

Wednesday, 23 April, 2008

FUTURE FARMING: \$24 MILLION TO STRENGTHEN LAND AND WATER MANAGEMENT

A new \$24 million boost to strengthen land and water management and tackle weeds and pests was announced today under *Future Farming*, the Brumby Government's \$205 million strategy for new services and growth in Victoria's agricultural sector.

Agriculture Minister Joe Helper said the long-term productivity of the farm sector relies on the sustainable use of natural resources.

"The Brumby Government is taking action for rural and regional Victoria and the *Future Farming* strategy will enable our farm businesses to become more productive, competitive and sustainable as they enter an era of unprecedented change," Mr Helper said.

"It will position farmers to meet the challenges ahead through new investment in modernised services, greater access to technology and research, improvements to the regional freight network, and more targeted support for farming communities."

Mr Helper said managing environmental risks and adapting more sustainable farming practices were essential to successful, productive agriculture.

"Victoria's farm businesses are increasingly subject to community expectations and scrutiny about their methods and environmental impacts," he said.

"They now also face intense competition for scarce water resources and in the face of greater climate variability, strong population growth and continued low rainfall, this competition is likely to increase."

Mr Helper said since 1999, the Government had led the nation in water management reform.

"The 2004 *Our Water Our Future* plan delivered actions which have saved 100 billion litres of water per year. The second phase of that plan will deliver the single biggest boost to the state's water supplies in decades – including the *Food Bowl Modernisation Project* in northern Victoria," Mr Helper said.

"We will continue to work with the Commonwealth Government in developing Stage Two of this important national project, which will deliver more water for farmers and more water for the Murray River.

"*Future Farming* also contains a range of initiatives to tackle weeds and pests and a new Regional Strategic Planning Expert Group to advise on rural land use planning issues that impact on the competitiveness of the agriculture sector and the sustainability of rural communities."

The Land and Water Management package includes:

- \$20 million over four years to:
 - Support local government in their management of pests on roadsides;

- Develop incursion and treatment plans for regionally prohibited weeds;
 - Improve early response capability for new and emerging pests in a changing climate;
 - Increase voluntary compliance for regionally controlled weeds;
 - More effectively control weeds and pests on public land by expanding the Government's *Good Neighbour Program*;
 - Improve the use of bio-controls for management of widespread weeds;
 - Review wild dog management options; and
 - Increase community involvement in more targeted programs for integrated fox management.
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- \$3.79 million over four years to establish a new Regional Strategic Planning Expert Group to identify and plan for future scenarios for farming and farming communities;
 - Work with community groups and landowners to finalise the Land and Biodiversity White Paper. The green paper has been released and further consultation will be undertaken. A white paper will be released in 2009 and will direct policy and investment priorities in natural resource management, land health and biodiversity for the next two decades; and
 - Work with the Commonwealth and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to progress national water reform, including delivery of the \$2 billion Food Bowl Modernisation Project in northern Victoria.

“Over the past eight years, our Government has worked hard to build on the strength of regional communities and economies and unlock the potential for growth,” Mr Helper said.

“There is now a solid foundation on which to grow Victoria’s primary industries and the *Future Farming* strategy will provide the services and support that farmers and their families need to prosper in the years ahead.”

For more information on *Future Farming* visit www.dpi.vic.gov.au/futurefarming