



The Coalition's Real Action Plan to
Support Agriculture

**Stand up for Australia.
Stand up for real action.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australian farmers and primary producers are among the most innovative in the world.

Despite challenging environmental conditions and competition from subsidised overseas goods, local farmers have continuously improved both the quality and quantity of their produce.

This success will only continue with direct support for research and development, finding new ways to do more with less water, growing more with finite supplies of arable land and finding alternatives to increasingly expensive critical inputs. The health and sustainability of our primary sector must also be protected from disease.

The Coalition has a comprehensive real action plan to boost Australian agriculture, including the following initiatives:

1. Increased funding for research and development in primary production

Commencing from 1 July 2011, the Coalition will increase the Commonwealth's contribution to research and development from a matching contribution of \$1 for every \$1 raised by industry to \$1.25 for each of the 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations. This will increase research funding by up to \$150 million over the next three years.

2. Support for cutting edge research by Australia's agricultural scientists

Australia needs to replenish our agricultural scientific 'brains trust' and ensure our scientists and researchers remain in Australia. Future Australian productivity relies on keeping our best minds working in Australian agricultural science. The Coalition will establish a \$5 million four-year pilot programme offering grants of up to \$50,000 for specialised research, mentoring or further study.

3. Improved water infrastructure through a 'Water Works' programme

The Coalition will provide grants of up to \$100,000 for farming enterprises to undertake water-saving activities such as installing pipes and troughs for stock water, and to improve grazing practices and protect environmental assets. Grants will also be available to introduce renewable energy technologies for pumps. The Coalition will provide \$50 million over four years for this initiative.

4. A large scale Feral Animal Control Programme

The CSIRO has estimated that pest animals directly cost Australian agriculture more than \$740 million per annum.¹ Australia must put control programmes in place now to control pest animals. The Coalition will commit \$20 million over four years towards a large scale Feral Animal Control Programme.

1. Tony Burke, 'New funding to tackle feral animal pests' (Press Release, 28 January 2010) at <http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media_releases/2010/january/new_funding_to_tackle_destructive_feral_animal_pests>.

5. **Saltbush, Fodder Trees and Blue Mallee Planting Programme**

Saltbush provides a carbon sink on marginal and extremely marginal land. Saltbush can also be used as a fodder source during droughts. Saltbush also stabilises country and stops erosion, and can be used to revegetate land which has been degraded or eroded. The Coalition will introduce a Saltbush Planting Programme to provide up to \$100,000 matched dollar for dollar per farm enterprise and up to \$250,000 per established nursery to ensure enough plants for the programme. The Programme will also support farmers and nursery owners who have successfully established saltbush plantations to become mentors to ensure the best survival and establishment rate of new plantations.

6. **Mapping Australia's Agriculture Carbon Footprint**

There is increasing concern that some countries may use environmental issues as a trade barrier. It is important that, as a large exporting nation, Australia is able to prove our reputation as a supplier of clean, green products is factual and defended in the global market place. This \$8 million initiative will provide a 'third party' auditable map of the carbon footprint of all of Australia's agricultural production, from paddock to plate, to be used to ensure that our primary products can compete in the global market place.

7. **'Green Tape' Audit**

An incoming Coalition Government will immediately commence an audit of all environmental legislation and regulation at Local, State and Federal levels. The audit will identify the 'green tape' which is unworkable, contradictory or incompatible with other legislation, affects food production or puts Australian lives at risk. The audit will also look at the impact environmental legislation can have on property rights.

8. **Bio-security Flying Squad**

Maintaining our clean, green, disease-free status is vital for the future of agricultural production in Australia. Any outbreak of imported disease could wipe out entire sectors of the industry, leading to the loss of billions of dollars of income and thousands of Australian jobs. The Coalition will provide \$15 million to establish a special agency to provide urgent additional resources when a bio-security risk is identified.

HOW LABOR HAS FAILED

After three years of Labor, Australia is heading down the wrong track.

Reckless spending, nearly \$90 billion of debt, a \$57 billion deficit and Labor Government borrowings of more than \$100 million every day have put the Australian economy in a highly vulnerable position.

Labor has no interest in Australia's primary sector or the regional communities so dependent on it. They have no understanding of its importance to the economic well-being of the nation.

Labor's indifference towards Australian agriculture and the communities it supports led to funding cuts and political fixes.

The Labor Government abolished Land and Water Australia and cut \$63 million in CSIRO agricultural research.² A \$12 million cut has also been made in funding to the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.³

The Labor Government failed to take the nation's bio-security needs seriously. With rapidly increasing imports and people movements, Australia is potentially facing a bio-security nightmare. The Beale Review found that *'it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the agencies are significantly under-resourced, putting Australia's economy, people and environment at significant risk.'*⁴

Despite Beale's Recommendations, Agriculture Minister Tony Burke's response was to cut the government's contribution to biosecurity by \$35.9 million⁵. Pressure from the Coalition subsequently forced the Labor Government to abandon these cuts.

In the 2009-10 Budget, Labor cut cargo screening resources at ports and airports by \$58.1 million. This has made it much easier for animal and plant disease to enter Australia, putting our agricultural sector at risk.

2. Rosslyn Beeby, '\$63m cut sends CSIRO research to the slaughter', *The Canberra Times*, 22 May 2008 at <<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/news/local/news/general/63m-cut-sends-csiro-research-to-the-slaughter/774880.aspx>>.

3. Portfolio Budget Statements 2009-10, Budget Related Paper No. 1.1, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Portfolio, 206 at <http://www.daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1115251/budgetfull.pdf>.

4. The Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements report to the Australian Government, The Beale report, One Biosecurity – a Working Partnership, Executive Summary, 2008, 205 a <http://daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/931609/report-single.pdf>.

5. Portfolio Budget Statements 2009-10, Budget Related Paper No. 1.1, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Portfolio, 69 at <http://www.daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1115251/budgetfull.pdf>.

THE COALITION'S PLAN FOR REAL ACTION TO SUPPORT AGRICULTURE

The Coalition believes that Australia needs to invest in our agriculture sector now for it to have a prosperous and sustainable future. Action is needed now to get Australian primary production back on track.

The Coalition knows there are many challenges ahead, including food security, biosecurity and the cost and increasing scarcity of some vital farming inputs.

The Coalition has a comprehensive plan for real action to support the Australian agricultural sector.

1. Increased funding for research and development in primary production

Productivity has levelled out in the agriculture sector after years of growth. Increasing cost pressures on farmers – particularly in inputs such as energy and fertilisers – are starting to make good farms unviable.

Agriculture research and development has been scaled back, particularly at a state level. At the federal level, Labor has shifted funding out of research designed to boost our economic productivity towards research for environmental purposes.

Australia needs new developments to provide farmers with the tools to help them maintain a competitive advantage in the market place.

According to Ben Fargher, CEO of the National Farmers Federation, *'Australian farmers have a track record of success through research innovation to lead almost all Australian industries with average productivity growth of 2.8% per year for the past 30 years. But we're now going backwards at the very time we need to be ramping up our research efforts.'*⁶

Commencing from 1 July 2011, the Coalition will increase the Commonwealth's contribution to research and development from a matching contribution of \$1 for every \$1 raised by industry to \$1.25 for each of the 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations. This will increase research funding by up to \$150 million over the next three years.

6. Ben Fargher, 'Australia can lead world food push, NFF challenges Govt' (Press Release, 23 March 2010) at <<http://www.nff.org.au/read/2482267883.html>>.

2. Support for cutting edge research by Australia's agricultural scientists

Australia needs to replenish our agricultural scientific 'brains trust' and ensure our scientists and researchers remain in Australia. Future Australian productivity relies on keeping our best minds working in Australian agricultural science.

The Coalition will establish a \$5 million four-year pilot programme offering grants of up to \$50,000 for specialised research, mentoring or further study.

The programme will provide access to mentoring and professional development in the applicant's chosen fields, especially in areas where Australia currently lacks skills such as taxonomy (discovery, description, identification and classification of organisms) and entomology (study of insects).

3. Improved water infrastructure through a 'Water Works' programme

Too much of Australia's water is lost due to poor water storage and evaporation. Improved on-farm water infrastructure and management practices could help prevent these valuable water losses.

The Coalition will introduce a 'Water Works' programme to provide grants to help farmers save water. Grants of up to \$100,000 will be made available for farming enterprises to undertake water-saving activities such as installing pipes and troughs for stock water, and to improve grazing practices and protect environmental assets. Grants will also be available to introduce renewable energy technologies for pumps.

The Coalition will provide \$50 million over four years for this initiative.

4. Introduce a large scale Feral Animal Control Programme

According to CSIRO, pest animals directly cost Australian agriculture more than \$740 million per annum.⁷ This does not include long-term losses associated with land degradation, native vegetation destruction, and the loss of native wildlife.

Australia's most destructive pests include rabbits, wild dogs, foxes, feral pigs, cane toads and feral camels. Rabbits, in particular, are again on the increase and have built up a resistance to biological controls employed in the past.

The Coalition believes that control programmes must be put in place now before too many pest animals once again reach plague proportions.

The Coalition will commit \$20 million over four years towards a large scale Feral Animal Control Programme.

5. Saltbush, Fodder Trees and Blue Mallee Planting Programme

There are a number of carbon sink options on more marginal land that are compatible with the Kyoto Protocols and would provide farmers with a dual purpose crop, namely a carbon sink and also a drought-proofing initiative.

7. Tony Burke, 'New funding to tackle feral animal pests' (Press Release, 28 January 2010) at <http://www.maff.gov.au/media/media_releases/2010/january/new_funding_to_tackle_destructive_feral_animal_pests>.

Native saltbushes have proven to be 'living haystacks' during the drought. Saltbush provides a carbon sink on marginal and extremely marginal land. Saltbush can also be used as a fodder source during droughts. Saltbush also stabilises country and stops erosion, and can be used to revegetate land which has been degraded or eroded.

The Coalition will introduce a Saltbush Planting Programme to provide up to \$100,000 matched dollar for dollar per farm enterprise and up to \$250,000 per established nursery to ensure enough plants for the program. The Programme will also support farmers and nursery owners who have successfully established saltbush plantations to become mentors to ensure the best survival and establishment rate of new plantations.

The grants would be used for both the establishment of the saltbush stands and also for fencing, and the delivery of stock water to the saltbush stands.

Farmers will also be able to access the grants if they are planting stands of native timber which can be used as fodder trees during times of drought, for example Mulga, Whitewoods or Myall Trees which are often used in times of drought as a feed source for livestock.

The Coalition will provide \$20 million over four years to this initiative.

6. Mapping Australia's Agriculture Carbon Footprint

There is increasing concern that some countries may use environmental issues as a trade barrier. In some cases, trading partners are demanding an environmental audit of produce and concepts such as the United Kingdom's 'Food Miles'. Often these give a distorted picture of the real environmental impact of food production - to the detriment of Australia's exporters.

It is important that, as a large exporting nation, Australia is able to prove our reputation as a supplier of clean, green products is factual and defended in the global market place. For example, Australian lamb uses about half the energy per kilogram as the equivalent United Kingdom produced kilo of lamb, even when transport is taken into account.

This \$8 million program would be a third party auditable map of the carbon foot print of all of Australia's agricultural production, from paddock to plate. This will then be used to ensure that our primary products can compete in the global market place.

7. Institute a 'Green Tape' Audit

An incoming Coalition Government will immediately commence an audit of all environmental legislation and regulation at local, State and Federal levels.

The audit will identify the 'green tape' which is unworkable, contradictory or incompatible with other legislation, affects food production or puts Australian lives at risk. The audit will also look at the impact environmental legislation can have on property rights.

The Coalition will commit \$2 million to this initiative.

8. Establish a Biosecurity Flying Squad

Maintaining our clean, green, disease-free status is vital for the future of agricultural production in Australia. Any outbreak of imported disease could wipe out entire sectors of the industry, leading to the loss of billions of dollars of income and thousands of Australian jobs.

As National Farmers Federation President David Crombie recently said '*We are blessed to be one of the most disease-free countries on Earth, but Australia's biosecurity system needs a major fix to get up to scratch and meet our modern needs*'.⁸

Labor's waste and mismanagement has led to cuts in critical areas, including the reduction in Customs' capacity to screen cargo entering Australia through our ports and airports. This has made it much easier for animal and plant disease to enter Australia, putting our agricultural sector at risk.

The Coalition has previously announced funding of \$93.1 million to reverse Labor's cuts and dramatically improve Customs' capacity to inspect incoming cargo. This additional funding will enable Customs to inspect an estimated additional 52,500 sea cargo consignments and at least 7.5 million additional air cargo consignments.

The Coalition will also provide \$15 million to establish a special agency to provide urgent additional resources when a bio-security risk is identified. The new agency will also randomly audit quarantine facilities and procedures, identifying problems and resolving them through direct co-operation with relevant agencies and industry.

8. David Crombie, "Whatever happened to Australia's nation building agenda?" (Press Release, 11 May 2010) at <<http://www.nff.org.au/read/2484579764.html>>.

COSTINGS

The Coalition will commit an additional \$270 million over the forward estimates towards these initiatives.

This funding will be provided from the more than \$24 billion in recurrent savings that have been identified by the Coalition over the forward estimates.

These savings are a result of cutting Labor's waste and mismanagement and redirecting funding from inefficient and poorly performing Labor Government programmes.

	2010/11 \$M	2011/12 \$M	2012/13 \$M	2013/14 \$M	TOTAL \$M
Primary Production R&D	-	50	50	50	150
Grant Funding for Specialised Research	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	5
'Water Works' Programme	5	15	15	15	50
Feral Animal Control	5	5	5	5	20
Saltbush Planting Programme	5	5	5	5	20
Green Tape Audit	2	-	-	-	2
Mapping Australia's Carbon Footprint	2	2	2	2	8
Bio-security Flying Squad	-	5	5	5	15

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