


Submission No:41.....
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Secretary: 

20 March 2009

House of Representatives

House Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Resources

Attn: Committee Secretary

PO Box 6021

Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600.

Re: Inquiry into "The Role of Government in Assisting Australian Farmers to Adapt to the Impact of Climate Change"

As a commercial grower of premium advanced trees and shrubs for the landscape and development industries, I welcome the opportunity to make a submission into the role of government in assisting farmers to adapt to the impact of climate change.

This submission is made in the context of Bangalow Wholesale Nursery being a primary producer and commercial production nursery business. The comments following focus on the issues affecting production nurseries and those maintaining greenlife (retail garden centres) as impacted by climate change and in addition, suggestions on the government's role in helping primary producers adapt on farm to climate change and promote research, extension and training to help farmers adapt to climate change.

Bagalow Wholesale Nursery is a representative and member of the Nursery and Garden Industry of Australia (NGIA), Nursery and Garden Industry of NSW & ACT (NGINA) and the Northern Rivers Region of NGINA. It is my understanding the NGIA will be making a submission on behalf of industry and consider the issues of greenhouse emissions and climate change response and the opportunities which this committee and Government could consider.

Our production nursery is located at Brooklet with the Northern Rivers Region of NSW which contains numerous large production nursery businesses and allied nursery traders producing and supplying a range of greenlife and associated products to commercial and retail sectors. The nursery industry is the largest primary production enterprise in the region with a farm gate value in excess of \$63m p/a. In addition to nursery businesses, there are numerous intensive horticultural operations such as: blueberries, macadamias, stonefruit and sugarcane.

Prior to establishing the nursery in the Northern Rivers Region a significant amount of research was undertaken to determine the climatic risk factors associated with operating a production nursery within Australia. The Brooklet location was selected due to the favourable meteorological data

(temperature range, rainfall) under Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and supportive evidence from local reference work undertaken to reduce the risk of extreme climatic events occurring, such as: hail, drought, flooding, frost and peak maximum temperatures.

In addition to researching the climatic conditions (BOM data) and planning for these provisions to minimise the risk of not having sufficient and sustainable access to natural resources, the nursery infrastructure was developed to optimise water use efficiency and reduce the risk of storm damage. The planning was undertaken according to the information provided as best management practice (BMP) to account for meteorological data relevant to the time. What we have experienced are weather events which have exceeded expectations according to BOM data which we believe is a result of climate change.

The implementation of water recycling systems, efficient irrigation and drainage systems have coped with the extreme rainfall events in the past 18 months. These rainfall events have regularly exceeded rainfall data for 1 in 20 year storm events.

The seemingly increased frequency and ferocity of these rainfall events in the past 18 months relative to the previous 5 years have also been accompanied with several hail storms and wind events which have caused significant damage to production nursery crops and infrastructure. The hail and wind events which can be described as twisters are not isolated to our nursery with these experienced within the wider Northern Rivers Region.

The concern we have is the decision to voluntarily invest in erecting hail netting structures which have been designed to cope with low level hail events have failed causing massive damage to infrastructure and crops growing under the structures. The hail net in use was designed and erected with the best scientific information at the time and risk assessment prior to the impacts of climate change.

In many instances Insurance Companies are reviewing their level of acceptable risk regarding coverage to primary producers and what is offered in the premium. Due to the experience and now knowledge of some Insurance Companies having to deal with "acts of god" or declared natural disaster zones, they are mitigating their risk by restricting their offer to insure. An example of this is many insurance companies failing to offer cover of hail net structures and crop damage/loss should the net fail.

The impact of drought has been felt not just by our business but other nursery producers who supply the wide range of greenlife and allied products. The widespread water restrictions have seen a significant reduction in plant purchases and a shift in the product mix for perceived water efficient or drought hardy plants.

As a business we have endeavoured to adapt to climate change by shifting the product mix grown, developing production systems which reduce risks of weather and the way the business utilises natural resources, business inputs and manages waste in a sustainable manner.

The key failing here has been in the inability of the hail net system and implementation of wind breaks designed and built to cope with the worst case scenario failing. Any loss in saleable product is a cost to the business and a reduction in the efficiency of inputs leading to waste. This has major long term impacts the more frequently these losses occur and it flows on to reduce the natural

resources available whilst increasing the cost of products and/or limiting profits of nursery businesses.

The role of government to augment farming practices which promote resilience to farming change are numerous. The government can take a leading role in reducing the marginality of farming by supporting primary producers to invest in the most suitable practices to deal with climate change.

A reduction in the amount of loss and damage associated with extreme weather events can reduce the financial cost to tax payers under the government financial benefits upon areas declared as natural disasters. If preventable management systems are supported to cope with hail events and wind storms, this will avoid compensation needing to be offered. The support would be both from research and development into the most suitable systems with financial assistance offered to allow implementation on the farm.

If plants are to cope with wider extremes in climatic conditions there needs to be research conducted to support the demands for plants with optimal use of natural resources to assist in managing water resources whilst being able to convert atmospheric carbon dioxide into carbon. The government can take a leading role in allowing primary producers (propagators and producers) to minimise demand on natural resources allowing more sustained use of resources.

To address the potential ongoing impacts of climate change and reverse the trends, there is a need to foster wider utilisation of greenlife. The government should recognise this and consider building the number of trees which are planted not just on farm but universally throughout Australia.

The nursery and garden industry has been assisting in the management of carbon dioxide levels by propagating plants. As a specialist breeder of Australian trees and shrubs we are making a positive contribution by providing the consumer with a sustainable alternative for urban landscape applications; trees which are hardy, compact, drought and coastal tolerant, fire retardant, disease resistant, non invasive and above all, beautiful.

Without support from governments to recognise the need to expedite the effects of climate change there will be a slow if not lack of on-farm adoption to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Should you wish to discuss any of these issues in more detail I encourage you to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,


Tracey Knowland B.Bus. G.A.I.C.D. A.T.C.C.

RIRDC Rural Woman's Award NSW 2008

Managing Partner

Bangalow Wholesale Nursery

"Growing Strong"

Premium Australian Trees & Shrubs

44 Rishworths Lane, Brooklet, N.S.W. 2479

bangalownursery@linknet.com.au

Website: <http://www.landscapingconnections.com/bangalow-wholesale-nursery.html>