

## **Submission to the Productivity Commission's Draft Report The Regulation of Australia Agriculture, 21 July 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft Report "The Regulation of Australian Agriculture" associated to the Productivity Commission's review of regulation across the key stages of the agricultural cycle and supply chain. The following proposed recommendations and new innovations are raised within the scope and "terms of reference" of the regulatory review for inclusion in the Public Commission's Final Report .

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Category : Land use regulation**

##### **Planning, zoning and development assessments**

According to the Australian Government Website Australia.gov.au [Our Natural Environment](#) (retrieved 14 August 2016) Australia is acknowledged as "the driest inhabited continent on earth with the least amount of water in the rivers, the lowest run-off and the smallest area of permanent wetlands of all the continent's . To ensure Australia's limited life sustaining water resources are protected and remain unpolluted - regional environment plans should be enhanced to provide protective zoning over agricultural food growing areas; natural water catchments and river systems excluding inappropriate developments such as extractive industries above and below ground level .

#### **Category: Environmental regulations – Addressing the issues**

##### **Environmental protection and biodiversity conservation**

According to the [Australian Wildlife Conservancy](#) website (retrieved 14 August 2016) "**Australia is facing an extinction crisis** and has the worst mammal extinction rate in the world: 30 native mammals have become extinct since European settlement. More than 1,700 species of animals and plants are listed by the Australian Government as being at risk of extinction". As a result it is essential our protective environmental laws and regulations are maintained throughout Australia to reduce the key threatening processes causing extinction including land degradation and loss of habitat from inappropriate land clearing and developments.

##### **Land conservation services and funding**

Further funding is sought from the government to permanently resource the employment of additional Threatened Species and Wildlife Extension Officer's across Australia to provide farmers and landowners with on ground support on ecological sustainable practices on private lands containing high nature conservation values. The existing legislation has traditionally provided a process for field extension services by the government sector as a "**safety net**" to capture "**knowledge limitations**" across vast landscapes. Therefore evidence based field survey monitoring

and reporting should be maintained as essential services to the community. Government incentives such as tax reductions and funding assistance for fencing and property management should be further enhanced to promote biodiversity conservation incentives such as voluntary conservation agreements and wildlife refuges across the landscape and connectivity along waterways.

### **Category: Regulation of farm animal welfare**

#### **Respect for animal welfare**

In accordance with animal welfare legislation the government should ensure regulations contain high ethical standards of care. Animals for human consumption should be raised as close as possible to their natural environment not only for the health of the animal but also for better quality food production. This includes providing access to outdoor grazing and roaming, natural sunlight and shelter, clean water and the foods they would normally naturally eat (unmodified). Factory farms which treat intelligent animals cruelly including crowded unnatural confined spaces for the whole life cycle of the animal do not comply to a code of practice for farm animal welfare.

With respect for animal welfare a quality system of animal farming could be supported and promoted by the Australia government with the objective “eat less meat of better quality” not only for the wellbeing of animals and human health but also global consumption may double from now to 2050 and how we manage our food system will ultimately determine the health of our planet for future generations ([Slow Food International](#) website, retrieved 14 August 2016).

### **Category: Transport**

#### **Support programs to sell and promote locally grown foods**

Where possible the Productivity Commission and other relevant government department's should provide support and incentives for food retail outlets to **also** sell and promote locally grown foods which:

- strengthens and provides an economic boost to the local community;
- reduces the cost and environmental impacts of long distance transport; and
- provides a local identity across the Australian landscape preserving the richness and diversity of our food cultures and traditions.

### **Category: Food regulation**

#### **Regulation of food labelling and regulation of food safety in the production process**

In addition to the present food labelling system - to enable consumers to make informed decisions (particularly for health reasons) a national improved food and product labelling system should be developed which clearly identifies:

- the country of origin and regional location of the agricultural product;
- all foods which are genetically modified and farm animals fed on GM crops;

- hormones, pesticides or any other chemicals used during the agricultural cycle of a food product;
- The BFA status of food packaging such as plastics and the lining of metal containers due to research indicating the potential adverse health effects from **bisphenol A** leaching into foods and beverages;
- In addition to the free-range and organic symbols - an animal welfare coding or rating that indicates the producers have met farm animal welfare standards during the animal's lifecycle including transportation.
- A biodiversity conservation coding for ecological sustainable agriculture practices that promote a healthy planet.

### **Category: Foreign investment in agriculture**

#### **Foreign investment in Australian agriculture & land acquisition**

Based on public opinion represented by the media, Australians generally believe foreign investment in Australian agriculture should be reduced and replaced with investment by Australians to maintain the nation's food security and capacity build on employment for Australian citizens. This enables property sales of agricultural lands including government leases to remain in continuity and custodianship of Australian citizens. Special consideration should be provided for further assessment and processing of Aboriginal Native Title Claims over agricultural leases proposed to be sold particularly in regard to significant landscapes of Aboriginal cultural heritage and identity.

### **Category: The way forward and public consultation**

#### **Sustainable agricultural practices**

The Australian landscape offers some world class produce and ecotourism experiences where small and medium farms exist in a landscape surround by outstanding national parks, catchment areas (which safe-guard our drinking water) and natural vegetation remnants on private lands designated as wildlife refuges and conservation agreements for biodiversity conservation.

In these areas, collectively governments, local councils and the community have put in place the foundations for a sustainable economy supporting and developing local businesses and employment associated with food produce, tourism and nature conservation. Regional information centres and websites have been established to guide visitors on the produce available from different farms, walks in national parks, restaurants and local bed and breakfast accommodation, cabins and camping areas. Such examples are very evident throughout Tasmania; the Hunter Valley and Blue Mountains in NSW and the Margaret River Region in Western Australia.

In an Australian context it is well recognised there are different sectors of agriculture providing a range of valuable services to the community. Further **participation** of the small and medium farmers and associated businesses in context of ecotourism and protecting the environment should be

incorporated into this regulatory review to build on local economies through sustainable agricultural practices.

**Internet References:**

- Australian Government – Our Natural Environment  
<http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-natural-environment>
- Australian Wildlife Conservancy  
<http://www.australianwildlife.org/wildlife.aspx>
- Slow Food International  
<http://www.slowfood.com/what-we-do/themes/slow-meat/>