

Submission by The



Submission from the South Australian Farmers' Federation (SAFF) on the

2010 Discussion Paper, February 2011 Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia 2005 / 2006 – 2014/2015

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SA Farmers Federation

The South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF) is South Australia's peak agricultural organisation representing farmers across South Australia. As an agri-political group, SAFF's aim is to assist South Australian farmers and their rural communities achieve sustainable profitability by providing representation, leadership and services to members. By lobbying governments, SAFF has been able to achieve changes in legislation that promotes farming interests and the rural communities where they live and work. The SAFF works to generate greater understanding and awareness of farming's role, contribution and value to the South Australian economy. It also works to ensure that our farming communities continue to play a key role in the development and sustainability of our state as well as their own livelihoods.

Farming in SA

South Australia's agricultural farming sector is now worth over \$5.0 billion annually. It includes the production of beef, sheep, lamb and chicken meat, chicken eggs and crops such as barley, oats and wheat. There are currently almost 12,000 farming families and 33,000 people employed in farm jobs in South Australia.

The agri-food industry currently contributes \$12.4 billion to the state's economy each year and accounts for 146,000 South Australian jobs. The majority of South Australian food industry businesses are small to medium operators.

Agriculture provides over half of South Australia's export income. Local farmers and producers play an integral role in feeding our increasing population.

South Australia's reputation as a clean and green food producer is of utmost importance to this State. Not only for the reputation of our producers but for the benefit of our consumers. Equally of importance, is the ability of South Australia's producers to safely and sustainably provide food to meet the demands of the State's increasing population.

Strategic Infrastructure Plan

In preparing this submission, SAFF has consulted with its members from across the State. Based on the feedback, the following comments are made:

Lack of reference to agriculture in the current Plan

SAFF would like to highlight that there is **no** focus on Agriculture in the 2010 discussion paper despite the importance of agriculture to South Australia, as highlighted in our introduction. There are sections on other industries such as Minerals and Energy Resources, and sections on Recreation and Sport, and Arts, Culture and Heritage, but not Agriculture.

Agriculture contributes much to the management of the biggest area of natural resources of this State and to regional economies mostly paid for by its own resourcing. It requires many forms of infrastructure. Without it, how is government going to feed its growing population?

The paper is very urban centric. It is all about new development. There is little about maintaining the infrastructure already in place. The State Government must maintain its current infrastructure before it looks at expanding on the scale this paper suggests. And regional areas must be included as equal.

Why do we create new housing townships with all the cost of installing infrastructure such as roads, water and sewerage when we have so many regional towns which are close to Adelaide dying? These towns are already surveyed and have all the services required including power, water, hospitals and policing. Re-development of older towns must be put on the table as this State cannot afford what has been put forward. Regional areas must have the industries established in them and to stop the urban sprawl. Why does the growth and new development have to be in Adelaide?

The Infrastructure Plan gives population projections of 2.2 million by 2036. This population will need to be fed, but for this to happen there needs to be a change in emphasis to improving regional infrastructure for this to happen. Also with such a population projection, the Government needs to put emphasis on ensuring that some of these people move to regional areas, particularly if there are not to be labour shortages.

Targets around agriculture need to be included in the updated Plan to reinforce that the State Government values this important industry. A vibrant and healthy agricultural industry needs to be supported and encouraged by State Government and needs to be included in the State Infrastructure Plan.

Need for a National Infrastructure Plan

Australia appears headed for a crisis in infrastructure nationally. Infrastructure in real terms has declined since the introduction of the GST as governments have become reluctant to invest in big projects due to lack of cohesion between Federal and State Government planning.

There is an urgent need for a National Infrastructure Plan, and as part of this South Australia must be involved and to be part of it. There is emphasis at the moment on having a flood levy to rebuild infrastructure in those areas of Australia hit by flooding. South Australia needs to make sure that some of this funding comes to assist with the rebuilding after the flood damage to roads and other infrastructure in the northern half of the State.

2010 Discussion Paper

SAFF wishes to make comment on some of the 15 infrastructure sectors addressed in the 2010 Discussion Paper on the Strategic Infrastructure Plan for South Australia:

Urban Land

SAFF is very concerned about the lack of transparency and control over new urban housing plans such as at Mount Barker, Roseworthy and Two Wells.

The Government must give an unconditional guarantee that it will openly support community consultation where new housing developments are being planned. It must recognise there are risks in allowing private developers to assume control of new housing projects in the metropolitan fringe region. These new housing schemes require careful assessment, which involves meeting the highest environmental standards, in particular, where soil degradation, drainage and flooding pose a risk. The *30-year Plan for Greater Adelaide* stipulated that agricultural land would be maintained. In framing the State's Infrastructure Plan, it is important that this is remembered.

Transport

At some stage in the near future there is the need to look at the north-south route to by-pass Adelaide. It seems ludicrous that the Government is pushing heavy transport down the South Eastern Freeway through the tunnels and through Adelaide along Portrush Road to go north. The number of truck incidents on that steep downhill run has to make people question the logistics of this idea. In addition with the expansion of residential areas such as that proposed at Mount Barker, it would assist traffic congestion if some of the heavy vehicles did not need to use this route.

The State Government needs to consider an alternative route which avoids the need to go near the city. The road from Murray Bridge to Burra should be the designated route. The road which goes through Cambrai and Sedan to Half Way House on the Sturt Highway is already sealed. The Bower Boundary continuing due north to the Goyder Highway should be sealed and promoted as a trucking route. This would take heavy transport out of built-up areas and would miss having to traverse through the Adelaide Hills. The livestock transporters already use this road extensively and fully support the concept. They also use this road to deliver livestock to T&R at Murray Bridge and Lobethal. In time, this road needs to be road train capable.

The state of the roads in the unincorporated areas is of major concern. Many are in very poor condition and this was before all these flooding rains. As an example, in the area north of Morgan known as the Eastern Districts, the roads have not had any re-sheeting work for many years. The traffic is no longer just the residents of the district, as it is being used by many tourists as an alternative route to Yunta or Broken Hill or a day trip around to Renmark. The increased pressure has worn it out and is now an impediment to the grazing industry of the district as after rains it can be some time before transports can take produce out or even for residents to get off their properties for business or leisure. Just closing a road does not fix the problem after rain. Some parts are just plain dangerous.

One other usage factor is the number of "bashes" that go through. Unfortunately sometimes it is wet and they do huge amounts of damage and take years out of the life expectancy of this type of road. These organisations do great things for charities, but it is the locals who pay for it in the long run.

In relation to road trains, the Goyder Highway should be road train as well. Much of the truck traffic is Sydney to Perth. Road trains can get to Burra from the north. This must be considered if the Government is serious about vehicle emissions and climate change.

It has been speculated that one of the reasons for the halting of the ferry service from Wallaroo to Lucky Bay was that road trains are not allowed through Wallaroo. Mechanisms need to be in place so that planning approval can be considered for road access with any infrastructure developments of this type.

In relation to ports and their development/maintenance, Thevenard needs upgrading with the channel deepened, and it appears that this will not be as expensive as first thought. Thevenard is used for shipping both grain and minerals.

Information and Communications Technology

There is still a lack of mobile phone services through much of rural South Australia. This impacts not only directly on rural people but tourists (limiting the tourism industry) and travellers passing through regional areas.

While the National Broadband Network (NBN) is briefly mentioned, there is the need for the Infrastructure Plan to include some details. SAFF would support a benefit cost analysis of the NBN.

An important development that will be of benefit to rural communities is the move into telehealth. This is where the NBN or any other improvements in information and communications technology will be of benefit.

Education and Training

While promotion of international students is supported, what about resourcing regional education needs? Education is a huge cost to remote people who have little other options. They require availability of affordable secondary education and some government assistance in establishing regional accommodation or boarding subsidies. With mining now a large employer, there is increased requirement for good secondary education and mining is often a long way from facilities.

Recently the Federal Government has been examining the best way to fund sustainable regional higher education. More funding in this area is required to provide adequate rural tertiary studies, particularly as part of the process to attract students to not only study in rural areas but ultimately hopefully to live and work in the country. In examining the current funding levels, it is noted that compared to the other States, very little funding goes towards education in rural South Australia. There appears to be a case to increase funding particularly for the expansion of the Roseworthy Campus of the University of Adelaide, instead of just allowing the sale of the University's farming assets.

While SAFF would like to see emphasis in the Infrastructure Plan on the expansion of the infrastructure at Roseworthy, we acknowledge the recent building of the Veterinary Health Centre.

Science, Technology and Innovation

It is estimated that SARDI's infrastructure is worth \$60 million. Why is the State Government now considering divesting itself of SARDI? After building some world-recognised facilities, surely it would be better to resource these rather than for the Government getting rid of SARDI?

There are some of SARDI's facilities that do need upgrading. Minnipa Research Centre, noted Australia-wide for low rainfall research, needs upgrading if it is going to remain a viable research centre. It was due to the research findings from places such as Minnipa that allowed farmers in this State to grow reasonable crops over the past few years despite this being one of the State's worse droughts, and with the beneficial flow-on for the State's economy.

Health

SAFF was involved in lobbying against the State Government's proposed Country Health Plan. As a result, the plan was significantly modified, with the Government now saying there will be "no closure of country hospitals" and "existing services will be maintained". We are not sure if this is reflected in the Infrastructure Plan.

Support for country hospitals is required not just for the benefit of their local communities but to service the influx of tourists and other travellers. The recent achievements listed in the Infrastructure Plan in relation to regional health facilities are noted.

For telehealth to become a reality in South Australia rural areas, the infrastructure required needs to be put in place.

Energy

It is not acceptable to promote self sufficiency in power production through diesel generators (as indicated on page 159). This goes against all the climate change / CO2 hype within bureaucracy at the moment. For example, the Mid Murray and Goyder Councils created an enterprise zone where alternative industries such as feed lots and piggeries could be established with low environmental risk and close to services and markets. The State Government would not support this by putting three-phase power to the area, and as a result the whole thing has basically fallen over.

Many of the transmission lines in this State are now well past their use-by date and need replacing. It is not much use encouraging wind and solar power generation if there is not the infrastructure in place to transmit electricity from these sources.

Water

Similar to the electricity lines, the State's water infrastructure badly needs upgrading.

The reliance on the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* to protect the State's natural water resources is questionable. This Act does not protect water resources, it only creates management structures after these resources have been depleted, and this is generally only for large systems that have high volume water use which is mostly by varying types of industries.

The challenge in water management is to have the ability to protect water resources at the time they are showing some type of stress and in any sized system. At the moment, there are small systems with little data available that are under extreme stress and used primarily for stock and domestic which does not fit into the Water Allocation Plan (WAP) scenario. There is often no reticulated water available as a backup. We need smaller WAP processes to preserve the water and environmental assets in other than high volume industry areas.

With the State Government openly saying that water prices will escalate rapidly, how will livestock producers afford to water their stock? Doubling the price will stifle livestock production and put higher pressure on ground and surface water systems. Feedlots will be put out of business. A differential rate needs to be established based on type of use. The implications of higher water cost will be detrimental to regional water resources and the ecosystems they support. It will also have an effect on production and food security and regional economies.

On page 159 there is promotion of the use of ground water resources in the Mallee. This must be questioned when this area is having enough trouble now. To end the statement with "this groundwater is essentially non renewable" is ludicrous. This appears to have been bad planning for large development.

This section of the Infrastructure Plan is very urban- orientated, statements are motherhood with little detail and very much about what is already planned and documented presenting little vision. There is no thought about smaller regional areas or the regional areas at all. Small water systems are not recognized nor their importance to production, and there are no fall back provision for when these systems fail. This past 15 years of drought needs to be acknowledged in the light of getting recharge back into these systems as they have been drawn down over this time.

There is also no vision or mention of mining requirements as they require lots of water.

Natural Assets

Why is the emphasis on the conservation of only “key” environmental assets? The entire environment is an asset and all should be made of equal significance to the Government.

Similarly, why a focus on “iconic” sites? While this is supported, other smaller assets give wider regional opportunities and underpin tourism in smaller regional centres. Agricultural production mentioned along with tourism as it is a major part of this.

In the Strategic Priorities for Natural Assets, revegetation programs are highlights under Land and Habitat Management. Surely there are more important issues to deal with before this can even be considered? For example on the Fleurieu Peninsula some \$1 million of revegetation work has been lost due to kangaroos - good kangaroo management needs to be first implemented in this area.

This section of the Infrastructure Plan has only a very narrow focus on conservation areas, when it should be about the management of all of the State’s natural resources. Where is productive capacity and position as a key driver for much of the State’s natural resources?

Reliance on NRM plans to cover many aspects is a farce as Natural Resource Management (NRM) budgets have had massive funding cuts and this has put NRM plans into disarray which questions the Government’s importance in managing the State’s natural assets.