



## Land Use Policy

### Policy Position

The NFF promotes the protection of agricultural land. The long term success of the agriculture sector will be dependent on our continued access to land and water. Agricultural land is a valuable resource that all levels of government should preserve for the future prosperity of our sector and our nation.

The land use decisions of governments must:

- recognise agriculture as a pillar of our local, state, territory and national economies
- support growth in the agriculture sector enabling farmers to intensify, improve productivity, and change enterprises;
- ensure that any change in land use is compatible with agriculture by ensuring that water resources are protected, food safety and biosecurity are not compromised and that the ability of farmers to implement modern farming practices is not restricted;
- be based on up to date land use trend information and the best scientific knowledge;
- ensure that farmers have the right to genuinely influence decisions about the activities that happen on their land; and
- recognise the role sustainable and profitable agriculture can play in preserving Australia's biodiversity and managing our natural resources.

### Issue

The future for Australian agriculture sector is exciting. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) predicts that by 2050 global population will exceed 9 billion (an increase of more than 2 billion from 2012), with an estimated 75% increase in demand for food. Much of the population growth, and growth in a more affluent middle class will occur on Australia's doorstep – in China, Indonesia and India. With the right policy settings, Australian agriculture is poised to double production by 2050. Our ability as a sector to reach this potential will be dependent on our ability to continue to access the land and water resources required to grow production. While agriculture remains Australia's dominant land use, the share of land used for agriculture is declining. At a local and regional scale, change in land use can have a

significant impact on the farm sector. Productive land in high rainfall zones along our coastlines and around our cities is now being used for urban and lifestyle living. As our neighbours change, our ability to adopt new technologies and practices is often curtailed by an idealised view of farming. The development mines and the expansion of onshore gas activities can risk the productivity of agricultural land where there are unacceptable impacts on the integrity of surrounding soil and water resources. The land use decisions of governments at all levels – local, state and federal – have the potential to affect the success of the agriculture sector.

## **Background**

In 2005/06 approximately 59% of the Australian continent is used for some form of agriculture<sup>1</sup>. Agriculture remains Australia's dominant land use, covering around 456 million hectares (ha). However the share of land for agriculture is declining, with a reduction of about 4 per cent (almost 19 million hectares) between 1992-93 and 2005-06. The availability of more recent data that tracks land use change at a regional, state and national scale is poor. However, we see land use changes at the regional and local scale that have the potential to significantly affect the agriculture sector.

These changes can:

- displace agriculture entirely (for example from the expansion of urban and peri-urban residential areas or the conversion of use from farmland to conservation areas)
- reduce the net productivity from the land (for example from the expansion of rural lifestyle living in our coastal fringes)
- limit the range of farming practices that can be used (for example, neighbour pressures can limit the ability to intensify or use more efficient practices)
- put at risk the natural resources, such as water, on which agriculture production relies (for example through mining or onshore gas developments that interfere with groundwater); and
- put at risk our international reputation as producers of safe food (for example the risk of land and water contamination from the chemicals used in onshore gas activities).

Local, state and federal governments all have responsibilities and decision making powers that influence access to land for the agriculture sector. The responsibilities and powers are largely enshrined in planning and environmental protection laws.

## **What the industry needs**

The agriculture sector is seeking that all levels of government:

- recognise the important role that the agriculture sector plays – and will continue to play - in the economies of our local communities, our states and territories and our nation;
- ensure that food and fibre production is prioritised in land and resource planning decisions. We must reset the balance between agriculture and other land and resource uses, particularly where co-use and co-existence is achievable;

- commit to protecting agricultural land from unreasonable land use change and land use regulation. We need a more comprehensive and strategic approach to considering the value of agricultural land in land use planning, and development assessments and approvals; and
- strive for cohesive planning frameworks that support the growth of the agriculture sector
- further invest to improve the information and knowledge base on which land use planning and development decisions are made. We need access to more up to date data on the rate of land use change at a national scale, with a finer focus in those areas where the risks to agriculture are most acute. We need a stronger scientific knowledge base to support the regulators who make decisions on developments which have the potential to impact land and water resources. And where decisions are made to change land use or allow co-use, we need regulators to transparently monitor observed impacts and enforce the conditions that are put in place to protect agricultural land.

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