

Senate Estimates – opening remarks – Ministerial achievements

This government is delivering a plan for Australian agriculture.

The plan is to strengthen the foundation, prepare for the future and to also create new opportunities for Australian farmers.

National Food Plan

The National Food Plan, released on the weekend [25 May 2013], is an important step in preparing for the future and creating those new opportunities for Australian farmers.

The Plan, like the Asian Century White Paper, sets the goals for Australia to be in the top five most efficiently-regulated countries in the world

It is a roadmap for the future of Australia's food industry and will be owned and driven by the whole nation.

Farm Finance

We're strengthening the foundation by tackling farm debt head on.

Late last month [April 27], the Deputy Prime Minister and I announced the Farm Finance package of measures to alleviate debt and provide breathing space for our farmers, including, among other measures, concessional loans to help restructure debt and invest in productivity.

Drought

In the 2013–14 Budget, the government announced its contribution to National Drought Program Reform—a \$99.4 million investment in a new Farm Household Allowance to support farmers and their partners when they are in hardship.

This government has struck a once-in-a-generation reform for the management and preparation for drought management.

This new approach, made in consultation with industry, changes us from a pattern of crisis response to greater preparedness and risk management.

Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals

We have improved the regulation of agricultural and veterinary chemicals by introducing legislation to reform assessment, review and compliance tools available to the regulator.

The reforms will improve the APVMA's transparency, predictability and timeliness while ensuring human, animal and environmental health and safety are the first priority.

Clean energy future / Caring for our Country

We are supporting farmers in reducing their emissions by encouraging participation in the Carbon Farming Initiative, investing \$1.7 billion through the Land Sector Package under the Clean Energy Future Plan to give farmers and landholders real opportunities to generate additional income while reducing carbon emissions.

To support sustainable land use and a healthy environment we have also committed \$2.2 billion to extend the Caring for our Country program for another five years and we have—since 2008—invested more than \$200 million in Reef Rescue.

Biosecurity

The government continues to invest in DAFF's commitment to delivering a modern biosecurity system, including:

- \$73.3 million for quarantine border security;
- \$9 million for information communication technology systems;
- \$60.6 million to continue the design and construction of a new post entry quarantine facility in Victoria; and
- introducing legislation into Parliament to replace the century-old Quarantine Act.

Trade

The government is working to position Australia as the first choice for the increasing number of consumers in the Asia-Pacific region, signing the Malaysia-Australia Free Trade Agreement which came into force in January this year and more recently, canola and cherry exports to China.

Skills

We are improving access to training, announcing changes that entitle all working-age Australians to a Commonwealth supported training place to get a qualification up to and including Certificate III.

This package, Skills for All Australians, has opportunities for people seeking to study diplomas in agriculture, agribusiness management, aquaculture, animal technology and forest and forest products.

Forestry

And at the end of last year, the government secured the passage of the *Illegal Logging Prohibition Act 2012*, making it an offence to import illegally logged timber or timber products into Australia or to process Australian grown timber that has been illegally logged.

Summary

I'm very proud of our achievements and the work we are doing across the board to strengthen the foundation, prepare for the future and to create new opportunities for Australian farmers.