SENATE ESTIMATES
AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY PORTFOLIO
OPENING STATEMENT

It is a pleasure to be here at the first Senate Estimates hearings since the Australian people returned the Albanese Labor Government to office in May.

We are grateful for the opportunity to continue our work, and a key focus for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio for this term will be to build on our strong partnership with Australia's farmers, fishers, and foresters, who are the backbone of our regional communities and our economy.

Before I proceed, I wish to formally acknowledge the recent departure of the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Mr Adam Fennessy, who concluded his term on Friday, 26 September.

Minister Collins and I thank Mr Fennessy for his service, and I wish him well for his future endeavours.

During his term, the department continued its important work on improving its finances, strengthening our biosecurity system, and expanding trade opportunities for our farmers and producers.

Ms Justine Saunders APM is currently acting as Secretary until a replacement is appointed.

The Albanese Labor Government's partnerships with the agricultural, fisheries and forestry industry are delivering real, tangible results.

As we have recently highlighted, ABARES forecasts show the value of our agricultural, fisheries and forestry industry are forecast to exceed $100 billion this financial year – for the first time in history.

This is a direct result of our deliberate and focused partnership with industry, and a powerful testament to the hard work, resilience, and innovation of our producers, whom this government will always back.

A cornerstone of this success is our deliberate work on the international stage to restore and improve market access, and to put agriculture at the centre of our trading relationships.

Our agricultural trade is now the most diversified it has ever been, reaching 169 global markets.

Since coming to office, we have worked methodically with industry to remove inherited trade impediments and create new opportunities.

This has resulted in over 230 market access wins since July 2022, opening new markets, protecting markets in the face of trade threats and improving access to existing ones.

This global focus provides a crucial buffer against volatility and translates into real dollars for farmers and producers, as well as more secure jobs in our regions.

Underpinning all of this is a strong biosecurity system.

It is our non-negotiable first line of defence, protecting our critical industries, livelihoods and communities from pests and diseases.

That is why we have invested over $2 billion in additional funding to strengthen our world-class biosecurity system since coming to government – addressing the funding cliff we inherited.

While these national figures are strong, we know they do not tell the story for every producer.

We continue to work hand-in-hand with industry and state and territory governments to support those facing hardship, from drought to challenging ecological events.

Looking forward, our focus is on building a more resilient and sustainable future for our industry.

We recently committed an additional $1 billion in new loan funding through the Regional Investment Corporation, providing certainty for farmers beyond 2026.

This complements our record investment of over $519 million into the Future Drought Fund, which empowers communities to manage climate risks through practical, locally-led resilience projects.

Along with our investment of over $300 million towards our Climate Smart Agriculture program.

This record $100 billion forecast is a moment to celebrate the incredible people who make up our agriculture, fisheries, and forestry sectors.

The Albanese Labor Government will continue to listen to them, work collaboratively with them, and back them every step of the way.

Thank you and we look forward to answering your questions today.