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Leader of the Australian Greens

Senator for Victoria

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10/05/2019

Tony Mahar
Chief Executive
National Farmers' Federation

Dear Mr Mahar,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the National Farmers' Federation's election priorities. Please find our responses to the Federation's priority ask below.

Customers and the Value Chain

Pursue timely ratification of IA-CEPA to enable its significant benefits to flow to farmers.

The Australian Greens do not support free trade agreements that do not include provision for labour rights and environmental protections, nor agreements that include Investor State Dispute Settlement arrangements. We will carefully review the IA-CEPA and make recommendations to amend these concerns. The Greens will continue to stand up for workers, the environment and Australian companies and producers by insisting on these as minimum standards for our trade agreements.

Growing sustainably

Establish an Environmental Stewardship Fund with an initial investment of \$1 billion to facilitate the development of market-based instruments for biophysical assets (natural capital) that includes a focus on listed threatened species and communities.

The Australian Greens have committed to a \$2 billion a year for ten years into a Nature Fund to address the myriad challenges facing our environment, including tackling our threatened species crisis. The full plan [is available online](#). We know that Australia's farmers play an important role in stewardship of the land so we have included significant funding for programs that sit at the important intersection of environment and agriculture.

LANDCARE

The Liberal National Government's cuts to Landcare have put the program under immense stress. The National Landcare Program (NLP) supports vitally important work across Australia's amazing landscapes, from helping small farmers develop new land management techniques, to providing grant funding for communities to play a bigger part in caring for the land they live on. Yet the Coalition Government has drastically cut funding to the program, undermining its vital work. The Greens have been in the fight for Landcare funding for years - managing to secure an extra \$100 million in 2016. Now we'll fully restore this crucial program to health, increasing funding by \$84 million a year over the course of the next Parliament. With extra funding, the NLP can provide for the productive and responsible use of our land and safeguard it for future generations.



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The NLP was funded to \$1 billion over four years from 2014-15.¹⁷ In 2017-18 it was announced it would receive a further \$1 billion over six years, representing a cut per year of \$83.3m.¹⁸ The National Landcare program is principally funded through the National Heritage Trust of Australia, which is declining in value per year through the forward estimates.

GREEN FARMING

Agriculture is one of the most aggressive drivers of habitat destruction on the planet. But it's also an invaluable source of export income, regional economic activity, jobs, opportunity and food and fibre. Australian agriculture feeds the world. But agriculture should not feed a planet and harm it at the same time. It's vital we steer a course to strengthen environmental outcomes, without breaking the back of an industry already exposed to an increasingly volatile climate and the financial challenges of farming. Australia's agriculture sector is one of the least subsidised in the world. But we know subsidies, when targeted at encouraging improved environmental outcomes, are proven to help farmers and the planet. Australia needs a viable, long-term agricultural industry. But to have it we need to ensure that agriculture and the environment aren't at odds with each other. Carefully directed environmental subsidies - to encourage farmers to reduce fertiliser use, improve land productivity and reduce water consumption - help ease pressure for land clearing and improve gross yields per hectare. It's better for the farmer, it's better for the planet. The Greens will make available \$80 million a year in direct agricultural subsidies for farmers to improve per-hectare yield without degrading the land. We will also fund a large scale rollout of the Whole of Paddock Rehabilitation Program. The Whole of Paddock Rehabilitation Program is an Australian-first, developed by farmers in conjunction with Greening Australia. It's an entirely voluntary program that allows farmers to repair degraded or cleared paddock over 10 hectares of size through the planting of a broad range of native trees and shrubs in widely spaced belts across the land. The paddock is 'rested' by excluding livestock for a period of five years. Unlike other land restoration programs, this involves no land lost to production. Instead, payments are made to farmers in return for 'renting' the land for five years while a mix of native trees and shrubs are established. Land restored through the program is more fertile, healthier, and demonstrates higher yields than its pre-restoration state. Farmers report ewes with lambs actively seeking out windbreaks created by the landscape restoration, and the lambing per centage for twinning ewes has increased by over 140 per cent. A number of independent reviews have found the program to be one of the most cost-effective, impactful programs for landscape restoration in practice today, in some instances able to deliver equivalent environmental and socioeconomic outcomes at half the cost of other programs. The Greens will fund a broad national rollout of the Whole of Paddock Rehabilitation program with a \$5.3 million a year investment through the National Landcare Programme. This will boost agricultural productivity, reduce land salinity, strengthen habitat networks and deliver meaningful outcomes to both farmers and the environment.

LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

This \$5 billion investment will fund a series of measures designed to improve the landscape, including coordinating with environmental managers employed through the Green Job Guarantee to work at a local level on revegetation, habitat conservation and haven establishment, inland waterway management, soil restoration, conservation covenant training and monitoring, as well as threatened species recovery plan implementation and infrastructure upgrades with local councils and community groups.



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CONSERVATION COVENANTS

Conservation Covenants play a critical supportive role to the National Reserve System, by permanently protecting privately-held land to protect and sustain our rich biodiversity. They're also tremendously durable: 99.9 per cent of multi-party covenants established since 1951 are still in place today. But 80 per cent of Australia's land mass remains outside the protected area estate. And the capacity for privately-owned land to contribute to the preservation of our biodiversity has barely been tapped. Part of the reason for that is because the current process of establishing conservation covenants is often bureaucratic, lengthy and costly. Landowners may need to contend with legal costs, paperwork, conveyancing and a tax system that doesn't recognise the cost and value of conservation.

The Greens will:

- Provide landowners grants of up to \$25,000 for conservation actions related to their conservation covenant management plan;
- Initiate a review into the treatment of expenditure on conservation works in accordance with a covenant program's management plan, with a view to:
 - Making this expenditure fully tax deductible against income;
 - Giving landowners flexibility and choice by permitting either direct deductibility for gifts and conservation management expenses, or tax credits equal to the value of the deductible expense, that can be claimed up to 10 years following the deductible expense's incidence, at the deductor's discretion; and
 - Offering a financial incentive equal to the value of foregone revenue for local governments to exclude covenanted properties from rates payments; and
- Establish a \$20 million a year grant program for non-government organisations to apply for funding to monitor existing conservation covenants remotely and in-situ. These funds can include funding for aerial photographs, remote-sensing and predictive modelling techniques, for remote breach identification, as well as annual site visits where remote identification is impossible.

Unlocking innovation

Implement the recommendations of the Regional Telecommunications Review;

The Greens are broadly supportive of the recommendations of the Regional Telecommunications Review.

Invest \$150 million in a new mobile black spots program;

The Greens fully support the Federations cause for increased investment in the blackspot program and are proud to have placed a \$100 million annual increase to program funding at the heart of our telecommunications policy. This amounts to a \$300 million investment in the program over the next three years.

Carry out accurate mobile coverage mapping, including an annual survey to map blackspots across regional Australia; and,



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The Greens fully support the Federation's support to carry out accurate mobile coverage mapping and will support legislation in the Parliament to map blackspots across regional Australia.

Guarantee a role for small network operators under the Universal Service Agreement.

We recognise that the value of diversity in relation to small network operators and will work constructively in the industry to ensure that the Universal Service Agreement does not negatively affect this diversity.

Capable people, vibrant communities

Introduce a new Agricultural Visa to specifically address unique skills shortages; and,

The Greens believe that to overcome any labour shortages, skills training of local workers should be the priority. Where such workers are not available, the system regulating the use of guest workers, such as introducing an agricultural visa, should be negotiated between unions, employer organisations and the federal government.

Establish strategic programs to attract more Australians to a career in agriculture.

The Greens would support the establishment of programs to promote more Australians working in agriculture. Additionally, the Greens' plan to make university and TAFE completely fee-free will mean Australians in rural and regional areas will be more able to complete degrees and training in agricultural studies.

Capital Risk and Management

Further reduce business and personal taxes:

The Greens do not support further reducing business or personal taxes. The Greens believe that government is underspending on infrastructure and services, and that increased expenditure in these areas would better serve the entire economy, including rural and regional economies.

Maintain income averaging provisions for farmers:

The Greens have no plans to change these provisions.

Extend income averaging to agricultural workers and adjacent businesses whose income is determined by farm production cycles:

The existing income averaging provisions allow primary producers to average out their costs, including the fair payment to workers and 'adjacent' businesses.



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Defend agriculture's use of discretionary trusts:

The Greens intention with respect to the reform of the taxation of trusts is to reduce complexity and minimise tax avoidance. Our intention is not to go after farmers.

Maintain the Fuel Tax Credits Scheme:

The Greens would retain the fuel tax credit scheme for the agriculture industry, but remove it for the resources industry.

Back a fair go, through proactive competition policy:

The Greens are proud of having helped deliver an 'effects test' and support further reforms that would enable the ACCC to better tackle misuse of market power throughout the supply chain.

Establish a comprehensive National Drought Policy:

The frequency and intensity of drought is growing in a warming world. In the last year alone we've seen the awful impact of drought on communities in Western Queensland, in the Murray-Darling Basin, from Eastern Gippsland to across the Nullabor in South West WA. The Greens would create a \$100m per annum drought fund for independently assessed grants to communities and business that would improve water security, soil quality and better insulate farms and communities from the impact of drought.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to the NFF's election priorities.

Yours sincerely,

Senator Richard Di Natale
Leader of the Australian Greens & Senator for Victoria



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