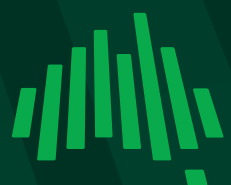


Submission to Safe Work Australia
*Best Practice Review of the Model
Work Health and Safety Laws*
Submission by National Farmers Federation

21 October 2025



The National Farmers' Federation

The National Farmers' Federation (**NFF**) is the voice of Australian farmers.

We were established in 1979 as the national peak body representing farmers and more broadly, agriculture across Australia. The NFF's membership comprises all of Australia's major agricultural commodities across the breadth and the length of the supply chain.

Operating under a federated structure, individual farmers join their respective state farm organisation and/or national commodity council. These organisations form the NFF.

The NFF represents Australian agriculture on national and foreign policy issues including workplace relations, trade and natural resource management. Our members complement this work through the delivery of direct 'grass roots' member services as well as state-based policy and commodity-specific interests.

NFF Member Organisations



Executive Summary

The NFF welcomes Safe Work Australia's Best Practice Review of the Model Work Health and Safety (**WHS**) Laws and supports efforts to ensure the WHS framework remains contemporary, effective, and practical for all industries.

Agriculture is one of the nation's highest-risk sectors, yet also one of the most diverse. It spans family farms, small enterprises, and complex supply chains operating across multiple jurisdictions. Achieving safer outcomes in this environment requires regulation that is proportionate, evidence-based, and co-designed with industry.

The NFF supports the principles of harmonisation, consistency, and continuous improvement. However, the sector cautions that excessive prescription, duplication, or urban-centric regulation risks undermining compliance and detracting from genuine safety outcomes.

Harmonisation and National Consistency

Key Issues

The agricultural sector supports a nationally consistent WHS framework that promotes clarity, efficiency, and fairness across jurisdictions. However, harmonisation must remain practical and avoid imposing overly restrictive rules without proven safety benefits. Harmonisation must:

- Improve clarity and reduce red tape.
- Provide alignment in licensing and enforcement that supports safer, simpler compliance.
- Stay evidence-based and proportionate.
- Differences such as telehandler licensing (Vic vs NSW) show the need for flexibility.
- National standards should only apply where clear safety gains are demonstrated.

Recommendations

- Maintain national consistency, limiting jurisdictional variations to justified, evidence-based cases.
- Introduce an Agriculture Annex or National Code of Practice addressing key farm hazards such as mobile plant, lone work, and seasonal labour

- Require public consultation and impact assessment before any state-based departures.
- Emphasise education-first enforcement, using improvement notices before prosecution.

Proportionate and Practical Regulation

Key Issues

Agriculture's diversity means one-size-fits-all regulation is ineffective. Family enterprises, small businesses, and seasonal contractors face unique challenges in applying industrial-style WHS laws including the following:

- Workplace diversity - Farm work often involves family and volunteer labour, blurred home/work boundaries, and variable risks.
- Administrative complexity - Excessive paperwork and prescriptive rules deter compliance rather than improve safety.
- Communication access - Remote settings require flexible, practical compliance tools.

Recommendations

- Keep WHS laws outcomes-based rather than process-heavy.
- Provide plain-English guidance, templates, and induction resources readily accessible to small businesses.
- Ensure all WHS materials are freely available, avoiding technical or paywalled requirements.

Education and Behavioural Change

Key Issues

All contributing organisations emphasise that education, empowerment, and behavioural change are the most effective drivers of long-term safety improvement. Regulation sets the baseline; education creates understanding and accountability.

- Embed safety education in industry programs such as Farmsafe and Cotton myBMP.

- Deliver training through mobile assessors, self-paced and blended learning, suitable for regional contexts.
- Develop translated and pictorial resources for migrant and seasonal workers.

Recommendations

- Establish a national farm safety education fund to support sector-specific campaigns.
- Integrate WHS modules into existing farm business management programs.
- Promote peer-based learning networks to encourage sustained cultural change.

Emerging and Sector-Specific Risks

Key Issues

1. Psychosocial Hazards and Mental Health

The inclusion of psychosocial hazards under WHS laws is welcomed, but agriculture requires tailored guidance recognising home–work overlap, financial stress, and rural isolation.

Recommendations

- Prioritise education and capacity-building over punitive compliance.
- Co-design rural-specific materials with partners such as the National Centre for Farmer Health and Rural Aid.
- Promote peer support through mental health literacy, and early help-seeking through community channels.

2. Chemical Exposure and Workplace Exposure Limits

The transition from Workplace Exposure Standards (**WES**) to Workplace Exposure Limits (**WEL**) is supported in principle. However, the proposed reduction in phosphine limits may cause disproportionate impacts across the grain supply chain, including longer ventilation times and delivery rejections.

Recommendations

- Conduct full impact assessments prior to adopting new WELs.
- Work with GRDC and industry to ensure compliance measures are practical and evidence-based

3. Machinery and Licensing

Regulations should reflect agricultural conditions, not urban-industrial models. Forklift and telehandler licensing in farm settings requires flexibility.

Recommendations

- Trial a rural-specific forklift accreditation that accounts for uneven terrain and open-air operation.

4. Fatigue, Climate and Technology

Emerging challenges include fatigue during seasonal peaks, exposure to extreme weather, and psychosocial risks linked to new technologies.

Recommendations

- Develop fatigue management guidance based on flexible work cycles, not rigid hours.
- Publish heat stress protocols with practical hydration and rest guidance.

Codes of Practice and Australian Standards

Key Issues

Complexity, cost, and inaccessibility of Australian Standards remain significant barriers for small and medium farm businesses.

- Many Standards are behind paywalls and written in highly technical language making them difficult to understand.
- Frequent updates cause uncertainty and risk inadvertent non-compliance.

Recommendations

- Remove or minimise references to external Standards in WHS Regulations.

- Incorporate core obligations directly into Regulations in plain language.
- Ensure all referenced Standards are free to access.
- Maintain Codes of Practice as flexible guidance, but not mandatory compliance documents.

Compliance, Enforcement, and Right of Entry

Key Issues

1. Enforcement Approach

Agriculture supports strong, fair enforcement by independent regulators. Inspectors must understand agricultural realities, i.e. remoteness, seasonality, and family labour, to apply proportionate risk-based approaches.

Recommendations

- Focus on education before penalties.
- Require inspectorate training on agricultural operations.
- Encourage regulator–industry partnerships to co-design compliance tools.

2. Right of Entry and Union Powers

Farm workplaces often double as private homes. Expanded union-style Right of Entry powers are inappropriate and risk unnecessary intrusion.

Recommendations

- Retain regulator-led inspection authority only.
- Maintain worker engagement through models such as direct consultation and toolbox talks, not unionised models.
- Ensure prosecutions remain the responsibility of regulators and the DPP, not third parties.

Recommendations Summary

Theme	Key Recommendations
Harmonisation	Maintain national consistency; introduce agriculture-specific annexes; consult before state variations.
Licensing	Pilot rural forklift accreditation; align telehandler rules with flexibility.
Standards	Remove or make referenced Standards free and accessible.
Enforcement	Education-first model; no union-style right of entry; regulator-led prosecution.
Psychosocial Risks	Deliver tailored rural guidance; co-design with mental health partners.
Emerging Risks	Address fatigue, heat stress, chemicals, and technology with practical guidance.
Education	Fund farm-specific training and awareness programs; use blended and mobile delivery.
Data & Evidence	Improve collection of agricultural WHS data, including near-miss and trend analysis.
Remoteness	Recognise remoteness as a WHS factor, embed it as a legitimate consideration in enforcement and compliance guidance.

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Key Recommendations</u>
Connectivity	Support connectivity investment (e.g. Starlink, satellite systems) as an enabler of safe lone working and fatigue management.
Streamline	Streamline overlapping frameworks across WHS, animal welfare, and biosecurity to reduce duplication.
Rural Assistances	Establish a rural WHS working group under Safe Work Australia to monitor emerging agricultural risks and review regulatory impacts on remote operations.



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