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MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY  
MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

**Address to the National Farmer's Federation Members Council**

**CANBERRA  
TUESDAY, 18 APRIL 2023**

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**WELCOME**

G'day everyone, its lovely to see so many from the agriculture industry here today.

An industry that feeds Australia and the world, that generates billions of dollars of wealth for our country, that employs thousands from our cities to our most remote regions and that is central to our national identity.

I'd of course like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners on the lands on which we are gathering and pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging.

And I reiterate the Government's commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and to recognising our first peoples in our constitution through a Voice to Parliament.

A voice, not a veto and not many other things that are falsely being claimed, on matters that directly impact our first peoples.

Recognition and consultation is what it is all about and I think that is something we can all get behind.

**INTRODUCTION**

I thought I'd take the chance today to talk to you about how our government sees the state of the sector, about our future agenda for the sector and about the progress we have made to date, since we've been at the helm.

On the whole, the ag sector is in a very strong position, off the back of generally good weather conditions and a lot of hard work by farmers, farm workers and policy and industry leaders.

A strong ag sector is not only good for those who work in it, and the communities it supports, but it is good for our whole country, and you should be proud of that fact.

As the son of a one-time North Queensland dairy farmer and cane cutter, I'm certainly proud of it and I know our Prime Minister is too.

Already in our first 12 months, I think we can say that we have - together - come up with successful outcomes for the industry.

To date, our government's carriage of the agriculture portfolio has been characterised by collaboration.

It's unrealistic to think that we will always have the same views on every issue, but I can guarantee you will always have my ear and that of the Albanese Government.

And we intend to continue to find solutions with you, through strong partnerships.

As you would have seen, since being appointed to the role as Minister, I've made a point of getting out and talking with farmers, processors, workers and businesses on the ground, right across the country.

And I'll be doing it again this week.

Wherever I've been, I've done a lot of listening, not lecturing - something I learned was a bit different to what producers and farm leaders had experienced from our predecessors.

And what that listening has done is convince me that my role, more than anything else, was to help protect and grow Australia's food and fibre industries.

Protecting the sector from immediate threats like an exotic pest or disease incursion.

Building our biosecurity preparedness, strengthening our response capability, and improving the effectiveness of the biosecurity regulatory system.

Protecting, too, the sector from the long-term threat of climate change, while grasping the opportunities it presents.

By increasing the resilience of the agriculture industry to a changing climate and reduce

Our willingness to protect the industry from short- and long-term threats comes from our desire to see it grow to that ambitious \$100 billion goal you have set.

A goal that Albanese Government shares.

And when it comes to growing our ag industry, we have listened and heard how important addressing workforce needs are at this time.

That's why I established the Agricultural Workforce Working Group to work with employer groups and unions to deliver on an agenda of skilling, attracting, retaining and protecting workers in agriculture.

And to assist the sector grow long-term, we are working hard to re-connect trade pathways that have fallen away, and also negotiate new avenues to increase the export of our products.

The key ingredients of our approach to protect and grow the sector - biosecurity, sustainability, workforce needs and trade - are all things I will address in detail today.

Of course there's a lot more we're working on with the industry, including assisting with flood recovery, maintaining high animal welfare standards and preparing for drought.

I am happy to discuss any of those issues, or others, in the Q and A at the end.

## **PROTECT - BIOSECURITY**

This audience knows very well that biosecurity is vital for Australia.

It is vital for our agricultural sector—for each of your industries.

It's vital for our natural environment, vital for our international trade, and vital for our Australian way of life.

And, of critical importance, it is vital for consumers, given any threat to our food supply has implications for the rising cost of living.

While our biosecurity system has for the most part served us well up until now, over the past few years we have started to see cracks in our biosecurity wall.

Well before the last election, outbreaks such as White Spot Disease in prawns in south-east Queensland, Panama disease in bananas in Far North Queensland and Tomato Potato Psyllid in Perth had significant impacts on our seafood and horticulture industries.

The risks are growing and increasing in complexity, driven by factors such as climate change, increasing trade and travel, and changes in land use.

I've said before that we need a biosecurity system that keeps pace with today's needs and prepares for the threats of tomorrow.

The urgent need for that was brought home to me a mere five weeks into the job, when we faced the threat of FMD on our doorstep as the disease spread to Bali.

It was a very serious issue that was suddenly on the lips of every Australian and the subject of much discussion, on farms, on breakfast TV and around CBD water coolers.

There were those who tried to use the threat to score political points, calling for border bans with Indonesia.

But we stood in partnership with industry and that worked to calm the situation, give confidence to producers and maintain those strong trade ties we have in south-east Asia.

Others said an outbreak here was inevitable.

But Australia remains FMD and LSD-free and we intend to keep it that way.

We have moved quickly to both assist our international partners but also shore up our protections here in Australia.

International support has been provided to Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea, including four million doses of FMD vaccine and 435,000 doses of LSD vaccines, with one million more to come.

At our border we've reviewed our import permits and risk management measures for incoming air and sea passengers, imported cargo and mail items, and returning livestock vessels.

We have included sanitation foot mats in Australian international airports and increased penalties for biosecurity non-compliance.

And that's on top of the significant changes we've made to protect our plant-based industries from the many threats they face too.

Last year we released our first ever National Biosecurity Strategy, and we are now focused on implementing it – in partnership with State and Territory Governments, industry, and the community.

But there is one key thing that remains to be done.

To meet our biosecurity objectives we need sustainable biosecurity funding.

Australia has never had a Sustainable Biosecurity Funding model.

This is despite it being recommended to the previous government in several reviews and reports, and it continually being asked for by the NFF and other industry leaders.

Staff at the department have continually been asked to do more with less, particularly in relation to biosecurity.

They have done a great job in keeping Australia safe from exotic pests and disease, but they need help.

There will always be a place for surge funding when events occur or appear likely.

But clearly, we need to lock in a more sustainable way of funding our biosecurity system, with predictable funding from year to year, rather than continue relying on the temporary funding injections that we have seen over the past few decades.

At the same time, we need to lock in a fair system of paying for it, that shares the cost between taxpayers, risk creators and beneficiaries of the system.

Because biosecurity – and how we pay for it – is a shared responsibility.

In our first budget last October, the Albanese Government has invested \$134 million in biosecurity measures that protect Australia from threats such as foot and mouth disease, lumpy skin disease and Xylella, to name just three.

I said at that time that investment was a downpayment on long-term sustainable biosecurity funding.

It was a significant investment that allowed us time to continue the consultation process on how a sustainable funding model might work.

Through that process, stakeholders from a wide variety of industries, everyone from the NFF, to Qantas, the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council and likely many of you here today, provided their feedback on the discussion paper drafted by the department.

We need to get this funding model right, because it will benefit so many different parts of our economy.

Not only protecting our \$90 billion agriculture sector, but also protecting our reputation as a clean, green trading partner across the globe.

## **PROTECT - CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

The other challenge on which we are working - to protect our agriculture industry - is adapting to climate change.

It is beyond doubt that climate change is already affecting Australian agriculture.

ABARES modelling shows that the average Australian farm's profitability has fallen by 23% over

Violent storms, wide scale flooding and prolonged drought are having an impact on bottom lines, right now.

That's why strong global action on emissions is in the interests of the sector.

Once again it is an area that will require partnership, communication and consultation.

It's in the interests of Australian producers and it's a massive opportunity if we get it right.

In addition to the environmental benefits, it offers opportunities to develop new income streams - for farmers and foresters, to reduce costs and to protect and grow our overseas markets.

The one consistent message I am hearing from our trading partners is that both the government and industry need to continue building our environmental credentials.

And my message back to them - including when I was in Berlin with your President, Fiona Simson, is that there is bad news, good news, and better news on that front.

The bad news is that our farmers are already intensely feeling the impacts of climate change, whether that be violent storms, intense flooding or prolonged drought.

The good news is that industry has been taking steps to improve its environmental performance for much longer than it's given credit for.

And the better news is that now Australia has a government that is matching industry's ambition.

We've obviously taken action to legislate stronger emissions reduction targets, we've signed the Global Methane Pledge and we're investing in low emission feed supplements and other technologies.

But we're also helping producers demonstrate their sustainability credentials.

Key to this is the work we are doing with the NFF to develop the Australian Agriculture Sustainability Framework (AASF).

The NFF is leading the development of the framework, funded through a \$4 million Federal grant under the Agricultural Biodiversity Stewardship Package.

The AASF is currently the only framework that provides a sector-wide approach to clearly communicate the sustainability status and goals of Australian agriculture to markets and the community.

On the international stage we need to continue to obtain assurances that the AASF will be accepted as equivalent to emerging sustainability requirements in markets.

We can establish an authoritative framework that will create certainty for industry.

This will allow investment in systems, technology, and practices.

And that will enable the agricultural sector to prove provenance, sustainability, and report on Australia's international commitments more easily.

This will also support enhanced environmental outcomes and promote climate action.

It can be used to enhance traceability across agricultural supply chains to provide value-added benefits.

Demonstrating Australia's value added, and sustainable agricultural credentials unlocks extra value from our overseas markets—ensuring benefits flow back to the farm gate and build prosperity for all.

#### **GROW - AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE**

Of course, a crucial ingredient in growing the sector is to grow the people who work in it.

Nothing is sown, grown, raised and harvested, delivered or processed without the people who underpin our agriculture sector.

So I'm pleased to note the progress we've made so far in attracting, retaining and protecting workers in the agriculture and processing industries, including:

- securing 13,200 fee-free TAFE places for agriculture across the country;
- reaching the government's target of 35,000 PALM workers in Australia in late 2022 six months ahead of time, up to nearly 38,000 on the latest figures;
- seeing Working Holiday Makers return, with over 134,000 in Australia (this is 98% of pre-COVID levels);
- extending post study work rights for international students;
- passing legislation that allows pensioners to earn \$4000 more per year without affecting their pension; and
- expanding the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List to include more agriculture, processing and veterinary careers.

I am also pleased to highlight the work of the Agricultural Workforce Working Group in building on these achievements and pursuing enduring solutions to workforce challenges in agriculture.

For instance, earlier this month the Working Group reached a ground-breaking agreement on key principles to underpin a national labour hire licensing scheme.

This is a significant step forward, being the first time that agricultural and processing sector employer groups and unions have reached such an agreement.

access the rewarding careers agriculture has to offer.

We're also funding work into how to make agricultural careers more attractive to school students.

I've said before that I think this sector has some tremendous competitive advantages that could be better used, in attracting young people to the industry.

We know that many young people are keenly interested in technology and sustainability.

Name me another industry that gives its people more opportunity to use and develop cutting edge technology and to put real sustainability measures into practice?

These are real opportunities that we can - together - take advantage of.

We know that there is still more to do to deliver the industry's workforce needs, as there is for every industry in Australia.

But these outcomes from the Working Group demonstrate what can be achieved by working collaboratively across industry, unions, and government.

## **GROW – TRADE**

Another area of collaboration we are working very hard on is improving trade and market access to continue to grow the industry.

It was great to be joined by Fiona on our trip to the United Kingdom and EU at the beginning of this year, to continue the push for those important trade agreements.

Our Free Trade Agreement with the United Kingdom received Royal Assent on 23 March, and we are aiming to bring it into force as soon as possible.

We're still fighting hard for the best possible market access to the huge, high value EU market.

Trade is the key to future growth in the industry.

Access to international markets is essential for the profitability of Australia's export-focussed agricultural, fisheries and forestry sectors.

More than 70% of Australia's agricultural production is exported, and in 2022-23 we are expected to export a record \$79 billion worth of products.

We want that number to continue to grow.

And to do that we are continuing to open new markets for the sector, to improve and maintain existing markets, and restore access where it has been lost.



I know there is more we can do, but it's worth reflecting on what's being achieved as well.

In 2022 the Australian Government recorded 106 technical market access achievements for international trade, which include:

- Gaining new market access for Australian peaches and nectarines to Vietnam,
- Working with industry to safeguard Australian \$14.7 billion red meat export industry.
- Supporting Australian infant formula exporters to access the United States, leading to more than \$19 million of infant formula exports.
- Improving access for Australian poultry meat exports to Singapore, which contributed to a 106% increase in exports.
- More recently, we also opened new market access to India for Australian avocados - and that market offers huge opportunities across many other commodities.

Of course, it is difficult to go to any agriculture event and discuss trade without mentioning China.

You may have seen in the newspaper this morning that yesterday I met with the Chinese Vice-Minister for Agriculture.

It was a warm, forward-focused meeting and I am heartened by the progress that has been made in stabilising our relationship with China.

We have seen progress on barley, with a review underway to try to unlock those restrictions placed on that industry.

There are of course other industries which remain in limbo, and I will continue strongly advocating for those restrictions to be lifted, because we believe it is in the best interest of both countries that occurs.

And right around the world, we will continue fighting for equivalence measures and tariff reform.

Because we strongly believe that free agricultural trade is globally beneficial.

Not only for the opportunities that presents our industry, but also because of the benefits to the world's food security and the health of our planet.

## **CONCLUSION**

Biosecurity, climate change and sustainability, workforce needs and trade.

These are some of our major focus areas for 2023 as we continue our work to protect Australian agriculture, remain productive in a changing climate, have the human resources to get the job done and grow the pie.

All of this is essential to deliver the NFF's goal - which we share - of becoming a \$100 billion industry by 2030.

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Thank you and I am happy to take questions.

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