



Newsletter

April – June 2005

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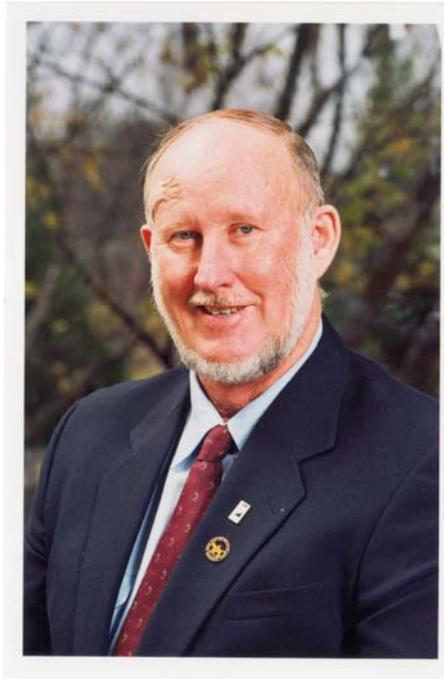
Clearing the path – is there a way forward?

Join our Corporate Members of the Month – AgriMedia and McGrathNicol+Partners – over lunch on Friday 24th June to hear the National Farmers' Federation (NFF)'s latest position on Native Vegetation – fresh from the NFF Policy Council meeting in Canberra this week.

Our guest speaker for June, Mr Larry Acton, is well positioned to provide insights. He is the Chair of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) Land and Native Vegetation Taskforce and has been at the centre of NFF's push for an Intergovernmental Agreement between State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments on land and native vegetation.

Native vegetation is a precious natural asset. It provides a range of benefits and plays a role in stabilizing the soil, preventing dryland salinity and absorbing greenhouse gases. Few would argue that it is worth protecting. Yet steps to do so are seldom without controversy as livelihoods and communities are shattered for varied and uncertain success at preservation.

Farmers, often cast as villains of the piece, claim that



native vegetation laws in New South Wales have crippled their ability to develop their farms to their full potential. In some cases, they go further - claiming that by preventing clearing of regrowth and by locking land out of rotations, the regulations have stopped them from managing land to achieve the best environmental outcome.

Is there a long-term solution?
Perhaps the NFF has a view.

Mr Acton also serves as a representative of NFF on the National Rural Advisory Council. He is also a director representing rural industry on the Workplace Health and Safety Board of Queensland and serves on the Board of Landcare Australia.

Raised on a cattle property, Mr Acton has been involved in the agricultural sector all his life. He was the president of AgForce for five years to 2004 and has served on many industry and community bodies.

Larry Acton and his wife, Beth, have operated their own cattle enterprise near Blackwater in Queensland for 28 years, breeding and finishing Bradford cattle for the Japanese market. –

☞ To book your seat for lunch on 24 June go to our website: www.nswfarmwriters.org/BOOKINGS.htm

Register on-line for Friday 24th June's luncheon seminar with Larry Acton.

Corporate Members of the Month: AgriMedia and McGrathNicol+partners

Venue: The MENZIES HOTEL, 14 Carrington Street, Sydney.

When: Friday 24th June 2005 at 12pm for 12:30pm

Cost: \$55 per head, or voucher, for members. **\$65 per head for all non-members.**

Register: BEFORE 5:00pm on Wednesday 22 June, on-line at <http://www.nswfarmwriters.org> or by emailing bookings@nswfarmers.org.au or by phone to Fiona Dewar, (02) 8203 3856.

Late cancellations: Phone Fiona Dewar (02 8203 3856) or Jamie Graham (0418 479 434)

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Election promises budgeted.

Farm Writers' members were again amongst the first to hear the details of how agriculture did in this year's Federal Budget. A typical contingent gathered early to hear the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon Warren Truss MP, cover some of the ground that didn't get a mention in the first reports of the budget.

The Minister talked about the unexpectedly large tax cuts (\$21.7 billion), the future fund to meet public service superannuation and the changes to welfare to push people back to work – but he also made the tenuous links to agriculture, saying that the more generous welfare tapers will help farmers on part EC benefits. He also expects farmers to welcome the abolition of the three per cent duty on imported machinery, as that should cut their input costs.

Mr Truss emphasised the Government's focus on "creating opportunities for trade and growth" and recognised "the need for sound infrastructure capabilities to capture these opportunities". Yet there is so little new spending in this area that the Minister could only remind us of already announced funding for AusLink and foreshadow a report from the Prime Minister's taskforce on infrastructure impediments.

The Minister didn't miss the opportunity to emphasise the Government's track record on economic management. He highlighted estimated economic growth of 3.3 per cent in 2005-06, the lowest unemployment rate for 28 years – at 5 per cent – and another Budget surplus (\$9.2 billion). He also emphasised the billions of dollars saved every year in interest payments because the Government has repaid \$90 billion of the debt it inherited on entering office.

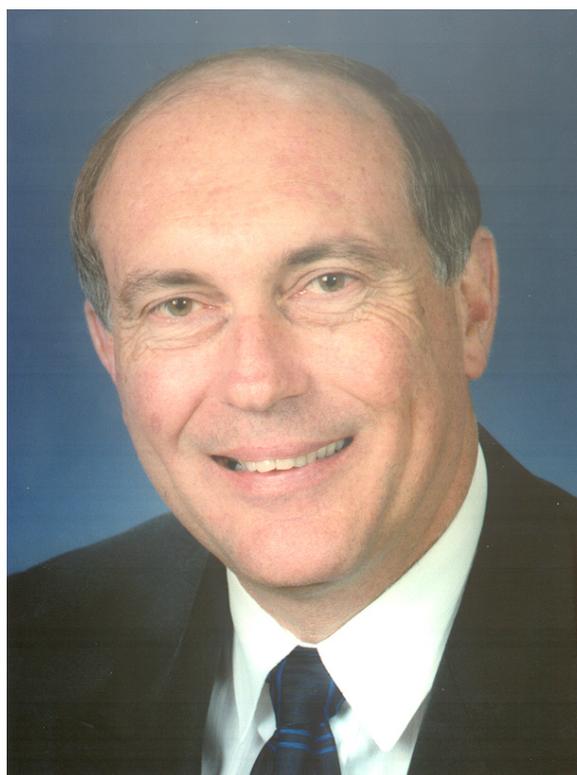
Minister Truss ran through the agriculture forecasts: gross value of farm production in 2005-06 estimated at \$35.2 billion, down from this year's \$35.5 billion, with the net value at \$5.1 billion, down from \$5.7 billion this year. Total exports are expected to fall by \$20 million in 2005-06.

Agriculture spending focuses on a broad range of key areas — from the continuing Triple-A programs, to drought assistance, natural resource management, border control and improving market access and curbing illegal, unregulated fishing.

"The Government has injected another \$15 million over three years for a new Industry Partnerships Program" said Mr Truss admitting that this is the rescue of a failed attempt to work with the states.

The Budget also provides \$12 million over four years to support a new regional food processing program.

The Government expects to spend about \$1 billion on assistance as a result of the drought. This is in



"This Government has delivered on its pledge to support rural and regional communities, with at least a dozen new programs."

addition to the hundreds-of-millions of dollars in tax concessions provided to assist drought preparedness. "The Australian Government is prepared to pay whatever is required to help farmers through this drought," Mr Truss said.

More than \$7 billion committed to major environment programs, includes a \$2 billion, five-year Australian Water Fund that will deliver on an election promise to provide grants for projects that improve water use efficiency or water quality. There is also \$40 million to help address the scourge of weeds and \$255 million over four years for Murray-Darling Basin initiatives.

The Coalition's promise to strengthen Australia's quarantine regime also features. The Budget delivers on that commitment by injecting \$560.9 million over four years across the agencies involved to maintain the invisible quarantine fence at our borders. And there is another \$5.6 million to continue to guard against avian influenza until 2006.

There is \$20 million to help producers introduce the National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS), and \$6 million for a national animal welfare strategy. Also there is \$9.7 million to post two new counsellors to help smooth problems that may arise in overseas ports. –Thank you to our corporate members of the month, Pulse Australia, NSW Farmers' Association and the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources at the University of Sydney.

Committee News

It is with thanks and regret that we mark the resignation last month of two members of the Association's committee: **Chris Dodd & Lucy Skuthorpe.**

Lucy leaves us after half a term, having made a big impression in a short time. **Chris** has worked tirelessly for five years as Membership Secretary keeping members informed and our records in great shape.

In her stead, we welcome **Brianna Casey.** Brianna has recently joined **NSW Farmers** – and we're grateful for their continued contribution to the smooth running of this Association.

And we need you!

This is your chance to influence the direction of the Association and to put something back. If you are interested in volunteering for the committee please call Stuart Hutton on 93382626, Bev Jordan on 0408699656 or any committee member (see www.nswfarmwriters.org for contact details.)

ACAJ News ★ Star Prize
Western Australian journalist Lara Ladyman will represent Australia in a bid to win the international Star Prize at the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) annual congress in Switzerland. Lara's story was published in the *Countryman* on July 15, 2004

Supported by John Deere, the award was organised by the Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists (ACAJ) as part of the international contest. For contest info see www.ifaj.org

Live Exports Live On

Guest speaker for our April event, Ian McIvor, pulled few punches in a frank address that gave Farm Writers insight into the state of live exports and life after the Keniry report.

In his opening comments Mr McIvor reminisced about his previous stints at the microphone at Farm Writers' events. He noted that on each occasion representative organizations were under the blowtorch – and this time was no different.

Mr McIvor said that the intense pressure on the live export industry came to a head – unfairly – with the *Cormo Express* affair. From the media cover, the uninitiated would think this was the first shipment with problems.

He commented that the biggest adversary the industry faces in the battle for urban hearts and minds is the animal activist – not the organised welfare lobby. "We work with the welfare lobby," he said. "And we're making a combined effort with the NFF (National Farmers' Federation) to fight off PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). Although this is not a battle that either side can win quickly."

Moving to the Keniry Inquiry, Mr McIvor expressed his view that its key recommendations were not new.

His example was the call for the Government to be solely responsible for granting export licences and making sure exporters comply with the standards. "This", he said, "was always the case".

He went on to detail two instances in which the Government had the final say and where industry arrangements were thwarted by bureaucratic slip-ups that contributed to the escalation of the *Cormo Express* incident.

He also detailed how the costs of the incident racked up. The Government insisted that the industry buy the

sheep back from the Saudi customer who held out for A\$4 million. The charter was taken over by the Government and the bill reached \$12 million by the time the sheep were landed in Eritrea. Although the Government initially tried to recover the extra \$8 million from the industry, they have now agreed on \$3 million.

Mr McIvor said that the industry is doing it tough, with time spent on paperwork up 500% and AQIS certification requirements up a thousandfold. However, he said that with new people in Canberra who know a little about the live export trade, the situation is improving.

There is good news. Despite a massive increase in exports over the past ten years, there has been a drop in mortalities – from three per cent when Mr McIvor entered the industry to 0.6 per cent now. He noted that a 5 per cent loss on farm raises little comment but a 1 per cent loss on a ship raises a hue and cry in the media.

Mr McIvor said that without live exports, everyone in the industry would be worse off as they underpin demand. They are most important in the Northern Territory, especially in Aboriginal communities, where they underpin employment.

In response to questions, Mr McIvor said that there is a market for the export of live camels, alpaca and deer and demand for sheep is steady -the hardest thing is finding sheep because of the drought. He said that industry has spent heavily on improving slaughter practices overseas. When asked about the impact of the costs of the Keniry regulations, Mr McIvor said he expects that firms will shape up rather than fail and regulations will be made more workable (not relaxed, but more practical).

Thank you to our corporate members of the month, Schute Bell Badgerly Lumby and Telstra Countrywide NSW.

📧 Do you have a speaker you'd like to hear at a Farm Writers' event – or any other suggestions - email us at suggestions@nswfarmwriters.org