

Barton Deakin Brief: Prime Minister's Bush Summit Address

18 July 2019

Overview

Today, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced his support for rural and regional communities at the Daily Telegraph's 2019 Bush Summit in Dubbo, NSW. Focusing on bringing together metropolitan and country Australia in the struggle against drought, the Prime Minister announced a number of policy initiatives as well as the Coalition's strategic direction for agriculture and regional development.

This Barton Deakin brief will outline the key announcements from the address, which include new measures to support and lift Australia's agricultural industry, expansion of our agricultural export market, legislation to prevent trespassing on farms, a re-invigorated role for soil health, the establishment of new Committees and the possibility of a bipartisan Future Drought Fund.

Background

More than 90 per cent of New South Wales is currently in drought. This has slashed agricultural exports in 2019 alone by 22 per cent and in the past 12 months across the nation, farm GDP has declined by approximately 7 per cent.

The focus of the Prime Minister's address was to highlight the importance of regional Australia and raise issues such as drought, water security, sustainability, innovative farming practices, job creation and soil health.

\$100bn agriculture industry by 2030

The plan to lift Australian agriculture to a \$100 billion industry in the next decade was a key feature of Mr Morrison's speech, and one of the most significant commitments to this sector by a Prime Minister in recent years. This commitment is in line with policy suggestions from the National Farmer's Federation to boost Australia's economic health and support farming communities.

In Australia, 75 per cent of agricultural products are exported and the value of farm production is currently estimated at \$60 billion. The Prime Minister stated that this figure can be improved by further measures to expand our export markets and lift the value of the industry. The Coalition Government will work with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in order to secure more preferential or duty-free access to overseas markets. The goal of these negotiations is to increase free-trade and preferential trade agreements to more than 90 per cent by 2022.

Minister for Regional Development Bridget McKenzie will oversee the creation of a national plan to increase productivity in the agricultural sector, which will include removing non-tariff barriers to trade, invigorating investments in agricultural research and development, the adoption of innovative



farming technologies, assisting with intergenerational land transfers, improving water policy and infrastructure and new efforts to manage native and introduced weeds.

Legislation to prevent trespassing on farms

The Coalition will also introduce legislation regarding trespassing on agricultural property, with a view to passing it through all stages of the Parliament in the next sitting period. This announcement comes after a recent spate of highly organised farm invasions.

New House Select Committee

A new House Select Committee will be established to look at the future of rural and regional Australia. The Committee will be Chaired by Tony Pasin MP, Member for Barker, and will look specifically at how regional economies are diversifying and what regional communities are doing to increase their resilience.

Prioritising soil health

The Government will also make significant improvements to the health of Australia's soils. Mr Morrison applauded the work of Governor General Major Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC in his previous role as the National Advocate for Soil Health to the Department of Agriculture from December 2012. General Jeffery has raised public awareness of the critical role of soil health in underpinning sustainable productivity. The Prime Minister requested that General Jeffrey resume the role as National Soils Advocate, which will now be made a permanent office, supported by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of The Nationals, the Hon Michael McCormack MP has also emphasised the need for measures to address declining soil health, including initiatives to ameliorate the effects of increased levels of soil carbon, increasing addification, increasing salinisation and loss of nutrients from erosion. To read more, click [here](#).

National Water Grid

The Prime Minister re-iterated the importance of the National Water Grid to provide a reliable source of water and help to mitigate the effect of future droughts. The Grid will build upon the Government's \$1.3 billion investment to fast-track water infrastructure through the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund and the \$2 billion National Water Infrastructure Loan Facility.

ALP called to back Future Drought Fund

The Government also called on the Australian Labor Party in his address to support a national Future Drought Fund. This fund will require an initial investment of \$3.9 billion, increasing to \$5 billion to provide a sustainable source of funding for drought resilience works, preparedness and recovery into the future.



The Prime Minister stated that building drought resilience requires comprehensive management of water resources, soil and vegetation, but also requires the support of all sides of government. Mr Morrison emphasised the fact that drought policy and funding requires preparation and programming by the industries and communities which are affected, informed by the best possible information.

Supported farm visits

The Prime Minister re-stated his commitment to connecting urban and regional communities through government supported farm visits. The Government will support farm visits by students, as well as the iFarm initiative so that kids can understand what happens on farms, how things grow, and how that changes and supports their livelihoods and their daily lives. This initiative, announced during the recent election campaign, will commence in 2020.

Further information

To read a transcript of the Prime Minister's speech at the Bush Summit, click [here](#).

For further information on the Prime Minister's address or the Coalition's strategic plan for agriculture and regional Development, contact [Katrina Hodgkinson](#) on +61 428 778 141 or [Georga Nonnenmacher](#) on +61 457 662 422.