

**SUBMISSION TO CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY  
REVIEW  
MAY 2011**

Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the peak body representing and uniting 16 of Queensland's rural industry organisations who work on behalf of primary producers across the state. QFF's mission is to secure a sustainable future for Queensland primary producers within a favourable social, economic and political environment by representing the common interests of its member organisations'. QFF's core business centres on resource security; water resources; environment and natural resources; industry development; economics; quarantine and trade.

Our goal is to secure a sustainable and profitable future for our members, as a core growth sector of the economy. Our members include:

- Australian Prawn Farmers' Association,
- CANEGROWERS,
- Cotton Australia,
- Growcom,
- Nursery and Garden Industry Queensland,
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association,
- Queensland Dairyfarmer's Organisation,
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council,
- Flower Association of Queensland Inc.,
- Pork Queensland Inc.,
- Queensland Aquaculture Industries Federation,
- Biological Farmers of Australia,
- Fitzroy Food and Fibre Association,
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Limited,
- Central Downs Irrigators Limited, and
- Burdekin River Irrigators Association.

## **1. National priorities in Caring for our Country**

*What is an effective and appropriate focus for the Australian Government to achieve an environment that is healthier, better protected, well-managed, and resilient and can provide essential ecosystem services in a changing climate?*

*How could the Australian Government's role in regional natural resource management planning be improved while retaining measurable strategic outcomes at a national scale?*

- Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF) and its members support the national priority areas identified for the Caring for our Country program and strongly support the inclusion of sustainable agricultural practices as a national priority.
- QFF supports the 5 year outcomes identified for the Sustainable Agriculture priority.
- QFF does not believe the mechanism used to direct CFOC funds towards national scale priorities has been appropriate (i.e. the national maps identifying investment areas for key issues). To provide a specific example, horticultural growers in the Condamine region of Queensland who have been motivated to address the most pressing NRM issues affecting their properties (wind erosion) – an issue that is

highlighted as a priority in the regional NRM plan – have been unable to access CFOC funding because the Condamine is not identified within the CFOC national wind erosion priority investment areas map.

- QFF is concerned that there appear to be inadequate linkages between national scale priorities and regional scale priorities identified within regional NRM plans. In particular, QFF questions the rigor and methodology behind the development of the maps.
- QFF members have invested substantial effort in ensuring critical industry issues were reflected in regional NRM plans and it is disappointing that there does not appear to be a stronger process to ensure regional NRM plan priorities underpin the identification of the national program priorities.

## **2. Setting annual priorities and ways of investing**

*What mix of investment timeframes and approaches would be most beneficial?*

*In what ways could the Australian Government improve the way it prioritises investments, encourages partnerships and identifies national priorities?*

*How could the packaging of Australian Government natural resource management activities be improved to provide administrative efficiencies for all partners or enhance outcomes?*

- QFF and its members support the concept of long term program goals supported by 5 year targets and annual business plans.
- QFF strongly advocates for 3 to 5 year horizons for project funding commitments to allow initiatives to gain traction. This is especially necessary when project teams (particularly a delivery or extension team) have to be built from scratch. For example, due to contract timeframes and deliverables the Horticulture Reef Rescue initiative would not have achieved what it did in the first 12 months without an established and strongly performing team which was essentially fully funded via other projects. This highlights the need for investment timeframes to be long enough to allow teams to establish, strengthen and reach a level of high performance.
- QFF believes that the success of the Reef Rescue initiative demonstrates the effectiveness of a matrix approach of regional NRM bodies partnering with industry organisations. QFF commends this model to the Australian Government as offering strong potential to foster and enhance effective partnerships for NRM project and program delivery.
- QFF's experience with the Reef Rescue initiative has highlighted the need for the Australian Government and potential project partners to acknowledge and

accommodate the need to invest in partnership development and healthy working relationships. To nurture strong partnerships, all players need to value each others' respective roles, demonstrate respect for each other and avoid circumstances where one partner seeks to wield power over others.

- QFF and its member's experiences in the CFOC program are that it is not well designed, overall, to foster partnership approaches. The process has been overly competitive and smaller scale, individual projects have been more likely to be successful in winning funds than larger scale, collaborative, partnership based projects. At times, it appeared investment decisions were made with inadequate regional knowledge.
- While QFF acknowledges areas for improvement in the Reef Rescue model for funding and delivery partnerships, we believe the model is strong in principle and overall design. Some of its key strengths include its capacity to support and sustain the development of partnerships between industry and community-based organisations, and that while it allows for regional specificity; it provides agricultural industries with consistency across the whole reef region. Delivery of services to landholders by industry organisations is a major part of the success of this model.
- QFF understands many of these issues have been explored in an evaluation of the Reef Rescue program conducted by Rachel Eberhard (pers. com.) and looks forward to reviewing this report.
- QFF strongly advocates that projects aimed at facilitating implementation of sustainable farm practices are approached through a business lens and provide for industry organisations to play a leading role in delivery of services or advice to landholders.
- QFF also recommends an increased emphasis on providing incentives for uptake of sustainable agricultural practices. This need not necessarily be in the form of direct financial incentives; often financial analysis of a new practice provided in a business case format is effective. This requires government investment in thorough economic assessment and evaluation of the recommended practice or other means of demonstrating its business benefits.
- QFF strongly encourages efforts to improve administrative efficiencies within CFOC. The misalignment of the delivery timeframe imperatives with the Australian Government's administrative process for the Reef Rescue program caused significant challenges and stress for the delivery partners. Delivery timeframes for the program were not adjusted in light of delays in finalising contracts and mobilising funds; accordingly several QFF members were required to initiate their projects and employ staff before an executed contract was in place and before the receipt of project funds. This mismatch continued through the life of the program and the final project payments were made four months after the last milestones report was completed. This is totally inconsistent with the (otherwise reasonable) requirements on deliverers to meet accountability and transparency measures. As a general rule, not-

for-profit organizations are not in a financial position to carry project operational costs when there are lengthy delays in the arrival of milestone payments.

- QFF is concerned that NRM in Northern Australia is identified as a national priority, but that priority investment mapping generally has excluded areas of northern Australia. Dedicated program areas and funding streams need to be developed to ensure CFOC funds flow to targeted activities in Northern Australia.

### **3. Community engagement and Landcare support**

*In your experience, what is the current state of community capacity to deliver natural resource management?*

*What are the best vehicles to deliver knowledge and capacity to program delivery agents?*

*What should be the respective roles of regional, state and Commonwealth government, industry and non-government organisations in building and maintaining community capacity for natural resource management?*

- QFF and its members strongly advocate for a greater emphasis on and investment in industry organisations playing a direct and leading role in delivering projects to landholders and producers.
- QFF believes that many industry organisations have strong capacity and expertise to deliver natural resource management programs and apply rigorous project/program design methods. Access to longer term and reliable funding arrangements would allow industry organisations to build and maintain highly performing program delivery teams.
- QFF recommends that program designs incorporate strong program planning at the front end, and adequate resources for the development of a strong technical base for extension services.
- There is a critical need to improve the information base available for identifying, promoting and facilitating implementation of sustainable farming practices. Future programs should ensure adequate investment is directed towards making greater use of R&D outcomes and preparing rigorous extension and training materials from them. In some cases there are years of results from R&D projects that have not been drawn into practical sustainable farm management programs and in other cases, the information base for developing more sustainable farm practices (eg nutrient management; soil management) is outdated and may not even be based on Australian research.
- To address this issue, QFF member Growcom has previously investigated opportunities to develop partnership arrangements with major research and

development agencies (such as the former Land & Water Australia) to establish a process for identifying relevant research outcomes and creating a rigorous technical base to underpin industry NRM programs/sustainability initiatives. An important component of stage one of the Queensland Government's Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative was the provision of time and resources for technical specialists to review available research and convert it into practical training and extension resources for use by the delivery team.

- Efficient methods of program/project reporting would contribute to improved capacity of delivery agents. Reporting requirements should be robust, but not excessive and reviewers and evaluators need to appreciate that NRM outcomes will not be immediate.

#### ***4. Engaging Indigenous Australians***

*What are the challenges for Indigenous groups under the current Caring for our Country model?*

*In what ways could the Australian Government improve Indigenous Australian's participation in natural resource management?*

*Are the targets that are Indigenous-specific appropriate and do they effectively engage Indigenous Australians in natural resource management?*

QFF has no comments to make in regards to this discussion point.

#### ***5. Working effectively with state and territory governments, engaging with local government***

*How can the Australian Government engage better with other levels of government on natural resource management outcomes?*

*How can overlaps or duplication of effort be avoided?*

- QFF and its members believe that clearer arrangements between the Australian Government and State Governments should be developed to support the delivery of the CFOC program and to better define their respective NRM roles and activities. Growcom does not believe that the state governments should be competing with other organizations for CFOC funds as it has resulted in the limited resources being spread too thinly and risks an increase in cost shifting projects that deliver no net increase in NRM outcomes.
- Local Government largely appear to remain under-engaged in the NRM process, in spite of the valuable roles they can play, especially in coordinating NRM activities with actions under regional plans. The nexus between local government and NRM

needs to be thoroughly investigated and resolved.

- Following the amalgamation of local governments in Queensland, there are now strong opportunities to drive improvements in coordinated and collaborative NRM and land use planning efforts at regional scales, involving councils, regional NRM groups, industry organisations and other players.

## **6. Regional base-level funding**

*How could the regional natural resource management delivery model be improved?*

- QFF and its members do not believe the CFOC approach has been particularly effective in balancing investment between individual projects targeted at national scale priority issues and implementation activities for regional NRM plans.
- It seems that under the CFOC process there is a partial or limited commitment to regional NRM plans. QFF believes that the CFOC process should either commit to a thorough delivery of a regional NRM process or take a completely alternative approach – it cannot try to do both. The regional model must be fully supported and properly resourced if it is to deliver substantial outcomes.
- QFF supports the approach of providing regional bodies with a base level of funding to allow their functional operation. Our experience has been that industry organisations' capacity to collaborate with regional bodies has significantly improved due to the provision of base funding; though the performance of regional bodies in Queensland is still patchy and there are some bodies with whom it is extremely difficult to collaborate. To ensure rigor, base funding should be directly linked to specific delivery of outcomes.