



National
Farmers
Federation

NFF Reform Roadmap Discussion Paper

United Advocacy Stronger Outcomes

Creating a framework that ensures a sustainable NFF will strengthen its reputation as a trusted, member-driven voice for agriculture, grounded in unity, transparency, and strategic impact.

May 2025 ■ Canberra

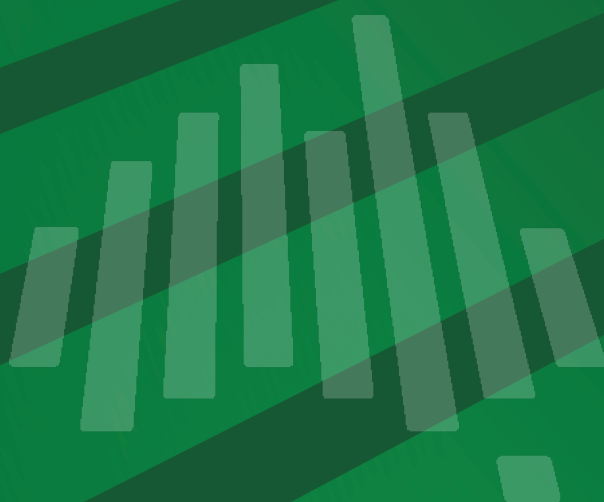


Table Of Contents

NFF Reform Roadmap Discussion Paper

The *NFF Reform Roadmap – United Advocacy Stronger Outcomes* framework supports a process to re-examine its structure, governance, and membership model. The aim is to strengthen NFFs ability to coordinate across jurisdictions, policy areas, and member types. This means revisiting long-standing assumptions about eligibility for membership, the balance between representation and efficiency, and how value and influence are allocated across different member categories.

Introduction Page: 2

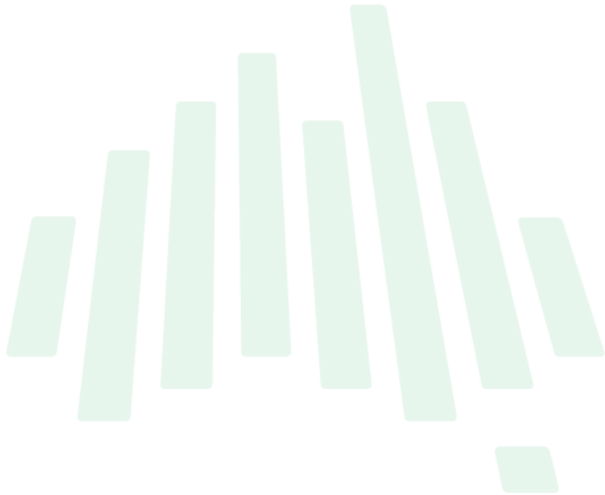
Preamble – A member-driven organisation Page: 3

Discussion Point – Contemporary membership structures Page: 6

Discussion Point – Properly resourcing the national body Page: 11

Discussion Point – Effective member-driven advocacy Page: 16

Reform Pathway – Towards united advocacy and stronger outcomes..... Page: 20



Introduction

United Advocacy Stronger Outcomes Reforms

This discussion paper brings together several interrelated issues that have been canvassed extensively through previous consultation processes, survey feedback, and reform documents over the past eighteen months. It builds upon the strong foundations of earlier work and aims to provide a consolidated reference point to support the next phase of the National Farmers' Federation's (NFF) reform journey. The observations and proposals outlined here are designed to support informed member discussion and will contribute directly to governance and membership reforms.

Since its formation in 1979, NFF has provided a national platform for Australia's diverse farming interests to come together under a federated, member-driven model. This structure has enabled coordinated policy development, consensus-building, and unified advocacy across a broad array of issues.

The strength of NFF has always resided in its ability to balance diversity with shared purpose, allowing commodity groups, state farming organisations, and supply chain stakeholders to retain their identity while contributing to a unified national voice.

Over more than four decades, NFF has evolved alongside the agricultural sector itself. It has responded to external pressures, internal challenges, and shifting member expectations. It has expanded its policy reach, diversified its membership, and strengthened its governance. In doing so, it has upheld its founding commitment to deliver practical outcomes for farmers through collaboration and credibility.

Today, the pressures on advocacy have grown more intense. Stakeholder complexity, competition for influence, and rapidly evolving national debates demand a strong, representative, and well-resourced Federation. This paper revisits key elements of NFF's structure and function to ensure they remain fit for purpose in 2025 and beyond. The task ahead is not to revisit well-worn debates, but to build on them, to sharpen the tools, clarify expectations, and renew NFF's enduring commitment supporting farmers..

The NFF Board is fully committed to a genuinely member-driven process. This discussion paper is intended solely as a starting point, not a predetermined agenda. The issues it canvases are based on feedback to date, not conclusions. There are no preconceptions about the direction or outcome: members will shape it through robust, inclusive deliberation. The Board's focus is on working with you to deliver a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready Federation that reflects the diversity of Australian agriculture and supports credible, united advocacy.

David Jochinke
NFF President

Troy Williams
NFF Chief Executive

May 2025, Canberra

Preamble

A Member-driven Organisation

Since its formation in 1979, NFF has united Australia's diverse agricultural voices through a federated, member-driven structure. It has led national advocacy on critical issues while adapting to changing policy, environmental, and economic contexts. Grounded in collaboration and credibility, NFF remains committed to delivering practical outcomes for farmers through unified representation, even as it continues to evolve to meet contemporary challenges and expectations.

Following decades of fragmented advocacy across the Australian agricultural sector, NFF finally came into being during 1979. Prior to its formation, farmers were represented by a complex web of state-based organisations and commodity-specific councils. These groups were effective in their own domains but often pursued independent and sometimes conflicting goals. As the political and economic climate in Australia began to shift, particularly with the rise of national policymaking in areas like trade, industrial relations, taxation, and environmental regulation, this decentralised model became increasingly inadequate. The sector lacked a unified national voice, and its influence in Canberra was diminished as a result.

The vision behind NFF was not to override or replace the existing organisations but to create a new national structure that would allow Australian agriculture to speak with one voice. It was intended to provide a framework through which coordinated national advocacy could occur, without diminishing the independence or integrity of state and commodity groups. This founding principle, unity through federation, remains central to NFF's identity today.

The federation model chosen by NFF meant that membership would be built from the ground up. Each State Farming Organisation (SFO) and national commodity council retained its own voice and vote but agreed to come together on issues of national importance. The model was built around consensus, collaboration, and mutual respect. It enabled a strategic division of labour, where SFOs could focus on state issues while NFF coordinated a national approach to federal government and key national stakeholders.

The 1980s and 1990s were formative decades for NFF. During this time, it took strong positions on industrial relations, played a key role in shaping drought policy, and began to influence trade negotiations. The Federation also developed a reputation for rigorous policy development, supported by evidence-based research and member consultation. Importantly, these efforts began to demonstrate the value of unified

advocacy and helped secure credibility with ministers, government departments, and the broader business community.

Throughout its history, NFF has demonstrated a unique ability to adapt. As the needs of the agricultural sector changed, so too did the organisation's structures and priorities. In the 2000s, new challenges such as digital connectivity, workforce shortages, water policy, and environmental sustainability rose to the fore. In response, NFF expanded its policy reach, modernised internal governance arrangements, and developed deeper relationships with non-traditional partners, including the education and tech sectors.

In 2010, NFF began exploring broader membership categories, leading to the inclusion of Associate Members. These are organisations connected to agriculture, whether in research, agribusiness, or professional services, that contribute valuable insights but do not fit the traditional mould of SFOs or commodity groups. The inclusion of Associate Members reflected a broader understanding of what constitutes the agricultural sector and recognised that effective advocacy requires engagement across the entire supply chain.

The Federation also responded to increasing demands for governance transparency. It introduced new voting structures, clearer definitions of member roles, and more robust policy development processes. These efforts have helped maintain the integrity of the Federation's decision-making, while still allowing a diversity of voices to be heard. At the same time, however, they have raised important questions about fairness, representation, and influence, issues that remain central to the current reform agenda.

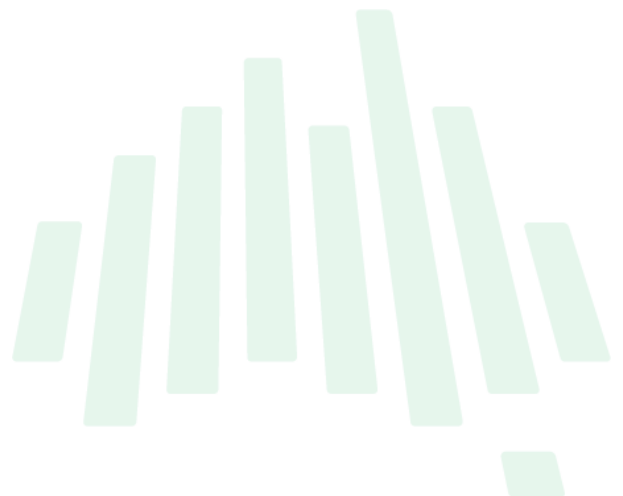
Another important milestone in NFF's development was its work on long-term strategic planning. The organisation led efforts to articulate a shared national vision for agriculture, including the ambitious goal of reaching \$100 billion in farm gate output by 2030. This target, widely adopted across the sector and in policy circles, underscored the need for long-term planning, coordinated investment, and unified advocacy. NFF played a critical role in coordinating partners, developing metrics, and promoting the roadmap to governments and industry.

The past five years have reinforced the importance of NFF's role. The sector has faced devastating bushfires, the global Covid-19 pandemic, ongoing drought and flood events, supply chain disruptions, and significant policy reforms in areas like biosecurity, climate policy, and workplace relations. In each case, NFF has acted as a focal point for coordinated action, bringing together members, engaging with governments, and advocating for practical solutions that reflect the reality of life on the land.

Yet the challenges of this new era also highlight areas where the Federation's current structures are under strain. A wider range of organisations now seek to influence national policy. The line between commodity-specific and cross-sectoral issues has blurred. Advocacy is more competitive, public expectations for transparency are higher, and political cycles are faster. The Federation needs to find ways to respond effectively while remaining anchored in its founding principle of member-driven unity.

NFF's legacy is not defined by any one campaign or policy win. Its greatest strength has always been its capacity to bring people together, to identify shared challenges, forge collective positions, and deliver results. That unity has never meant sameness. It has meant shared purpose. The Federation model is not perfect, but it has allowed Australian agriculture to respond to change while retaining its core values of cooperation, trust, and evidence-based policy development.

As NFF approaches its fifth decade, it must once again renew itself to remain fit for purpose. The world in which it operates has changed, and member expectations along with it. Australia's agricultural sector is more complex, more diverse, and more exposed to global and technological forces. But the central question remains the same: how can agriculture best speak with a united, credible, and effective national voice? The answer, as it was in 1979, lies in federation, not as a static structure, but as a living commitment to unity through diversity.



Discussion Point

A Contemporary Membership Structure

The structure of membership within NFF sits at the heart of its ability to deliver strong, representative and credible national advocacy. Membership determines not only who has a seat at the table, but also how agricultural interests are coordinated, communicated and acted upon at a national level. As Australia's farming sector evolves, NFF's structures need to evolve with it to remain effective, inclusive and member-led.

Members consistently express strong support for NFF's work. There is broad recognition of its role in uniting diverse voices and shaping national debate with credibility. Feedback from a member survey in 2024 confirms this sentiment, with many stakeholders reaffirming the need for a well-resourced, effective national body. At the same time, members have highlighted opportunities to refine the structure to better reflect the complexity and dynamism of modern agriculture. Reform is seen as a way to build on a strong foundation.

NFF's current structure reflects its founding vision of a federation. This includes SFOs representing geographic jurisdictions, national Commodity Councils representing sectoral interests, and Associate Members offering industry and supply chain perspectives. This model has supported coordinated advocacy, allowed for diversity of input, and maintained a level of stability and consensus in policy development.

Over the past decade, the agricultural landscape has grown more diverse, with the emergence of new types of organisations and production systems. Vertically integrated agribusinesses, cross-jurisdictional cooperatives, and sector-wide alliances are reshaping the context in which national representation takes place. The feedback from members and recent reviews indicates that while the current membership model remains fit for many, it may not fully accommodate these evolving realities.

NFF's federation model has long supported unity and diversity in advocacy. But as agriculture evolves, so too must our structures. Embracing new voices and business models can ensure national representation remains inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the sector's changing needs.

NFF Constitution, revised in 2023, outlines three membership classes: State Members, Commodity Councils, and Associate Members. Voting rights at Members' Council are held by State and Commodity Members, while Associate Members may have voting rights depending on their fee level and classification. These rights are

regulated by a weighted system based on contribution and category, and further detailed in NFF Regulations. This structure reflects a balance between representational equity and operational pragmatism.

While this framework has served the Federation well, members have offered thoughtful reflections on where it can be improved. Smaller members have emphasised the importance of maintaining influence even when financial contributions are modest. Larger contributors have asked for more clarity on how voting and participation reflect investment. The goal for all is a system that enables shared ownership and accountability without discouraging engagement.

One promising idea raised during reform consultations has been the introduction of more tailored membership categories. These could include a “Strategic Affiliate” class for organisations with complementary interests, such as national research institutions or vertically integrated supply chains. Another option is a tiered Associate Member structure that could differentiate between levels of engagement and voting entitlement. These changes could support wider inclusion while maintaining the integrity of the Members’ Council.

Another area that has generated constructive discussion is the potential duplication of effort and funding. It is common for organisations to contribute to NFF while also supporting a State Member or Commodity Council that is itself an NFF member. While this reflects a shared commitment to advocacy, it does raise concerns about efficiency and equity. Some members have suggested opportunities for coordinated policy planning, joint communications platforms, and shared data or administrative systems as ways to reduce duplication while respecting organisational autonomy.

Shared commitment to advocacy is a strength, but reducing duplication enhances impact. Coordinated planning, shared platforms, and streamlined systems can improve efficiency and fairness, while respecting each organisation’s independence. Strengthening collaboration can ensure that every dollar and effort advances the shared interests of Australian agriculture.

The 'single council' approach to NFF membership, where only one voting member is permitted per jurisdiction or commodity, has attracted criticism. Some members question the legitimacy of restricting representation in this way, particularly given the risk of it appearing anticompetitive or excluding emerging voices in a rapidly evolving sector. There is growing interest in exploring a more expansive and inclusive membership model that better reflects the diversity of modern Australian agriculture. However, this must be balanced by the need to maintain NFF’s focus and effectiveness. Any move toward broader representation should also be accompanied by robust criteria to ensure only organisations with a demonstrated capacity to

contribute meaningfully to NFF's national agenda are admitted. This approach preserves the organisation's coherence while recognising the dynamic nature of the sector and the importance of ensuring all legitimate voices can participate in shaping national agricultural advocacy.

NFF Reform Roadmap outlines a process to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each member category. This includes defining expectations around participation, advocacy alignment, and communications. A clearer articulation of these roles, formalised through updated membership guidelines or a Member Charter, could provide consistency while allowing for the diversity of approaches that different organisations bring to the Federation.

The topic of voting rights remains central to these discussions. The existing model links voting to financial contribution and class of membership. Some members have suggested a hybrid model, where all members receive a base level of voting power and additional weight is assigned based on engagement or strategic contribution. Others have proposed capping the influence of any single organisation to prevent disproportionate influence. These ideas are not mutually exclusive and can be evaluated through the lens of fairness, transparency, and impact.

Fair and transparent voting rights are key to a strong federation. Balancing base-level representation with recognition of strategic contribution can strengthen unity and accountability, ensuring every voice is heard, while no single voice dominates. Thoughtful reform can support shared purpose and sector-wide legitimacy.

Some SFOs have raised thoughtful concerns about the advocacy roles of national Commodity Councils, noting that these councils often undertake policy work that intersects with, or complements, NFF's own efforts. This dynamic has understandably influenced membership discussions, particularly around fairness and representation. However, as a federation, NFF cannot seek to control the independent policy activities of its constituent members. Each organisation has a legitimate mandate to represent its sector. NFF's focus must remain on the ability of each member to contribute meaningfully to national advocacy efforts. This includes engaging constructively in policy development, supporting coordinated communication, and participating in shared governance. The strength of the federation lies not in uniformity of action, but in shared purpose—ensuring that diverse voices come together to advance the interests of Australian agriculture at the national level.

There is also widespread support for enhancing member engagement mechanisms. This includes establishing clearer nomination processes for policy committees, improving feedback loops from working groups to the Members' Council, and setting

up formal opportunities for reflection and review. Members want to know how their views are incorporated into final positions, and how decisions are made when consensus cannot be reached. Steps in this direction could reinforce trust and strengthen the member-driven ethos of NFF.

To complement structural adjustments, the development of a Member Charter has been broadly supported. This Charter could outline shared expectations of conduct, contribution, confidentiality, and collaboration. It could also include processes for onboarding new members, managing member disputes, and periodically reviewing alignment with NFF's strategic priorities. In doing so, it would reinforce a culture of shared responsibility and continuous improvement.

Importantly, while there are areas for refinement, there is also clear confidence in NFF's foundational model, a conclusion based upon the broad view of current members. The strength of a federation lies in its ability to balance diversity and unity. This has long been a defining feature of NFF and continues to be seen by members as one of its core advantages. The challenge is not to reinvent the Federation, but to modernise its structures in ways that reflect how agriculture is practiced, organised and governed in 2025 and beyond.

An updated Constitution and accompanying regulations could give NFF the tools it needs to pursue these reforms. They could provide for flexibility in membership structures, adjustments to voting entitlements, and the creation of new categories where appropriate. The reform process, as articulated in the Reform Roadmap, is focused on updating these tools with member input, ensuring that the next phase of development is collaborative, fair and future-focused.

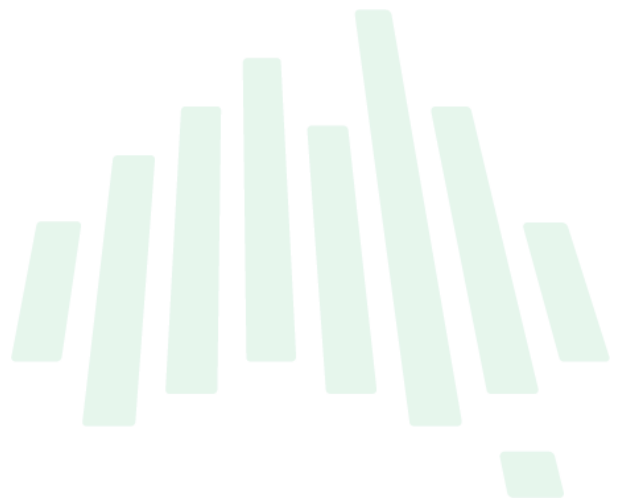
As these reforms are considered, it is important to acknowledge that structural clarity is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a foundation for effective action. A clear, fair and inclusive membership structure supports better advocacy, more meaningful collaboration, and stronger outcomes for Australian agriculture. It ensures that NFF remains a credible, capable and respected national voice.

Conclusion —

A clear, inclusive, and future-ready membership structure is vital to NFF's success. Members recognise the strength of a federation that balances diversity and unity, and support thoughtful reform to reflect agriculture's evolving landscape. By refining categories, voting rights, and engagement pathways, NFF can ensure fair representation while maintaining strategic coherence. Modernising the structure has the potential to strengthen member confidence, foster shared ownership, and ensure the Federation remains a credible, capable, and collaborative voice for Australian agriculture.

Discussion points for members:

- What should determine eligibility for membership in NFF? Should it be based on size, national presence, contribution to advocacy, or something else?
- Are the current membership categories (State, Commodity, Associate) still relevant and fit for purpose? Are there new categories or subcategories that should be introduced?
- Should voting rights be linked more explicitly to financial contribution, engagement, or some other metric? Should all members have equal voting rights on all matters?
- How can NFF better accommodate organisations that straddle traditional membership categories or operate across jurisdictions?
- How can we improve transparency and trust in how membership decisions are made and how member input is reflected in policy development?



Discussion Point

Properly Resourcing The National Body

The financial foundation of NFF is inextricably linked to its ability to deliver impactful, independent, and timely advocacy. Ensuring that NFF is well-resourced is not simply a matter of internal financial stability, it is essential to upholding the Federation's credibility, influence, and leadership on behalf of the agricultural sector. Across recent consultation processes, including in a 2024 survey reviewing national advocacy, members were clear – a strong NFF requires strong funding.

There is widespread agreement among members that NFF plays a unique and valuable role in Australian agriculture. NFF provides a respected voice in Canberra, leads national campaigns on critical issues, and connects diverse interests across the sector. These functions, however, come with substantial operational costs. From maintaining expert policy teams to executing strategic communications and government relations, delivering on NFF's mandate requires a level of resourcing that cannot be met through minimal contributions alone.

The Australian Farm Institute (AFI) report *The evolution of agricultural advocacy* highlighted that agricultural advocacy is a public good, its benefits are shared across the sector, regardless of contribution. This fundamental economic reality makes sustainably funding advocacy efforts an ongoing challenge for all representative organisations.

The current fee structure is governed by NFF Constitution and detailed in NFF Regulations. It provides for a differential model, reflecting the diversity of member size and capacity to pay. For State Members, fees are scaled according to membership income; for Commodity Councils, somewhat based on Gross Value of Production (GVP); and for Associate Members, a tiered structure applies varying fees and associated rights aligned to their turnover. This structure reflects the principle that organisations should contribute in proportion to their scale and strategic interest in national advocacy.

Effective national advocacy requires more than the minimum. Members recognise that a fair, transparent fee model must reflect both capacity and commitment, ensuring every contribution supports the Federation's strength, credibility, and ability to meet the complex challenges facing Australian agriculture.

Of NFF's core advocacy budget of approximately \$3.4 million, only around 60% is funded through membership fees. The remainder is covered by project and

sponsorship income. This reliance on non-member revenue raises important questions about the sustainability of NFF's funding model and the potential for perceived or actual compromise in its advocacy independence. It also prompts reflection on the value members receive, as they currently contribute well below the full cost of delivering core services. This may justify a broader conversation about whether membership fees should be increased to better reflect the true cost of representation.

Going forward, membership fees need to be set at a level that sustainably funds the core activities of NFF (including policy development, advocacy, communication, and member engagement), but also be responsive to the real-world circumstances facing member organisations. In particular, any new model should recognise that external pressures such as drought, flood, and commodity downturns can significantly affect an organisation's ability to pay in a given year. Some members argue the emphasis should be on current ability to pay, rather than theoretical capacity based on historical or structural indicators. They say this approach supports equity and strengthens the Federation by enabling all members to remain active and engaged, even during challenging periods. Incorporating this principle into the fee model, potentially through hardship provisions or temporary adjustments, could help ensure NFF remains inclusive, stable, and truly reflective of the agricultural sector it represents, particularly when national advocacy is needed most.

As highlighted in consultation feedback and reform documents including *NFF Reform Roadmap – United Advocacy Stronger Outcomes* paper and the *2014 Streamline And Strengthen Review*, concerns remain about transparency, equity, and strategic alignment. Some members have noted inconsistencies in how fees are assessed, or gaps in how value is articulated. Others have called for greater clarity about what their fees fund and how that translates into influence within the Federation.

At the heart of the discussion is a fundamental truth: a lowest-common-denominator approach to fees is unlikely to provide the resources necessary for NFF to function at the level members expect. While affordability should be considered, so too the strategic value of advocacy and the cost of failing to meet national challenges need to be factored into the design of any new fee schedule. As policy, public scrutiny, and stakeholder complexity grow, the Federation's capacity needs to grow with them.

Feedback suggests that members support the idea of maintaining a differential fee structure, but with refinements that improve fairness and transparency. This includes reassessing how financial capacity is measured, ensuring consistency in assessment, and linking contributions more directly to tangible benefits and representation.

There is particular interest in setting clearer expectations around the minimum financial contribution required to hold voting rights within NFF. Members are seeking greater clarity and fairness to ensure that all participating organisations contribute meaningfully, both financially and strategically, to the collective effort of national advocacy, reinforcing shared responsibility and the integrity of the representative structure.

The current regulations state that State Member fees range from \$44,000 to \$500,000 depending on membership income (no member currently pays at the higher rate); Commodity Council fees are based on commodity GVP, with a minimum of \$44,000 and maximum of \$220,000; and associate Member fees begin at \$5,500 and vary depending on their classification.

These levels were designed to reflect the broad financial landscape of the sector, but they have not kept pace with inflation, rising operational costs, or the strategic demands now placed on NFF. A periodic review of fee bands, possibly linked to CPI or sector growth metrics, could provide a more adaptive and forward-looking mechanism.

There is ongoing discussion about the perceived duplication of fees paid by SFOs to both their national Commodity Councils and to NFF, particularly as some Commodity Councils are also members of NFF. While these concerns are acknowledged, it is important to recognise that this is not a matter for NFF to resolve. NFF cannot determine or influence the fee structures set by independent Commodity Councils. Each organisation has its own governance and funding arrangements, and any financial relationships between SFOs and Commodity Councils has to be managed directly between those parties. NFF's focus should be on ensuring transparency in its own membership framework and providing value through coordinated, member-driven national advocacy.

While SFO concerns about fee duplication (i.e. payments to NFF and Commodity Councils) are understood, NFF's role is to provide transparent, member-driven advocacy, not to set fees for independent bodies such as the Commodity Councils. Respecting organisational autonomy is key to ensuring stronger relationships and a united voice for Australian agriculture.

NFF Reform Roadmap proposes developing a more transparent and consistent methodology for determining fees, ideally supported by a published framework. This could include clear criteria for each member category, articulation of the services and advocacy provided at different tiers, and an annual report on how membership contributions are used. Members have indicated that greater clarity in this area would help reinforce the value proposition and support continued investment.

Another suggestion has been the introduction of a voluntary “advocacy levy” or campaign-specific contribution scheme. This would allow members to contribute above their base fee towards high-priority initiatives, such as sector-wide campaigns or emergency advocacy responses. Such a mechanism could help mobilise additional resources while demonstrating collective commitment to critical issues.

Several members have also called for improved communication on how membership fees link to outcomes. There is strong support for case studies, infographics, and briefings that demonstrate where NFF’s influence has led to policy wins or protected farm business interests. These narratives can reinforce the value of advocacy and help justify fees internally within member organisations.

Another area for improvement is consistency in invoicing, timing, and budgeting alignment. Some members noted that misalignment between their internal financial year and NFF’s fee cycle can create cashflow or approval issues. More tailored billing options or multi-year agreements could help address this, while also improving predictability for NFF’s own planning.

Importantly, the issue of membership fees should not be seen in isolation. It is directly tied to governance, influence, representation, and advocacy impact. Members have expressed support for a model where fees reflect not just capacity to pay, but also the level of engagement, leadership contribution, and alignment with national strategy. In this way, funding becomes a tool for empowerment, not exclusion.

The NFF Board is committed to pursuing greater transparency in how membership fees are calculated each year through the reform process. This could include providing clear explanations of the methodology, the principles guiding fee structures, and how member contributions support core activities. The aim would be to build trust, support fairness, and ensure all members understand how their investment drives collective outcomes.

Members agree that NFF must be well-resourced if it is to deliver on its mandate. A fair, transparent, and adaptive fee model is central to this. While some members have limited capacity to contribute at higher levels, all members recognise that strong national advocacy requires meaningful investment. They say reform should aim to strike a balance: respecting diversity of size and circumstance, while also upholding shared responsibility for the future of Australian agriculture.

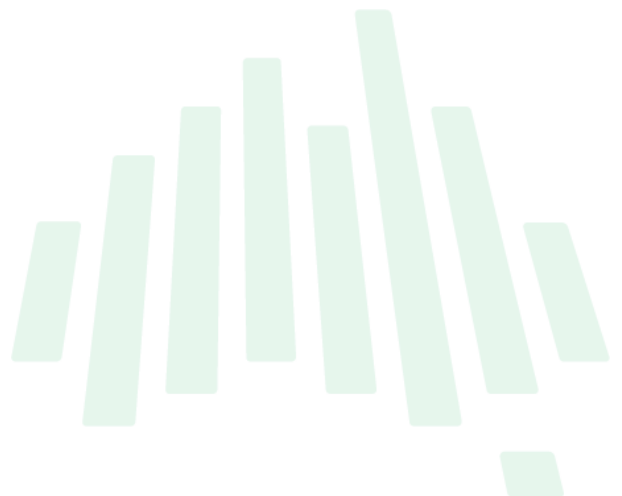
The NFF Board is committed to working closely with members to refine the membership fee structure in a way that reflects both member expectations and the economic realities of the sector. By drawing on member advice and guidance, NFF can strengthen its financial sustainability, foster deeper engagement, and enhance its influence well into the future.

Conclusion —

A strong NFF depends on fair, transparent, and sustainable funding. Members recognise that impactful advocacy requires meaningful investment. Refining the fee model to better reflect capacity, engagement, and strategic alignment will ensure the Federation remains influential and resilient. Reform could enhance equity, reinforce the value proposition, and support shared responsibility. With member-led oversight and clear communication, NFF could build the financial foundation needed to advocate effectively for Australian agriculture now and into the future.

Discussion points for members:

- How should financial capacity be measured and verified when setting membership fees?
- Should fee structures include automatic adjustments for inflation or sector growth?
- What mechanisms could be used to link fees more clearly to advocacy outcomes?
- Would you support the introduction of voluntary advocacy levies or campaign-based contributions?
- What transparency measures would help you better understand how fees are allocated and spent?
- Should members who contribute above a certain threshold receive enhanced representation or recognition?
- How can we ensure smaller members are not excluded while maintaining overall financial sustainability?



Discussion Point

Effective Member-Driven Advocacy

At the heart of NFF lies a foundational principle: policy advocacy must be shaped, driven, and owned by its members. As the national voice for Australian farmers, NFF operates within a federated model that draws strength from its diversity of State Farming Organisations (SFOs), national commodity councils, and associate members. In this context, reinforcing member-driven advocacy is a strategic imperative.

It is possible to overlook, and indeed underestimate, the role of NFF in the nation's political and economic debate. Parliamentarians, departmental officials and the media regard NFF as one of Australia's five major employer organisations, standing alongside the Business Council of Australia (BCA), the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), the Australian Industry Group (Ai Group), and the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA). This is a position built upon a long-standing reputation for member-driven evidence-based policy, and it's one that should be preserved so NFF can effectively represent farmers.

Member-driven advocacy is central to NFF's credibility, influence, and unity. The need for national cohesion in agricultural advocacy has never been more urgent. External challenges such as climate volatility, shifting trade dynamics, workforce disruption, and rising social expectations are compounded by a competitive and often fragmented domestic advocacy environment. These factors underscore the importance of a coherent and respected voice that draws its authority from grassroots consensus and sector-wide representation.

Effective consultation processes are structured, inclusive, and timely. Survey results from the national advocacy review reveal member concerns about the pace of reform, ambiguity in NFF's role, and perceived inequities in influence relative to membership contributions. Members desire a national body that clearly articulates roles and responsibilities, sets transparent processes for input, and maintains legitimacy through broad participation.

In a time of growing complexity and external pressure, NFF's legitimacy depends on a unified, member-driven voice. Strength lies in structured, inclusive consultation that reflects grassroots consensus and delivers fair, transparent advocacy shaped by all corners of Australian agriculture.

The current federated model requires recalibration. While diversity of views is a strength, it can dilute impact if not harnessed through disciplined consultation and coordinated messaging. For NFF to continue to command authority across

government and industry, its policy platforms must demonstrably reflect the shared priorities of members.

The AFI report entitled *The evolution of agricultural advocacy* reinforces this need. It identifies engagement, competition for attention, and the influence of well-resourced social groups as critical risks to agricultural advocacy. A stronger NFF must act as a platform, not just a peak body, supporting members to project unified messages without subsuming their autonomy. This requires genuine empowerment of members, rather than superficial engagement.

The policy committees and the Members' Council are the two principal governance bodies through which members shape and authorise NFF policy. Strengthening their role is vital to institutionalising member-driven advocacy.

The Members' Council, as outlined in NFF Constitution, is the ultimate policy-making authority. Its deliberations provide the mandate for advocacy priorities, strategic direction, and formal policy positions. Reforms under the "United Advocacy, Stronger Outcomes" initiative can affirm the centrality of the Members' Council, embedding member control into the core of NFF's governance.

However, structural reforms alone may not be sufficient. Operational practices can also evolve. The Members' Council can be better briefed, prepared, and supported in its decision-making. This can include clearer policy pathways from committees to Council, timely distribution of draft policies for consideration, and an agreed framework for testing consensus across members.

Policy committees can play a foundational role. They are the engine rooms of technical expertise and policy development. However, feedback has pointed to variability in effectiveness across committees. Some are well-functioning centres of excellence, while others lack momentum or clear mandates.

To address this, each committee could have more clearly defined terms of reference, consistent chairing and secretariat support, and formalised processes for progressing issues. There could be routine reporting from policy committees to the Members' Council, enabling the latter to make informed decisions based on member-driven inputs. The participation of committee chairs in Council meetings could also help ensure alignment and accountability.

A reciprocal relationship between policy committees and member organisations could lift performance. Committees could advise the Members' Council as member advocates if investment in communication, workflows, and support systems were increased.

Stronger policy outcomes could come from clear terms of reference, consistent leadership, and genuine two-way engagement. When committees are well-supported and connected to members, they become a powerful conduit for grassroots input and nationally coordinated decision-making.

A core challenge facing any member-led organisation is balancing broad consultation with the need for rapid policy responses to emerging issues. In recent years, NFF has confronted time-sensitive events including trade disruptions, biosecurity threats, and natural disasters. In these instances, responsiveness was essential to safeguarding farmers' interests.

NFF Constitution and Regulations provide a framework for deliberation, but they are primarily structured around scheduled meetings and consensus processes. While this supports legitimacy, it may hinder responsiveness. To address this, a tiered policy response mechanism has been suggested.

This mechanism could retain the primacy of the Members' Council while allowing for delegated authority to respond in urgent circumstances. For example, the Council could pre-authorise the Board or a designated policy subcommittee to act within defined parameters when an immediate advocacy response is required.

To strengthen both legitimacy and agility, NFF needs to protect the primacy of the Member Council while enabling timely responses to urgent challenges. A clear, delegated authority framework can help ensure swift advocacy when needed—without compromising transparency, accountability, or member oversight.

Clear thresholds for triggering this mechanism should be considered. These could include nationally significant events, urgent legislative developments, or international crises requiring representation. Any action taken under delegated authority could be reported to the Members' Council at the earliest opportunity, with provision for retrospective endorsement, amendment, or withdrawal.

This approach could strengthen NFF's capacity to act with agility, without compromising its democratic foundations. Other federated advocacy organisations, including many overseas, operate successfully under dual-authority models, enabling nimble engagement while preserving member control over longer-term policy.

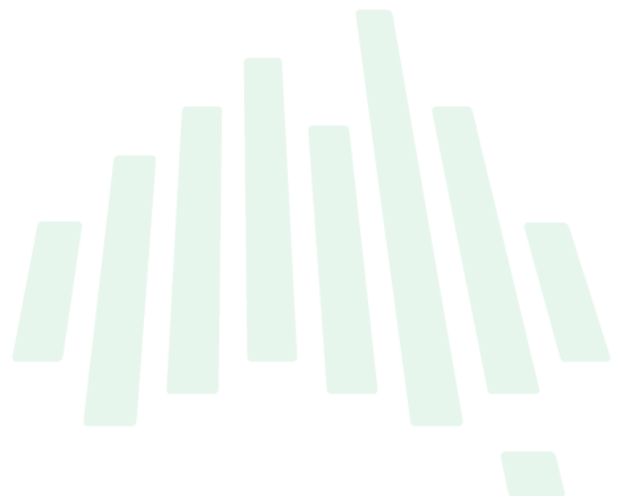
Agreed communication protocols can enhance transparency. When expedited processes are invoked, members can be alerted to what actions were taken on an urgent basis. Safeguards such as these can build trust in the process and reinforce NFF's accountability to its members.

Conclusion —

Strengthening member-driven advocacy requires NFF to adapt its structures, behaviours, and processes. A more empowered Members' Council, supported by effective policy committees and agile decision-making, could ensure NFF remains a respected and relevant voice for Australian farmers. Success will depend on continued consultation, shared commitment, and collective confidence in the path forward.

Discussion Points —

- How can the Members' Council be supported to provide timely and authoritative policy positions without compromising its representative role?
- What improvements are needed to ensure policy committees are consistently effective and responsive to member priorities?
- Should NFF adopt a policy framework to expedite urgent issues, and what safeguards would be required to maintain trust in that process?
- How can NFF better articulate and demonstrate the value of membership and engagement in national advocacy?
- What tools, platforms, or support might help member organisations more actively contribute to and lead national advocacy efforts?



The Reform Pathway Towards United Advocacy & Stronger Outcomes

The next phase of work under NFF *Reform Roadmap – United Advocacy, Stronger Outcomes* represents a significant opportunity for members to shape the future of Australia's peak agricultural representative body. This stage builds on more than eighteen months of substantial member engagement, reflection, and analysis undertaken throughout 2024 and 2025.

Past activities included structured consultations with member organisations, a national membership survey, and detailed responses to discussion papers. Crucially, they have also been informed by external reviews and expert insights, particularly the Australian Farm Institute (AFI) landmark report, *The Evolution of Agricultural Advocacy*, which highlighted the need for more unified, transparent, and inclusive advocacy structures.

To support a fair and productive dialogue, the process will be facilitated by Randall Pearce, Principal of *Think Insight Advice*. He will draw on multiple forms of input—written commentary, one-on-one discussions, and group workshops—to surface ideas, navigate tensions, and help members identify common ground. His role is to support a respectful and open process, ensuring all members can contribute meaningfully to the conversation.

Randall Pearce is a specialist consultant in governance, strategy, and stakeholder engagement for board-led, purpose-driven organisations. As Principal of THINK: Insight & Advice since 2007, he has supported dozens of associations, charities, and government bodies to align governance with purpose and strategy. Randall is an accredited coach and trained facilitator with qualifications from Harvard, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and the Governance Institute of Australia. He is known for his deep listening, inclusive facilitation, and ability to bring governance to life for members and stakeholders.

NFF Board is fully committed to a genuinely member-driven reform process. This discussion paper is intended solely as a starting point, not a predetermined agenda. The issues it canvases are based on feedback to date, not conclusions. There are no preconceptions about the direction or outcome; it will be shaped by members through robust, inclusive deliberation.

Importantly, the process is being undertaken in a spirit of good faith and with a shared belief in the importance of national coordination. Members are encouraged to engage openly and constructively, having regard to the board and divergent views. While

perspectives may differ, the underlying goal is the same: to ensure NFF remains a strong, focused, and legitimate voice for Australian agriculture, guided by its members and grounded in a renewed commitment to unity and impact.

Reform Timeline —

NFF Members Council (May 2025):

- Provide details on the pathway, key timeframes and expected outcomes.
- Working group meeting to confirm the reform priorities.

Members & Stakeholder Consultations (June & July 2025):

- Facilitated discussions with members on the reform priorities to identify opportunities, tension points and reform options.
- External stakeholder engagement to help identify perceptions about strengths and weaknesses in the current structure .

Reform Options Development (July & August 2025):

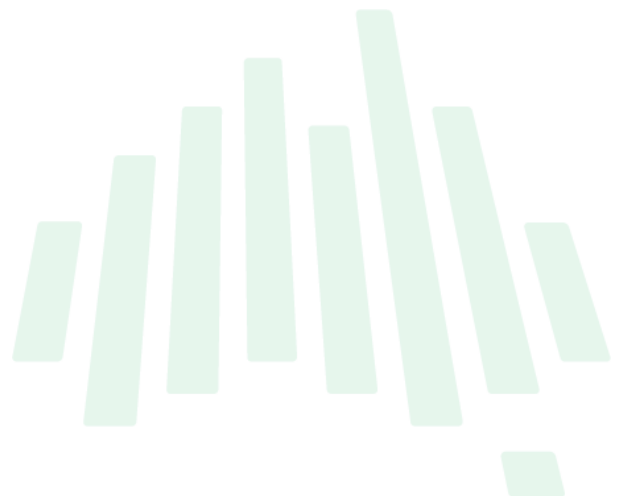
Co-design workshop with the NFF Board and key members to refine reform options to governance, membership structures and member-driven policy advocacy.

- The priority will be on developing an agreed set of reforms that can be presented to members.

Member Endorsement (September & October 2025):

- The agreed reforms will be overviewed at the AgXchange conference.
- The final suite of reforms will be presented to members for endorsement at

the annual generalmeeting/special general meeting



Members

National Farmers Federation

Cattle Australia Australian Livestock & Property Agents Association Soils for Life
Australian Organic Seafood Industry Australia Queensland Farmers' Federation
Australian Livestock Exporters' Council Beechworth Honey Cotton Australia
Australian Wild Game Industry Council GrainGrowers NSW Irrigators Council
Australian Veterinary Association Australian Pork Sheep Producers Australia
Ricegrowers' Association of Australia Seafood Industry Australia TasFarmers
Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association AgForce Queensland Farmers
NRM Regions Australia Farmers for Climate Action Primary Employers Tasmania
Goat Industry Council of Australia NFF Horticulture Council WA Farmers
Pastoralists Association of West Darling Australian Forest Products Association
Australian Cane Growers' Council Australian Chicken Growers Council
Queensland Farmers' Federation Sheep Producers Australia Primary Producers SA
Australian Dairy Farmers NSW Farmers Victorian Farmers' Federation
WoolProducers Australia



National Farmers' Federation

Street Address: Level 3 – 16-18 Brisbane Avenue, Barton, ACT, 2000

Postal Address: Locked Bag 9, Kingston, ACT, 2604

t: +61 2 6269 5666 e: reception@nff.org.au

www.nff.org.au