

**QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION – 2010 ELECTION POLICY ANALYSIS**

Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the peak rural industry organisation in Queensland, uniting 16 of the State's rural industry organisations, who collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers. QFF is a federation of the major intensive rural commodity organisations working on behalf of all primary producers and rural communities in an industry valued at \$13 billion. Through QFF, rural industry resources are pooled to ensure powerful representation and effective strategy development on important industry issues. QFF provides direction, leadership and representation on issues of common interest to the agricultural sector in Queensland. Our goal is to secure a sustainable and profitable future for our members, as a core and dynamic element of the economy.

This document is a summary of the major agricultural policy announcements of the 2010 Federal election campaign. It is not intended to cover all policies of the listed political parties, but it aims to serve as a broad guide to the major agricultural policies that stand to have an impact on Queensland's agricultural sector.

**MURRAY DARLING BASIN / WATER**

|                  | <b>Policy</b>  | <b>QFF comment</b>  |
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| <b>Coalition</b> | To fix the Menindee Lakes through reengineering solutions within one year.   | Queensland irrigators would welcome a swift resolution to the long-running problems at the Menindee Lakes as a more efficient system there would ease the pressure on the Northern regions of the Murray Darling Basin.   |
|                  | To purchase water from willing sellers to meet future reductions in water allocation.  | QFF welcomes the commitment to meet any reductions in water allocation by using the market to purchase water from willing sellers. To date, though, comparatively little water has been bought in Queensland, and as the Basin Plan was delayed until after the election, we do not know how much water is required to be purchased nor do we know whether enough money has been allocated for the purpose. |
|                  | \$200 million additional funding for the Strengthening Basin Communities program and \$300 million additional for water-efficient irrigation infrastructure. | Additional funding for infrastructure and communities goes at least some way to addressing the potentially devastating socioeconomic impact of the Basin Plan. The principle of acknowledging that these issues exist is a good start – funding them is even better.  |
|                  | ABARE/Productivity Commission study into the socioeconomic impact  | Such a study has the potential to bring the water reform process back   |

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|               | of the draft Basin Plan.  | to the original intent of the Water Act 2007 – and that is to fairly balance social, economic, and environmental needs. Timing of the study would be important if it is to influence the plan.  |
|               | \$500 million fund to secure water supplies for productive purposes, not exclusive to the Murray Darling Basin.   | QFF welcomes this commitment but looks forward to seeing more detail on implementation of this funding as it is unclear on what the priorities are.   |
| <b>Labor</b>  | Signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the Menindee Lakes, which will see a final feasibility assessment on changes at the Lakes.  | Mending the evaporation issues at the Menindee Lakes was listed as a top priority in 2007. Solutions to the inefficiencies at Menindee Lakes have been analysed to death and action is now required.  |
|               | To purchase water from willing sellers to meet future reductions in water allocation  | QFF welcomes the commitment to meet any reductions in water allocation by using the market to purchase water from willing sellers. To date, though, comparatively little water has been bought in Queensland and as the Basin Plan was delayed until after the election we do not know how much water is required to be purchased nor do we know whether enough money has been allocated for the purpose. |
|               | To buy one in every seven litres of water in the Murray Darling Basin.  | With the draft Basin Plan not released, QFF is unable to comment on the merits of buying one in every seven litres of irrigation water. Each litre purchased must be bought in the correct place strategically and used efficiently. This policy implies that the Labor Party knows the reductions called for by the Basin Plan.  |
| <b>Greens</b> | Establishing a national register of foreign ownership of land and water licences and investigate whether the Foreign Investment Review Board should consider whether purchases of agricultural land and water resources are in the national interest. | It is not clear what would constitute the 'national interest' to either qualify or disqualify a foreign investment in Australian land or water. Agriculture in Australia relies on international trade and foreign investment but the target and intent of this policy is unclear.  |

## **ENVIRONMENT**

|                  | <b>Policy</b>   | <b>QFF Comment</b>   |
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| <b>Coalition</b> | Mapping Australia's Agriculture Carbon Footprint. The \$8 million initiative will provide a 'third party' auditable map of the carbon foot print of all Australian agricultural | We need a better understanding of the green house gas emissions that emit from agricultural systems. The principle is sound, but a map that is not linked to any plan for its use or |

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|               | production, from paddock to plate, to be used to ensure that our primary products can compete in the global market place.  | the use of the data at a farm scale leaves this commitment lacking some comprehensive details.  |
|               | Green Tape Audit. The Coalition proposes to immediately commence an audit of all environmental legislation and regulation at Local, State and Federal levels. The Audit will also look at the impact environmental legislation can have on property rights   | The Queensland Government has already started this process. The concept is a good one, particularly if it were to delve into the interactions that occur at the property / business scale. Further detail is required though.   |
| <b>Labor</b>  | Labor has announced reforms to improve the regulation of agricultural and veterinary chemicals in Australia through the APVMA.<br>A key focus will be on the efficient assessment of lower-risk agricultural and veterinary (agvet) chemicals while ensuring that higher-risk agvet chemicals are assessed appropriately. Additional funding of \$5 million per year for three years will be provided to APVMA.  | QFF believes that the APVMA needs more funding, as does the critical control of use work conducted by State agencies. Driving for efficient risk assessment and management between registration and control of use is important to manage chemicals but also to encourage investment in modern chemistry. This funding is a positive start but further structural and procedural reform is also required. There remains some very concerning implications in some of the associated suggestions in this policy. |
| <b>Greens</b> | Genetically manipulated organisms (GMOs) policy. GMOs their products, and the chemicals used to manage them, pose unacceptable threats to ecosystems.<br>The Greens propose labelling of GM products and have spoken of a moratorium on the release of GMOs into the environment.  | A ban or moratorium would be a disastrous policy for agricultural research and development and it would threaten productivity growth targets. It would also dramatically curtail the inroads many industries have made in reducing the risks to the environment posed by agricultural production.   |
|               | Sustainable Agriculture Policy has identified 20 measures that the Greens propose to implement.<br>Some of the policy measures proposed include: recognition that long term sustainability of agriculture is essential for Australia's society, economy and environment. Supportive of an integrated approach to farm management and will address climatic variability and climate change through risk management strategies. Extension of incentive schemes to landholders implementing sustainable farming systems. The Greens will regulate for sustainable use of irrigation water and groundwater, including transparent pricing to | The principles outlined here are worthy of discussion although in some form or another most of them are already being implemented in existing Government programs. The headline issue of a Sustainable Agriculture policy is the "new" concept and certainly promising, but it is pure rhetoric only if it does not also indicate how this would be implemented. There is no funding, or hints towards how such a concept would be given "legs".  |

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|  | promote efficient water use.   |   |
|  | Animal policy - This policy proposes to minimise animal cruelty, protect native wildlife, end the live export of animals and no animal testing   | The wording of this policy is inconsistent with any knowledge of modern agricultural practices and the treatment of production animals. If fully implemented it would devastate many farming businesses.  |
|  | Biological Diversity policy<br>Habitat management including establishing buffer zones in high conservation areas, support programs that work with landowners to protect and restore nature conservation values on their land, and end broad scale clearing.  | A lot of rhetoric is used in this policy and much of it ignores existing measures to incorporate sustainable farming practices within sustainable management of natural resources. The policy appears to assume nothing has happened in the past. This therefore provides us with no information about how any of these principles would be implemented   |
|  | Environmental Principles policy<br>The Greens will provide incentives to individuals and businesses to promote sustainability, while phasing out tax breaks, subsidies and other government policies that stimulate waste, pollution and environmental degradation. They propose to phase out the use of persistent and bio-accumulative chemicals, and prevent the release of hazardous chemicals into the environment and rehabilitate affected environments where possible. | A lot of rhetoric is used in this policy and much of it ignores existing measures to manage these issues now within a profitable farming system that already operates under rigorous and comprehensive regulations. The policy appears to assume nothing has happened in the past. This therefore provides us with no information about how any of these principles would be implemented in the future. |
|  | Marine and Coastal policy<br>It is proposed that the Greens will work with the states & territories to reduce land-based sources of marine pollution, including pollution from diffuse urban and agricultural sources.   | The rhetoric in this policy is not backed up by any information about what would actually be done. The policy again assumes that no measures are in place to control these issues now. This is clearly incorrect.   |

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

|                  | <b>Policy</b>   | <b>QFF Comment</b>  |
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| <b>Coalition</b> | Proposal for direct action plan on the environment and climate change. A Coalition Government will establish an Emissions Reduction Fund to directly support CO2 emissions reduction activities by business and industry.<br>Through the Fund, the Coalition will call for tenders for projects that will:<br>1. reduce CO2 emissions;<br>2. deliver additional practical | QFF is encouraged by the recognition of the positive role that farmers can play in reducing greenhouse gas concentrations and storing carbon. This policy appears to propose an incentive based scheme for farmers to drive abatement from their sector. Although it is unclear how this would be achieved, it is important that the policy strives for no additional |

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|               | <p>environmental benefits;</p> <p>3. not result in price increases to consumers;</p> <p>4. protect Australian jobs; and</p> <p>5. not otherwise proceed without fund assistance.</p> <p>In order to achieve a five per cent reduction in CO2 emissions by 2020, the Fund will support direct action to hold our national CO2 emissions to a target of approximately 525 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent per annum by 2020. This will match Labor's five per cent emissions reductions target.</p> | <p>indirect costs to energy and energy related farm inputs. Further clarification is needed regarding the support of additional research and development (R&amp;D) in forming their agriculture carbon policy.</p>  |
| <b>Labor</b>  | <p>Revised Climate Change Policy released in July 2010 that proposes to convene a citizens' assembly that will be given a year to consider what action the Government should take on climate change.</p>   | <p>QFF does not support this concept.</p>   |
|               | <p>To open up the carbon trading market for Australian farmers so they can use parts of their land for sequestration. The government would fund facilitation for farmers to receive information on carbon farming, and also allow farmers and brokers to come together so they can sell carbon credits internationally.</p>  | <p>Further information and detail on this policy is required but it does recognise the important and positive role farmers can play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and, more importantly, it proposes a tangible and economically rewarding way to achieve it. This policy attempts to pick up many of the messages that having come from the agricultural and NRM sectors.</p> |
| <b>Greens</b> | <p>The Greens have long campaigned for an emissions trading scheme or carbon tax as part of a broad suite of policies to tackle the climate crisis. The polluter pays principle is fundamental to the Greens' principles. The Greens propose a target of 40% reduction on 1990 emissions levels by 2020.</p>   | <p>There is still a large gap between the Greens' emissions cuts target and what its policies could deliver. Research shows that a 40% cut would cripple many Australian agricultural industries, particularly without any thought for international markets, local implementation strategies or policies to manage the economic impacts on communities.</p>                          |

## **FOOD POLICY**

|                  | <b>Policy</b>  | <b>QFF Comment</b>  |
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| <b>Coalition</b> | <p>Commencing from 1 July 2011, the Coalition will increase the Commonwealth contribution to research and development from a matching contribution of \$1 for every \$1 raised by industry to \$1.25 for each of the 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations. This will</p> | <p>QFF believes that this is a small but very important step forward in redressing the slippage in research and development spending.</p> |

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|               | increase research funding by up to \$150 million over the next three years.  |   |
| <b>Labor</b>  | Labor would introduce a National Food Plan to better integrate food policy by looking at the food chain from the paddock to the plate. It would consider domestic and international food security; food safety and nutrition; issues which affect food affordability; and the sustainability of our food systems, from producers on the land, through to food businesses, manufacturers and retailers. | The idea of this plan is welcomed but to be serious, a plan must involve all the players and it must deal with the reality of producing more food and fibre with less energy, less water and less land in the future. Therefore the plan's development must be attached to funding for activities and policy reforms along all the critical points of production; including farming systems, infrastructure bottlenecks, processing, and research. There is also a concern that the proposal focuses too much on food processing. |
| <b>Greens</b> | The Greens would act to place a moratorium on coal seam gas mining and exploration until adequate environmental protections are in place.  | QFF recognises that the Greens have attempted to pick up on what is a critical threatening issue for many farming businesses. While the sentiment is noble the rhetoric provides no information for how this could be achieved, particularly as CSG developments are approved by State Governments. The policy also looks for a very narrowly focused solution to a very complex issue.   |

## **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER ISSUES**

|                  | <b>Policy</b>   | <b>QFF Comment</b>   |
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| <b>Coalition</b> | Inland rail line from Melbourne to Brisbane through the Central West of NSW. This rail line would reduce the time to move freight between Melbourne and Brisbane and reduce the growth of heavy vehicle traffic on highways. The project, with an estimated cost of \$4.7 billion, will be undertaken in partnership with the private sector. | Big picture infrastructure such as railways are badly needed to foster regional development. Greater rural access to train services for commodity transport is welcomed. |
|                  | Constructing the Toowoomba Bypass   | A welcome announcement for Toowoomba and the Darling Downs.  |
|                  | Double the number of Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships. 100 new regional Nurse Practitioner scholarships. A new \$10,000 annual bonus for Nurse Practitioners who practice in regional towns with no resident medical practitioner.<br>A new pilot scheme for rural and regional dentists.  | Rural and regional services are in decline and need further investment such as this.   |

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|               | The Coalition will offer unemployed jobseekers on NewStart Allowance a payment of up to \$6,000 if they move to a regional area to take up a job offer. In addition, employers will receive a subsidy of \$2,500 for employing an eligible jobseeker, paid at \$500 per week for the first five weeks of employment. | QFF welcomes initiatives that promote employment in regional areas.  |
| <b>Labor</b>  | For people on a Newstart or a working age payment without work for more than 12 months – if they take a job in an area and need to move, they will get \$6000 if they are moving a regional area. Their employer will receive an incentive of \$2500 for the job opportunity for that relocated job-seeker.          | QFF welcomes initiatives that promote employment in regional areas.  |
|               | Northern Australia Sustainable Futures Program to prepare northern Australia for future challenges, to identify and promote opportunities such as mining, tourism, and agriculture.  | This policy consists of numerous forums and committees. The need for action on this issue has arrived and it is unclear whether any would eventuate from this policy.                        |
|               | \$200 million to help build up to 15,000 more affordable homes in regional cities over three years and relieve pressure on our major capital cities, so that Australia can grow sustainably.   | Regional housing is an increasingly important issue in Queensland, and measures that improve housing capacity in regional areas – especially if implemented in mining regions – are welcome. |
| <b>Greens</b> | An Australian population policy must consider the geographical distribution of human settlements rather than just concentrate upon population size at the national level.  | It is unclear how this policy could be implemented.  |
|               | Introduce an estate tax with full provisions to protect the family farm, the family home and small business with a threshold of \$5 million as indexed from the year 2010.   | While farms would be exempted, the reintroduction of an estate tax (death duties) would be regressive for regional businesses and regional families.   |