



# Regional Resilience

## Investing in the future of rural WA

Strong. Sustainable. Innovative.

Western Australia's rural communities are essential to our food security, economy, and cultural identity. The Greens support a resilient, sustainable agricultural sector and support farmers to remain on the land and earn a healthy return on their produce. We will enhance services to rural communities and bring renewable energy to regional WA.

Western Australia's place as an exporter of food to a hungry world should be protected and supported. Many farmers and pastoralists are practicing sustainable farming, but still face less predictable rainfall, uncertain returns and extreme weather events as a result of climate change.

The agriculture and food sector of WA accounts for around 10% of the state's GDP and is vital to the economy. In 2012-13, the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry employed around 34,000 people, or 2.6% of the working population. Over \$7.9 billion in gross value was generated from agriculture in 2014-15, with crop production accounting for 71.6% of this revenue at \$5.7 billion. Up to 80% of WA's produce is exported, with the majority sold to Asia.

A combination of a drying climate and a series of poor seasons, rising costs of fuel and fertilisers, competition from imported produce, limited local markets, price pressures from the large supermarket chains and often having to compete in international markets is putting many farmers under significant financial pressure.

The farming population in Western Australia is ageing with the median age now being 57, much higher than other industries. There is also a growing skill shortage with fewer young people choosing to stay in farming or related skill areas.

In addition, mining and onshore gas extraction is threatening important agricultural areas, either directly or by damage to water sources. This has put additional strain on farming communities.

Finally, the release into the environment of Genetically Modified (GM) crops has set farmer against farmer in legal challenges to protect the rights of Western Australia's organic producers and other non-GM farmers.

WA needs a resilient agricultural sector that supports farmers to remain on the land and earn a healthy return on their produce. That's why the Greens are campaigning for solutions that will

help farmers adapt to climate change and continue to provide western Australians and regional markets with a safe and reliable source of food.

### > INVESTING IN INNOVATIVE AGRICULTURE

With agriculture in Australia under increasing pressure, particularly in the face of climate change, now is the time to invest in the knowledge and innovation we need to boost and sustain agricultural productivity, and ensure that our rural and regional communities are connected to the knowledge they need for resilience and sustainability. The old parties have under-funded Australia's public agricultural research and development (R&D) causing a persistent decline in real investment. Long-term public investment in agricultural R&D is more essential than ever to ensure we can address the complex and cross-disciplinary challenges facing us.

The Greens \$242m package for investing in agricultural research and development will:

- **Invest \$75 million in additional research and development funding over four years.** Extra funding will boost key research, including through agricultural research and development corporations.
- **Provide \$100 million over four years for the establishment of a new Centre for Sustainable Agriculture.** The Centre for Sustainable Agriculture will focus on cross-sector agriculture issues that affect all farms, such as climate change, or water and energy challenges

Fund a national network of **180 agricultural extension officers** at a cost of \$67million over the forward estimates. These officers provide a direct link between innovative research and farmers on the ground

---

## > HELPING COMMUNITIES BUY DIRECTLY FROM FARMERS

The Greens will provide \$80m in grants to help communities buy directly from farmers. Many Australians want to “know their farmer”, and buy directly from where the food is grown. The Greens will **provide \$80m in grants over four years for infrastructure and initiatives that connect local communities**, such as:

- Starting farmers markets, mobile markets and community food box schemes.
- Creating and supporting community producer cooperatives.
- Fitting out local food hubs for packaging and value-adding local food, including for larger bulk supply.
- Creating and marketing a regional content brand.

Farmers and local businesses can benefit from the opportunity to sell directly to local communities. Being able to buy directly from local growers can also help communities access fresh foods at competitive prices and helps expand access to affordable healthy food.

## > INVESTMENT IN SOIL HEALTH

Soil is a pivotal resource for agriculture and food production. The Greens will **invest an additional \$100m in our national soil health strategy**. This will drive innovation in farming techniques, to improve the sustainability and efficiency of Australian farmers over the long. Reducing input costs such as fertilizer and reducing the drop in productivity that results from decreasing soil quality will make a real difference for farmers.

## > SAYING NO TO CORPORATE CONTROL

The Greens care about Australian food security and environmental sustainability. **We will stand up to big GM companies, and provide farmers and consumers genuine choice over GM crops.**

The Greens support the right of organic and non-GM growers to protect their crops from contamination by GM crops - and their market advantage – including through the courts.

The Greens oppose the release into the environment of any genetically modified organisms. The Greens want independent research carried out under appropriate conditions of safety for those involved and for the public and biosphere at large, with no adverse impact on non-GM producers or consumers and no approval of the patenting of life forms.

The Greens will begin work on a GM contamination clean-up fund, establish an inquiry into the assessment procedures for GM crops and products, and introduce comprehensive, mandatory labelling. All Australians should be able to choose GM free food.

## > FARMING IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

The Greens believe that farmers need support to make their farms climate change ready and to grow new crops in changing conditions. Australian farmers are very innovative and progressive in their ability to adapt their properties and practices to meet climate variability. We need farmers to remain viable for our own food security as well as our economic well-being. The Greens plan includes coordinating across departmental efforts to bring practical know-how together with scientific research to deliver real solutions for climate change adaptation; pushing for more funding for research and development; and ensuring regional communities are ready for extremes in weather.

Caring for our farmers also means helping them with the high energy costs of farming and food storage. Farmers are operating in a tough competitive environment many of them also against the rise of cheap imports. Helping energy intensive farms increase their energy self-sufficiency will lower costs, strengthen the food supply chain, lower our greenhouse gas emissions and build the clean green reputation of Australian agriculture. If we want to ensure Australia is always able to produce enough fresh food to feed itself, it makes sense to build resilience through our whole food supply system by encouraging increased energy efficiency and switching to renewable energy.

The Australian Greens **\$75 million in additional funding for research and development will help ensure Australian farmers have access to the latest technologies to help them combat climate change**. The establishment of a Centre for Sustainable Agriculture with an additional \$100 million will help address key challenges that matter most to farmers across Australia.

## > FOREIGN OWNERSHIP OF AUSTRALIAN FARMLAND

In 2015 the Greens secured an Australian-first register of foreign owned water entitlements. After a long campaign to reduce the trigger for the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) to conduct a national interest test, the government has reduced it from \$252 million to \$15 million.

Unfortunately, the government has not made this information available to the public, giving the register little value. **We need transparency on the foreign ownership of some of our nation’s most important assets**. Keeping this information private harms the ability to plan effectively, especially in the face of the impacts of climate change. The Greens believe that a register is useless if it isn’t publicly available and will fight to make the information available.

There is no question that foreign investment brings considerable economic benefits to Australia. However, the details about these investments need to be known – who bought the land, what the land is to be used for, how much similar land has the same investor purchased elsewhere in Australia, etc. That’s why we’re also advocating for a stronger register to protect Australians farming land and our capacity to feed our population.

---

## > FOOD SECURITY

As Australians we love our food. We have embraced dining out, café culture, community gardens, farmers markets and TV cooking shows with great enthusiasm.

But Australia's food security – ensuring that every Australian has access to a nutritious and adequate diet – rests on our farmers growing enough of a wide variety of food through the best and worst of times.

Under the pressure of cheap imports, local food processing jobs are also under intense pressure. Brands that are so ingrained in our national consciousness, such as Rosella, have gone.

Much of Australia's agricultural land is degraded, many rivers and groundwater systems are over-allocated, and our rare pockets of prime agricultural land and water are being lost to urban expansion, mining and onshore gas extraction. These issues are urgent, interrelated and of enormous consequence. **Our food system has reached a crossroad, and we must now make a choice.**

We can choose to give our farmers a fair price and ensure we are self-sufficient in nutritious food. We can understand that our food security and regional economies will be weakened by the loss of local food manufacturing and take steps to support it. We can recognise that our farmers are the vital custodians of our landscapes, and support them in adopting sustainable techniques that restore our landscapes and adapt and anticipate changes in the climate. We can ensure that every Australian has access to nutritious and affordable food.

We can do this by:

- Increasing commonwealth funding into public research and development in agriculture;
- Providing funding for a national network of 180 agricultural extension officers at a cost of \$67 million over the three years; and
- Expanding support for farmers to help them sell direct, bypassing the big supermarkets.

## > EFFECTIVE COMPETITION POLICY

Consumers, local businesses, farmers and food manufacturers are all under increasing pressure from the domination of Coles and Woolworths in the marketplace. The Greens have campaigned successfully for an effects test, which was adopted as policy by the Government. Now we need that protection in legislation. **An effects test will help people, farmers and communities, and limit the ability of the big supermarkets to control the supply chain.** We will continue to campaign to tackle the supermarket duopoly and fight to get protections into legislation.

## > SAFEGUARDING PRIME AGRICULTURAL LAND

Around 31,000 people work in the WA agricultural sector, but the protections for the land they work on to produce food are weak. Prime agricultural land in Western Australia is not defined in WA. The Greens believe it **should be defined under a scientifically based land classification system which has been developed with farmers' input.**

The Greens believe the State's Mining Act should be amended to protect prime agricultural land and water sources, from mining operations. This would mean that an exploration license, retention license, general purpose license or mining lease cannot be granted under that Act in relation to any such protected land and water sources.

The Greens believe that if any dispute arises as to whether or not any particular land is prime agricultural land, any party to the dispute should be able to apply to the State Administrative Tribunal (SAT) for a determination.

The Greens are also working towards a ban on new unconventional gas and coal mines, and stronger federal environmental laws to more strongly regulate unconventional gas and coal mining, including a water trigger. The Greens have consistently stood for the protection of our precious water resources and agricultural land from fracking.

## > TRANSITIONING FROM LIVE EXPORTS TO PROCESSED MEAT

Instead of costing Australian jobs, the Greens advocate a move away from live export to processed meat, managed by a comprehensive industry transition plan. Western Australia contributes 75% of Australia's live export trade, mainly sheep and cattle.

A series of high-profile animal welfare disasters has cast a cloud over the industry, leaving producers on edge and unable to predict when the next public relations debacle will unfold.

Long-distance transportation is stressful to animals and at their destination, exported animals are likely to face handling and slaughtering conditions which are unacceptable in Australia. In an age of ubiquitous social media and heightened awareness of the conditions in foreign abattoirs, producers need new strategies to rebuild confidence in their industry.

Live exports not only outsource animal cruelty offshore, they also export jobs. Since the 1980s, when a number of Australian abattoirs were closed due to the rise of the live export trade, around 40,000 meat industry jobs have been lost. **We can expand exports of chilled or frozen meats, including to the Middle East.**

Economic research shows domestic processing of livestock is worth more to the Australian economy per animal than live

---

exports. For example a sheep processed in Australian abattoirs is worth 20% more to the Australian economy than one exported live.

The Greens believe that WA's live export trade can be successfully replaced with an already established, Halal-accredited chilled and frozen carcass industry. **This would be a boost to abattoirs in the south west which are currently underutilised, and could process at least 1.5 million more sheep annually.** It would also mean a boost to the domestic market, as meat processing will become more competitive and will give local consumers more choice.

## > RURAL HEALTH

For too long we have seen poorer health outcomes in rural and regional Australia. People living in rural and regional communities experience poorer access to health services, significantly higher rates of disease and injury, worse health outcomes and a significantly shorter life expectancy compared to people living in major cities.

Despite the fact that about one quarter of Western Australia's population lives in rural, regional and remote areas, key health indicators like death rates and life expectancy are higher in these areas than in our major cities. It is not acceptable in 2016, that where you live should determine your health outcomes.

Despite these statistics, rural health has been too often ignored by the major parties. The Greens have listened to stakeholder concerns and will fight for better health outcomes in rural Australia through a targeted plan and key health measures to better align our health system with the needs of people in the bush.

The Greens see affordable, universal health care as an investment, not a cost. Our plan for investing in regional and rural health includes:

- **Advocating for the development of a National Rural Health Plan** to establish key areas of need in the bush and strategies to improve health outcomes, underpinned by appropriate funding and nation-wide coordination
- **Building a strong, sustainable workforce through a National Rural Generalist Framework.** This would include the development of mechanisms to promote and sustain rural general practices, strategies for rural recruitment and retention, and a training program that ensures rural medical practice are high quality
- **Unfreezing Medicare indexation to protect the most vulnerable members of our community from being priced out of the health system.** We have opposed this measure since it was first introduced by Labor, and have continued to oppose as this government has extended it. We would unfreeze indexation from 1 January 2017, investing \$2.4 billion back into Medicare and protecting rural health.

- **Investing in rural mental health with \$280 million to improve the availability and quality of rural and regional mental health services.** This will include attracting more mental health workers to regional WA, improving the skills of the existing workforce, and properly funding appropriate support services for those being treated for a mental illness in regional WA.
- **Safeguarding access to dental care** by maintaining the Child Dental Benefits Scheme and working towards universal access to dental care
- **Protecting hospitals by preventing further cuts to funding and ensure the Commonwealth pay its fair share** by increasing funding to match 50% of the efficient growth in hospital costs from the next budget cycle. This commitment will ensure patients in rural and regional Australia can have confidence in their local hospitals to provide the services they need, when they need them. We'll couple this will further focus on a primary care system which meets modern needs, leading to a reduction in avoidable hospital admissions.
- **Ensuring rural women's access to abortion by eliminating out of pocket costs.** The Greens will invest \$15 million over 4 years to improve access – no matter where you live. Women from regional areas must often spend vast amounts of time and money travelling to the urban centres to access terminations, far from their homes. More provision through the public hospital system will ease this problem.
- **Closing the Gap** by calling on the government to ensure the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (NATSIHP) is implemented in full, with appropriate resources and transparent monitoring.

## > ABORIGINAL REHABILITATION CENTRE FOR THE SOUTH WEST

The Greens have committed \$12m to fund the first Aboriginal residential rehabilitation service in the South West of Western Australia.

The establishment of such a service in the South West has been a long standing priority for the community sector in WA, which says it is desperately needed in the region.

Such a rehabilitation centre is essential if we are to **address alcohol and other drug addiction issues** in order to close the gap and reduce disadvantage.

When programs or initiatives have been evidenced to effectively reduce drug and alcohol addiction they should be developed and viewed as an investment in our community rather than a cost. Evidence shows that community driven residential treatment reduces drug use and criminality whilst improving physical and psychological health.

---

At the moment there are only two Aboriginal specific residential rehabilitation services in Western Australia, both are in the Kimberley. It is disappointing that WA doesn't already have this service when the evidence shows residential rehabilitation services are a key part of long term recovery.

The Greens **propose \$12m to fund an Aboriginal-specific residential rehabilitation service in the South West**; this is in line with recommendations by the West Australian Council of Social Services in their pre-budget submission.

## > CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

The Greens support the provision of essential infrastructure to all Australian communities on an open-access, universal service basis. Fast, ubiquitous telecommunications holds out the promise of greater connectivity to family and colleagues, a drawcard for younger people to remain on the land, the provision of distance education and healthcare services in ways never possible before, and direct contact with marketing and extension services.

For larger cities and towns, direct optic fibre connections to the premises promises greatly increased speeds, but it also makes possible vastly improved telecommunications services in regional areas. Wholesale NBN operations in the cities return a small profit to the taxpayer, enabling regional centres to be served by fast satellite and wireless services, finally bringing these centres into the digital economy.

**We support a high quality NBN that meets the needs of Australians now and into the future.** The Greens passed amendments to the NBN legislation improving transparency and making it harder for a future government to privatise the network.

## > BOOSTING REGIONAL TOURISM

The Greens will contribute **\$60 million to regional tourism grants** to be awarded to local small to medium tourism businesses, community groups and local governments on a competitive basis.

These grants would be targeted towards rural and regional communities where tourism offers a long-term sustainable economic footing, in particular those areas in economic transition post-mining boom or those currently economically reliant on unsustainable fossil fuel extraction. The grants would be applied on a matched funding basis, with a funding range of \$1000 to \$100,000 per grant.

These grants would provide funding for infrastructure, marketing and service provision that would contribute towards a long term increase in tourism activity and visitor numbers. We know that smart investment in tourism infrastructure will tap into the current potential of our tourism industry to grow.

By reducing the economic reliance of regional communities on extractive industries like fossil fuel mining and native forest

logging, we can make the inevitable transition to a sustainable future cheaper, faster and more equitable.

The Greens are the only party committed to a sustainable economic future for our rural and regional areas. Our tourism investment is a plan for moving regional economies beyond the old 'dig it up and ship it out' mindset of the 19th and 20th centuries. Instead, we want to work with regional communities to transition to long-term prosperity via sustainable industries like regional tourism.

## > RENEW WA

Renewable technologies are clean; already create more jobs than coal generation; are driving down power prices; and have advanced to a stage where they can provide secure base load power.

With over 300 sunny days in a year, a long stretch of coastline and being one of the windiest regions in the world, the potential for WA to generate renewable energy from our natural resources is enormous.

Our Renew WA study puts forward credible scenarios for meeting WA's south-west grid electricity demand entirely through energy efficiency, fuel switching, and a range of renewable energy technologies. The Greens have committed to reaching 90 per cent renewables by 2030. The study shows this is not only possible but also, in the long run, cheaper than business as usual.

A clean energy powered economy is inevitable. However, for WA to secure all the benefits of lower process, better technologies, more jobs, competitive advantages, significant export opportunities for innovative technologies and services, building the clean economy needs to start right now.

**The Greens are committed to renewing and diversifying our economy from one that relies on the declining industries of the past to one that provides the jobs and opportunities of the future.** The industries that have brought us prosperity in the past are now holding us back from creating prosperity for the future.