

Policy Position for Horticulture on Natural Resource Management

Background

Vision

A profitable horticultural industry based on environmentally sustainable production.

Goal

Australian horticulture to be regarded as a best-practice environmental steward:

By 2010, Australian horticulture will be recognized internationally for its widespread adoption of commonly agreed good management practices, which conserve and enhance the natural resource base and promote a long-term, viable, industry.

Our Position - Summary

Horticulture calls for:

- ❖ Collaboration to further develop and promote the adoption of measures such as the Horticulture Environmental Assurance Guidelines, to continually improve, and demonstrate, the 'clean and green' environmental credentials of Australian horticultural produce.
- ❖ Ongoing provision of incentives to help on-farm change for sound resource management and the exploration of emerging options such as environmental stewardship payments.
- ❖ Collaboration to develop comprehensive approaches to manage the impact of extreme weather events on growers, industries, regional communities and markets.
- ❖ Improved reliability in the supply of secure water entitlements to irrigators, incorporating risk management strategies to cater for fluctuating and changing seasonal circumstances.
- ❖ Support for an Industry Leadership Group (industry 'champions'), with input from the Australian Government, Landcare and other key stakeholders, to advise on industry NRM strategies and promote coordination of their implementation.
- ❖ Support for the implementation of the Horticulture NRM Strategy, (eg statements of intent or MOUs regarding different elements of the Strategy) and for its incorporation in industry development plans.
- ❖ Horticulture NRM Coordinators, to be appointed on a State basis, to work with State and Regional NRM bodies and align their efforts and those of horticulture, its various commodities, and (where appropriate) Industry Development Officers.
- ❖ The involvement of industry in the ongoing monitoring of the regional NRM delivery model and the development of improvements to it.
- ❖ Regional NRM bodies to be required to collaborate with horticultural (and other) industries to jointly set sustainable production targets, as 'matters for targets', in regional NRM plans.
- ❖ Collaboration in investigating effective measures to ensure all horticultural produce purchased in Australia has sound environmental credentials (eg in accord with the industry's Environmental Assurance Guidelines).

1. On-Farm Action

Issues

To remain successful, Australian horticulturalists need to strive for continual improvement in the efficiency of their operations and production systems, ensuring they do not adversely impact on the environment. This requires ongoing research and programs to build the understanding of growers to enable them to adopt practices appropriate to their circumstances.

In the past, State Agencies often played a lead role in research and provided “extension” services to industry. These services are now uneven between States - and in some cases, drastically reduced. The alignment of extension services with industry is much reduced overall – putting at risk the capacity of growers to keep on improving.

Regional Natural Resource Management plans now include targets for resource condition and for the management actions of producers. Regional NRM bodies and State agencies, have an interest in promoting excellence in production, in conjunction with the industry.

Although industry runs NRM programs, such as Enviroveg and the Horticulture Environmental Assurance Guidelines, there has not been a considered discussion of the roles of different organisations in “extension”. There has not been a collaborative design of industry, State and regional NRM programs for optimal effectiveness and efficiency. Consequently, there are gaps and overlaps in delivery, and growers become confused at the array of disjointed information with which they are confronted. A number of horticultural industries have Industry Development Officers and Industry Development Plans that could also assist in linking NRM and production programs.

Our Position

Horticulture calls for:

- ❖ Dialogue between Industry, governments and regional NRM bodies about the roles and responsibilities for natural resource management research and extension, and its alignment with industry and NRM programs (eg incentives for on-ground change).
- ❖ Collaboration to further develop and promote the adoption of measures such as the Environmental Assurance Guidelines, to continually improve, and demonstrate, the ‘clean and green’ environmental credentials of Australian horticultural produce.
- ❖ Collaboration to develop additional extension programs for growers, eg NRM training and access to expert advisors.
- ❖ Ongoing provision of incentives to help on-farm change for sound resource management and the exploration of emerging options such as environmental stewardship payments.

2. Climate Change

Background

Water is increasingly important to the production of fruit, vegetables, nuts and amenity horticulture products (eg nursery, parks and gardens, and turf). Customers require access to high quality produce, for as much of the year as possible; and retailers want steady, reliable supply. In turn, growers require access to secure supplies of water, on which they can develop production, business, and financial plans. In Australia's variable (and changing) climate, irrigation is becoming fundamental to horticultural production systems.

Industry has been proactive in water use research, but additional input is needed. The past over-allocation of water supplies, and shifting priorities to direct more water to the environment and urban supplies, are serious challenges to individual horticultural enterprises (refer to Horticulture's Water Policy).

If there is an increase in extreme weather events (storms, frosts and droughts) as part of climate change, then growers, industries, regional communities and markets will require more sophisticated support than short-term, knee-jerk responses. Industry wishes to be part of the development of new policy approaches as options to meet that need, should it be required.

Other global issues also pose risks - eg Greenhouse and Peak Energy - not only as immediate issues for production, but also secondary market considerations; eg the possible introduction of carbon trading or greenhouse protocols, or the concept of "food miles". Again, industry wants to be at the forefront in assessing the threats and opportunities presented by such issues and in formulating options for response.

Issues

The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions while protecting Australia's competitive advantages is critical to the sustainability of horticulture and all agricultural industries. Because of their significant role in Australia's emissions profile, the full involvement of agriculture and forestry in any emissions trading system could assist access to lowest-cost abatement solutions and deliver deep cuts in emissions. As Australia and the world work to reduce impacts of climate change, a carbon constrained future is inevitable.

Climate and climate change impact directly on Australia's agriculture and forestry industries; and horticulture is impacted in a very immediate way by even relatively small variations in climate. Agricultural industries, in turn, play a key role in Australia's profile of greenhouse gas emissions: agriculture is the nation's second largest emitter; forestry and horticulture's permanent plantings provide a significant carbon sink; and much of Australia's emissions abatement so far has come from significant reduction of land clearing from agricultural areas.

While agriculture has not been included in any emissions trading system developed yet, its emissions profile in Australia could make it a candidate for inclusion in any newly developed national emissions trading system which seeks to reduce national emissions in a cost-effective manner. Forestry is already active in existing trading systems. Through both the planting of new

trees and dramatic reductions in land clearing, agricultural industries have already done more than any other sector to reduce Australia's net greenhouse gas emissions. Horticulture is at the

fore-front of NRM innovation and best-practice (for example, the EPS Guidelines developed under our NRM umbrella, *Horticulture for Tomorrow*). As fluxes of greenhouse gases to and from the land are significant, deep cuts to greenhouse gas emissions from Australia will necessarily further involve agricultural industries.

Agricultural industries have unique features which must be taken into account if they are to play a comprehensive role in emissions trading. These include the widely distributed nature of the industries involved, the difficulty of measuring small changes in annual fluxes over wide areas, permanence, and the lack of knowledge about best management practices for greenhouse gas abatement in agriculture or the costs of such abatement.

The exploration of a phased approach to incorporating agriculture fully into a national emissions trading system highlights the need for research to identify low-cost mitigation options for Australian agriculture, the development of industry standards for mitigation and offsets, the verification of methodologies, and the accreditation of management practices. This will require industry, government and the research community working together.

Our Position

Horticulture calls for:

- ❖ Improved reliability in the supply of secure water entitlements to irrigators, incorporating risk management strategies to cater for fluctuating and changing seasonal circumstances.
- ❖ Collaboration to develop comprehensive approaches to manage the impact of extreme weather events on growers, industries, regional communities and markets.
- ❖ Significantly more research into the potential impact on industry of greenhouse-climate change, energy-transport costs, and carbon trading; and collaboration on appropriate future policies.
- ❖ Policies which support the immediate adoption of a national system (and work towards the development of a sustainable international system) of carbon trading
 - A phased approach which included the development and implementation of the necessary research program could allow agricultural industries to become full participants in an emissions trading system over time to ensure the continued sustainability of agriculture and forestry in Australia. This will require business, government and the research community working together.

3. Industry Leadership

Issues

Industry leadership is the key to a successful industry program. Industries need grower 'champions' who are well informed about industry and environmental matters, who are willing and able to put in their time to spread the word and discuss options, and to help develop and implement programs and structures.

With an industry like horticulture – a collective of some 45 different commodities – coordination within the industry is a major task in itself. However, when accomplished the results are very good, given the breadth of experience and knowledge brought to the table.

When industry is able to develop a coherent voice it is easier for other interests (eg governments) to communicate with it and to share ideas and solutions. The process is mutually beneficial. With effective leadership, there is more chance of effectively planning for sustainable industry development.

A threat to sustainable horticultural development arises from land that is suited to horticulture, and near its urban markets, being sought for lifestyle uses. An increasing number of non-producer neighbours makes it difficult for growers (eg in managing pests and diseases from derelict – hobby - plantings) and can pressure them to abandon the region. Local and State Governments need to improve their planning and development controls to avoid the premature, unplanned demise of horticulture within the vicinity of urban markets (the peri-urban fringe).

Before introducing development policies and controls, governments and industries will need good data on production, where it is occurring and what resources (water and land) it is consuming. At present such information is often scarce.

Our Position

Horticulture calls for:

- ❖ Support for an Industry Leadership Group (industry 'champions'), with input from the Australian Government, Landcare and other key stakeholders, to advise on industry NRM strategies and promote coordination of their implementation.
- ❖ Support for the implementation of the Horticulture NRM Strategy, (eg statements of intent or MOUs regarding different elements of the Strategy) and for its incorporation in industry development plans.
- ❖ Assistance in aligning industry development plans, regional NRM/water allocation plans and local development plans, involving State and local governments, industry and NRM groups – including measures to avoid the premature conversion of horticultural land to lifestyle or residential uses.
- ❖ Support from governments in gathering, collating and analyzing production and management data.
- ❖ Assistance with investigations into the environmental elements of production (eg to maintain access to chemicals required as part of integrated pest and disease management programs).

4. NRM Partnerships

Background

The Australian Government has initiated a regional delivery model for NRM. It has the backing of the horticulture industries as a means to engage and empower regional communities. The model is an innovative measure and will, no doubt, need monitoring and adjustment as it evolves. At the same time, there is growing acceptance that Government requires a better means of communicating and collaborating with industry.

Issues

Regional NRM bodies are required to set targets for ‘matters for target’, that include Resource Condition Targets and Management Action Targets. There is no requirement to set targets for sustainable production even though primary production is often a major user of natural resources, and is **the major manager** of them.

There is an obvious link between the use and management of resources and the condition of the resources; ie between production and the environment. Requiring regional NRM bodies to collaborate with industry and jointly set targets for sustainable production (as matters for target), would ensure that more realistic and achievable NRM targets are set to both maintain production and conserve the natural resource base.

More collaboration between industry and regional NRM bodies would also add a further level of information to communicate with Australian communities about the credentials of Australian produce and primary industries. Experience from the Sustainable Industries Initiative has shown that industries, NRM bodies and the environment all benefit when there is a NRM coordinator available within industry, to plan and manage collaborative NRM initiatives.

Our Position

Horticulture calls for:

- ❖ Horticulture NRM Coordinators, to be appointed on a State basis, to work with State and Regional NRM bodies and align their efforts and those of horticulture, its various commodities, and Industry Development Officers (where appropriate).
- ❖ The involvement of industry in the ongoing monitoring of the regional NRM delivery model and the development of improvements to it.
- ❖ Regional NRM bodies to be required to collaborate with horticultural (and other) industries to jointly set sustainable production targets, as ‘matters for targets’, in regional NRM plans.
- ❖ Increased monitoring and reporting by regional NRM bodies (in conjunction with industry) of improvements in resource condition, the changes in on-farm management that contributed to these changes, and the extension / incentives programs that supported the changes.

5. Health & Wellbeing

Background

Horticulture includes industries growing fruit, vegetables, nuts and amenity horticulture products (eg nursery, garden and turf). Horticultural produce is essential for good health (eg as per the *Go for 2 & 5* campaign) and wellbeing (eg the aesthetic, mental health and fitness aspects of parks, gardens and sports fields). Australian producers have a history of providing Australian consumers with quality, fresh produce - grown with attention to sustainable environmental practices.

An example of Australia's approach is the development of the *Horticulture for Tomorrow* Environmental Assurance guidelines, aimed at promoting sustainable production and assisting growers to demonstrate the credentials of their production systems.

Issues

Changes in Australia and overseas - ranging through issues like energy (transport) costs, labour (production) costs and welfare, water availability (drought) and care for wetland environments - are changing the relative competitiveness of Australian production. Australian growers may face increasing competition, within Australia, from imported goods. Even in low volumes, low cost imports may set the benchmark for pricing – resulting in less Australian production.

Australian growers are efficient in their use of natural resources and careful in their management. If Australian consumers increasingly rely on low cost imports they may be inadvertently supporting environmentally unsustainable production in other parts of the world, and putting at risk their access to secure food supplies.

Australia should demand high standards of environmental care in the production of all horticultural produce consumed in Australia, in order to maintain our food security and the planet.

Our Position

Horticulture calls for:

- ❖ Collaboration in investigating effective measures to ensure all horticultural produce purchased in Australia has sound environmental credentials (eg in accord with the industry's Environmental Assurance Guidelines).
- ❖ Support to the horticulture industry in continuing to promote the health and wellbeing benefits of horticultural produce and practice.
- ❖ Assistance in communicating information about good on-farm management by growers, plus industry/regional NRM programs and the outcomes they produce, to Australian consumers and communities.