

# **Queensland Election 2006/7**

## **A Rural Industries Perspective**

Brisbane  
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## Introduction

Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the peak rural industry organisation in Queensland, uniting 13 of the State's peak rural industry organisations, who collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers across the State. QFF is a federation of the major intensive rural commodity organisations working on behalf of all primary producers and rural communities in an industry valued at \$11 billion, and employing over 75,000 people across the State.

Through QFF, rural industry resources are pooled to ensure powerful representation and effective strategy development on important industry issues.

QFF provides direction, leadership and representation on issues of common interest to the rural sector in Queensland. Our goal is to secure a sustainable and profitable future for our members, as a core and dynamic element of the economy.

*Queensland Election 2006/7 – A Rural Industries Perspective* outlines key election priorities for QFF across the State.

QFF Member bodies include:

Australian Prawn Farmers Association

CANEGROWERS

Cotton Australia

Growcom

Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland

Qld Chicken Growers Association

Qld Dairyfarmers' Organisation

Qld Irrigators Council Association Inc

Emerging Primary Industries Group

- Australian Ginger Growers
- Biological Farmers of Australia
- Flower Association of Queensland Inc
- Queensland Aquaculture Industries Federation
- Qld Olive Associations Group

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## **Overview of agriculture in Queensland**

QFF and its member bodies represent the major intensive commodities in Queensland. Intensive agriculture makes a significant contribution to the regional, state and national economies, forecast to provide 58% of agricultural production in Queensland this year. In the five years to 2005/6, the value of intensive industries in Queensland rose by more than \$1 billion (24%) despite the impact of drought, nearly three times the growth in extensive industries (up 7.7%). The value of Queensland's leading agricultural industries are:<sup>1</sup>

- Cattle: \$3675m
- Lifestyle horticulture \$1480m
- Sugar \$1000m
- Fruit \$785m
- Vegetables \$740m
- Forestry \$720m
- Grains \$510m
- Cotton \$395m
- Trawl fishing \$280m
- Poultry \$230m
- Pigs \$220m
- Dairy \$210m
- Eggs \$100m
- Aquaculture \$65m
- Other crops \$520m
- TOTAL \$10930m

The impact of Cyclone Larry on intensive agriculture in far north Queensland has been on a very large scale with initial estimates of up to \$500 million for the first 12 months.

Agriculture continues to be a major employer in Queensland. In 2000, prior to the drought taking hold, agriculture accounted for 103,000 employees or 6.2% of the Queensland workforce, employing more workers than the tourism and hospitality, mining, transport, communications or financial services industries. As the drought has taken hold, farmers have been forced to downsize, with 27% of jobs disappearing between 2000 and 2005.<sup>2</sup>

A recent report by the Productivity Commission notes a shift towards more intensive farming, both as a structural shift to enterprises using more intensive production systems (poultry, cotton, grapes nurseries) and the adoption of more intensive production techniques in increased use of supplementary feed, chemicals and irrigation.<sup>3</sup> The report also notes that while agricultural output has increased in absolute terms, it has declined in relative terms to just 4% of total national output, employing around 375,000 people nationally and accounting for over 22% of Australia's exports.

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<sup>1</sup> DPI&F Prospects June 2006

<sup>2</sup> ABS Labour Force cat. No. 6291.0

<sup>3</sup> Productivity Commission Trends in Australian Agriculture June 2005 p. 42

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The contribution of agriculture to the economy is much larger than the 'official' statistics imply, particularly in regional areas. Research by Econtech suggests that adding in the value of all activities that occur to farm outputs post farm gate and the value of economic activities supporting farm production gives a better indication of Australia's 'farm dependent economy'. On this analysis, the farming/farm dependent component of the economy rises from 3.2% of GDP to 12.1% of GDP. In employment terms, while the agricultural sector employed 407,000 in 1998/99, this figure rose to 1.6 million (or 17% of the labour force) when the farm output sector is included.<sup>4</sup>

Even this may understate the contribution of agriculture. Agricultural landscapes play an important role in tourism and providing 'breathing space' for urban development. It is difficult to imagine North Queensland without the green cane fields, or the green hills of Maleny not dotted by dairy cows. In Europe, the contribution of agriculture to tourism is recognised, with farmers now often paid to maintain rural landscapes such as hedgerows under schemes like Britain's Countryside Stewardship program<sup>5</sup> The linkages of scenic amenity values and rural landscapes is recognised in the SEQ Regional Plan<sup>6</sup>, with work now proceeding under the auspices of the Office of Urban Management on developing policy covering ecosystem services.

However, it is worth noting that the achievements in terms of increased value of production have occurred in an environment of long term decline in the terms of trade for producers. ABARE's terms of trade index (index of prices received for outputs compared with prices paid for inputs) has declined by a third since 1990.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, farmers have only been able to maintain their incomes by controlling costs and increasing productivity and efficiency. This has been made more difficult in recent years by a rapid acceleration in costs at a time of, in many cases, stagnant or reducing prices.

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<sup>4</sup> Econtech "Australia's Farm Dependent Economy" Australian Farm Institute March 2005

<sup>5</sup> Cain Z and Lovejoy S "Overview of Agr-Environmental Programs in the European Union and the United States" Farm Policy Journal Vol. 2 No 3 Aug 2005 p. 35-6

<sup>6</sup> SEQ Regional Plan pp36-41

<sup>7</sup> ABARE Australian Commodities Sep 2005 p.289

## **Issues requiring Government action**

### **1. Water Resource Management and Pricing**

#### ***1.1 National Water Initiative***

The State Government is preparing an implementation plan for the National Water Initiative. There has been little consultation with industry regarding the implementation plan. Poor design and delivery of key components of the NWI will significantly increase the costs of implementation of reforms for farmers and threaten the benefits of the reforms.

QFF is seeking the development of a joint Government and industry plan over the next three years for the implementation of NWI providing for:

- Coordination of the implementation of reforms at a regional level.
- Transparency of the costs and implications of reform implementation.
- Measures to implement reforms in an efficient and practical manner.
- Measures to account for the impact of reforms at the farm and landscape scale.

#### ***1.2 Water Resource Charges***

QFF is opposed to the water resource charge as there is no adequate assessment that the charge will recover the efficient costs of implementing water management reforms into the future. The charge is also being imposed too early in the water reform process when the vast majority of water users are yet to see any benefit from reforms.

QFF calls for:

- The suspension of the charges until at least July 2009 to allow for a full and independent assessment of the efficient costs of Government water policy management activities as a basis for setting the water resource charge.
- An assessment of Government water policy management activities which takes account of:
  - Costs of water management on a regional basis to better address efficiency in the delivery of services.
  - Beneficiary pays principles of costs allocation.
  - A full review of the water policy management costs including means to improve the efficiency of performance and delivery.

#### ***1.3 Water Prices for SunWater Schemes***

The new price paths for SunWater schemes for the period July 2006 to June 2011 are currently being set following statewide and scheme negotiations.

The State Government is set to re-examine imposing a rate of return on scheme assets and a charge to recover dam spillway upgrades post 2011. QFF is opposed to both proposals.

Rural customers need a greater say in scheme investments and innovations over the next five years to take greater responsibility for managing their schemes to function independently beyond 2011. To achieve this outcome post 2011, QFF calls for:

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- Scheme management committees to have a greater involvement in the day-to-day management of their schemes during the next five years, including the development of practical measures to improve supply efficiency and meet customers needs.
- Customer reporting framework to provide regular feedback on SunWater's performance over the course of the price path.
- A review of customer service standards of concern for schemes.
- Measures to reduce the level of regulation and costs faced by SunWater.
- A review of the allocation of scheme costs between medium and high priority users.
- Fairer sharing of the costs of recreation facilities at SunWater facilities between customers and the community who benefits from these facilities.
- Reducing the costs to rural users of free allocations in schemes.
- Reviews of the viability of schemes unable to meet lower bound efficient costs particularly those who face permanent adverse changes in hydrology.
- A commitment not to impose a rate of return or spillway upgrade charges for the next price path.

### **1.4 Water Planning and Management**

Water Resource Plans are showing that there are a few overallocation problems with surface access in Queensland catchments but overallocation of groundwater resources is expected to be a problem as the formal planning process extends to groundwater, and major adjustment issues could occur. There is also scope in the water resource planning process to improve the way water is converted to allocations and shared to better deal with access and availability for each irrigation scheme and unsupplemented area. But to achieve this in most schemes, it will be important to establish adequate system monitoring and reporting first. QFF calls for:

- Secure and reliable access to water, particularly in South East Queensland to ensure a continuing future for farming in the region. Secure entitlements also need to be supported by efficient supply performance for supplemented and unsupplemented supply systems and greater certainty about use of water on farm and in a landscape context.
- Any extension of water planning to groundwater access to provide for adjustment assistance for those affected by plan requirements.
- Implementation of initiatives to better measure the performance of irrigation schemes and to better manage water allocations to meet the needs of irrigation customers.
- Strategic planning for development of key irrigation areas across the state to address future rural water needs, through better use of existing infrastructure, water trading and new irrigation projects.

## **2. Backing good farming practices**

Maintaining profitable and sustainable agricultural industries while protecting Queensland's outstanding natural assets and environments is a goal shared by QFF and its member bodies along with the Queensland community.

QFF has established itself as a leader in facilitating the delivery of successful farm management programs and promoting new thinking about the partnerships and arrangements needed to support sustainable development in the agriculture sector.

QFF has long argued that better sustainability outcomes are achieved through innovative, voluntary on-farm measures than by rigid, imposed regulation. QFF and its member bodies have engaged in successful industry partnerships with the Queensland Government and its agencies on initiatives such as the *Reef Water Quality Protection Plan*, the Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative and most recently with Farm Management Systems. Strong Government backing for industry based efforts is crucial to the promotion of sustainable farming practices in Queensland.

### **2.1 A strategic approach to sustainable agriculture**

QFF believes it is essential to develop a shared understanding on the strategic directions for sustainable and profitable agriculture in Queensland to guide the delivery of key programs including the *Memorandum of Understanding to Progress Farm Management Systems*, *Blueprint for the Bush*, bilateral agreements for the next round of Natural Heritage Trust, regional natural resource management plans, and current water and vegetation reform activities, climate change adaptation and biosecurity.

QFF calls for

- A long-term policy commitment to establish a cooperative approach to sustainable agriculture that places emphasis on self-management rather than regulation.
- Establishment of a whole of government ministerial taskforce to co-ordinate delivery on this long term strategic policy.
- A long term commitment to properly resource and coordinate the implementation of sustainable agriculture programs and initiatives.
- More effective linkages between regional government agencies and industry efforts.

### **2.2 Support for industry development programs**

In 2005, QFF and the Queensland Premier signed a Memorandum of Understanding to jointly work together to facilitate the development of industry Farm Management Systems programs. The Government followed up this initiative with a \$5 million allocation in *Blueprint for the Bush* to assist with industry implementation with dedicated property management officers. While welcome, this initiative falls well short of the investment necessary to accelerate the rollout and adoption of Farm Management Systems and similar programs across Queensland. QFF calls for:

- \$19 million over three years (equivalent funding to that provided to the rural leasehold strategy) for a SmartFarms Program to promote best management practices on farms across Queensland through industry-run programs such as Farm Management Systems.
- \$10 million for a spatial imagery acquisition program to meet whole of government and industry needs for good mapping for property and regional planning purposes.
- \$5 million to promote sustainability throughout supply chains that will deliver innovation through enhanced collaboration, maximised value of produce and better targeted consumer messages.

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### 2.3 Environmental stewardship

In 2006, the State Government secured \$3 million for the Nature Assist program and \$5.5 million in *Blueprint for the Bush* for “other environmental stewardship” programs. The design of these programs tends to focus on broadacre properties rather than encouraging biodiversity outcomes in many coastal catchments, particularly along the Reef and in South East Queensland. To accelerate the involvement of farmers in environmental stewardship activities, QFF calls for:

- Increase funding for environmental stewardship programs over the next three years to \$50 million.
- A joint industry–government taskforce to determine how Environmental Stewardship payments will be implemented in Queensland, with particular regard to the needs of protecting environmental assets on private land in the Great Barrier Reef catchment and the fast growing South East Queensland region as well as protecting biodiversity and native vegetation in broadacre environments.

### **3 Climate change & variability**

Adaptation to climate change is the biggest challenge facing Australian agriculture in the next 20 to 30 years. The impacts of climate change are being felt with hotter temperatures – January 2006 was the hottest month in Queensland's recorded history - and less frequent rainfall. Like all changes, a changing climate brings both risks and opportunities. Those who better understand the nature and implications of the change can adapt more effectively to avoid the risks and seize the opportunities.

#### **3.1 Climate change & agriculture program:**

The State Government has now identified dealing with climate change as one of the biggest future challenges for the State, and allocated the \$1 billion proceeds from the Energex sale to a 'Future Fund' to address these changes. Agriculture is arguably the most seriously affected sector of the State economy in terms of climate change effects. Yet there has been little investment by the State in identifying the impacts of climate change for farmers, or in preparing farmers for adaptation or mitigation strategies. To close this gap, QFF calls for:

- \$100 million from the 'Future Fund' to be allocated to a five year Climate Change and Agriculture program to work with industry on:
  - a research program to develop regional and industry scenarios for climate change in industry and likely threats and opportunities for industry;
  - follow research to identify new plant varieties and farming practices that might be better suited to climate change in Queensland;
  - raising awareness about and voluntary on-farm adoption of measures to address issues of climate adaptation, greenhouse gas abatement and the identification of new opportunities for rural industries;
  - research in terms of mitigation effects and adaptation techniques.
- Introduction of a State-based carbon emission trading and credit scheme even if the Federal Government fails to do so, and as part of that, particularly explore opportunities for rural landholders to be funded for providing carbon offsets.
- A commitment to work with industry to help irrigators assess risks they face and decisions they have to make in planning their future irrigation and improving water use efficiency, including on-farm irrigation systems, better matching of demand and supply of water resources throughout the system and improving the management of irrigation to achieve more sustainable landscape outcomes.

#### **3.2 Drought policy:**

The Queensland Government plays a crucial role in drought policy in terms of assessing the extent of drought for access to Federal programs, and in the management of assistance. Drought assessments and programs are too often concerned with broadacre situations and have difficulty fully appreciating the impact of drought on intensive, irrigated agriculture. To address these policy shortcomings, QFF calls for:

- Expansion of the reporting of seasonal conditions in shires to incorporate all principal agricultural activities in a shire.
- Improvement in the collection and reporting of data for assessment of drought declarations and recoveries to provide a more full appreciation of the impact of climate on all-year intensive agricultural activities.

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### **3.3 Cyclone Larry long term commitment:**

QFF has greatly appreciated the assistance provided by the Federal and State Government in the wake of Cyclone Larry. Estimates of the full year cost to agricultural production from the cyclone now exceed \$300 million, and could extend many years into the future. QFF calls for:

- A long term commitment from Government to continue to support primary producers in the affected region until full recovery has been achieved, with the Industry Recovery Taskforce extended for at least three years.
- Flexible repayment of loans through QRAA that take into account that return to normal incomes could be up to 10 years away for some farmers.
- Continued pressure on the Federal Government for more flexibility in the wages subsidy criteria and an extension from 13 to 36 weeks to help producers to employ workers during the recovery period when they will be without income due to crop damage.
- Fodder freight subsidy improvements for intensive animal industries on the Tablelands due to the failure of the maize and fodder crops.
- Transport of planting material to be eligible for the freight subsidy.
- Targeted exit payments to be added to the package for producers (particularly older farmers) who choose to exit rather than rebuild.
- Economic assessment of the impact of Cyclone Larry and recovery package.
- A general cyclone recovery strategy to be developed to ensure lessons are learnt from Cyclone Larry.

### **3.4 Energy policy:**

QFF calls for:

- The mandatory renewable energy target (MRET) to be increased to at least 5% within five years and as high as 10% within 10 years, and to do this at a State level even if the Federal Government fails to act.
- As part of an MRET initiative, incentives to be provided to rural industries (e.g. sugar mills) to encourage the investment in renewable energy.
- Support for a national carbon emissions trading scheme, and while waiting for that, development of a State-based scheme where practicable.

### **3.5 Crop insurance:**

QFF wants the Queensland Government to:

- Develop an innovative, Government-supported insurance program for natural disasters that would meet Government's requests for improved risk management in the rural sector.
- Removal of stamp duty on such insurance would contribute greatly to the affordability of insurance, and is an important component of improving the business environment of primary producers.

## **4 Farm business and economics**

QFF commodity members are affected by cost structures and market forces which are impacting on the primary production sector as a whole, with farm costs rising 4.2% faster than farm gate prices in 2005/06. Rising costs meant that net farm income fell almost 10% in 2004/5, and by a projected 23% in 2005/6 to \$4.5 billion.<sup>8</sup> Government rates, charges and taxes charged to the rural sector have risen twice as fast as prices over the past eight years. Too often, Governments have imposed costs on the rural sector without proper consideration of the cumulative economic impact those costs have. For farmers trying to improve the profitability of their businesses, key issues are about containing costs, improving market access and terms of trade, and improving productivity through continuous innovation.

### **4.1 Quarantine and biosecurity:**

QFF believes the avoidance of pest or disease incursions is of vital importance to the viability of all rural industry, as is protecting our environment and our unique plants and animals. Queensland's unique biodiversity and relatively disease-free status, along with our reputation as a supplier of fresh, high quality, clean produce must be protected. The Federal Government has recently moved to substantially increase funding for biosecurity and quarantine services recognising the increasing cost of protecting that status. The Queensland Government has not done so, and continues to run a 'crisis management' style approach to biosecurity issues without adequate resourcing of services.

QFF calls for:

- A ten per cent sustained increase in the core resourcing of the State's biosecurity and quarantine services (to \$67 million) to increase its response capacity and its monitoring and awareness raising activities.
- Resourcing of the response to biosecurity emergencies to come out of State contingency funds rather than DPI&F's core budget.
- A comprehensive review of Queensland's biosecurity services to ensure that new and emerging threats are adequately recognised and planned for.
- Recognition of appropriately audited industry assurance programs as a cost effective alternative to costly DPI&F inspection requirements.
- Improved industry engagement to build awareness, preparedness and response capacity.

### **4.2 Regulation review:**

QFF calls for:

- The establishment of a joint government-industry Rural Regulation Review Taskforce to comprehensively document the extent of paperwork faced by primary producers and reports back to Government on how to improve the business and regulatory environment for farmers.

### **4.3 Stamp duty, taxes & charges:**

Recent increases in land values have significantly increased the stamp duties and rates payable by farmers on land conveyancing and in leasehold rents. Similarly, the large increase in insurance costs has led to a commensurate increase in stamp duties payable. Stamp duty

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<sup>8</sup> ABARE Australian Commodities

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adds costs in an economically inefficient way to farm businesses engaging in succession planning or loan renegotiation.

QFF proposes:

- The immediate removal of stamp duty on the GST-component of fees and charges, and the removal of stamp duty on crop insurance.
- The removal of stamp duty on rural business insurance policies.
- Review of agricultural land rents to ensure that rents do not rise by more than CPI from the 2004 base for both category 1 and category 2 rents.

### **4.4 Fuel prices & ethanol:**

Fuel costs for the rural sector this year are double what they were eight years ago. RACQ data shows that petrol and diesel regularly sell for more than 10 cents a litre more in many regional centres than in Brisbane. QFF believes the Queensland Government can do more to close the gap between city and country fuel prices.

QFF calls for the Queensland Government to:

- Provide additional funding to the EPA for research and promotion into fuel efficiency projects in the rural sector in close partnership with industry.
- Support the development of an ethanol industry that can be viable and sustainable in the longer term without ongoing subsidies, and provide some balanced Government policy intervention to help such an industry become established such as greater promotion of E10 availability and research on more cost-effective production methods.
- Establish a farm-scale biodiesel production trial utilising a range of technologies and fuel feedstocks as part of an accelerated R&D effort on the potential of biodiesel and other energy creation work.
- Take active steps to ensure that independent fuel suppliers enjoy adequate port and oil refinery access and facilities.

### **4.5 Country of origin labelling:**

QFF calls for increased resources to Queensland Health so it can:

- Actively monitor and enforce the new Country of Origin labelling laws for fresh fruit vegetables, nuts and seafood and investigate consumer complaints.
- Implement an awareness campaign for retailers, producers and consumers.
- Introduce on-the-spot fines for misleading Country of Origin labelling.

### **4.6 Research and Development:**

The Queensland Government has reduced its own contribution to DPI&F and its research program by \$23 million (or 10%) over the last four years. Funding from external grants has fallen around 12% over the same period. Such a large reduction in state investment in primary industries seriously undermines the effectiveness of DPI&F's research effort, and the ability of Queensland rural industries to continue to improve productivity.

QFF calls for:

- Increasing State Government funding by at least \$23 million on current levels to at least those allocated in 2002/03 with the additional funds prioritised for R&D and extension activities.
- Industry and the Queensland Government working together to jointly determine DPI&F's research and extension priorities.

**4.7 Future of rural industries:**

QFF calls for:

- A clear commitment to supporting viable rural industries in South East Queensland with:
  - adequate resourcing of the Rural Futures initiative (including spatial information);
  - a long term commitment to maintaining rural water availability
  - provision of compensation to non-viable farms denied development rights due to 'green belt' restrictions
  - appropriate consideration given to the operating needs of rural industries in the region (e.g. chicken industry).

## **5 Labour skills shortage crisis**

Agriculture is a major employer, employing over 75,000 workers across Queensland, most in rural and regional areas. With a tightening labour market, rural industries have been finding it more difficult to find new staff and to retain experienced existing staff. A concerted effort is needed to promote rural careers, particularly in high schools, to ensure adequate university places are available, training is available and relevant to rural needs, and to ensure that harvest workforces are recruited.

### **5.1 Attracting and retaining rural workers:**

QFF calls for:

- The development of a comprehensive strategy to retain and attract skilled workers to rural areas including a range of financial and tax incentives, such as:
  - increasing travel and accommodation allowances for attending training in other centres;
  - improved recognition of prior learning;
  - increased incentives to rural industries and rural centres to offer more apprenticeships.

### **5.2 Rural training plan:**

QFF calls for

- A comprehensive joint industry-government approach to identify industry training needs on a regional basis to ensure that outcomes-focused training is provided in both formal and on-the-job environments.
- Commitment to renew funding at increased levels for FarmBis from June 2008 onwards.

### **5.3 Agriculture in schools:**

QFF calls for:

- The funding of 3 FTE people for a comprehensive program to promote agriculture and agricultural careers in schools, including the offering of more vocational training specific to agriculture in schools.

### **5.4 Agricultural colleges:**

QFF calls for:

- The reform process for the agricultural colleges to involve close industry involvement, with a commitment to upgrade the colleges to provide training on the latest technology, equipment and best management practices in industry.

### **5.5 Workplace health and safety application to rural industry:**

QFF calls for:

- Closer consultation between Government and industry on the removal of rural industry exemptions from the WH&S Act (e.g. on prescribed occupations) to develop appropriate conditions and codes for the application of the Act to rural industry, as has occurred in the electrical safety code;
- A 20% increase in funding to farm safety awareness programs (e.g. FarmSafe) to increase training and awareness of WH&S issues across the rural sector corresponding with the removal of the exemptions.

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### 5.6 Workplace health and safety – employer obligations:

QFF supports Commerce Queensland in seeking a workplace health and safety system that positively encourages employers to take actions that improve health and safety in their workplace. QFF calls on the Queensland Government to:

- Amend the Workplace Health and Safety Act to ensure that:
  - The responsibility for workplace health and safety between employers and employees is fairly distributed.
  - Employers' responsibility for managing workplace risks is limited to incidents that are foreseeable.
- Increase businesses uptake of enforceable undertakings by:
  - Reducing the cost associated with the scheme.
  - Encouraging business to develop and commence enforceable undertakings which provide broader benefits to the workforce/community, particularly in instances where the business already has a sophisticated workplace health and safety system in place.
- Provide incentives that encourage employers to develop workplace health and safety systems, instead of relying on deterrents alone – for example, through a credit point system. Developing incentives for good workplace health and safety practices will:
  - Allow employers to self regulate and develop workplace health and safety practices that best fit the individual circumstances of their business.
  - Improve the quality of workplace health and safety practices, decreasing the occurrence of incidents.
  - Greatly decrease prescriptive, third party intervention by the State Government.
  - Reduce the level of regulation and red tape that business faces and reduce expenses for the Queensland Government.

## **6. Government support for rural and regional communities**

Adequate infrastructure in transport, communications, health, education and housing is essential in order to allow existing rural enterprises to operate effectively and to attract new business and residents to rural and remote areas. The role of the private sector in infrastructure provision is acknowledged, however Government will need to continue to play a significant role in infrastructure provision as many projects in rural areas will be economically unattractive to the private sector.

### **6.1 Blueprint for the Bush infrastructure program**

The Blueprint for the Bush outlines some \$36 billion of public and private investment already underway or under active consideration in Queensland to sustain and grow rural communities west of the Dividing Range. QFF calls on the Queensland Government to:

- Commit similar funding levels to rural communities east of the Dividing Range to ensure the needs of all rural and regional Queenslanders are met.

### **6.2 Communications & Technology**

QFF believes there needs to be a program of continual improvement in rural telecommunications in order to facilitate business development and allow rural enterprises to keep pace with technological advances. With the proposed privatisation of Telstra, there is a very real danger that rural communications infrastructure will lag even further behind that provided in urban areas in the future. QFF calls for:

- The State Government to ensure that before the Federal Government sells Telstra that it guarantees regional customers receive equivalent services to urban customers.
- A State Government initiative to monitor the provision of telecommunications in rural Queensland to ensure that communications benchmarks are met in rural and regional areas, and to raise concerns direct to the Federal Government to meet any deficiencies.
- A Rural and Regional Technology strategy to include communications, health, satellite imagery, precision agriculture, computers on farms.

### **6.3 Transport**

The reliability of the road network is crucial to meet the basic needs of rural and regional communities such as education, health and their welfare and social needs. The provision of reliable transport networks at a manageable cost is essential to the movement of rural produce to its key markets in urban Australia. QFF calls on the Queensland Government to:

- Increase funding for road infrastructure to secure all-weather roads in rural and remote areas.
- Continue to oppose increase in national heavy transport road user charges that would ultimately be passed on to primary producers.
- Review impacts of transport regulations on rural industry including licensing of farm vehicles.

### **6.4 Government Service Centres**

Many of the problems experienced by rural and regional people in dealing with Government stem from poor communications or lack of access to real people or an understanding of who to talk to in government. QFF calls on the Queensland Government to:

- Establish Government Service Centres in rural towns in all regions to handle help desk for service enquiries across all government departments and agencies or the efficient processing of motor vehicle registrations or licences.