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Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture
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Inquiry into food security in Australia

INTRODUCTION

The Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA (PGA) is a non-profit industry organisation established in 1907, which represents primary producers in both the pastoral and agricultural regions of Western Australia.

Current membership numbers equate to 84% of all pastoral leases, excluding Indigenous and conservation leases, and 21% of broadacre producers in the agricultural regions of Western Australia. This includes grain, livestock and mixed enterprises.

As an organisation which consists solely of primary producers from both the pastoral and agricultural regions of Western Australia, we are pleased to provide this brief submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Food Security in Australia.

BACKGROUND

Food security refers to the physical availability of food, and to whether people have the resources and opportunity to gain reliable access to it. Specifically, this includes availability, access, utilization and stability of supply.

Despite being one of the driest continents in the world, and with a limited proportion of arable land, Australia ranks among the most food secure nations in the world, alongside Canada, Germany, and France. Australia is a high-income country, ranking 12th in the world for per capita income, and the vast majority of Australians can purchase basic foodstuffs that provide adequate nutrition.

Australians benefit from being able to choose from an enormous and growing number of food products sourced from all over the world at affordable prices and can access diverse and high-quality foods regardless of seasonal conditions or changes in world prices. We are in the top 10 countries in the world for affordability and availability and have the world's equal lowest level of undernourishment.

Australia also plays a part in the food security of other countries. International trade – including Australian food exports – supports food security in other countries through providing physical access to food, lowering prices, and making food more economically accessible. Australia also contributes to food security in other countries through agricultural research, development assistance, and the transfer of Australian agronomic knowledge and expertise.

SUMMARY

Australia is one of the most food secure countries in the world, and produces much more food than it consumes, exporting around 70% of all agricultural production. In Western Australia up to 80% of grains, meats, fruits and vegetables, and live animals are supplied to the international marketplace.

The Western Australian grains industry is a major contributor to the agrifood sector and the Australian economy. Western Australia produces on average 13 million tonnes of grains each year, and the past harvest at a record 21.3 million tonnes. WA exports approximately 80% of its annual grain production to more than 50 countries world-wide, generating more than \$5 billion for the WA economy each year. Wheat production accounts for over 70% of total cereal production in Western Australia, with close to 90% exported to Asia and the Middle East.

Western Australia's livestock industries contribute over \$2.5 billion at the farm gate. WA is a world leader in live exports (including being the largest exporter of sheep in Australia), superfine wool production and dryland sheep and grazing systems. WA's cattle and sheep systems are focussed on live export markets to Asia and the Middle East and with the exception of mining and petroleum, are the major economic activity in the pastoral regions.

The WA beef industry is comprised of approximately 4000 cattle businesses with a total herd of approximately two million head distributed throughout the state. By number, the largest herd are in the Kimberley region of the State, followed by the Pilbara and then Southern Rangelands. The majority of these properties are pastoral lease hold.

ISSUES

Australia is a net food exporter, including in severe drought years, producing more food than required for domestic consumption. This results in domestic consumption remaining stable while exports vary, absorbing the ups and downs in annual production associated

with Australia's variable climate and seasonal conditions. However, Australia remains vulnerable to supply chain issues, due to its reliance on imports of agrichemicals and fertilisers. As has been seen with the Russia/Ukraine conflict, or with trade tensions with China, any disruption to the availability of these inputs would have a major impact on both domestic and export production.

The cumulative and ever-increasing pressure on governments to instigate carbon neutral or net zero targets is now placing future pressures on food security. Most net-zero schemes rely on carbon markets, offset schemes, and using arable land as carbon sinks—a tactic that might mean forced removal of the people currently living and working on them.

In Western Australia thousands of square kilometres of valuable grazing and watering land has been excluded due to Commonwealth and State national parks and reserves. In addition, the WA State Governments ambitious 2030 reduction target of 80% below 2020 levels is resulting on valuable land being taken out of the WA pastoral estate for wind and solar farms to develop an emerging WA hydrogen industry.

The approval processes for land clearing, and the creation of dams and other watering points, chemical use, transport, as well as stocking densities remain both costly and prescriptive for most producers. Further, the impacts on production and supply chain costs from rising fuel prices, as well as the need for the removal of immigration barriers to allow overseas workers entry to meet the significant labour shortages across the State continue to impact on the ability for producers to increase productivity.

The PGA welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



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