

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Policy Statement

The issues

Access to the natural resources of soil, water and air are critical for a viable fruit and vegetable industry. Natural resource management is an important issue for growers with much of Queensland's fruit and vegetable industry located close to sensitive environments such as the Great Barrier Reef, Ramsar wetlands and the Murray-Darling basin.

The community, industry and government recognise the importance of maintaining a healthy environment. Across Australia there is a high level of concern about major environmental issues such as salinity, water quality and the loss of natural ecosystems. Issues such as resource security in water and vegetation are the subjects of hot debate.

Fruit and vegetable growers in Queensland aim to be responsible custodians of natural resources, however, highly complex regulatory, policy and planning systems make natural resource management a major challenge for growers.

Our position

Growcom supports the sustainable development of the horticulture industry in Queensland. This requires horticultural enterprises to be profitable, socially viable and environmentally responsible. Growcom and its members aim to work in partnership with government, research organisations, regional natural resource and catchment management bodies, the community and other stakeholders to address natural resource management issues.

Growcom believes an overarching framework is needed to encourage and coordinate sustainable natural resource management at local, regional, state and national levels.

We also believe that Government's continued commitment to natural resource management is essential for maintaining the role of protecting and enhancing Australia's unique biodiversity, the future productive capacity of agricultural industries and viability of rural and regional communities. Growcom is fully supportive of enhancing direct industry engagement in natural resource management programmes through industry organisations to improve outcomes.

Through a cooperative and holistic approach, we aim to deliver workable and balanced outcomes for the industry that also benefit the broader community.

Our commitment

Growcom is committed to maintaining and establishing partnerships with Government and other stakeholders to support the sustainable development of the horticulture industry. The industry has a long history in natural resource management and has made a commitment to the *Farmcare Code of Practice for Sustainable Fruit and Vegetable Production in Queensland*¹, which outlines good environmental management practices such as:

- Efficient and careful use of natural resources, particularly water, soils and vegetation.
- Minimising environmental impacts caused by horticultural land use, particularly run-off of sediments, fertilisers and pesticides into waterways.
- Minimising waste and pollution from horticultural land use.
- Careful use of pesticides.
- Minimising impacts on biodiversity. Growcom maintains an environment program designed to assist its members to continually improve their environmental performance and achieve ecological sustainability. We believe a 'triple bottom line' approach would be an appropriate measure of the industry's performance.

Growcom is also committed to developing and implementing our Farm Management System (FMS) program within horticulture enterprises throughout the state. The FMS is in modular format with each module focusing on the potential risk areas and opportunities for improvement. Each module will generate an action plan with target dates for the grower to work towards in order to minimise their risks.

Our expectations

Growcom seeks recognition and commitment from government and the community that the industry requires support to achieve its goals in natural resource management. In particular, the industry requires:

- The opportunity to apply voluntary, workable, industry-led initiatives wherever possible to address natural resource management issues.
- Planning and management of natural resources to be based on sound science.
- If necessary, negotiated transition phases of an appropriate, planned, and agreed timeframe that allow industry members time to adapt or restructure to legislative or policy changes, implement changes to practices or develop solutions to issues.
- Financial and other support for industry based programs such as stewardship and ecosystem services, when the public benefits of natural resource management outweigh private benefits, and when the community's expectations of natural resource management or biodiversity conservation restrict growers' farm management beyond current recommended practices.
- A range of financial and market-based incentives be explored and used as much as possible to encourage the adoption of improved natural resource management practices.
- Institutional, economic and other barriers to the adoption of sustainable management practices be identified and addressed.

¹ The Farmcare Code has been endorsed by the Queensland Government as an approved Code of Practice under Section 219 of the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*. It constitutes an industry standard giving guidance to growers in meeting their 'General Environmental Duty' under the Act. This Code was originally developed in 1998 and was reviewed and updated in 2007 by Growcom.

Our agenda items

Issues to be considered within this policy area include:

- A long term plan for natural resource management and on-farm delivery programs.
- Water quality.
- Farm management systems.
- Developing an overarching framework for regional and catchment planning and management.
- Natural resource access, allocation and trading (e.g. water, ecosystem services).
- Vegetation management and tree clearing.
- Greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.
- Biodiversity and wildlife management.
- Pest and weed management and chemical use.
- Competing land uses e.g. urban development in rural areas and peri-urban agriculture.
- Local government and regional planning activities and initiatives.
- Market based instruments for natural resources management issues.
- Commitment to work with regional natural resource management arrangements to align farm scale activities to surrounding sub-catchments.
- One Plan framework.
- Funding stream for NRM initiatives that work in tandem with regional arrangements.