.html) and consumer based models (community supported agriculture [USDA - Community Supported Agriculture information](#) and direct marketing to consumers e.g. www.aussiefarmers.com.au) for sharing risk with farmers. There has been some innovative thinking about what government could do to promote investor supported agriculture e.g. using tax incentives, but ensuring these incentives are better targeted and controlled than traditional MIS.

In relation to adverse events such as black frost, floods and hail which are predicted to increasingly affect horticultural producers around Australia, there is a need for increased research and development in physical alleviation of risk and improved varieties and practices. Hail net design is one example where R&D is needed to improve efficacy and also make available a net design which is more durable and reusable after a hail event. In many instances, producers are only able to insure plant stock under net, however whilst hail net it is effective in protecting the crop, current models are very expensive to repair and insurers are now refusing hail net cover.

In some cases, the low interest loans currently on offer post disaster declaration can place farmers in further debt, particularly when the producer's cash flow has been critically affected and their crop has been destroyed, with a severe impact on both farmer and consumer. Government assistance (incentives, research, extension) to construct mitigation infrastructure would be a more efficient use of funds to ensure that the precious crop and the income stream is protected. An insurance pool system similar to that currently available in the U.S. to enable continuity of income for primary producers would also be beneficial.

Landcare and Other Reservoirs of Social Capital

There is a common perception amongst policy makers that the Landcare movement is burnt out and obsolete. Whilst acknowledging that all movements have to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves constantly, this belief ignores the reality of the enormous amount of social capital embedded in Landcare across Australia. This social capital can be utilized effectively by government to assist farmers to adapt to climate change, because while many of the adaptations are techno-scientific, many are also social and behavioural and require change at a community level. Associate Professor Jon Barnett (University of Melbourne *Voice* 5(6) 2009, p 3) has suggested that 'If adaptation is going to be sustainable, it has to be owned by the people who are at risk, which means it has to be consistent with their needs and values.' He goes on to say 'Adaptation is not something that can be done to a community, it is something that needs to be done by a community.' There is, therefore, an imperative for understanding the needs and values of local communities and this cultural paradigm can be enhanced by community arts programs, environment education in schools and the activities of local Landcare, service and sustainability groups.

For adaptation to climate change to be in parallel with enhanced productivity, it is essential that Landcare has a sustainable agriculture focus alongside the natural resource and biodiversity management role. There was significant funding through the National Landcare Program (NLP) which was focused on sustainable agriculture – under the new Caring for our Country most of this has gone and the farming systems groups are looking for alternative funding sources to survive. It is understood that the government wanted larger collaborative applications, however a large amount of time and effort went into putting these together in many regions with limited success. It can also be argued that the Caring for Country money will not get out on the ground to the groups as quickly or efficiently as the NLP funding did.

Conclusion

There is a school of thought which suggests that a resilient community should not need to rely on government. Alternatively, Australian Women in Agriculture contends that working in partnership across all sectors, with a high degree of interdependence and collaboration, will be the only way for the Australian community and rural communities in particular, to meet the challenge of climate change. Meeting the challenge will involve technical and scientific solutions, as well as cultural and behavioural changes, all of which can be fostered by an integrated and focused approach by governments at all levels across Australia.

Yours sincerely,

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