

OPENING STATEMENT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

2024-25 SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES

Thank you Chair and Committee Members for the opportunity to provide an opening statement.

Of course this Committee is not new to me, but I am here today as a new face in the Chair for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

It was a privilege to be appointed as the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry by the Prime Minister.

The Albanese Labor Government knows the agricultural sector is critical for trade, economic resilience and jobs in regional Australia – that's why we're committed to protecting and growing the industry.

It is an exciting time for Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The latest estimates by ABARES show that including fisheries and forestry production the gross value of production is forecast to rise to \$92.1 billion in 2024-25 – the third highest on record.

And I've been pleased to be able to visit a number of these producers and their representatives in the time I've been Assistant Minister.

In the time since the Committee met at May's budget estimates, we've continued to deliver across this Government's key priorities of protecting Australian agriculture through strengthened biosecurity, growing the sector by taking advantage of trade opportunities, building the agriculture workforce of the future and delivering on our climate and sustainability measures.

As the officials here will be able to tell you, a strong biosecurity system is absolutely critical to Australian agriculture.

The Albanese Labor Government has delivered on our election commitment by investing over \$1 billion in a sustainable, broadly based, biosecurity funding model.

And we are continuing to invest in our protection against future threats with over \$100 million invested across government to prepare and protect the nation against H5 bird flu.

The Albanese Labor Government is focussed on opening doors for Australian agriculture and processing industries to grow and diversify their overseas markets.

Our agricultural trade is now the most diversified it's ever been thanks to the Albanese Labor Government.

We achieved 88 technical market access achievements last financial year, and achievements continue this year with new access for plums to Vietnam and expansion of grape exports to Japan to name a couple.

And we have significant runs on the board stabilizing the relationship with our biggest trading partner in China.

In particular since the last Estimates, we achieved agreement between the Prime Minister and Premier Li on a timetable for the full resumption of live rock lobster trade in time for Lunar New Year.

These outcomes have put billions of dollars back into the pockets of our agriculture industry – proof again of the Albanese Labor Government delivering for farmers after inheriting over \$20 billion in trade impediments.

On the phase out of live sheep exports by sea, the Albanese Labor Government is providing certainty, time and support to the industry with a legislated end date of 1 May 2028 and a \$139.7 million transition assistance package.

This includes \$97.3 million of funding specifically allocated to assist sheep producers and supply chain businesses to transition away from live sheep

exports by sea and take advantage of the rapidly growing demand for sheepmeat, with exports currently valued at around \$4.5 billion a year.

Our Government is working with the Western Australian Government to deliver key elements of the transition package including processing capacity grants and community wellbeing support.

We are also committed to working with industry through a co-design process to prioritise the assistance that producers and supply chain businesses needs to plan, respond and adapt.

The Albanese Labor Government continues to bring employers, unions and government together to tackle the workforce challenges impacting Australia's agriculture and processing industry.

I was pleased just last month to attend a meeting of the Government's Agriculture Workforce Forum which brings together employee and employer groups to work towards solutions to better skill, attract, protect and retain workers in the sector.

Because of the Albanese Labor Government's investment in fee-free TAFE, we have had over 20,300 enrolments in agriculture related fee-free TAFE courses from 1 January 2023 to 30 June 2024.

We are getting on with the job of delivering the agricultural workforce for the future.

Yesterday, our Government released its detailed response to the final report on future structure and governance arrangements for the APVMA.

Our response outlines our reform agenda for the APVMA, which also includes reforms already underway, which were needed after serious allegations were raised in Senate Estimates early last year.

Our government has taken a pragmatic and mature approach to reforming the APVMA after the forced move to Armidale in 2016. Our response demonstrates our commitment to a modern, fit-for-purpose and independent chemical regulator that builds public confidence in chemical

and food safety. Most importantly, our response provides the stability the organisation needs to continue to be a world-class regulator.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the Committee for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

I, along with representatives from the Department, look forward to answering the committee's questions about these and other portfolio matters.