



13 April 2026

RE: National Statement on First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry* (Department) regarding the draft *National Statement on First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry* (National Statement). We acknowledge the significant work undertaken to-date on the development of this draft National Statement and thank the Department for their continued engagement with industry.

As stated in our 2024 and 2025 submissions to this process, the NFF is a genuine and willing partner in supporting the advancement of Indigenous peoples in the agriculture, fisheries, and forestry sector. We consider that a National Statement, properly consulted and carefully framed, can play a role in supporting this advancement. Our prior submissions, Attachment 1 and 2 respectively, are to be read in conjunction with this submission.

Priority Areas

Leadership and Workforce

“Foster First Nations skills development, employment pathways, leadership opportunities, and participation in decision-making across the sector.”

The NFF supports this Intent. As previously affirmed, the NFF is of the view that capacity building, mentoring, and leadership programs are likely to have tangible benefit to the agriculture industry, and to Indigenous peoples within it.

The NFF supports efforts to utilise and expand existing government, industry, and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) initiatives to strengthen Indigenous workforce participation and leadership pathways, including within our member organisations and the NFF itself. This aligns with the priorities of the NFF *2030 Roadmap* in which Action 4.3.3 is to “Work with Indigenous leaders to grow opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in agriculture, including within industry leadership.”

This approach is further reinforced by the *NFF Indigenous Engagement – Principles and Focus Areas Paper* (NFF Principles Paper) adopted by the NFF Members' Council in November 2022, which states “The NFF, where appropriate, should work with members to increase engagement by Indigenous representatives in established agricultural advocacy structures, including into leadership roles.”

Referring specifically to First Nations “participation in decision-making across the sector”, the NFF believes established agricultural advocacy structures can be the primary mechanism for enabling this increased participation, as per the Enabling Opportunity to “... support participation in sector leadership and governance.”

The NFF has previously provided examples of industry programs that contribute toward the Enabling Opportunity to “Strengthen place-based, culturally informed pathways for skills development, education and employment across the value chain.” Further engagement on how these programs can be supported, strengthened, or expanded is strongly welcomed.

Finance and Business Support

“Improve access to fit-for-purpose finance and business support that consider economic, cultural, and structural barriers affecting First Nations participation across the sector.”

The NFF recognises the challenges affecting the ability of Indigenous agribusinesses to “[access] the finance, business support, and technical expertise needed to start, grow, or sustain



operations.” As stated in the draft National Statement, economic and structural barriers include the “complexities of communal land tenure, land rights, and limited access to collateral.” Prior submissions put forward by NFF discussed these items in detail including the complex interactions of multiple statutory frameworks and the parameters by which they operate within.

While the draft National Statement acknowledges challenges relating to “complexities of communal land tenure, land rights, and limited access to collateral”, the draft National Statement does not attempt to engage directly with, or alter, established land tenure arrangements. As previously stated, such measures would far exceed the boundaries and purpose of a National Statement. This must also remain the case in relation to later proposals in the draft National Statement to explore “self-determined opportunities to activate underutilised land and water assets through culturally informed planning, partnerships and enterprise pathways”, where the lack of clarity around the meaning and application of “underutilised” remains a concern for NFF.

NFF views other tangential processes including the current Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) Review of the *Future Acts Regime* as a more appropriate avenue to consider how Indigenous economic outcomes can be further realised under the *Native Title Act 1993*. NFF awaits the outcomes of this Review and will continue to engage to ensure reforms deliver a sustainable Native Title regime and tangible agricultural, economic, and regional benefits for all communities consistent with NFF 2030 Roadmap Action 2.4.3: “Partner with indigenous landholders on a sustainable Native Title regime.”

With regards to the Enabling Opportunities, as stated in our prior submissions, the NFF notes that Indigenous access to private capital can presently be achieved through a range of sophisticated and dedicated avenues such as special investment vehicles like the Regional Investment Corporation, Government grants, corporate Commonwealth entities, and/or other lender product types. These pathways remain accessible and while they deserve recognition, it is our view that they could be better leveraged and communicated to further strengthen Indigenous participation and development in the sector. We acknowledge alternative pathways may be needed to improve access to capital and business capability for Indigenous agribusinesses, including through the Enabling Opportunities that can help address the challenges outlined above.

Knowledge-Sharing and Safeguards

“Encourage two-way knowledge-sharing and ensure research and data practices respect Indigenous Data Sovereignty and protect Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.”

The NFF recognises the importance of two-way knowledge exchange, and we support practical and collaborative approaches that deliver improved outcomes across the sector. This includes fit-for-purpose research, transparent benefit-sharing, and meaningful involvement in decision-making practices.

We note that the recently released *Collective Research and Innovation Outcomes Report 2025* highlighted that across the 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs), 23 projects were undertaken in 2024-25 with a total expenditure of \$3.75 million. We support efforts to increase two-way knowledge-sharing, including the stated Enabling Opportunity to “Support First Nations-led RD&E across agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, and promote leading practice in ethical research standards, drawing on models such as the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research.”

The NFF, in its prior submission, supported considering adapting this Code of Ethics for agriculture, fisheries, and forestry contexts. The code sets out principles for consent, attribution, and cultural authority in research contexts. Extending its application to agribusiness partnerships would provide a recognised standard for ethical engagement. Similarly, sector-specific codes of practice could be developed for agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, setting clear expectations for how Indigenous knowledge can be accessed, applied, and acknowledged.



As previously stated, there is scope to support respectful and culturally informed sharing of Indigenous Knowledges through practical, non-statutory mechanisms. This aligns with the second Enabling Opportunity.

More broadly, we acknowledge the unique and significant complexity of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, particularly relating to the intersection of ICIP with existing regulatory regimes. This includes, for example, genetic resources, land management practices, and scientific innovation – areas already governed by State and Federal laws. For example, legislating new statutory ICIP protections over genetic material could limit existing rights of access and use by industry, particularly where biological resources are owned by State Governments on behalf of all citizens.

We welcome that the National Statement does not signal endorsement for new legislative frameworks for ICIP but proposes Enabling Opportunities that we believe may deliver further improvements in benefit-sharing, accountability, and uptake of ethical research practices.

The NFF does not have an established position on ICIP in agriculture. We welcome further discussion on these matters.

Indigenous Estate

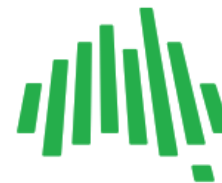
“Support First Nations peoples to exercise their rights and leverage opportunities that enable food and fibre production on the Indigenous Estate.”

We acknowledge that “Sector-wide development on the Indigenous Estate must navigate complex and overlapping tenure arrangements, creating uncertainty that can hinder or deter First Nations stakeholders and non-Indigenous partners from pursuing agribusiness opportunities.”

We agree that “Reducing barriers and providing clearer pathways will help enable opportunities on the Indigenous Estate where communities seek them.”

As stated in our response to both prior consultations and in other related consultations including those to the ALRC, establishing Indigenous Land-Use Agreements (ILUAs) remains a complex and resource-intensive process for non-Indigenous proponents, particularly in agriculture. One of the primary challenges that prohibits the realisation of economic opportunities on the Indigenous Estate includes the proper identification of Native Title representatives with which to engage. This complexity is further exacerbated by overlapping Native Title claims, inherent intricate governance structures, and limited support administrative and funding support mechanisms for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous proponents.

We therefore support the intent of the Enabling Opportunity to “Support clearer, more accessible information and regulatory settings, including reliable data, to help First Nations peoples navigate land and water tenure arrangements for agriculture, fisheries, and forestry.” However, the framing should not be limited to Indigenous users alone. Clearer and more accessible information and regulatory settings benefit all stakeholders engaging within the Indigenous Estate. It can also unlock new opportunities to grow the agriculture, fisheries, and forestry sectors, promote good faith collaboration, and provide greater certainty to producers. A broader framing is needed to reflect this shared need for transparency across all parties. The NFF supports “strengthening the infrastructure, technology, and services needed to enable sector activities on the Indigenous Estate.” Australian agriculture is heavily reliant on efficient transport networks to access global markets. However, this essential network is under growing strain – characterised by ageing infrastructure, underinvestment, and increasing impacts from climate-related events, not to mention the current impacts of access to fuel. The NFF supports increased investment in infrastructure that can enable agricultural development, including freight networks. Other critical infrastructure to enable sector activities on the Indigenous Estate includes connectivity.



Trade and Market Access

“Grow domestic opportunities and unlock international markets for First Nations producers and agribusinesses.”

The NFF supports efforts to improve market access for Australian agricultural exports of all types, including for First Nations producers and agribusinesses.

We particularly welcome recognition of the Indigenous Agricultural Product Framework Project (IAPFP) as part of an Enabling Opportunity relating to “authenticity, provenance and trusted supply chains”.

The NFF supports further consideration of options proposed through the IAPFP. An Indigenous agribusiness credential may, if properly developed and implemented, help to deliver upon the stated Intent of this priority area.

Government Coordination

“Ensure coherent whole-of-government decision making, minimise duplication, and provide clearer accountability for outcomes.”

We support joint government efforts to deliver greater coordination, transparency, and strategic policy alignment. While primarily government-focused, we note that some of the Enabling Opportunities may have additional benefits for industry. This includes, for example: “Strengthen sector-wide insights by improving the availability, consistency and use of data on First Nations participation to better inform government decision making, reporting and policy development.”

Improved data may help inform not just government decision making and policy development, but industry approaches.

Reporting and Accountability

The NFF supports annual reporting on the progress against the priority areas of the draft National Statement. Transparency of government priorities, decision-making, and implementation is crucial. The NFF believes industry must be closely engaged in this reporting process – ensuring that government efforts are not in isolation, but support industry approaches.