



**RICEGROWERS' ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA INC**

RGA FARM BUSINESS AND PRODUCTIVITY COMMITTEE

OBJECTIVE

To ensure government and industry investment and regulations aim to maximise the net profitability of growers.

RGF FARM BUSINESS AND PRODUCTIVITY COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

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RGF FARM BUSINESS AND PRODUCTIVITY POLICY POSITIONS

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1. Research, Development and Extension

The Rice Industries Research, Development and Extension program has four key components:

- **Plan:** The Rice Program Five Year Research, Development and Extension Plan 2016/17 – 2021/22. The Plan outlines four key objectives for investment:
 - Rice breeding – varietal and quality improvement;
 - Development of an aerobic rice system;
 - Farm productivity – crop inputs, crop protection and the farming system; and
 - Extension, communication and partnership development.
- **Funding:** The program is funded by grower levies, the Rice R&D Levy, with matching funds contributed by the Commonwealth government (in accordance with the national Research and Development Corporation model).

The Rice R&D Levy is regulated under the *Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Act 1999* and the *Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Regulations 1999*. The Regulations provide that the current levy is:

- R&D levy - \$2.94 per tonne of rice (on or after 1 January 2009)
- Plant Health Australia levy - \$0.06 per tonne of rice (on or after January 2009)

In addition, investment is made by both SunRice and the NSW's Department of Primary Industries predominantly through the Rice Breeding Partnership.

- **Governance:** The Rice Research and Development Advisory Panel oversees the administration of the program. The Panel is made up of skills based appointed representatives.
- **Administration:** The Program is administered and coordinated by AgriFutures Australia (previously Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation or RIRDC).

The Rice Extension Program was developed by the RGA following the reduction of NSW government funding to the public rice extension program. Rice Extension is funded through the Rice Industries RD&E program.

The RGA'S Policy Positions:

- The RGA seeks an increase to the Rice R&D Levy (the grower levy).
- The RGA seeks that research be increased into the benefit of rice in crop rotations with other summer crops, for example cotton.
- The RGA seeks information regarding GRDC investment in the Murray/Murrumbidgee.

2. Telecommunications

Voice and data telecommunication services are sub-par across much of the rice growing.

Having adequate telecom services is critical to the ongoing success of individual businesses as productive technologies such as big data become more and more reliant on telecommunication technologies.

Led by the National Farmers' Federation, the RGA has joined forces with a number of other rural industry and community peak bodies to campaign for increased investment in telecommunication for the bush: the Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC). For further information visit: <https://farmers.org.au/get-involved/campaigns/rrrcc-data-drought.html>. In particular, the RRRCC seeks:

1. A universal service obligation that is technologically neutral and provides access to both voice and data;
2. Customer service guarantees and reliability measures to underpin the provision of voice and data services, to deliver more accountability from providers and nbn;
3. Long term public funding for open access mobile network expansion in rural and regional Australia;
4. Fair and equitable access to Sky Muster for those with genuine a need for the service, and access which reflects the residential, educational and business needs of rural and regional Australia
5. Fully resourced capacity building programs that build digital ability, and development of effective problem solving support for regional, rural and remote businesses and consumers.

The RGA'S Policy Positions:

- The RGA seeks that all members, their businesses and their communities should have access to reliable and affordable telecommunication services, equal in quality to the services offered to their metropolitan counterparts.
- The below map demonstrates that rice growers suffer from severe mobile coverage deficiencies across the whole of the Riverina. The federal government ought to ensure that funding is directed to address these deficiencies.

Figure 1: Map of mobile coverage blackspots located within the Rice Growing region of NSW. This is a representative sample taken from a survey of 41 rice growers. There may be additional blackspots not identified in this sample¹.

¹ This map has been created using data collected by the RGA's May 2016 survey of 41 member representatives located across all seven RGA branches. Members were asked to provide GPS coordinates for mobile coverage blackspots located within their branch.



- Removing blackspots is critical to ensuring:
 - the prosperity of our members businesses;
 - the safety of our members, their families and employees; and
 - the ability of our members and their families to complete their education.
- Due to a lack of sufficient mobile or internet coverage, many rice growers are prevented from applying innovative technologies to their businesses, including technologies used to manage data.
- Rice growers are often required to pay exorbitant prices for mobile and internet services, which are often subpar when compared to services available in cities.

3. Transport and Infrastructure

In NSW vehicles that travel on public roads are regulated by the Roads and Maritime Service and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR).

To drive on the road network, vehicles need to be within certain weight and dimension limits. Vehicles outside these limits may require special permits, or must travel under conditions.

- **Light vehicles and combinations** (Gross Vehicle Mass (GVM) or Aggregate Trailer Mass (ATM) not exceeding 4.5 tonnes) - Light vehicles and light combinations that exceed the prescribed dimension limits can travel under the *NSW Light Vehicle Agricultural and Load Exemption Ministerial Order 2015* if they meet the requirements of the Order.
- **Heavy vehicles and combinations** (GVM or an ATM of more than 4.5 tonnes) - Heavy vehicle operations are regulated under the *Heavy Vehicle National Law* and *National Regulations* by the NHVR.

Agricultural vehicles and equipment Permits

Under the *Heavy Vehicle National Law* an agricultural vehicle is defined as an agricultural machine or agricultural implement. An agricultural vehicle is considered a Class 1 restricted access heavy vehicle

if it, together with its load, does not comply with a prescribed mass or prescribed dimension requirement. Examples of an agricultural vehicle include harvesters, tractors, augers and conveyors.

A Class 1 agricultural vehicle will not require a permit to operate provided the movement of the vehicle complies with all of the requirements and travel conditions outlined in a Notice or Ministerial Order.

If a Class 1 agricultural vehicle does not comply with the mass or dimension limits set out in a Notice or Ministerial Order, an operator must obtain an access permit.

2016/21 Grain Harvest Management Scheme

The NSW Grain Harvest Management Scheme (GHMS) promotes the safe and productive movement of grain. It is designed to decrease this risk, protect roads and to increase productivity and efficiency. The GHMS also seeks to provide a productivity benefit for growers and a higher degree of visibility to road managers of the use of their road assets. The *NSW Class 3 GHMS Mass Exemption (Notice) 2016* provides that the Scheme will continue to operate from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2021.

Under the scheme, eligible heavy vehicles may exceed regulated total mass limits by up to 5% when delivering specified grains, including rice, to participating grain receivers in participating council areas.

Local councils may decide to participate in the scheme for the complete period or for specific time periods and may also specify access conditions. We note that seven of the eight councils within the rice growing region have elected to participate in the scheme until its current expiry in June 2021, with Murrumbidgee choosing to only participate until June 2019. Some of these councils have placed conditions on their participation (Berrigan, Carrathool, Edward River, Griffith, Hay, Murray River and Murrumbidgee). AGS is a participating grain receiver (PGR) and must provide data on all vehicle deliveries, including overloaded deliveries, to Roads and Maritime for compliance and enforcement action.

The RGA is a member of the Grain Harvest Management Scheme Consultative Committee.

4. Fuel Tax Credits

The purpose of the fuel tax credits scheme is to remove the effect of fuel tax on business inputs.

Fuel tax credits also recognise that the fuel tax excise is an implicit road-user charge originally introduced to fund public roads. Farmers operate vehicles and machinery on farms not public roads.

Fuel tax credits are claimed by a range of industries and by households. They are vital to the competitiveness of industries operating in regional Australia.

The RGA is a members of the Fuel Tax Credit Alliance.

Large export earning industries such as agriculture rely on diesel to operate heavy machinery off-road and to operate in remote areas off the electricity grid.

The RGA'S Policy Positions:

- Any changes to existing fuel tax credit arrangements would amount to a new tax on regional and rural Australia and would significantly impact on the competitiveness of Australian agricultural industries including the Rice Industry.

5. Chemical Access

As new pests or diseases are identified, or resistance develops to existing chemicals, access to safe and effective chemicals becomes critical to the rice industry. In particular the Rice Industry seeks chemical solutions to Barnyard Grass, Stem Rot and Dirty Dora, just to name a few.

Chemical Registration

The registration and access to chemical products within Australia is regulated by the Commonwealth government authority, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) up to—and including—the point of retail sale. Beyond this point the state and territory governments are responsible, including controlling the use of these chemicals.

In determining the registration of a product, the APVMA assess the product for safety, efficacy, trade and labelling. The APVMA manages potential risks posed by chemicals, among other things, imposing conditions on approvals or registrations, and through requiring that certain information be contained on chemical product labels. Furthermore, in the event of a contamination of a product, the APVMA has the power to compulsorily recall the product.

AgVet Collaborative Forum Project

Australian farmers have less access to chemicals than many of their international competitors.

The purpose of the forum is to increase investment in chemicals in Australia through facilitating cross-sector discussion between industry, government and commercial chemical companies on options for more efficient and effective chemical investment. Through the Forum, industries identify issues requiring chemical solutions and these were allocated a priority according to the technical viability of a solution and commercial registrant support. The Rice Industry is an active participant in the AgVet Collaborative Forum.

6. Other Grower Inputs

Machinery - Precision Agriculture

Currently there are a number of precision agriculture products on the market that do not communicate with one another. This can be a burden to growers who own different systems and implements.

7. Farm Safety and Grower Welfare

Farms can be dangerous places – whether it's dealing with farm machinery, working with chemicals, keeping kids safe, feeling down or getting back to work after an injury – there is help and support available to keep growers, their workers and families alive and well.

Work Health and Safety legislation (WHS) in all States and Territories requires employers and managers to manage health and safety. The Duty of Care responsibility applies to all 'Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) (including officers of a company and trustees) and extends beyond employees to all people who work, including contractors, sub-contractors and volunteers.

Responsibilities of rice growers include:

- Consulting with workers and other duty holders/PCBUs to implement WHS programs
- Providing a safe workplace and organising safe systems of work
- Maintaining work areas, machinery and equipment in a safe condition, including quad bikes.
- Ensuring safe use, handling, storage and transport of plant, hazardous chemicals and dangerous goods
- Assessing the health and safety risks to employees and others in the workplace, and taking effective risk control measures
- Providing adequate information, induction, instruction, training and supervision to employees
- Providing facilities for the welfare of workers.

The steps for Work Health and Safety Risk Management include:

- Identifying Hazards - The most important first step to improving safety on farms is to identify all the hazards to health and safety on the farm.
- Assessing Risk - Where a hazard has been identified, then an assessment of the risk associated with the hazard must be made. The degree of risk is a combination of the potential severity of injury and the frequency of exposure to the hazard. In all instances where there is significant risk of serious injury or death, urgent action to fix the problem should be planned.
- Risk Control - Once hazards of significant risk have been identified then action should be planned and implemented to control that risk. Generally, eliminating the hazard is the most effective solution and every effort should be made to eliminate hazards. However, practicalities and cost often limit this option, referred to as reasonably practicable. From most to least effective, control measures include:
 1. Eliminating the risk
 2. Substituting the risk for a lesser risk
 3. Engineering controls, including design for safety, guarding and other isolation solutions
 4. Designing safer work procedures, practices and training
 5. Using personal protective equipment.

Farmsafe Australia and SafeWork NSW provide resources to assist farmers to manage health and safety risks on farm.