

**Firearms
fallout**

—
Terror attack
prompts change



**Bill
shock**

—
Land tax
concerns



**Quiet
crisis**

—
Invasive
weed woes



**Review of
Basin Plan**

—
What's next
for water?

The Farmer

AUTUMN 2026 / \$ 9.95



Vet shortage bites

How we can attract and retain vets in the bush

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From the CEO

Keeping the Faith.

Having worked for you for six months I can now safely say that your organisation is the strongest State Farming Organisation in Australia.

Yes, you have the strongest balance sheet of any State Farming Organisation but that's not what I'm talking about. You have an advocacy strength that comes from the way you're organised and how you go about what you do. Through your Elected Council (EC), your Committees and Annual Conference you have a structure and processes that deliver results.

You need look no further than the strong influence we had on ill-conceived firearm reform on the eve of Christmas. Those reforms are certainly a step in the wrong direction – but they would have been a whole lot worse without a powerful eight days of lobbying by your association that I witnessed firsthand.

NSW Farmers makes mistakes and misses opportunities too – make no mistake. However, the wins far outweigh the losses. My encouragement to you therefore as I step down from my Acting role as CEO is to offer this – KEEP THE FAITH. Continue to invest in your organisation, to use the foundation built by your forefathers to drive necessary policy reform through the State and Federal Parliament's and to recognise the value of what was built by others before you. Use mistakes as learning opportunities, rather than as a chance to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'.

I've seen groups think they can do it better and start new organisations. The result is inevitably not as good as investing in and/or driving change through an existing structure – in your case through the most powerful state structure in Australia.

Bringing through new ideas and fresh thinking periodically, continuing to invest in tomorrow's leaders as well as today's, spending all your association energy targeted at the opportunity of policy reform and always agitating for the environmental, social and economic benefits your industry can bring to Australia will inevitably deliver the strongest return on investment.

I'll remain an advocate for NSW Farmers in my new role as CEO of the National Farmers' Federation and lastly want to thank you for allowing me to be a little part of your journey for a few months.

MIKE GUERIN

Acting CEO



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President's report

It's been a busy start to the year for NSW Farmers as the state and federal governments enact firearm reforms writes Xavier.

Summer is usually quite a relaxed season. It's a time for family holidays, road trips and of course the cricket. For many, the daily grind only returns to normal after Australia Day.

However, the start of 2026 was different at NSW Farmers.

Instead of winding down for Christmas and the new year period, we were winding up.

Following the Bondi terrorist attack in December when our state and federal governments began to initiate ill-thought-out gun reforms, NSW Farmers was there to represent our state's farmers and agriculture.

We spent days and nights on end on Macquarie Street meeting with politicians voicing our concerns and objections that law abiding farmers would be collateral damage as the government hastily passed new laws on Christmas Eve in response to the atrocity.

What was made clear is that the Minns Government didn't give the farming community a second's thought until NSW Farmers exercised its might—holding a press conference in Parliament House, demanding politicians pause and think about the unintended consequences. That night we secured widespread impactful coverage across print, television and radio networks

and the days following.

The changes to firearms laws are far from perfect—and we are still working with government on how the regulations will be implemented—but they would have been a whole lot worse without NSW Farmers holding politicians to account raising the problems our members may face on the ground simply to do their job of growing the state's food and fibre.

You can read more on our advocacy on page 36.

As I write these words, half the state is drought affected according to the combined drought indicator. We have many members de-stocking and going down to core breeders. We have volume in our grain harvest, but not necessarily the quality and value.

What we really need is good rain, and until it comes in the quantity needed, NSW Farmers will be working with government to secure the assistance our members need at this time.

We're pleased the NSW Government is making additional support available by expanding its drought plan with new financial support products, including doubling the loan amount available up to \$500,000 and additional funding to tackle feral animals competing with our livestock

around critical vegetation and water points.

Late last year we had a win with the proposed Superannuation tax on unrealised gains being scrapped. It was pleasing to see our advocacy work pay off on this important issue which would have put many family farms across the country and their succession plans in jeopardy. This year, we have a fresh focus with wanting to secure an update to the definition of primary production land. We've heard of a number of stories from members suffering land tax bill shock for simply doing what governments have been encouraging for years: diversifying their businesses. You can read more on page 11.

Finally, I'd like to wrap up by thanking our Acting-CEO Mike Guerin for his outstanding leadership over the past few months. Mike joined NSW Farmers in late September and hit the ground running, leading the team and overseeing our response to important advocacy issues including our concerns around water, the Narrabri Gas Project and the state and federal governments gun reforms. We wish him well as he embarks on his new role as CEO at the National Farmers' Federation.

I'd also like to welcome back CEO Annabel Johnson following her maternity leave and look forward to her leading our team through another productive year.



• NEWS

NSW Farmers Welcomes Parliamentary Support for Royal Commission into Water Management

NSW Farmers has welcomed a vote in the NSW Parliament supporting the establishment of a Royal Commission into water management, describing the move as a positive step toward restoring confidence in the system and securing the future of farming communities across the state.

The support followed a Public Interest Debate and a successful motion moved by Murray MP Helen Dalton, calling on the NSW Government to immediately back the creation of a Royal Commission into water management in NSW. The motion also urged the government to fully cooperate with any inquiry, including the compulsory production of all relevant water modelling, data, licences, compliance records, enforcement actions and intergovernmental agreements.

NSW Farmers Water Taskforce Chair Richard Bootle said water remained the single most critical resource for farmers, essential to feeding and clothing the nation, yet years of dysfunction in water management had taken a heavy toll on regional communities.

“We’ve been sounding the alarm on water management for a number of years, it’s beyond time that farmers and communities were treated as equal partners with the environment,” Mr Bootle said.

“We’ve seen firsthand the serious social, economic and environmental harm across rural, regional and remote NSW, undermining livelihoods, community viability and river health.

“We welcome any inquiry that brings clarity, improves oversight, and helps ensure water can be used to benefit not only the environment but also the farmers and the communities who depend on it.”

The parliamentary vote coincided with the commencement of the

Murray–Darling Basin Plan review, with NSW Farmers confirming it would fully engage in the process. Mr Bootle said the organisation was preparing a detailed submission to ensure the voices of its members were heard, alongside addressing unanswered questions that remain with the Murray–Darling Basin Authority.

“With finite public funds and significant community need, the Murray–Darling Basin Authority must reset expectations and focus on delivering the most realistic environmental outcomes.

“Governments should prioritise non flow centric projects, including immediate investment in carp control, to complement smarter watering strategies.”



PICTURED
Murray MP Helen Dalton
SOURCE: Facebook

• NEWS

New chair for AgriFutures

The Hon. Mick Veitch was appointed to lead AgriFutures Australia just before Christmas, replacing Cathy McGowan AO.

Mr Veitch had a longstanding relationship with agriculture and NSW Farmers, from his experience working as a shearer through to 16 years in NSW Parliament during which time he served as Labor’s Shadow Minister for Primary Industries and Regional NSW.

AgriFutures Australia was a Research and Development Corporation servicing chicken meat, rice, honey bee and pollination, ginger, tea tree oil, pasture seeds, export fodder, thoroughbred horses, kangaroo, buffalo, deer, goat fibre and ratite.

• NEWS

Koala numbers ‘misleading’

The Australian Government’s multimillion-dollar National Koala Monitoring Program has drastically increased its population estimates, drawing fierce criticism from the NSW Opposition.

The CSIRO program reported there were between 398,000 and 569,000 koalas in 2025; a dramatic rise from the 2024 estimate of just 95,000 to 238,000.

NSW Nationals Member for Oxley Michael Kemp said it was clear koala populations had been under-reported for decades, and called the decision to push ahead with the Great Koala National Park (GKNP) a ‘blatant disregard for evidence’.

While researchers emphasised the numbers reflected better data collection and broader survey coverage, not necessarily a sudden population boom, NSW Farmers members had voiced serious concerns about the GKNP.

Read more in the Summer 2025 edition of *The Farmer*.



• NEWS

Guerin joins NFF as Chief Executive

Recent NSW Farmers Acting CEO and former AgForce boss Mike Guerin has been appointed CEO of the National Farmers' Federation, starting in the role on 23 March 2026.

NFF President Hamish McIntyre welcomed the appointment, pointing to Mr Guerin's proven leadership capabilities and passionate ag advocacy work.

"Mike brings extensive experience to the NFF CEO role, through his current role as Acting CEO of NSW Farmers, and as the eight years he spent as AgForce CEO," Mr McIntyre said.

Mr Guerin said he was honoured to take on the role, taking the reins from Interim Chief Executive Su McCluskey.

Mr Guerin served for eight years as CEO of AgForce Queensland prior to joining NSW Farmers for the past few months. He had a strong reputation across the NFF federated family and played a central role in national reform workshops.

NSW Farmers wishes Mr Guerin well.

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‘Panicked politics’ under fire

By Steve Mudd

The December 14 2025 terrorist attack on a Jewish event at Bondi Beach, the first mass shooting on Australian soil in almost 30 years, was a watershed moment for our nation.

A father-son pair of ISIS-inspired gunmen opened fire on crowds celebrating the start of Hanukkah, killing 15 people and injuring dozens of others. The shooting was indiscriminate; the youngest victim a 10-year-old girl who had been playing in a petting zoo shortly before the attack, the oldest an 87-year-old Holocaust survivor who died shielding his wife from bullets.

Australians expressed immediate shock and outrage that such an atrocity could occur, and soon thereafter the media shifted the focus to firearms: “The rising tide of antisemitism and Australia’s gun laws are in sharp focus as a shocked nation grieves the horrific killing of 15 people at Bondi

Beach and faces the traumatic aftermath,” the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald read on Tuesday 16 December.

Of great concern for many Australians was the fact the older shooter, who was killed during the attack, legally owned the firearms used in the attack. His son, who media reported was known to ASIO, was hospitalised but later charged with more than 50 offences and subsequently held in strict isolation at the Goulburn Supermax Prison.

It was within this context that NSW Premier Chris Minns announced he would recall Parliament before Christmas to make it more difficult to own firearms and crack down on hate speech, but the politics quickly became murky. State and federal opposition MPs criticised their respective governments for using firearms as a scapegoat after two years of rising antisemitism in the community. The NSW

Nationals and the Greens voted against a combined hate speech and firearms bill in the NSW Parliament while the Liberals sided with Labor.

ECHOES OF PORT ARTHUR

The April 28 1996 Port Arthur Massacre was a pivotal moment in Australian history, which led to strict controls on firearm ownership that were controversial at the time, but which had proven to significantly reduce violence involving legally owned firearms.

But in the days following the Bondi attack, and with a public demanding action, firearms legislation was once again on the table.

NSW Farmers President Xavier Martin, who was involved in advocacy during the Port Arthur debate, said there were stark differences this time around.

“The week following the atrocity was



NSW Premier Chris Minns waves off concerns about hastily-drafted firearms laws.

full of heightened emotion and tension, and given the risk of causing further harm or distress to the victims and families impacted by the attack we chose to engage directly with politicians rather than through the media, as many others did,” Mr Martin said.

“But instead of the considered consultation and frank discussions the farming community had with the Howard Government almost 30 years ago, we were met with silence, which is why the laws they drafted were so impractical – and in some

places just plain wrong.

“What this means is that there’s great uncertainty hanging over farmers, the overwhelming majority of whom have been caught up in this rushed response to an atrocity that had everything to do with hatred and little to do with law-abiding firearms owners.”

PRACTICAL CONCERNS

The Minns Government ignored multiple and repeated attempts to inform it about

the practicalities of firearms and farming before drafting legislation, which Mr Martin criticised as “panicked politics running roughshod over practical policy.”

As a result, the rushed laws set arbitrary ownership limits of four firearms per licence holder, and 10 firearms for primary producers, along with a requirement for licence holders to attend gun clubs.

This requirement, which Mr Martin warned would greatly impact more remote farmers, swiftly created problems for existing clubs.

In a Facebook post soon after the attack, Armidale Rifle Club reported it had fielded “a large number of enquiries regarding membership” before indicating it did not have resources to cater for hundreds of extra members seeking to keep their firearms licences and would not consider extending membership to those people.

LASTING IMPACTS

In response to the Bondi incident, NSW Premier Chris Minns announced a Royal Commission, belatedly followed weeks later by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s announcement of a Royal Commission into Anti-Semitism and Social Cohesion.

The attack occurred following a marked increase in anti-Jewish rhetoric in recent years, an issue highlighted by a recent Four Corners expose that raised serious questions about the failure of Australia’s reportedly ‘strict’ system to identify the suspicious activity of the attackers – including a visit to a global terrorist training hotspot.

Responding to those questions, rather than rushing anti-firearms changes, would determine what future Australia might have.



NSW Farmers President Xavier Martin addresses media in NSW Parliament.



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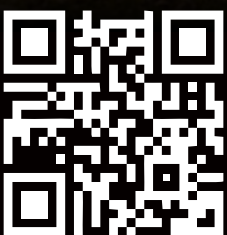
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Primary Production Land Tax

Statement of Expectations

NSW Farmers has increasing concerns that the current definition and compliance activity is acting as a disincentive to on-farm diversification and resilient farm businesses.

The following Statement outlines NSW Farmers' expectations required for a modern, fit-for-purpose definition of Primary Production Land (PPL) for the purposes of the land tax exemption. It is critical that the NSW Government acts now to ensure that the land tax exemption continues to support evolving, contemporary and diversified farm businesses.

Not updating the current primary production definition for land taxes not only risks food security and business resilience but also risks the NSW Government's existing government policies to promote agrifood development and agritourism being realised e.g. through the *NSW Trade and Investment Strategy*.

NSW FARMERS CONSIDERS THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES ARE ESSENTIAL

- **Genuine farmers not excluded**
The definition of "primary production land" must not exclude genuine primary producer – recognising diversified on-farm activities which are complementary to, not competing with primary production.
- **Minimise barriers for agricultural diversification**
Enterprises that integrate small-scale value-adding, agritourism, processing activities on-farm that are directly linked to the cultivation or maintenance of that land should remain eligible for the exemption.
- **Parity with other states**
NSW should align its land tax framework for primary production with other jurisdictions that support the sale of value-added agricultural products, such as Victoria.
- **Updated 'Primary Production' definition**
The definition of primary production land in land tax legislation has not been updated in over 25 years and is at risk of no longer reflecting modern farm businesses. Where activities are a component of a genuine farm business but not the majority activity, farmers should not be penalised for land used for value-adding, landscape management and participation in environmental markets such as, nature repair and carbon credits.
- **Thresholds and Indexation**
The pause on indexation of the general and premium land tax thresholds from 2025 must be reversed. The planned review of the thresholds must be brought forward to 1 July 2026 with a commitment to ongoing annual indexation to prevent bracket creep and rising tax liabilities for farmers.
- **Retrospective Assessments**
Remove the risk of retrospective land tax assessments extending up to five years for farmers which has created significant financial uncertainty for farm business. Any necessary reviews should be for the previous financial year only unless non-compliance has been disingenuous.
- **Interest and Penalties**
Abolish or significantly reduce punitive interest charges (currently 11.6%) on disputed or outstanding amounts for farmers where compliance intent has been genuine or interpretive uncertainty exists.
- **Pause compliance**
Pause further primary production compliance against the current interpretation of the definition until the definition is updated.

BACKGROUND

- Recent compliance activity by Revenue NSW has created significant concern amongst farmers over land tax exemptions for genuine primary producers who have held these exemptions for as long as they have conducted their operations.
- Farmers report that genuine primary production enterprises are being denied their land tax exemptions based on definition and interpretation of primary production land in the Land Tax Management Act 1956 that no longer reflect the realities of modern agriculture and adding significant financial pressure to small-medium family farms.
- Farmers who engage in activities such as value-adding (eg packaging, butchering, processing into intermediate or finished goods) and agritourism (“pick-your-own”, farm experiences, farm retail) are treated as secondary competing uses to primary production under the current rules.
- In addition, the current compliance approach is seen as burdensome, inconsistent, and unfair, creating financial uncertainty for producers with significant administrative burdens to prove their case.



Problems to be solved

- Modern farming enterprises are increasingly integrating value-adding activities, and diversifying farm operations to manage risk, respond to market opportunities and government policy.
- The current definition and interpretation of the primary production exemption fails to recognise these developments, resulting in exemptions being revoked where farms undertake complementary on-farm value-add such as agrifood manufacturing, agritourism operations and other activities encouraged by the NSW Government economic strategies.
- This is creating disincentives and barriers for farm businesses to diversify activities and vertically integrate farm activities to manage risk, maintain profitability and achieve NSW Government priorities for agrifood, trade and agritourism.

NEED FOR UPDATED ‘PRIMARY PRODUCER’ DEFINITION

- The definition of primary production land in land tax legislation has not been updated in over 25 years and is at risk of no longer reflecting modern farm businesses. This should be updated to include income generated from:
 - Converting produce grown or cultivated from that land into a value-added product;
 - Products or services directly reliant on the cultivation or maintenance of that land for primary production, such as agritourism;
 - Participation in environmental markets such as, nature repair and carbon credits where it complements legitimate primary production activities.
- Alternative approaches exist, for example, Victoria’s definition of primary production land recognises produce “whether in a natural, processed, or converted state,” which provides some flexibility for diversified agricultural enterprises. · NSW Farmers Budget submission FY 2026-27 details additional information.
- A survey conducted by NSW Farmers indicate that 12% of respondents had avoided expanding or diversifying their businesses due to the risk of losing the PPL exemption.
- NSW Farmers Budget submission FY 2026-27 details additional information.



Risks and consequences if no action

- Producers seeking to scale or diversify into value-add face the risk of losing their land tax exemption, creating a significant disincentive to growth and on-farm investment.
- The current definition is inconsistent with achieving the NSW Government’s Trade and Investment Strategy (and the new Agricultural Industries innovation and Growth Fund) through local agrifood value-add manufacturing driven by the farm sector to leverage both domestic and export opportunities.
- In addition, NSW Government and Destination NSW planning reforms encourage landholders to diversify, add value, and improve business resilience through agritourism.
- Added burden of significant financial imposts from land tax will create business viability issues for family farms and food security in the medium-long term.

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Case Studies

PIGGERY

- A family-run piggery operating across three properties was ruled ineligible for the primary production land tax exemption.
- Selling pork from the farm (processed off-site) through an on-farm shop was deemed to mean the land was no longer used for primary production under the current definition.
- Two parcels used for effluent disposal were also found ineligible, despite being essential to the operation of the piggery.

HORTICULTURE

- A cherry and apricot grower incorporated “pick-your-own” activities and farm gate sales as an alternative harvesting method and as a path to market for orchard production, shortening the value chain by selling directly to consumers.
- However, Revenue NSW recently determined that tourists/consumers buying fruit they picked themselves constituted a competing use of the land rather than an alternative harvesting activity for the purpose of sale of the plant product. Grading and packaging cherries for sale was also deemed “processing,” and this combination, resulted in the land losing its exemption.
- While the exemption was ultimately reinstated in this instance due to the short agritourism season after the grower lodged an objection, the experience has created substantial business uncertainty and discouraged the grower from further investment in farm diversification.

VINEYARD

- A grape grower expanded their business by having grapes processed into wine off-site and selling the wine through an on-farm cellar door.
- Revenue NSW ruled that selling wine was not the sale of raw agricultural produce.
- The grower appealed to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal, which found that despite the majority of effort, labour and land being devoted to viticulture, the higher revenue from wine sales meant primary production was not the dominant use of the land.

ORCHARD

- A farmer operating an apple orchard has processed inferior apples on-farm into juice for more than 30 years, using fruit from their own orchard and nearby farms.
- Without on-site processing, much of this fruit would have been discarded. The farm also offered “pick-your-own” experiences.
- Despite most labour and capital being invested in the orchard, Revenue NSW determined that the property was not used predominantly for primary production and revoked the exemption as a result of several small diversifications.



Value adding refers to activities that enhances a product's value beyond that of its basic components. It can apply to anything from physically transforming it into a “processed or converted state” or simply making it more appealing by making it more convenient (eg, farm to door delivery), applying branding (eg, utilising a trademark or a website), adding an experience (eg, pick your own). The act of tailoring product lines to different customer groups in order to diversify is also a form of value adding.



Update Definition of Primary Production for Land Tax

To help resolve the current issue relating to the definition, NSW Farmers has made the following recommendation (Priority Pillar 2) to the NSW Government Budget process from FY 2026

Commitment	\$36m/year
Brief Description	Updating the definition of primary producer for the purpose of land tax exemptions to include farm produce value-adding and on-farm income diversification.
Economic Rationale	The current limited definition of primary production under the land tax exemptions is preventing genuine farmers from investing in complementary value-adding or new income streams that drive productivity and farm resilience.
Monetised Benefits (5% discount rate)	<p>Over a 10-year analysis period, the exemptions will lead to avoided tax transfers from landholders to Government of \$360 million, and avoided deadweight loss of \$30 million.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NPV: \$23.2m BCR: 1.08

COMMITMENT

Update the definition of primary production for the purposes of obtaining exemptions from land tax to include income generated from:

- Converting produce grown or cultivated from that land into a value-added product
- Products or services directly reliant on the cultivation or maintenance of that land for primary production, such as agritourism

CASE FOR CHANGE

The current definition of primary production for the purpose of obtaining an exemption from land tax is preventing farmers from investing in activities that value-add their produce (eg packaging, butchering, processing into intermediate or finished goods) or diversify their income streams (eg agritourism). This conflicts with ongoing Government and advice to farmers to actively invest in value-adding and diversification to drive productivity, increase resilience and mitigate risk. Where the land is being for primary production by genuine farm businesses and the diversification complements the land use it should not be deemed competing use.

COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Costs

Data from ABS and Tourism Research Australia indicate that about 5% of farm business in NSW are engaged in value-adding or agritourism. In addition, the NSW Farmers Farm Business Sentiment Survey indicates that 12% of farmers have avoided expanding their businesses due to the risk of losing their primary producer status. Under an updated PPL exemption, 1,700 farm businesses currently liable for land tax may be exempt, leading to foregone tax revenues of \$35.8 million per year.

Benefits

Taxes distort investment and consumption by creating a disincentive to invest in value-adding and income diversification, creating a deadweight loss. This disincentive directly contradicts existing government policies to promote agrifood development and agritourism, e.g. through the NSW Trade and Investment Strategy and changes to planning regulations to encourage agritourism. The benefits of avoiding the deadweight loss (the marginal excess tax burden) are 8c per dollar for land taxes in NSW.

Results

Over a 10-year analysis period, granting expanded primary producer exemptions to land tax will cost in PV terms \$290 million in foregone taxes, and generate \$313 million in benefits through transfers and improved use of land, amounting to an NPV \$23.2 million (BCR: 1.08, 5% d.r.).

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- WFI actively sponsors events and organisations that promote safety and wellbeing in rural areas.
- Listen to the 'Good People to Know' podcast. WFI's series giving a voice to regional communities.
- WFI is part of IAG, a leader in climate change risk mitigation and sustainability initiatives. This helps WFI invest in long-term resilience programs for rural communities such as education on climate risk, disaster preparedness and environmental sustainability.
- And most of all, WFI has been supporting rural Australians since 1919. That's over 100 years of insurance expertise, helping to protect what's most important to you.

Client support program

WFI offers clients access to the WFI Insurance client support program. This is a confidential counselling and mental health support service provided by an independent, Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS) accredited organisation called Sonder. For access, please reach out to your local WFI Insurance Representative.

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Securing NSW farmland against invasive weeds

By Denis Howard

In the agricultural heartlands of NSW, a quiet but devastating crisis is unfolding.

It doesn't have the sudden roar of a flame or the immediate shock of a flood, but its impact on the landscape is no less transformative.

The continued march of invasive species — such as African lovegrass, serrated tussock, and the encroaching harrisia cactus — is having a profound effect on the farmers' livelihoods.

The biosecurity landscape in NSW has reached a decisive tipping point, as the state grapples with an unprecedented biological burden.

Currently, over 340 invasive weed species and 40 species of pest animals have established a foothold across the region, creating a combined financial drain of at least \$1.9 billion annually.

This staggering figure represents more than just a line item in a budget; it reflects a direct hit to farm gate profitability, the degradation of native ecosystems, and the rising cost of management for both public and private landholders.

With the economic impact continuing to climb, the scale of the invasion has moved beyond a localised nuisance to a significant threat to the state's primary production and environmental heritage.

The financial toll of weeds is often underestimated because it is incremental. However, for the modern NSW landholder, weed management has evolved from a seasonal chore into a critical component of business survival.

While hundreds of species exist, a small group of "high-impact" weeds and pests account for the vast majority of the \$1.9 billion drain.

Weeds can cause direct costs for things like herbicide use and machinery costs, but the true impact includes indirect losses such as pasture loss, crop competition and decreased land valuation.

Without coordinated, cross-tenure management, these costs are projected to rise as invasive species

exploit changing weather patterns and seasonal shifts.

HARRISIA CACTUS

Farmers across northern NSW are facing a deepening crisis as the Harrisia cactus, an aggressive and drought-tolerant invader, continues to march south from the Queensland border.

The weed is transforming productive grazing land into impenetrable, thorny wastelands, leaving landholders with a mounting bill for control and livestock losses.

The NSW Farmers Association has identified the cactus as one of the most significant biological threats to the region, describing its ability to choke out native pastures and "lock" farmers out of their own paddocks.

The impact of Harrisia cactus is felt across three main fronts: production, animal welfare, and infrastructure. Unlike common weeds, this cactus forms sprawling, dense thickets that completely outcompete native grasses.

The physical danger to livestock is severe; the strong spines cause deep wounds that lead to debilitating infections and, in some cases, death.

Furthermore, the financial burden is staggering, with many farmers forced to spend between \$20,000 and \$30,000 annually on control measures.

The cactus also takes a toll on machinery, with its spines easily puncturing heavy-duty vehicle tyres.

Harrisia cactus is listed as a "regional priority weed" in the North West and Northern Tablelands, with a strategic goal of containment.

However, the mechanism of spread makes containment a moving target.

Seeds are spread extensively by birds and feral pigs, often turning a manageable patch into a regional outbreak overnight.

Control is notoriously difficult due to the plant's deep, fleshy tuber system. If the entire root system isn't removed or killed, the plant will simply regenerate. >



Effective management currently relies on a combination of:

- Targeted herbicides - chemical control to knock down established plants;
- Biocontrol - the introduction of mealy bugs, a natural enemy that weakens the cactus; and
- Manual removal - labor-intensive digging to extract reproductive tubers from the soil.

While biocontrol offers some hope, industry leaders warn that without sustained state and federal funding, the battle may be lost.

Farmers are calling for a “cross-tenure” approach to ensure the weed is managed on public lands as aggressively as it is on private property.

AFRICAN LOVEGRASS

African lovegrass has transitioned from a roadside nuisance to a premier biosecurity threat, particularly across the Monaro Tablelands.

This aggressive perennial doesn’t just grow alongside native pastures — it chokes them out, creating a dense monoculture that is as difficult to digest as it is to kill.

The arrival of African lovegrass marks a steep decline in a property’s productive value. Unlike nutritious native grasses, lovegrass offers very little to the animal once it matures.

The grass is characterised by low digestibility and poor nutritional value. The impact is physical and immediate - pregnant cows forced onto lovegrass-dominant paddocks can lose nearly one kilogram of body weight per day.

The cost of “fighting the fire” is becoming unsustainable for many. Between continuous spot-spraying, mechanical slashing, and specialised herbicides, some producers are seeing annual management costs exceed \$100,000.

On heavily infested land, these expenses can actually outstrip the total profit generated from livestock production.

Perhaps most alarming for regional communities is the plant’s role as a high-intensity fuel source.

African lovegrass produces a massive amount of dry, thatch-like material that accumulates at the base of the plant.

This “fuel load” remains highly flammable even when surrounding vegetation is green, effectively extending the fire danger season.

Rural firefighters have described the plant’s volatility as akin to “petrol”, capable of creating fast-moving, high-heat blazes that are difficult to contain.

Because African lovegrass thrives in disturbed or sandy soils, management requires a “whole-of-farm” strategic approach rather than occasional spraying.

This includes:

- Pasture competition - The best defense is a thick, healthy pasture. By maintaining strong, competitive ground cover and avoiding excessive soil disturbance, landholders can prevent the wind-borne seeds from ever finding a home;
- Hygiene and targeted treatment - Strict vehicle and machinery hygiene is essential to stop the spread between paddocks. When the grass does

appear, targeted herbicide treatments are required to stop the soil seed bank from growing; and

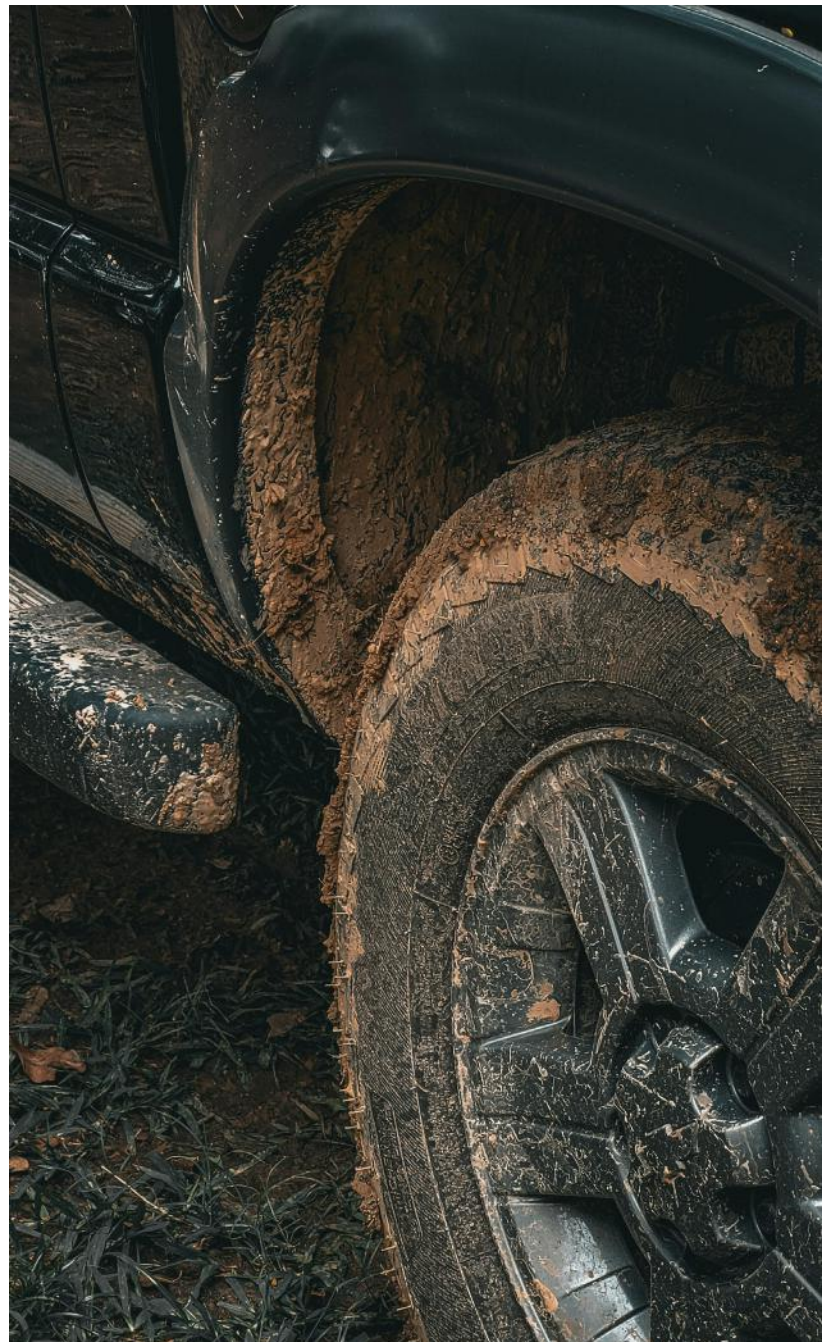
- Strategic grazing - Timing is everything. While mature lovegrass is unpalatable, the plant is relatively nutritious when it is young and green. Utilising stock for intensive grazing during the spring and summer can help manage the biomass before the plant turns to “wood and thatch.”

SERRATED TUSSOCK

Across the Great Dividing Range and throughout the southern and central tablelands of NSW, a deceptively simple grass is waging a war of attrition against the state’s agricultural productivity.

Serrated tussock is not merely a nuisance; it is widely classified as one of Australia’s most devastating weeds.

This perennial, drought-resistant invader possesses





the unique ability to render fertile grazing land virtually useless in a matter of seasons.

The arrival of serrated tussock marks a catastrophic shift in land value. Unlike other weeds that might coexist with pasture, this species is a “transformer” — it completely alters the ecosystem it inhabits.

In severe infestations, serrated tussock can reduce the carrying capacity of a pasture by up to 95 per cent. Land that once supported hundreds of head of livestock can be reduced to a barren landscape of unpalatable fibre.

Because the weed has almost no nutritional value and is highly fibrous, livestock forced to graze it can actually die of starvation with a full stomach. The weed forms undigestible “balls” in the animal’s rumen, physically preventing the digestion of actual nutrients.

Beyond the paddock, the weed strikes at the product. Its seeds easily contaminate wool and hides, significantly lowering their quality and market price at the point of sale.

The scale of the crisis is reflected in the numbers. In NSW alone, the combined cost of lost production and management efforts is estimated at more than \$40 million per year.

For the individual farmer, control costs are a heavy burden, frequently exceeding \$100 per hectare just to keep the infestation at bay.

The difficulty in managing serrated tussock lies in its biological “stealth” and resilience.

To the untrained eye, it closely resembles native *Poa* grasses. It often remains undetected until its flowering period (November to January), but by the time the purple-tinged seed heads are visible, the damage is done.

A single mature plant can produce up to 140,000 seeds in a single season.

These seeds are lightweight and designed for wind dispersal, capable of traveling up to 20 kilometres to colonise neighboring properties.

The “silver bullet” is fading. In critical regions from Armidale to Goulburn, the weed has developed a documented resistance to flupropate, the most common herbicide used for long-term control.

Because seeds respect no boundaries, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development experts emphasise a “whole-of-district” approach.

Individual efforts are easily undermined if a neighboring property allows seeds to blow over the fence.

Effective management must focus on pasture competition. Serrated tussock is an opportunist that thrives on bare ground and in drought conditions.

Maintaining a thick, healthy perennial pasture is the only long-term defense against a weed that is built to survive the toughest Australian conditions.

HOW WEEDS CROSS THE GATE

The first step in any defense is understanding how the enemy moves.

Weeds are master hitchhikers, and they almost always enter a property through the front gate. The primary vectors include:

- Machinery and vehicles - seeds and small pieces of vegetation lodge in tire treads, chassis crevices, and engine bays;
- Livestock - seeds can cling to animal coats or remain viable in the gut for days, being deposited in fresh soil long after the animal has arrived;
- Stock feed - fodder cut from weedy paddocks acts as a “Trojan Horse,” introducing thousands of dormant seeds directly into feeding areas; and
- People - boots, clothing, and even camping gear can transport seeds across hundreds of kilometres.

While it is difficult to stop every single seed, landholders can significantly reduce the risk by implementing a robust biosecurity plan.

The goal is to create a “filter” at the property boundary.

ESTABLISH A DESIGNATED WASHDOWN AREA

A well-constructed washdown area is the single most effective tool for stopping weed transfer. To be effective, this area should be:

- Accessible - located near the road to prevent high-risk vehicles from traversing your land before being cleaned;
- Sized appropriately - at least 6m by 8m to accommodate large contractor equipment and harvesters;
- Contained - gently sloping with bunding or percolation areas to collect runoff. This allows you to treat emerging weeds in one localized spot rather than across the entire property; and
- Equipped - outfitted with a high-pressure washer, air blower for dry debris, and long-handled brushes.

OPERATIONAL CONTROLS

Beyond the washdown bay, daily habits can block the spread:

- Biosecurity signage - install Local Land Services-approved signage at all entrances to alert visitors of their responsibilities;
- Dedicated Tracks - limit vehicle movement to permanent tracks and parking areas to reduce the “pick-up” of seeds from paddocks;
- Radiator screens - use gauze screens in front of radiators to prevent seeds from entering the engine bay — a notorious hiding spot for weeds like African lovegrass; and
- The quarantine paddock - always hold new livestock in a dedicated yard for several days. This ensures that any weed seeds in their system are eliminated in a controlled area that can be easily monitored and sprayed.



Workplace Relations

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“Our family has been with NSW Farmers for many decades and a subscriber to Workplace Relations from the beginning, and I would 100 per cent recommend it to every farmer with employees.

I use the workplace relations service in multiple ways: (i) If I've got a new employee they will draft the contract for me, (ii) on a quarterly basis to just double-check rates and conditions and (iii) yearly making sure that I'm up to date with broader changes in industrial rules and regulations. They drafted a contract for me that was really great work and saved me thousands of dollars if I'd had to pay a private employment lawyer and/or saved me tens of thousands (and potentially criminal responsibility) if I had tried to work it out myself!

As a farmer you want to have that expert to give you the advice that you need, to know that what you're doing is right. To have that resource, I'm always blown away by it just how good it is.

Just the day-to-day of being able to check with a specialist saves you a lot of money and stress and keeps me out of trouble! I don't understand why any farmer who employs people wouldn't be a member and use this service.”



Richard Bootle

	Base	Core	Comprehensive
Intended business size	Up to two employees	Up to 10 employees	More than 10 employees
Included advisory calls	Four	10	Unlimited
Access to template library	-	✓	✓
Tailored documentation and customised written support	30 minutes	Three hours	Three hours
Discount for additional written support beyond the allocated cap	10 per cent	15 per cent	20 per cent
Continuous subscription benefit*	-	✓	✓
Annual fee in addition to Farmer Membership (GST exclusive)	\$150	\$500	\$1500

*Representation fees waived for one claim in each of those 12 months for those who have subscribed to the same level for more than 12 months.

Case Study

Gundamain Pastoral Co

How we helped Tess manage her workplace obligations

For Tess Herbert of the Gundamain Pastoral Company, the 'people part' of business represents the key to success and the greatest risk, and the small investment she makes in her workplace relations support is worth every cent.

Gundamain Pastoral Co runs a farming and lot feeding operation outside Eugowra, with about 20 staff including some who have been with the business since the feedlot was established two decades ago.

"People are what make our business run. We can look after the market side of the operation but the people who work for us are what makes us successful. If the people side of the business was to fail, that's a real risk," Tess says. Tess has her own HR qualifications, but even so she appreciates the specialised support that NSW Farmers can offer. In particular, she values the annual wage guides, regular updates and the ability to call if she needs clarification on legislation or advice on tricky situations.

"They really know agriculture, and they know us. They know what we do and how we work so they can offer very specific advice. The service they have provided when we have needed technical support has been amazing. They are responsive, knowledgeable, they work really hard and they get stuff done. I'm so pleased they're on my side."

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Vet void needs filling

The void of vets in regional NSW remains despite some 30 recommendations from the 2023 Inquiry into the state's Veterinary workforce shortage. State government incentives, new veterinary telemedicine services and mobile vet clinics are making a difference, but NSW Farmers says there are still barriers to getting more vets in the bush.

By **MICHAEL BURT**

**PICTURED**

Self-styled 'Flying Vet' Ameliah Scott plays a vital role on farms.

Vets are at the top of the call list when it comes to responding to emergency animal disease outbreaks and natural disasters.

They also sit alongside livestock agents, agronomists and accountants in providing a critical service to farm businesses.

That's why NSW Farmers is actively involved in advocating for solutions to an acute decline in veterinary services in rural areas over the past decade.

As of mid-2024, there were 4,721 registered veterinarians in New South Wales (NSW) with 31 per cent located in inner regional areas and only 8 per cent in rural and remote regions.

Updated data for all of 2025 is not yet available, but the number of registered veterinarians in NSW has been growing at an average annual growth rate of 3.9 per cent over the five years leading up to June 2024.

That trend is not being seen in the bush however, with the latest Job and Skills Australia report revealing that 44 per cent of advertised veterinary jobs remain vacant for more than 12 months in regional areas compared to 28 per cent in metropolitan areas.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) says long working hours, poor mental health, substantial student debt, relatively low pay and conditions, and increasing demand for veterinary services are reasons behind this statistic.

NSW Farmers Member Dr Robyn Alders AO, a qualified vet and farmer from the Upper Lachlan region, said the rural veterinary profession in Australia, and worldwide, is facing significant workforce challenges.

"This is not just a problem for NSW and it's not just Australia. It's a trend being seen globally with similar issues in the US, Canada and many European

countries," Dr Alders said.

"It makes sense to look at what has worked overseas and cherry-pick the best solutions for Australia."

Dr Alders represented NSW Farmers at the 2023 inquiry to put forward a range of recommendations to reverse the decline in rural veterinary services.

They included student loan waivers to incentivise new graduates to practice in underserved rural areas – such as had been implemented in the United States. Another solution was to improve veterinary services in rural areas through greater partnership between the public and private sectors, in line with a recommendation from the World Organisation for Animal Health.

"Some of the provinces in Canada are setting a good example. They have rolled out telehealth services, offered grants to equip mobile veterinary clinics and are contributing to travel costs associated with farm visits to share the costs of biosecurity risk management."

One approach suggested by NSW Farmers during the inquiry has had some success. It was for the state government to invest in incentives to attract and retain vets, veterinary nurses and assistants in regional and rural areas.

Six months after the inquiry's report was released in June 2024, The Minns Government announced that vets, vet nurses, vet technicians and their families would be eligible for the Welcome Experience Program. The program helps with sourcing housing, childcare and other services when moving to rural NSW and has resulted in at least 15 new veterinary workers taking up jobs in the regions.

"We are still seeing clinics closing down in regional towns. You can't expect clinics to remain operational

Flying vet Ameliah Scott backs calls for stronger partnerships between the public and private vet sectors.



if they are not viable,” Dr Alders said.

“If we want to build a sustainable veterinary workforce here in rural NSW, then we need a range of solutions that address the complex challenges that have caused this shortage in the first place.”

“Incentives such as waiving student debt for graduate vets who take up work in rural NSW would make a real difference in attracting vets to the rural communities, as would more partnerships between the public and private vet sectors in support of rapid exotic animal disease detection and control in NSW.”

“The key issue with a having so few vets in regional areas is responding to emergency disease outbreaks like the recent White Spot in prawns.”

“Effective surveillance, detection and response to animal disease is reliant on a strong veterinary sector. This has been highlighted recently in relation to the outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease and Lumpy Skin disease in Indonesia.”

FLYING VET BACKS MORE INTEGRATION

Ameliah Scott is doing more than most to help fill the void of veterinary services in the vast Western Division.

The fifth-generation farmer and third-generation pilot operates a unique mobile vet clinic from a family sheep, cattle and goat station at White Cliffs. Aptly named The Flying Vet clinic, Dr Scott uses a plane to provide on-farm veterinary care to the state’s most remote stations.

Dr Scott also does regular 10-day ‘Road Runs’ in her ute to provide companion animal and livestock care at pre-arranged locations in towns like Wilcannia, Ivanhoe and Menindee.

“The plan was always to come back out bush and be a vet,” Dr Scott said.

“There were more vets looking for jobs than jobs advertised back when I graduated. The industry has changed so much in the last decade.”

Dr Scott said she was fortunate to land an inspiring first job as a vet in rural Victoria working with feedlot cattle and more intensive health management programs on dairy farms.

“That was the best thing I could have done because it has really set me up with the skills for where my career has gone and what the industry has come to.”

“That first 12 months out of university is really what makes or breaks you professionally as a vet. Having a good mentor at that time is critical, but unfortunately there are not enough experienced vets in some regions to support and inspire graduates.”

Dr Scott followed up with an equine internship and experience in mixed vet practices before heading back to the family farm six years ago to become The Flying Vet, a farmer and a mother of three.

While The Flying Vet is helping to meet the needs of farmers in the far west, Dr Scott said structural changes to state government veterinary services would help address the wider shortage of vets in rural NSW.

She backs Dr Alders’ call for stronger partnerships between the public and private vet sectors for responses to exotic animal disease detection and natural disasters.

“Victoria does integration between government and private vets extremely well. Private vets can act as contractors to support responses to disease outbreaks and are invited to meetings and training events facilitated by the state government.”

BREAKING DOWN EDUCATION BARRIERS

Dr Helen Scott-Orr began life as a vet in the Central Coast region in late 1960s, when only 10 per cent of veterinary science graduates were female. Today, it’s around 80 per cent.

In more recent times, her illustrious career in veterinary sciences, agriculture and biosecurity has led to key postings in examining and advocating for the veterinary workforce in Australia.

Dr Scott-Orr said despite the challenges for rural veterinary practices being well-known, there is a lack of comprehensive data to validate and quantify the problem.

“Policies that will make a change to our profession, must be informed by good data. You can’t just use anecdotes about individuals, you have to have good

data, and you have to have an understanding as to how that can make a difference,” Dr Scott-Orr said.

Dr Scott-Orr was appointed chair of the federal Governments Veterinary Workforce Data Taskforce in February last year. The Taskforce aims to develop recommendations relating to comprehensive national data approaches for advocacy, policymaking, and planning, while reviewing governance and operational options to support the veterinary workforce.

“The overall purpose of the taskforce was to get a better understanding of where the veterinary workforce is across the country and how it is engaged.”

“That purpose comes from the distressing statistics about veterinary suicides and mental health and lots of issues about the supply of veterinary services in rural areas. Emergency management of disease outbreaks and climate disasters is also a key driver.”

The taskforce will meet for the final time in February before handing a report to Australian Chief Veterinary Officer Chief Beth Cookson.

Dr Scott-Orr also led a review of veterinary education in Australia and New Zealand in 2023. The resulting Rethinking Veterinary Education report found veterinary education is at a crisis point in Australasia and is directly contributing to vet shortages.

Dr Scott-Orr said several factors were contributing to the crisis, including growing demand for veterinary services, inadequate funding, high student debt and uncompetitive salaries.

The report made 25 recommendations directed at veterinary schools, their universities, accrediting bodies, veterinary associations, and governments. They are supported by the NSW Government in the 2024 inquiry report and include lobbying the federal government to extend to veterinarians the student debt relief available to doctors and nurses who practice in rural and remote areas.

NSW Farmers and the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) continue to actively lobby for specific HECS debt relief for veterinary students, which was one of the recommendations from the 2023 NSW government inquiry.

In a survey conducted by the AVA, 100% of respondents indicated that they would consider working in a regional or rural practice if their HECS debt was wiped.

Both organisations are advocating for a Rural Placement Incentives Scheme that waives HECS fees for early-career veterinarians practicing in regional and rural areas.



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ECO-ANXIETY & RURAL COMMUNITIES



In rural communities, conversations around extreme weather events like drought, bushfires or flooding are part of daily life. You hear it on the radio, read it in the news, at the local coffee shop and around sporting fields. The discussion might turn to climate change and how ‘things are different now’ or ‘it never used to be like this’. The word “unprecedented” has become overused in recent times. All this chatter can plant seeds of worry about the future of the planet, which might lead some to experience feelings of helplessness, stress and guilt. For those living and working on the land, such worries can weigh even heavier. This feeling is known as eco-anxiety, and it’s a far more common experience than you might think.

Eco-anxiety is a deep sense of worry or distress about environmental changes and their future impact. It’s not a clinical diagnosis, but a real emotional response to things like extreme weather, ongoing

uncertainty, and changes to the land and seasons. Eco-anxiety can show up as constant worry and checking of forecasts, avoidance of climate news, concern over long-term viability of the farm, sleeplessness, relationship strain, anger, guilt about not doing enough, or existential dread. More than three quarters of Australians¹ feel the impact of eco-anxiety, and for some, these feelings can significantly impact their daily lives, choices and mental well-being. Eco-anxiety affects people everywhere, but when you live in rural communities or work on farms, it can take on added complexity, where extreme weather events directly shape daily life, livelihoods, and land.

For many rural families, farming is a way of life passed down through generations. It’s deeply connected to family history, culture, and community identity. When livelihood and identity are directly tied to the land, climate uncertainty threatens

both heritage and sense of self. The direct exposure to extreme weather, such as droughts, bushfires and floods, means the impact is experienced firsthand. Media coverage of these events can be prolonged and framed for maximum impact, showing images of stock losses, burned fences or washed-out roads. This can lead farmers not directly affected to identify with those who are on an emotional level. When devastating weather events occur, like the severe flooding on the Mid North Coast and Hunter regions, damaging storms, and widespread bushfires across NSW in 2025, it’s not just a loss of property and infrastructure. These events make climate fears feel very real and personal.

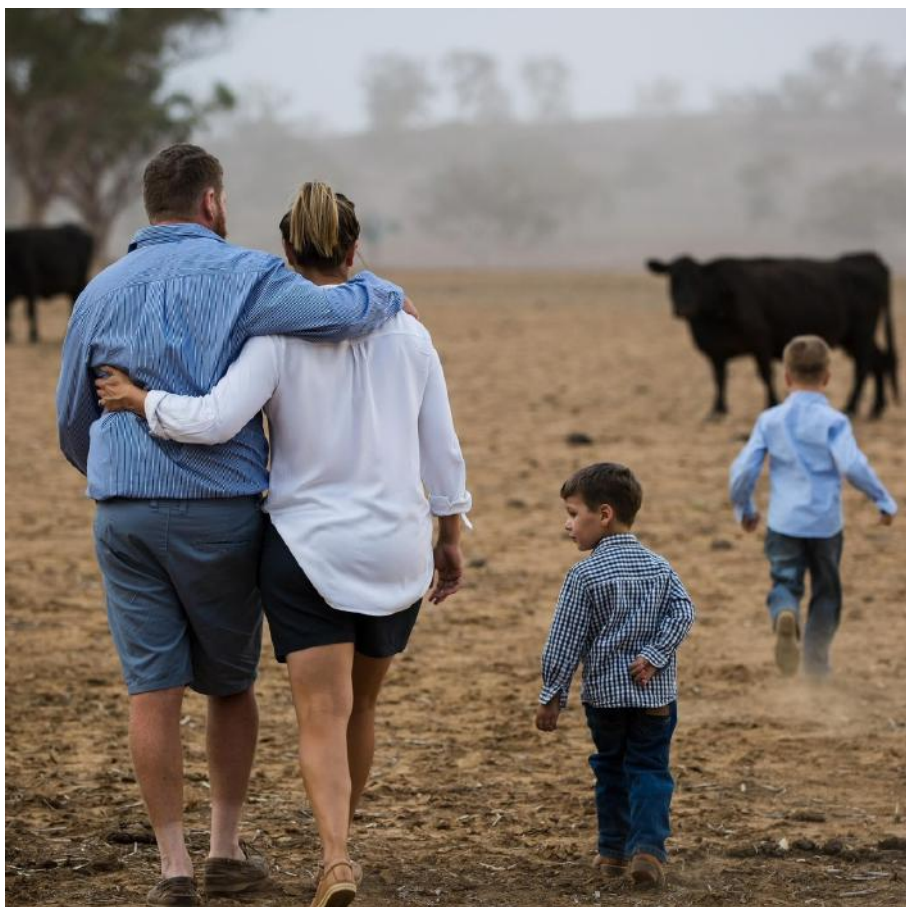
Young people in these communities also face unique challenges, adding another layer to the conversation. Spending a considerable amount of time thinking about the future ahead of them, more than half of all young people experience

feelings of eco-anxiety². When the climate feels uncertain or worsening, it can trigger worry for the future of the family farm, as well as concern about feeling caught between existing farming practices and sustainable farming options. Young people often describe feeling disregarded in discussions or told they 'don't understand how things work'. Social media and news

outlets can amplify this sense of doom and inability to make an impact, leading to thought patterns of 'I can't make a difference'. The inherent global scale of climate issues clashes with the perceived smaller area of influence, creating a gap that can feel like powerlessness.

Despite these challenges, there are hopeful signs. Many people and communities are turning worry into action. Getting involved in groups like NSW Landcare, farmer networks, regenerative agriculture groups and resilience committees, showing how people can band together to make small, meaningful changes. Initiatives like these create spaces for people to connect with nature and take practical action. Through hands-on projects and activities, they're proving that thinking globally and acting locally can make a real difference. Similarly, these projects don't just help the environment, they give people a sense of purpose and hope in the face of climate challenges.

Small actions can shift thinking from catastrophising to problem-solving. Focusing on what is within your control, even the little things, helps reduce stress, ease anxiety and improve mental wellbeing. While some sustainable changes may seem too extensive or cost-prohibitive to undertake, such as major water-infrastructure upgrades or large carbon farming projects, there are many simpler steps you can take to make a difference and ease eco-anxiety.



Increasing groundcover, recycling, small water conservation steps, rotational cropping or grazing, and taking part in Landcare projects can contribute greatly to change in yourself and the environment. Research has shown one of the easiest and most beneficial ways to improve your mood and reduce stress is spending time in nature. A quiet walk through the paddock, a moment to breathe and look out over the sunset, watching birds go about their small actions. By taking a few minutes to engage with the land without a purpose or task creates a mindful connection to the environment and can reduce overwhelm and anxiety while building resilience.

While feeling concern about extreme weather and the climate is a normal response to real challenges, the way in which these feelings are managed is important. When worry becomes constant, overwhelming, or begins to affect sleep, relationships, or daily functioning, it may be a sign that extra support could be helpful. Stay connected and start with small achievable steps like joining a local sustainability project, community group or simply getting some quiet time outdoors. Every action matters, and together they can create meaningful change for both the environment and your wellbeing.

Contributed by the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program.

If eco-anxiety is affecting you or someone you know, reach out to your local RAMHP Coordinator.



For more tips, see the Climate Council's Climate Anxiety Toolkit.



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By **KATHY RANKIN**
HEAD OF POLICY
AND ADVOCACY



Advocacy work delivers results for our members

The NSW Farmers Policy Team recognises many of our members are facing significant challenges and uncertainty as we head into Autumn. Be it the incredibly hot and dry conditions that exacerbated drought conditions, the aftermath of the severe weather and flooding of 2025, those seeking to manage the growing

number of feral animals, or those grappling with the uncertainty of new government legislation and regulation related to firearms, native vegetation, or livestock management.

Consequently, there is much for your Association to take to government on your behalf.

In the past few months NSW Farmers has, to



Workplace Relations update



By **GRACIA KUSUMA**
HEAD OF COMMERCIAL
& WORKPLACE
RELATIONS

NSW Farmers has continued its advocacy across key workplace relations matters at both the State and Federal level, focusing on ensuring employment regulation remains practical, balanced and supportive of business viability in regional NSW.

On 12 February 2026, the WHS Amendment (Digital Work Systems) Bill passed the Parliament of New South Wales, despite strong objections from business groups including NSW Farmers. We engaged directly with the Minister's office outlining our grave concerns with aspects of the Bill. The legislation grants union permit holders access to

employers' digital work systems to investigate suspected contraventions. While the Bill proceeds largely unchanged, late amendments were secured requiring at least 48 hours' notice before access can be requested, and the access provisions will not commence until Guidelines are drafted, consulted on and published.

NSW Farmers remains concerned about the breadth of the definition of "digital work systems" and the potential exposure of confidential, proprietary and personal information. We will continue engaging with the Minister's Office and SafeWork NSW to ensure the forthcoming Guidelines appropriately

highlight a few outcomes:

- Appeared before a NSW Parliamentary Inquiry to vigorously argue against regional NSW becoming the dumping ground for the state's waste,
- Delivered strong advocacy that enabled electronic fencing to be legislated in NSW,
- Achieved a conditional registration for Farm Firefighting Units to strengthen local bushfire responses,
- Been successful in forcing the Australian Government to step back from the introduction of unfair taxes on superannuation,
- Brought government agencies in front of members to address the concerns many have about Native Vegetation Maps, and
- Highlighted the importance of government being good neighbors as the managers of National Parks.

While it is great to be able to highlight a few achievements, it is important to note that many of these are the result of much effort – in some cases, over many years. Our work, informed by our Advisory Committees, Councils and Taskforces, is based on the issues and concerns of our membership who bring policy motions for debate to Annual Conference and Executive Council.

We also recognise that our members and staff were devastated by the terror attack at Bondi last

December. We recognise the critical importance of effective legislation to minimise the likelihood of such an attack being repeated, but we also know that legislation and regulation must be appropriate and workable.

The legislation raised a range of concerns across the farming community – proposed changes to licensing requirements and firearm designations for example – that had the potential to impact the use of firearms as a tool of trade by primary producers.

There remains uncertainty as the regulations are developed, but I want to assure our members that the voice of farmers will be front and centre as these are developed.

Over the coming weeks members will be attending Branch annual and general meetings and may be considering motions for debate. As you engage in local Branch debate, I hope our work and achievements aid you in developing ideas that have the potential to set our policy priorities into the future. We have improved the process for motion submission and encourage all members to get involved in this important endeavor.

It is important that our members' voice underpins the Association's advocacy and sets clear direction for our work. I encourage members to bring forward concerns and highlight key issues that have the potential to negatively impact the future food and sustainability of our nation.

safeguard sensitive information and limit access to what is reasonably necessary to investigate a suspected contravention. We will advocate for clear, objective parameters around what constitutes a "justifiable" suspected contravention, to prevent vexatious or unwarranted allegations being used to trigger access to employers' digital work systems.

At the Federal level, NSW Farmers, through the National Farmers' Federation, is contributing to the parliamentary inquiry into the operation and adequacy of the National Employment Standards under the Fair Work Act 2009. There are aspects of the NES that increasingly constrain business flexibility, risk undermining productivity and economic growth. The employment safety net must strike an appropriate balance between fair treatment of workers and the sustainability of the businesses that employ them, particularly small and regional enterprises. Our advocacy will emphasise restraint

in any further expansion of the NES and caution against reforms that increase the cost of employing people where there is no clear evidence of improved productivity. Workplace regulation should not be used as a substitute for addressing broader social issues without a clear productivity or economic rationale.

This article is provided for general information only. Farming businesses should seek professional advice regarding their specific circumstances. The NSW Farmers Workplace Relations team is available to assist members in reviewing salary arrangements, maintaining compliance, and implementing best-practice record-keeping practices to ensure employees are correctly remunerated and award obligations are met.

Join NSW Farmers as a Farmer or Agribusiness member to access our Workplace Relations packages.
Find out more at www.nswfarmers.org.au/join

Already a member? Contact our Member Service Centre on **1300 794 000**,
to add on a Workplace Relations package.





Major milestones ahead for the future of the Murray-Darling Basin



By **CONNIE MORT**
SENIOR POLICY
ADVISOR

2026 is shaping up to be a transformative period of time for the future of water management within the Murray-Darling Basin. Most significantly, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will embark on the first major wholesale evaluation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan as part of their two-year long Basin Plan Review. A 12-week period of public consultation through February, March and April is expected to lay out what the MDBA has concluded about not only the achievements, pitfalls and consequences of the Basin Plan rollout over the past 14 years, but how to consider the future management of the Basin through the lenses of a changing climate, a shifting agricultural industry and evolving environmental pressures. As part of the review, the MDBA released four significant reports in 2025 – the Basin Plan Evaluation, the Sustainable Rivers Audit, the Basin Outlook and the Sustainable Yields – which all said many things but most importantly concluded that simply, the Basin Plan is achieving what it set out to do. At a topline level, the environmental health of the Basin has improved, Sustainable Diversion Limits are in place and water diversions for industry (including agriculture) are compliant to those limits. It is now the case that over 70% of inflows remain in system for the environment, and the productive pool of water available for agriculture continues to shrink through water entitlement buybacks. But the MDBA themselves resolved that adding more water to the environmental pool is not the solution to deliver the next level of outcomes under the Basin Plan. It is estimated that the Australian Government has spent over \$11 billion to implement reform in the Basin and to this day continues to buy more water, often at poor value for money, towards the 450GL target that was codified through a political deal under the Restoring Our Rivers Act 2023 negotiations.

Bubbling along underneath this headline national review are a handful of looming events going on at a NSW state level, with potential to boil over and make the water policy space even more complicated. Throughout 2025, the Committee on Investment,

Industry and Regional Development from the Legislative Assembly of NSW Parliament has been running an inquiry into the impacts of the Restoring Our Rivers Act 2023 on NSW regional communities. NSW Farmers provided a submission to the inquiry and appeared at a hearing, where we highlighted the detrimental cumulative impact on the agricultural industries and communities within the Basin from years of water recovery and reform. It is expected that the Committee will table their report, including their recommendations to the NSW Government on what should be done next, sometime in 2026. Another major piece of work for the MDBA due this year is the reconciliation process of the 2017 adjustments to the sustainable diversion limits. Their assurance report on the sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism (SDLAM) from last year confirmed that delayed SDLAM projects like constraints relaxation, and the water savings that were to be delivered via these measures, will result in a potential shortfall of over 300GL. Any shortfall could mean either a reduction in the Sustainable Diversion Limits set for each valley (how much water is made available to industries like agriculture) or a bulletproof reason for the Australian Government to trigger another suite of water buybacks – or concerningly, both options could be on the table. NSW is responsible for delivering 22 SDLAM projects, of which 10 are already operational and major progress is occurring with a handful more but it is now expected that almost half of all SDLAM measures will most likely not be completed by the 31 December 2026 deadline.

It is expected that there will be some big and hard questions posed as the Basin Plan Review evolves over 2026 and there will be some major lines drawn in the sand by stakeholders about what should be done about the future of water in the Basin as thinking and momentum shifts into constructing Basin Plan 2.0. What is most important is that those farmers who live in, rely on and protect the environment of the Murray-Darling Basin in NSW can have their say and share their thoughts on what it all means to them.



By **RHIANNON HEATH**
SENIOR POLICY
ADVISOR

Across regional NSW, farmers are reminded constantly of their responsibilities under the Biosecurity Act 2015 (NSW). The legislation imposes a general biosecurity duty on all landholders, requiring them to prevent or minimise risks of pests, diseases and weeds spreading on their properties and onto neighbouring properties. Many producers have responded by creating detailed Farm Biosecurity Plans, which specify how visitors and contractors must behave when accessing their land. For example, they set rules around vehicle hygiene, clean-down procedures, restricted paddock entry and sign-in declarations. These plans are not simply about bureaucracy, they are essential safeguards for production systems, market integrity and fulfilling legal responsibilities.

Exemptions to the obligations of all parties to comply with Farm Biosecurity Plans are justified in certain cases. During emergencies, the exemptions and emergency powers under the Biosecurity Act 2015 are specifically intended for situations where life, property or the environment face immediate danger, such as firefighting, flood response, rescue operations, infrastructure collapse or urgent repairs to fallen power poles. These powers are granted under provisions such as s 122 and s 141 of the Biosecurity Act 2015, which allow immediate action without prior notice in emergencies.

However, a keen eye will notice that a few other agencies have managed to slip into the same exemption clause, even though they are not emergency services. Under the Mining Act 1992 (NSW), the Petroleum (Onshore) Act 1991 (NSW), the Electricity Supply Act 1995 (NSW) and the Telecommunications Act 1997 (Cth), mining, gas and transmission line contractors and telco company contractors are granted statutory rights to enter land for exploration, survey and

infrastructure purposes. These powers allow access without any explicit requirement to comply with a landholder's Farm Biosecurity Plan.

It has been observed that mining companies and major infrastructure contractors have relied on this legislative authority to access land without complying with proper biosecurity requirements. In doing so, they exploit the ambiguity within the Act.

This becomes most visible when exploration or infrastructure contractors arrive at short notice, citing legislative authority for entry. The consequences of these instances can be extreme. Weed seeds clinging to a vehicle undercarriage, fungal spores on boots or soil-borne pathogens on equipment can cause incursions with costs that stretch into years of lost productivity. A clear example is the spread of the Hudson pear in western NSW, a highly invasive cactus that has become established around the Lightning Ridge opal fields. Its rapid spread has been linked to mining vehicle movements, showing how easily a poorly managed contractor entry can seed a weed problem that becomes a lasting burden on the surrounding farming community.

No farmer disputes that fire crews, flood responders and rescue services must be able to enter land immediately and without delay. That is the obvious intent of the exemptions. The problem arises when mining exploration surveys or transmission-line maintenance teams are treated as though they fall under the same category.

Relevant agencies often respond to complaints about these practices by pointing to the General Biosecurity Duty under the Biosecurity Act, arguing that this is a sufficient legal pathway to hold individuals accountable. The problem is that the General Biosecurity Duty is poorly defined within the Act and, in practice, prosecutions under it are incredibly rare.

The solution lies in restoring the original intent of the law. A straightforward fix would be to amend relevant legislation so that any person entering land under authority, except for genuine emergency services, must comply with the notified Farm Biosecurity Plan of that property. Liability for breaches should also be clarified, ensuring that contractors, not landholders, bear responsibility where their actions introduce biosecurity risks.

Farmers are being told daily that biosecurity is everyone's responsibility. That message is hollow when the law allows mining companies and large-scale contractors to treat on-farm protocols as discretionary, thanks to clauses that were originally designed for emergency situations. If the General Biosecurity Duty is to mean anything, it must apply equally to those who work the land and those who enter it under statutory privilege. NSW Farmers continues to propose solutions on ways to close this loophole, so that where a biosecurity management plan is in place, reasonable measures must be complied with by miners and explorers accessing farmland.



Land tax statement of expectation



By **DAVID TREGENZA**
POLICY ADVISOR

NSW Farmers has been hearing from a growing number of members facing the sudden loss of their primary production land tax exemption.

In several cases, farmers after going through a gruelling compliance process have received a large, and sometimes retrospective, land tax assessment potentially worth over \$300,000. These are genuine primary production businesses who are now faced with a large, unexpected tax bill.

So what triggered these bills? For some, it was operating a small farm shop. For others, offering 'pic-your-own' produce as an alternative harvesting method. These are the kinds of activities farmers are adopting, often encouraged by the NSW Government, to manage risks such as drought and respond to market opportunities. Small scale value adding, agritourism, direct to consumer sales and on farm small scale processing connected to the cultivation and maintenance of the land are now common features of modern farm businesses.

Yet under the current interpretation of the Land Tax Management Act 1956, these complementary on farm activities are being treated as non-primary production and thus competing uses of the land. As a result, many farming businesses are being deemed by Revenue NSW as not having primary production as the dominant use of their land and therefore losing their exemption.

After receiving increasing reports from affected members and policy passed by Executive Council, the Business, Economics and Trade Committee made this issue a priority for the Committee year. To underpin NSW Farmers advocacy and engagement with the NSW Government, the Committee has developed a position

paper which outlines our expectations regarding the current compliance and policy framework.

In developing this Statement, the Committee drew on members' firsthand experiences, NSW Farmers policy, detailed policy analysis, and engagement with key stakeholders to outline what a modern, fit for purpose definition of primary production land should look like including parity with Victoria maintaining integrity of the exemptions purpose.

WHAT NSW FARMERS IS CALLING FOR

The Statement of Expectations calls for practical reforms, including:

- updating the definition of primary production land to reflect modern farming practices,
- reinstating indexation of land tax thresholds to prevent bracket creep,
- limiting retrospective assessments to one year,
- reducing punitive interest rates on disputed tax bills,
- pausing compliance action while reforms are considered.

Importantly, NSW Farmers believes the definition must clearly recognise income generated from converting produce grown on that land into value added products which is currently allowed in Victoria and activities directly reliant on the land such as low tier agritourism (e.g. pick-your-own produce), which has emerged as an increasing problem point for family farms around the state.

At its heart, this is a simple issue. The law needs updating to ensure the land tax exemption properly reflects and supports the realities of modern farming.

NSW Budget

A roadmap to \$30 billion by the year 2030



By **SAMUEL MILLER**
PRINCIPAL ECONOMIST

The annual state budget is an opportunity to reset and reflect on what has been achieved and what still needs to be done to reach our goal of hitting \$30 billion in agriculture output by 2030, now only 5 short years away. In 2025 we secured \$100 million for biosecurity, \$140 million for primary industry research, and \$500 million in support for flood and storm disasters.

This year, we are keeping our ambition high, and once again building our budget asks around 5 key pillars geared towards delivering the maximum value to agriculture across the state. These priority asks were identified through a comprehensive engagement with elected farmers representatives serving on NSW Farmers committees and Executive Council. The priority budget asks are:

- \$400m for an Agriculture R&D Endowment and Innovation Fund
- \$36m/year to Update the Definition of Primary Production for Land Tax
- \$250m for a Farm Risk Fund to Mitigate the impacts of Climate and Weather Risk
- \$500m to upgrade Country Rail to 25TAL through the Regional Network East/West Program
- \$50m/year for a 10-year Biosecurity Coordination Action Program

All together these investments are projected to drive net benefits of \$1.4 billion (in present value terms) to the economy and industry. All the budget proposals have gone through a rigorous economic evaluation, and have been assessed to generate a Benefit-Cost Ratio greater than 1.0, meaning that they represent value-for-taxpayer money, an important consideration when state government revenue remains tight.

In addition, our budget submission lays out a number of other funding priorities that remain important to our advocacy. These include:

BIOSECURITY AND ANIMAL WELFARE

- Continued funding for Cattle Tick, Good Neighbour Program, and the Sheep and Goat eID device discount programs
- Reallocate funding from the proposed Office of Animal Welfare

LAND USE

- Support for landholders to manage mining exploration and land access challenges.
- Support for landholders with native vegetation assessments

WORKFORCE

- Implementation of the Primary Industries Workforce Strategy
- Ongoing funding for AgSkilled
- Waive Stamp Duty for First Farm Buyers
- Expansion of the farmgate counselling program

WATER AND DROUGHT

- Extension of the funding for telemetry and the Cap and Bore Program
- Availability of drought relief to support recovery.

TRANSPORT

- Improved funding for local roads

This year we also encouraged NSW Farmers branches to write letters to the State Government, outlining priorities for funding and support that are relevant at the local level. By raising our voices together, branches elevate the volume and impact of our advocacy, driving our successes. We hope that as many branches as possible took advantage of the opportunity and assistance provided, and will continue to do so in future years. In the meantime, our work has only just begun in promoting our advocacy priorities, and in the coming weeks and months we will be actively meeting with parliamentarians and pushing our platform at every chance.

WHAT ELSE?

NSW Farmers has written to the Treasurer, Jim Chalmers, expressing our disappointment at the ACCC's decision not to oppose the acquisition of Delta Agribusiness by Elders, and have requested that he exercise his powers under the Consumer and Competition Act to authorise the ACCC to initiate an investigation of the industry if evidence of anti-competitive business practices arises in the rural merchandising sector.

Late last year the Government released their proposed laws to prohibit price gouging by Supermarkets, which has incorporated some of the feedback provided by NSW Farmers to utilise an appropriate cost-plus benchmark that considers the cost to supply, and recognition of seasonal supply and demand trends as factors that enable supermarkets to charge excessive prices.



Firearm change explained



By **ELEN WELCH**
POLICY DIRECTOR

The past couple of months have been extremely challenging for many, as we've managed the impacts that followed the significant tragedy that occurred in Bondi on 14 December.

Whilst Sydney was grieving the worst terrorist act Australia has seen, federal and state governments were moving swiftly to reassure those communities directly affected, increase police powers, crack down on hate speech and introduce tougher gun laws.

In the days that followed there was a lot of uncertainty about exactly what changes would be made around firearms. NSW Farmers actively worked throughout that period to advocate to the NSW Government, opposition and crossbench that legitimate agricultural use must not be unfairly targeted by the reforms as firearms are vital tools of trade for farming with continued access a necessity.

SO WHAT HAS CHANGED IN NSW?

At the time of writing in February, there continued to be considerable uncertainty about the timelines and next steps of the regulatory changes required to implement firearms changes passed by the NSW Parliament on Christmas Eve.

While primary legislation passed, for the most part the new limits and requirements were yet to come into effect and would commence by proclamation with the regulation changes made in due course. Some changes to Permits to Acquire were effective immediately, and updated information was available via the NSW Police Firearms Registry page.

Changes passed in NSW regarding ownership and licencing:

- Imposing a firearms cap – no more than four for individuals, no more than 10 for primary producers (not cumulative with any other genuine reasons you might be authorised for on licence).
- Limits straight-pull/pump action and button/lever release firearms to primary producers (moved to Cat C).
- Reduces magazine capacity for category A and B firearms (5 & 10 depending on firearms)
- Prohibits firearms using belt-fed magazines.
- Gun club membership will be mandatory for all firearms licence holders (exemption provision enabled without specific detail).
- Licence terms reduced from 5 years to 2 years.
- Licence requirement for Australian Citizenship.
- Requirement to nominate deceased estate arrangements on application and renewal
- No longer be able to seek to overturn a licence decision through the NSW Civil and Administrative

Tribunal.

- Requiring all gun clubs to use the GunSafe online platform,
- Requirement for safe storage inspections before the issue of a permit.
- Changes to be accompanied by a comprehensive audit of existing firearms licences, as well as a gun buyback scheme, in partnership with the Federal Government

Federally, legislation was passed in January relating to the National Gun Buyback. This enabled the ability for it to be established with agreement by the states and territories. Importantly, the Bill did not prescribe any design detail beyond requiring cost-sharing with the states, which was positive to ensure the design process was not rushed and the scheme was fit-for-purpose.

WHAT HAS NSW FARMERS BEEN DOING?

To inform the Association's ongoing advocacy at both the state and federal level, the Rural Affairs Committee had been busy reviewing the details and avenues to get the best outcome possible for farmers and agriculture following the passage of primary legislation. Whilst the tougher gun laws could have been a lot worse for farmers in terms of restrictions on types of firearms and caps, the changes were certainly not ideal and there were several feasibility issues that we seek to resolve through the process to change the regulation. This included the gun club membership requirement, the need for ability to apply to have more than 10 firearms where there was a legitimate use case, risk of processing delays due to increased frequency of licence renewals/applications, and restoration of a merit review pathway to appeal licensing decisions through NCAT.

Whilst NSW Farmers did not support the need for a buyback, we recognised that if farmers were required to surrender firearms to meet new state-based requirements, there needed to be fair compensation available including ammunition, accessories and parts limited by those laws. Equally, in our view the design of the national gun buyback should not be rushed and be informed by robust consultation with affected stakeholders to ensure law-abiding farmers had clarity and were not unfairly penalised or faced with financial hardship as a result of these changes.

We have long advocated for state and federal governments to focus on ensuring that those operating illegally (outside of the rules) were meaningfully addressed – not just those following the rules – which included the ongoing development of the National Firearms Registry.

It will be a busy year and NSW Farmers will continue to advocate strongly for the sector to ensure that these changes are workable for farmers, and any adverse or unintended consequences for farm businesses are minimised, including through our representative on the NSW Firearms Consultative Council.



Major changes for End Point Royalties in the grains industry



By **COSTA THEODORE**
SENIOR POLICY
ADVISOR

What is an End Point Royalty (EPR)? An end point royalty is a fee paid by crop growers to plant breeders based on the amount of grain produced and sold, rather than on the amount of seed purchased.

This is legislated under the Plant Breeder's Rights (PBR) Act 1994 and recognises intellectual property rights of the owner of a variety (the plant breeder) for a period of 20 years from its development. EPRs acknowledge the effort plant breeders put into the development of new seed and to incentivise the ongoing development of novel varieties.

Development of new varieties can take upwards of 10 years and require significant amounts of research, market analysis and sustainable funding. EPRs therefore incentivise continued research and development of quality breeds that are designed for Australia's diverse seasons and unique growing settings.

HOW ARE EPRS COLLECTED?

EPRs are collected once the grain has been sold, and there are two methods to collect those.

1. Either the grain buyer or trader automatically deducts the required EPR once the grain has been sold before paying the grower the remainder and remits the EPR to the plant breeder, or
2. The grower must voluntarily declare the amount of grain sold of the particular EPR variety via the National Grower Register (NGR) and pay the breeder directly once they have received an invoice.

While growers acknowledge the value of sustainable research in this space and are supportive of a fair EPR system that is easy to navigate, the collection of EPRs has been difficult to manage, particularly in the East

Coast where farming practices and supply chains can be quite complex.

This complexity has led to a system that places significant administrative burden on growers, and increases the risk of non-compliance with the PBR Act for farming businesses.

WHAT CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE?

Following feedback on this process from NSW Farmers and grains stakeholders, Australian Crop Breeders, the peak body for field crop breeders, has simplified the grower declaration questionnaire to make the declaration process easier. From 1 February 2026, the questions growers will be asked are:

- Tonnes unsold from last season by variety (2024)
- Tonnes harvested this season by variety (2025)
- If required, tonnes cut for hay or silage by variety
- Tonnes retained for seed this season by variety (planting from 2026)

This change is expected to ease the laborious administrative task for farmers, particularly for those who do not have access to grain buyers or traders who auto-deduct EPRs at the first point of sale.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

NSW Farmers continues to advocate for the collection of EPRs by grain buyers to be mandated at the first point of sale – this auto-deduction would eliminate the administrative burden for farmers.

However, to enforce auto-deduction at the first point of sale, amendments are required to be implemented within the legislation of the PBR Act itself, meaning it would need ministerial intervention at the Federal level of government. We continue to work through our peak bodies in pushing for this change.

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In the paddock, on the air

Farmer and podcaster Jack Creswell shares his story with a wide audience.



Jack Creswell

HOW DID YOU GET INTO FARMING?

Grew up not knowing I was in agriculture, it was just what we did. Grew up pretty remotely near Tilpa NSW and most days were filled in by “working”.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT AGRICULTURE?

I love that nowadays any job can be found in agriculture. From accountants to tech to the soft skills as well as people and culture. It’s the best people that are too humble for their own good. We just get on and do it, no one tells a farmer get out of bed more than themselves...or the bank.

WHAT DO YOU WISH MORE PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT FARMING?

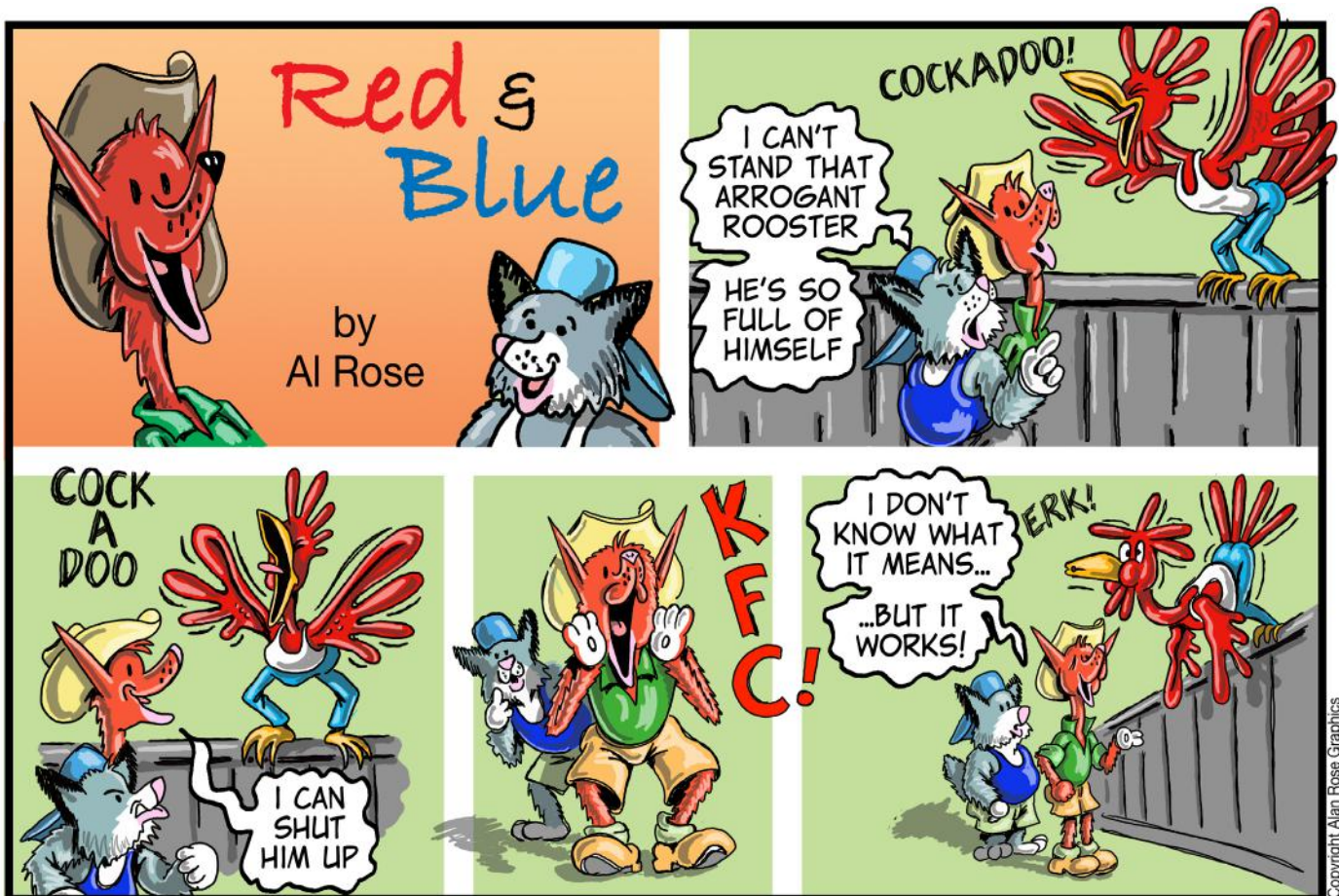
It’s bloody tough but you’ll have fun doing it. I probably think what I wish farmers knew

about are other areas - that’s where we can see improvement. I was born to connect ideas to those that need it I think.

“Don’t know about off-farm investments? This person does go there!” That is what I wish farmers knew. You don’t know what you don’t know...

WHAT ARE YOUR ASPIRATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURE?

To think big within the farm gate. There is so much opportunity if done correctly, yes there are variables but put the “gutter guards” up and bowl your ball down. Aspire to help improve the “great” transition of assets from one gen to another and to do that successfully isn’t always easy. Spin the right plates and you’ll keep them going. Keep on farming!



Your goals, our commitment



We're proud of our regional roots because they taught us what really matters – community.

That's why we take the time to understand your unique goals and support your journey, so together we can turn your vision of retirement into reality.



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