

I am speaking as a farmer – so excuse a rough rambling submission

Agriculture has an enormous multiplier effect – evidence – occasional paper by O'Mara of ABARE in about 1983 – the 1982 drought contributed to the 1983 recession – or words to that effect – and “if agriculture gets the flu, the Australian economy catches a cold”

Costello was quoted several times in the media re the significant fall in growth rate the 2002 drought caused the economy – I suspect this was estimated by the big number crunchers computers in the bowels of Canberra – they should have the figures and this drought is still continuing so the effect could be greater

And a local bank manager so well put it – “I can never get over the enormous wealth a busted arse farmer can generate for the economy “

Thus agriculture and farmers should be looked after because of the enormous flow on effects to the Australian economy – not because they are good fellows and the salt of the earth – The community will benefit – it is a good investment – I suspect the multiplier factor could be 50+ - test - remove agriculture from Australia and see what effect on the economy

Food and Fibre have the potential to become very strategic especially with a rapidly growing world population – has Australia placed itself to take advantage of this

There are long lead times with RD&E – we have run down our capacity possibly below critical mass and will be dependant on overseas expertise – except they have also done the same – not a comfortable situation an agricultural country should be in

The universities have falling student numbers – this needs to be reversed – it is a public good so the community should fund it – If it believes agriculture is important

Is the problem with the community's perception of agriculture with the fact that there has never been a bi-partisan and general discussion of what Australia wants or sees for rural and regional Australia – until this is answered your inquiry is never going to be well founded – should we be just a miner and import our food from elsewhere – a Vision for Agriculture should be the first step before anything else

A good financial manager diversifies his portfolio – our mining wealth should be cross subsidising our agricultural industry

I believe our agricultural industries are suffering a crisis of confidence – farmers “ have had a gut full “ and labour shortages are starting to impact – we need to re-invest in agriculture – an increased investment in RD&E will restore confidence – show farmers they are important and not the cause of all the problems impacting on us now – we get

blamed for climate change to dust storms – even to no water in the M-D system – it does not flow if it does not rain – it is simple – we have had a long dry/drought

If YOU are going to go down the climate change track – then start investing in low energy systems now because a carbon emission scheme imposed on agriculture is not going to feed the world let alone Australia – Agriculture is heavily dependant on fossil fuel – also phosphorus sources are running out – Nitrogen inputs drive agriculture also – mostly bag N – made from the Haber-Bosch process – a very energy intensive process – we need to change to legume systems ASAP

The emphasis on climate change has neglected the old fashioned drought or climatic variability – has always been a challenge for Australian agriculture and will continue to be – but it needs to feed into policy – get the rewards right and the rest will follow – eg drought – whilst you continue to reward a drought with drought assistance , you will continue to have them – also there is no extension effort with the new advances in climatic variability

Does the commodity based levy system provide the best RD&E outcomes? Some suggest a whole farm based RD&E system would be superior - this would pick up the mixed farm situation of much of Australian Agriculture – except the specialist beef systems of the north

The RIRDC and LWA models covered some of these gaps and the emerging issues and industries but still many remain – the Grain and Graze project was starting to explore these cross commodity synergies and trade-offs but stalled as its complexities arose and the skills needed to understand them were found to be deficient

The commodity RD&E corporations do not talk with each other nearly enough and the community is missing out

Producers struggle with the long term and high risk nature of RD&E

It is difficult to get producers involved in directing RD&E

A final disturbing thought – the climate change division seems to have government employed scientists on one side and farmers (who are the most affected by climate change) , retired scientists and secure tenure scientists on the other sceptical side – I find this an interesting division – has science become pollicised and consensus driven and how far has this possible contagion spread – science used to be hypothesis driven – this is the hypothesis – does a rigorous and open analysis of the facts support it – if not relook at the hypothesis and change it – not cherry pick the data to support the hypothesis

We need to support a rigorous and open scientific system as the basis for RD&E

We also need to allocate time to our scientists to ponder and explore and encourage more generalists – science has become too specialised – we need people to pull the

disciplines together – also get scientists out in the field more and reduce the over reliance on models

We need to develop better pathways between all stakeholders

Encourage farmers to participate in scientific conferences – this will require training – a public investment but a good one

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