

MEDIA RELEASE

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Election – Deans’ Council wants action on R, D and E

The Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture are calling on both sides of Parliament to address key issues that will contribute to a stronger agriculture and food sector and which will enable it to capitalise on the opportunities that are presenting internationally.

The ACDA is concerned that neither side is indicating how it might treat agriculture and has therefore put together a list of issues warranting the attention of the parties.

Key actions needed are:

- Bipartisan support for the National Food Plan with specific export targets, and the pathways to enable their achievement;
- Financial support for the Australian Academy of Science, in conjunction with the ACDA, to develop a Decadal Plan for Agricultural Science that includes drought resilience and water-use, biosecurity and crop protection . Such plan is critical to determining the human and physical resources needed to undertake the research agenda of the next decade This Plan would assess the current state of agricultural research in Australia, address the challenges and opportunities for agriculture over the next 10-15 years and outline the contributions research could make to meeting them. By taking a national view covering all sectors, the Plan would give the overview that is presently lacking.
- Increased investment by government in research, development and extension to provide the productivity and profitability boost needed to meet the National Food Plan targets. This should include increasing co-contribution to industry levies to 1.5:1, thereby allowing a proportion of such increase (0.3) to be allocated to the agricultural universities for extension activity akin to the land grant university system in the US. This would partially address the shortfall in extension expertise resulting from state agencies withdrawing from extension.
- Specific focus on research workforce career paths to attract, recruit and retain the best and brightest in the food industries. This would be achieved substantially by:

- raising postgraduate stipends to the minimum of the ARC linkage scholarship level, with tax-free provisions for top-up to 100% (currently 75%), annual increments and with superannuation entitlements added; and
- ensuring postdoctoral fellowships be a minimum of 5 years, with review at 3 years to determine ongoing prospects or termination at the completion of the fellowship.
- Government to drive a workforce strategy, including career paths, for the agricultural industries to support above targets through:
- continuing support for the Primary Industries Education Foundation (PIEF) as the trusted provider of industry teaching and learning materials to the primary and secondary education system nationally;
- providing leadership in professional accreditation and market accreditation in the agricultural and food industries;
- providing support for the career website, Career Harvest, the independent industry portal which supports and promotes professional career pathways in the food and fibre industries; and
- supporting further initiatives to increase Indigenous participation in vocational and higher agricultural education.

President of ACDA, Professor Iain Young said that “government action along these lines helps address the shortage of graduates in agriculture courses and will translate research into practice more quickly to meet the national need. It is in the national interest that there is action on these issues”

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