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**Subject: Senate Inquiry into Food Production in Australia**

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Queensland's 19,000 primary producers contribute approximately \$13 billion per annum to the state economy, employ over 100,000 people and manage the environment over the bulk of the state. AgForce represents Queensland broad acre primary producers who make up the single largest group within Queensland primary industries and has a major interest in rural and regional communities where members live and operate their businesses. AgForce delivers key lobbying outcomes and services for members, and presents the facts about modern farming to consumers through the *Every Family Needs A Farmer* campaign.

The Senate inquiry into food production in Australia is both a timely and important reminder of the importance of food and fibre production in this country, which feeds and clothes not only our own population, but much of the worlds as well; and also contributes to the ongoing long-term sustainable contribution of the agriculture sector to Australia's GDP.

The importance of securing Australia's food production cannot be emphasised enough and as part of this inquiry process, AgForce is pleased to provide input in relation to a number of issues that we believe have the potential to adversely affect the security of such production. We have outlined these various issues below:

### **Issue 1 – Emissions Trade**

Climate change already has serious impacts for agriculture in terms of increased temperatures, changed rainfall patterns and increased climate variability. Productivity of livestock will be particularly affected by the quality and quantity of pasture and the direct effects of temperature changes. Coupled with rising input costs as a result of the CPRS and the industry's impending possible inclusion into the scheme post-2015, the industry faces serious threats to their viability. Despite these predictions, it is important to note that historically the Australian agriculture sector has adjusted and adapted continually to external drivers such as climate variability and climate change. Such adaptability has been achieved predominantly through productivity improvements induced by technological changes, changes to farm management practices and more market oriented domestic policy reforms.

The CPRS is not a silver bullet. In fact, alternative policies, running alongside and complementary with the CPRS, will be essential for reducing global emissions without slashing production and productivity in the process. Operating in a carbon constrained economy will result in increased business operating costs.

There is wide recognition that regardless of the participative role of agriculture in the proposed CPRS, there will be an impact on any energy intensive product supply. Energy, electricity, gas, steel and fertiliser to name just a few are predicted to increase in price anywhere from 10 to 20%. The primary production sector, unlike many other trading industries, does not have the capacity to pass this cost on, and therefore the cost will be born by the producer.

This cost is regardless to the possible impact on agriculture if after the deliberation and review period the Federal Government decides to directly include the sector under the scheme in 2015. Impacts far more reaching than these have been shown through the report recently released by the Australian Farm Institute in conjunction with the Centre for International Economics outlining the impacts on agriculture of an emissions trading scheme. The report stipulates that a CPRS has the potential to reduce the value of Australian agricultural production by \$2.4 billion per annum by 2020, and \$10.9 billion per annum by 2030 compared to the business-as-usual scenario. The report also identifies the biggest impacts of the CPRS will be on beef, wool, sheep meats, pork and dairy sectors.

Experiencing production declines of 9%, 6.8%, 5.8%, 3.9% and 2.7% respectively by 2020, and 28.2%, 27.5%, 21%, 10.4% and 8.1% by 2030 compared to a business-as-usual scenario. AgForce will be utilising this information to further our position in the debate on agriculture's position in a carbon regulated economy.

This economic cost will severely hit the 315,000 direct employees on Australian farms, not to mention the flow-on impact to the 1.6 million jobs across the rest of economy that hinge on agricultural production. AgForce believe that if the Federal Government is serious about carbon reduction and capture strategies in agriculture, as opposed to just putting in place an emissions trading scheme, then all workable options must be on the table.

There is a growing recognition that agriculture cannot be covered under an emissions trading scheme due to many impediments, including measuring, monitoring and verifying emissions across 155,000 farms. Making the storage of carbon in soils, crops and pastures is a reality, requires greater research and development investment to quantify the carbon capture. The recent announcement by Minister Tony Burke of a significant increase in funded projects is very welcome and will hopefully answer many of the contested points on sequestration.

In addition to these very positive measures the Federal Government should work to find ways incentivise those practices we know can measurably reduce greenhouse gases by annexing agriculture's sequestration ability alongside its CPRS. That is, provide incentives for farmers to voluntarily take up those carbon saving practices. The US and Canada are already implementing such incentives.

The second area of impact of a CPRS is landscape competition, in particular that from forestry. Government reports show a possible increase of up to 40Mha of forest growth potential under a CPRS – land otherwise occupied in the main by primary production applications. With current competition from Offsetting Schemes within the voluntary market, and those of Managed Investment Schemes, this would see a further exponential landscape competition issue emerge. The ability of existing industries to feed and cloth our domestic population whilst servicing export markets would be at least strained under this scenario.



## **Issue 2 - Trade & Trade Infrastructure**

Access to international markets remains a key Federal Government policy area for food producers. Queensland graziers and farmers produce more than this nation eats, in a world short of food so access to markets is crucial for Australian farmers to achieve a fair price. The majority of Queensland producers believe that given fair access to these countries that market forces will ensure a fair price to retain the viability of Australia's food producing enterprises. The recent ASEAN Multilateral agreement is hugely significant, and positive. The progress of specific FTAs under development (such as Rep. of Korea, China and Japan) is being closely watched by beef producers, given the importance of these markets. The success of the Federal Government's attempts for greater agricultural access through multilateral and bilateral agreements will be one of the most important aspects

However there are some significant other barriers to trade (not based on importer country tariffs or quotas) which affect Queensland producers. One key element which is sadly lacking is the infrastructure to be able to transport the food to market domestically and for export. Rail is a key area of limitation and one which demonstrates a quantifiable impact - \$20/t less for grain in QLD than NSW due to transport issues. Market forces cannot dictate our competitiveness as long as infrastructure bottlenecks prevent the movement of products. These bottlenecks also serve to limit the availability of input supplies at competitive rates - which though less of an issue given recent AUD declines, is a major factor in determining the profitability of producers. The investment by state and federal governments in key infrastructure projects for agriculture is justified by the recent about face in terms of the profitability of resources versus agricultural industries. The ABS September quarter figures show that in seasonally adjusted terms, agriculture, forestry and fishing contributed 0.3 percentage points to Gross Domestic Product while all other sectors except construction had a negative GDP.

At the time Charles Burke, AgForce Vice President/Treasurer was quoted saying "At the height of the financial and resources boom, it was easy for some to forget the ongoing long-term sustainable contribution of the agricultural sector. The global financial crisis has had an impact on agriculture, but the small rise in GDP demonstrates that our sector is faring better than others." The ABS figures underline the strategic importance of the agricultural sector to the Australian economy and the justification for infrastructure spending and service provision.

Another area of domestic policy which reduces global competitiveness in livestock industries is the large number of meat processing regulations in both the domestic export markets, with the cost of complying with these regulations becoming a major problem for rural industries. The major decline of AQIS funding and switch to cost recovery will make export orientated businesses less competitive and the impact will be passed back to livestock producers.

AgForce understands that many processors and producers with vertically integrated production are seeking the development of a co-regulatory approach which reduces the sheer mass of burdensome audits and QA by AQIS to certify processors. Facilitation of this move by the new biosecurity agencies and state food safety bodies is crucial, especially for smaller processing operations for whom these overheads limit the scope of their business and potentially reduce the level of competition for sheep and cattle. For these businesses having a SafeFood approval system and AQIS approval system is too costly and cumbersome, and in addition the food safety regulations seem to be unworkable and difficult when some plants need to be accredited under both State and Federal processes. Clearly there is a need for a

uniform regulatory framework to be developed, to identify where duplication of regulatory issues is impacting business and where mutual recognition could reduce red tape.

Domestic competition policy is an area requiring further discussion. Many producers believe that the ACCCs role in administering competition domestically needs review and improvement. In many markets a natural duopoly or oligopoly exists and these markets need careful monitoring to ensure no manipulation of market power to the detriment of food producing farmers.

### **Issue 3 - Drought, Environmental Laws & Regulatory Issues including Leasehold Land Rental**

Natural Resource Management is by far the most controversial and costly areas of policy for producers to manage. With multiple pieces of legislation and regulations at each level, as well as best practice guides and sometimes conflicting messages to producers from Federal, State, CMA or NRM groups and local government, many producers find compliance with law extremely difficult. The pace of development of a number of pieces of NRM focused legislation, and an apparent lack of consultation with industry has furthered producer concerns over current management of natural infrastructure and resources on agricultural land.

AgForce believes there is a need for a national focus on the cost of Environmental legislation, with a view to coordination of Federal and State agencies and activities, and reducing complexity and negative economic impacts of legislation including Wild Rivers legislation, National Park declarations, NRM management plans and Vegetation Management acts. Given that there have already been two significant Productivity Commission reports there should be a focus for this committee on the furthering of existing reviews, with a view to furthering the implementation of these recommendations.

Further to this, reviewing any new State or Federal NRM legislative initiatives and finding clear breakdowns on the individual versus societal costs and benefits is crucial, as there needs to be a greater recognition of the contribution made by food producers to positive NRM outcomes which benefit the wider community.

Further development and adoption of national review systems would help to ensure that the sometimes uninformed yet populist campaigns on specific NRM issues are challenged by real costings, and become less politically expedient issues. Many Queensland producers see the recent Victorian fires as simply an example of well meaning but ill informed biodiversity and NRM policies (in this case burns offs) being a factor in creating an adverse environmental outcome. The policies put in place to improve biodiversity seem to have, in conjunction with a lack of political will to allocate resources for adequate vegetation management, created a serious NRM and public safety issue. The recent debate on the potential restrictions to management of regrowth is seen by all affected graziers as an example of this. If these scenarios are to be avoided there must be more informed debate with a greater focus on land managers input.

Drought policy is also seen by many Queensland producers as Government support holds up non-viable businesses in many cases resulting in environmental degradation; in some cases being seen as Government policies reducing industry's competitiveness. Support should therefore be refocussed towards drought preparedness and development of better resources to manage 'dry periods' rather than reactive measures is important in improving practices. The significant NRM benefits this would have will ensure that community expectations about



maintenance of the productive capacity of the land, including elements such as land condition, are met even in period of below average rainfall.

If the costs of drought are run on loan or overdraft they become significantly higher and longer lasting. Interest subsidy or low interest loans must remain in place for the foreseeable future. Therefore whilst moving to help producers become more prepared, drought policy must also assist producers with coping with debt that is associated with drought.

Leasehold land rentals are a State NRM issue, but an important one for the beef industry in particular. AgForce continues to support the proposed State government commitment to a review of Leasehold land rentals, with a focus on alternative mechanisms for calculation in light of increased NRM responsibilities for graziers and, potentially impending market failures in some areas. If the potential revenue from beef producing enterprises is seriously eroded by increased rental costs the viability of businesses and their ability to undertake land management will be curbed.

This review is justified by the need to ensure that productive land is used in the most sustainable way, without causing economic pressure on producers to overutilize land. Compounding land rental increases risk becoming more than 10% of operating costs and in years with a negative cash flow situation (due to floods / droughts) would still have to be paid. It is not sustainable and producers will likely exit the industry as a result.

This mechanism has the potential to have negative natural resource management impacts due to increased stocking as land rental fees force graziers to try to gain greater output from their land, running more animals on existing pasture. Increased grazing pressure will lead to decreased land condition and over time, as the land condition degrades, the "true" value of the land will decline with it. Also there is the likelihood of decreased spending on pest species control as the reduction in discretionary funds mean reduction or cessation of allocation of weed control measures and feral animal control. Lessening or cessation of weed and feral animal control will further degrade the productive value of the land. This short term approach by producers under economic strain could potentially be avoided by finding alternative rent calculation mechanisms which allow for a State Lands management fee (for the entire leasehold area) to be calculated and then allocated on a production basis (not a UCV basis).

#### **Issue 4 – A Commitment to Research, Development and Extension**

Investment by governments in R & D for food production has decreased in most developed economies over the last few decades. With the impact of climate change, increased population growth, reduced land available for agricultural production and global food shortages, there is an urgent need for the Government to increase its investment into research and development. The trend in Queensland is similar to most developed economies which has led to a global food crisis and to the increase in food prices running at above CPI. Currently, the DPIF is relying on the sale of assets to fund an upgrade in R & D facilities, but a specific allocation by Government to fund staff and recurrent costs is essential.

Fortunately the Australian Federal Government has maintained its commitment to funding RD&E through the Rural Development Corporations, and Universities. The industry government partnership expressed in the RDC's is one of the best examples of funding for food production research and development in the world and must be maintained. It is crucial that the Federal government funding for R&D is retained and that barriers to productivity can be overcome by research translated into better practices. However the recent CSIRO cuts, and

a series of reductions to their programs and facilities is a deeply concerning trend. It is vital that both state and federal funding for rural research is increased to meet the needs of the industry and to help Queensland exporting industries compete on a global scale

Involvement of levy paying farmers in these RDC's and the connection of the management of these organisations to the grass roots farmers is vital to the success of the system. Without grower involvement and interaction with the investment of their levies it is unlikely farmers will be comfortable in continuing or importantly increasing their investment in RD&E through levies.

It is clear that growth in the productivity of rural production systems can be directly connected to the percentage value of production versus investment in R&D. For example the grains industry has one of the highest investments to value ratios of any commodity in Australia and also has a high productivity growth. The livestock industries of beef and wool have relatively low investment levels and similarly low productivity growth. This is why the AgForce Cattle board are pushing for industry peak bodies and the Federal Minister to review the R&D component of the CTL to ensure there is adequate contribution to industry programs in the beef industry.

This trend of reduced productivity following reduced investment is evident in the fodder industry. This is the forgotten industry of Australia's food producing enterprises as no statutory levy exists for the production of fodder and investment from organisations such as GRDC, MLA and AWI is also very low in the fodder industry. AgForce Grains supports the proposal from the Australian Fodder Industry Association to levy string and bale wrap to provide some funds for research in the industry.

However despite improvements to understanding via research, the "E" component is vital to ensure R&D is adopted by farmers on the ground. Extension via support from state government and RDC's is the most important mechanism for adoption of new practices by food producers. The level of uptake of important productivity improvements, whether it be in grazing, marketing or genetics is in many livestock businesses, extremely low. Whilst the national trend for reducing extension services has in Queensland being steadied (if not reversed through initiatives such as the "Future Beef" system for DPI&F extension), the inclusion of productivity focussed extension by NRM groups, especially under Federally funded initiatives (such as Caring for Our Country programs) is crucial. Productivity gains in food producing industries is a core component of NRM to ensure that environmental sustainability and economic viability goes hand in hand. Part of this move could include increased support for industry based programs which assist producers in improving their farming economic and environmental viability (e.g. Grains BMP).

AgForce have worked to ensure that industry is engaged with, and in many cases leading extension on NRM, production and training activities. A list of these is below:

- AgForward – deliver tools and information to producers to help them upskill and have all management information required (eg vegetation laws, computer mapping skills, physical maps and other advice. AgForward is state funded
- AgForests –assistance in managing silviculture practices, assistance with requirements under vegetation management, trials of management techniques. AgForests receives State and Federal funding
- Leasehold land – assisting producers understand the new requirements under the Delbessie agreement. Assistance with mapping properties and property planning for lease renewals. This project is State funded

- Reef projects – building capacity and partnerships with regional groups to improve on ground outcomes in reef catchments. Providing information and skills. Grains industry roll out of BMP
- Carbon project – assisting producers understand their carbon footprint and providing them with tools to assist in calculating the footprint and planning for carbon issues. Federally funded
- Spatial project – upgrading to best property imagery available, assisting producers utilise and analyse tools developed by Government to assess pasture growth etc (Veg machine etc) and upgrade software to maximise property mapping for management and NRM outcomes. State funded
- Nature refuge projects – develop frameworks for assisting producers access funding for conservation areas. Federally funded.
- Training – as a registered training organisation AgForce also runs a number of courses in work place health and safety, chemical accreditation, leadership and personal skills. Various funding streams.

Biotechnology is another important research area. Without investment in, but more importantly access to biotechnology, growth in Australia's food producing ability will be reduced significantly. All regulatory powers for GM technology should be taken from the State's and left to the OGTR. The OGTR then needs a more user friendly and cost effective application process, particularly for minor crops and proven technology (e.g. GM corn and soybeans). AgForce's view is that it is currently too costly for commercial entities to get registrations of these commodities through the OGTR and Australian farmers are missing out on use of this productive and environmentally friendly technology.

### **Issue 5 – Biosecurity**

The appropriate resourcing and operation of Biosecurity is a critical factor in protecting the future of Queensland's \$13 billion primary industries, natural environment, food security and human health. Without adequate biosecurity measures Australia's ability to remain in export markets and produce for domestic and export markets will be at risk.

Biosecurity Queensland within the Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries is the Queensland Government agency responsible for protecting Queensland from exotic pests and diseases and mitigating the impact of existing pests and diseases. AgForce Queensland considers that the current budget of Biosecurity Queensland is inadequate to meet current and future challenges and places the Queensland primary industry sector and the broader environment at risk.

AgForce seek a commitment to adequate biosecurity funding to include better weed and pest control in common and protected lands (including national parks), better research on production (including 3 day vaccine and tick fever via CSIRO), more training, more funding for biosecurity preparation and incident management.

A sustainable environment is of vital importance to Queensland primary producers. AgForce has followed the Government responses to the Beale Review with interest. In line with the CCA submission to the Federal Minister, AgForce believe that whilst having many positives the new measures may also contain some negative impacts in terms of consultation by departments and statutory authorities with industry. Accountability of departmental staff for decision making and policy recommendations is crucial.

The AgForce submission to the Beale review noted the special conditions and risks in Northern Australia. To a certain degree both the Biosecurity Strategy for Queensland and Government response to Beale have recognized these special conditions, the importance of increased surveillance and post border management in these areas is high. The risk of increased vector spread, potential exacerbated by climate change and the movement of arbovirus and other animal borne diseases, means a greater on this focus is required.

Pests and weeds have a significant impact on primary producers through reduced production and cost of control measures, but also have a significant impact on our environment and native fauna. Food producers believe keeping that federal weed programs and border security measures effective is crucial.

The control of feral pest and weed species in national parks is of particular concern, not only for the park itself, but also surrounding landholders. As the State has increased the area under National Parks, the budget for the control of pest and weeds species in these parks has failed to keep pace. The need for adequate funding of programs is crucial.

### **Issue 6 – Fuel, Road Spending & Transport Infrastructure**

Input costs are one of the major factors out of the control of Australia's food producing farmers and something which has a significant impact on their profitability and ability to continually and sustainably produce. Fuel for machinery, water pumping and transport is one of the major costs of production for farmers.

Access to excise free fuel is key to the ability of farmers to operate machinery off road. The excise relief for off-road diesel is one which has very positive affects on farmers profitability. However it is recognised by farmers that the use of fossil fuels has a finite life and one which may be at an end sooner rather than later. Access to non-oil based fuels is vital to the long term future of farming in Australia. Access to fuels such as LPG, CNG and biofuels will not be wide spread without support from Government to overcome the stranglehold held by the four fuel majors over the petroleum and diesel markets.

In order to ensure swift access to alternative fuels there is a need for Government to provide incentives to both producers and users of the fuels. Producers need incentives through long term removal of the excise on alternative fuels. Consumers of fuel at all levels require incentives to use the fuel by providing subsidised access to engine conversion, or new vehicle technology. Importantly these two parts of the fuel supply chain can't access each other without support for fuel distribution networks. There is therefore a clear need for conversion and infrastructure provision on LPG, CSG or other sources. A system such as this would be ideal for both CNG and biofuels in QLD. With abundant reserves of CNG in particular it seems inefficient to import most of our fossil fuel needs when our farming land sits atop one of the largest gas reserves in the world.

Biofuels from starch form sorghum, QLD's equally largest grain crop (with wheat) and from sugar cane can help in the short term to reduce some of the foreign debt issues Australia is facing, but also ensure long term productivity of food producing farmers. IN the longer term cellulose based fuels will replace starch based ones, but without the initial investment in starch based biofuels Australia will be left behind the rest of the world in an ability to supply second generation biofuels and our fuel derived foreign debt will continue.



Currently an integrated transport and infrastructure plan for Queensland's \$13 billion pa annum of agricultural commodities does not exist. Co-ordination between rail and road networks is inadequate and the rail network is at full capacity after prolonged periods without significant new investment. Over the last decade, there has been a rapid increase in production from the resources sector and now agricultural production, (particularly in grain and cattle) has also increased significantly. The rail network in Queensland is currently unable to cope with the transport needs of both the agricultural and resources sectors with increasing volumes being pushed onto the road network. This has resulted in increased pressures on major feeder roads such as the Warrego Highway and bottlenecks accessing the Port of Brisbane by road, particularly from Toowoomba. On this basis there is a clear need for increased Federal road funding for adequate number of major roads needed for the industry, as well as increased funding for addressing the problems identified by the NTC.

This comes as new legislation (driver hours and animal welfare) will create additional demand for cattle rail services out of the western parts of the State. There are concerns regarding inflexibility of driver hours and log-book entries and lack of uniformity across states on animal welfare issues. Adjustment by the industry will be costly and new resources are needed to allow industry to adjust, especially in remote areas. Subsequently infrastructure pending is required, as is funding for better communication and mechanisms for review of the road load limit systems.

Furthermore there is a need to ensure that mechanisms coupling registration with road infrastructure funds are set to ensure that higher productivity vehicles are not disadvantaged. Increased registration costs for B-Doubles (and road trains) will have a highly deleterious impact on Queensland food producers, with beef producers most seriously impacted given the high usage of these vehicles and long distances.

In terms of rail there are a number of problems being reviewed by industry. The priority rail access given to the resources sector across the northern line (Mt Isa to Townsville) and southern lines has seen pressure on existing services for . Current infrastructure may not be sufficient to meet demand. There is an urgent need for transparent pricing and access policy, as some historic anomalies remain and risks the cattle industry ceasing use of the rail network entirely.

It is the opinion of AgForce that investment in large infrastructure would have a larger and longer term affect on the economy than the recent cash hand outs to consumers. A good example of a wide ranging and deep impacting project would be construction of the inland rail route form Melbourne to Brisbane.

Government should give priority to this project in order to:

- Inject growth in the economy
- Provide a more cost efficient system of transporting goods across the East cost
- Decrease road traffic and therefore increase safety of other road users.
- Reduce GHG emissions by moving to rail from road transport
- Avoid congestion in major centres such as Toowoomba and Brisbane

### **Issue 7 - Labour**

There are a number of complex labour market issues which are impacting on the food producing extensive industries. These include competition for labour from the mining sector;

employment and training of back-packer labour with short term holiday visas; training opportunities for workers interested in employment in the processing sector; and opportunities to employ skilled migrants.

There is a shortage of skilled labour. Putting non-skilled (short term) labour into skilled jobs has risks, and there is a need to continuously train and retrain staff who are on short term employment. Processors need skilled labour; some plants could increase their kill and operate on 3 shifts per day, 7 days a week if sufficient labour was available. Changes in visas, especially skilled migrant 457 visa are needed to address the immediate workforce needs. In particular the inability for 457s to be translated to permanent settlement is a problem for the longer term use of foreign labour. Many Queensland processors, and the local communities in which they operate are keen to permanently settle those workers whose 457s are about to expire.

Construction and traditional trades are historically highly organised and connected, this is not generally the case in the rural sector. Therefore there is a clear need for prioritization agricultural workforce training. Skills and labour needs to be a priority, for example, extension and structured training, leading to a high end career choice for young people, linkages to urban education and national recognition of agricultural education as a priority for Australia. This would go some way towards alleviating the increasing numbers of young people exiting the rural industry.

### **Issue 8 – Food versus Mines**

Primary industries directly contribute over \$13 billion per annum to the Queensland Economy and are a sustainable and renewable resource. Agricultural land in Queensland is now being consumed by the resources sector at an unprecedented rate with a permanent reduction in their agricultural capacity. With over 80% of the State now under exploration permits and the growing impact of the resource sector on more intensively farmed agricultural land; the conflict between the two sectors is also increasing. Currently there is no robust or adequate State Government planning policy which provides for the preservation of agricultural land. AgForce are seeking the development of venues, including at Ministerial forums/committees which helps facilitate a commitment from all State Governments and local levels of government to prioritizing food over mineral production.

AgForce also believe there need to be changes to exploration and mining permits to reflect this. Codes also need reviewing to ensure that mining, gas and exploration companies have clear guidelines for appropriate behaviour.

As a core goal, AgForce believe that these mechanisms must prioritize the protection of quality agricultural land from mining. They must also ensure that degradation of land from mining is completely rehabilitated to the same productive potential it had before mining took place.

### **Issue 9 – Water in Northern and North Western Queensland’s food producing capacity**

With the recent floods in the north we have just seen the huge amount of water that can be sustainably harvested to increase Australia’s productive capacity. Queensland’s Gulf Country is ideally placed for a sustainable irrigation scheme. Investment in such a scheme from

Government would be long term and hugely multiplying investment in the economy at this time of economic crisis.

However there are a number of less positive water policy impacts for the state. A key area is water access uncertainty, especially the lack of information about the time needed to develop water resource plans and resource operation plans leading to uncertainty on water access, particularly in the Gulf rivers. There is a need for clearer timelines for decisions on ROPs to enable property planning.

There also needs to be further review of Wild Rivers legislation and the impact on potential growth and development of the region. Underlying all of AgForce's policies surrounding water resource management and the development of northern regions are the principles that:

- Environmental conservation and primary production are compatible activities;
- Regional planning is required to address diverse social, cultural, environmental and economic issues; and
- A policy framework that supports ecologically sustainable management and development is required.

## **Conclusion**

Food is essential to survival therefore government policies that inhibit food production in Queensland should be of concerns to all Australian's. Although farmers are used to dealing with economic and climatic ups and downs and global market forces, agriculture is increasingly coming under threat because of competing uses for farm land.

The reality is that without farmers there is no food, and that is the basis of our No Farmers No Food message - to ensure consumers appreciate that society needs to consciously prioritise policies that enable farmers to stay on the farm.

AgForce thanks the committee for the opportunity to present to this inquiry and looks forwards to recommendation which will help secure the long term viability of food producing extensive businesses in Queensland, improve the continuity and quality of supply of food from these industries, and ensure that Australian community and trading partner expectations continue to be met and exceeded.