



The Hon. David Littleproud MP
Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management
Deputy Leader of the Nationals
Federal Member for Maranoa

Ref: MC20-012889

16 OCT 2020

Mayor David O'Loughlin
President
Australian Local Government Association
8 Geils Court
DEAKIN ACT 2600

Via email: alga@alga.asn.au

Dear Mayor O'Loughlin

Thank you for your letter of 21 August 2020 concerning motions submitted by your member Councils to the Australian Local Government Association for debate, which relate to my portfolio responsibilities. I appreciate the time you have taken to bring these matters to my attention. Please find following my response to the key areas of members' areas of interest.

Motions related to Agriculture

The Australian Government invests around \$1.1 billion a year in rural research and development (R&D) through the rural R&D corporations (RDCs), Cooperative Research Centres, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), universities, the R&D Tax Incentive and other programs. A key role of RDCs is to invest in R&D to address emerging issues, such as reduced water availability, for the industries they serve. AgriFutures Australia invests in R&D to support new and emerging industries, and to address challenges shared by multiple agricultural industries. Agrifutures Australia's Emerging National Rural Issues program is a key example of cross-RDC coordination and collaboration, alongside the National Farmers' Federation and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, to address shared issues.

Although those involved in the agricultural innovation system, including local governments, are already delivering benefits from innovation to levy payers and the broader Australian community, there is more work to be done. This is why the government has announced an ambitious reform agenda that will modernise Australia's agricultural innovation system and deliver the transformational productivity gains needed to achieve a \$100 billion sector by 2030. To deliver this reform agenda, the government will:

- Develop a National Agricultural Innovation Policy Statement, which will include new ambitious, mission-oriented innovation priorities to stimulate investment and action on important cross-sectoral issues

- Develop a Digital Foundations for Agriculture Strategy to set the foundations for digital growth and opportunity across the sector
- Work with RDCs to deliver digital platforms that support uptake of innovation and commercialisation outcomes
- Scale up agricultural innovation hubs and precincts and work with industry to strengthen extension, adoption and commercialisation

For more information about the National Agricultural Innovation Agenda, visit agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/innovation/national-ag-innovation-agenda.

The government recognises the important role of Australia's farming, food processing and packaging industries play in food security. Due to the work of these industries we have an abundant supply of top quality fresh food produced from all parts of the country that ensures there will be plenty of food on the table, with over 90 per cent of fresh produce sold in Australia domestically grown. Our strong food security position will help industry reach the goal of a \$100 billion agriculture industry by 2030. A report released by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences on 17 April 2020 found Australia is one of the most food secure countries in the world. The report found that despite temporary shortages of some food items in supermarkets in March and April, caused by an unexpected surge in demand, Australia does not have a food security problem. Australia produces substantially more food than it consumes, exporting about 70 per cent of agricultural production.

The government's 2020-21 Budget demonstrates strong commitment to rural and regional Australia, and support for the farm sector's ambition of a \$100 billion industry by 2030. For more information, visit nationals.org.au/ag2030.

Motions related to Drought

The government is listening to farmers, small businesses and regional communities. Drought is an enduring, regular feature of the Australian landscape, and while it is not a natural disaster, its impacts can be disastrous. That is why the government continues to step up for farmers and regional communities across the three pillars of our long-term drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan, committing more than \$10 billion in assistance for this drought, and for preparing Australia for future droughts. Managing drought requires a combined effort, and in 2018 the Australian, state, and territory governments signed the National Drought Agreement to create a collaborative environment for drought management.

The Future Drought Fund is an important part of the Government's Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan to deliver the support Australian farmers and communities need to be sustainable and productive. In 2020-21, eight foundational programs will be progressively rolled out delivering triple bottom line outcomes to build resilience to the impacts of drought and climate change. We are funding best practice business planning, information for decision-making, the adoption of research and technologies, and ways to improve the resilience of the soil and vegetation on which farmers depend. Communities will also benefit through improved regional planning, networks and leadership capabilities, and small-scale infrastructure projects. You can find more information regarding the Fund's current opportunities at agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/drought/future-drought-fund.

The government is taking immediate action to support those in drought. For example, through the Regional Investment Corporation over \$4 billion in concessional loans is being provided to assist farmers and regional small businesses. A range of initiatives are also supporting communities including a \$301 million commitment to the Drought Communities Programme Extension and funding for a drought-stream of the Building Better Regions Fund and targeted Roads to Recovery Projects. We are also supporting long-term resilience with \$5 billion committed to the Future Drought Fund to prepare Australia's farmers and regional communities for the next drought, including support for councils, small businesses and research and development. This expansion of government assistance will build capacity across our communities and build a more resilient Australia.

The 2020-21 Budget highlights the government's ongoing commitment to support drought affected farmers and communities.

Motions related to Emergency Management

I am pleased that the ALGA member councils appreciate the importance of well-coordinated efforts in meeting our collective responsibility to reduce the risk and impact of disasters and to build resilience at the national and local level. The government provides comprehensive support to the states including through the jointly funded Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to help with the costs of providing relief and recovery assistance to disaster affected communities and the National Partnership Agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction to enable the delivery of risk reduction initiatives within jurisdictions.

I also note that the government, in response to recent unprecedented disaster events, established the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster which has heard evidence in relation to several of the issues raised in your letter. The government will consider recommendations arising from the Royal Commission following its scheduled conclusion on 28 October 2020.

The 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires were unprecedented in their scale and impact. Over 3,000 homes were destroyed, 33 lives lost, over 1 billion animals perished and 12 million hectares burnt. The unprecedented extent of the fires required a new approach to relief and recovery in Australia. On 6 January 2020, the Prime Minister, the Hon. Scott Morrison MP, announced the establishment of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency (NBRA), to co-ordinate national recovery and to partner with state and territory governments, charities and industry to support community recovery. In addition, more than \$2 billion has been provided to support bushfire recovery through the National Bushfire Recovery Fund. This is in addition to funding and support provided through existing disaster support funding mechanisms. The NBRA continues to work with industry groups, charities, local and state governments to ensure support is reaching those with the greatest need.

Flaxleaf fleabane is widely naturalised across Australia, and is a major cropping weed in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales. The weed has become resistant to herbicides such as glyphosate in some areas. State and territory governments and landholders are primarily responsible for the on-ground management of flaxleaf fleabane,

and the Australian Local Government Association should raise its concerns regarding the control of the weed in relation to the New South Wales Biosecurity Act and Weed Action program directly with the New South Wales Government.

The government provides leadership and coordination, and invests in research and development, to improve established weed management where it is in the national interest, including through the Established Pest Animals and Weeds Management Pipeline Program. For more information, visit agriculture.gov.au/pests-diseases-weeds/pest-animals-and-weeds.

The 2020-21 Budget highlights the government's ongoing commitment to support recovery from bushfires and other natural disasters, and to build resilience for future events

The government provided funding to AgriFutures Australia, through rounds 2 (\$6.2 million (2016-20)) and 4 (\$7.49 million (2019-22)) of the Rural R&D for Profit program, to support research into potential biological control agents for major weeds including flaxleaf fleabane. Flaxleaf fleabane was approved as a candidate for biological control by all jurisdictions in 2017. More information can be found at agrifutures.com.au.

Thank you for raising this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'David Littleproud', written in a cursive style with several loops and flourishes.

DAVID LITTLEPROUD MP