

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 402
Asked on 24 March 2011

MR HOPPER asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Regional Economies (MR MULHERIN)–

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise as to what initiatives are being provided to Queensland food producers by his department to ensure the food security of the state and nation?

ANSWER:

Queensland's rich natural resources, robust regulatory framework and research and development investment ensure we can produce high-quality, internationally competitive food.

Queensland is overwhelmingly a net food exporter - Queenslanders will not starve. In fact, Australia has an opportunity to contribute to regional and global food security. More than 90% of domestic food supply is grown and produced in Australia, and the nation exports 80% of total GVP from agricultural production (ABS).

Queensland can, however, have localised food supply and continuity problems, as seen during the recent natural disasters. The critical question now is how government and industry can improve the food supply chain, prepare and plan for future events and rebuild infrastructure for greater resilience and economic growth.

The Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) has started mapping key food supply chains to help us understand where the strengths and weaknesses lie.

DEEDI is leading a host of other initiatives to ensure the continued profitability of Queensland's food supply:

- The Government is committed to protecting the best of Queensland's cropping land resources. The strategic cropping land policy and legislation, to which DEEDI is providing input, will protect Queensland's best cropping land and strike a balance between competing land interests. On 14 April 2011, the Minister for Environment and Resource Management released criteria for identifying and protecting strategic cropping land which is suitable for a range of crops. Availability of strategic cropping land is important to our ability to respond to changes in food markets. The release of the criteria is a further step toward implementing the policy.
- A Queensland food policy will provide a framework for investment along the food value chain, to strengthen Queensland's competitive position in the global economy. The policy framework was discussed with food industry stakeholders at a Dialogue for Action forum on 29 March 2011. DEEDI will incorporate feedback from the dialogue to further develop the Food Policy paper, which I plan to release later this year.

- The Queensland Government and the CSIRO have invested a total of \$377.9 million in the Ecosciences Precinct, off-site ancillary facilities and the Health and Food Sciences Precinct at Coopers Plains. The two precincts will employ hundreds of scientists who will work to protect Queensland's international reputation for clean, safe and high quality food and animal products. That will include creating 'super' foods to combat disorders such as diabetes and degenerative eye diseases. They will also work to enhance animal health and biosecurity by finding new ways to protect against emerging and exotic diseases and contaminants in food.
- DEEDI is working with the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) to quantify social and economic costs of proposed allocation cut-backs in the Murray-Darling Basin to minimise impacts on agricultural production and the viability of associated regional communities.
- DEEDI is also working with DERM to simplify reef protection environmental management plan requirements, so that producers, especially cattle producers in the northern reef catchments, can meet their regulatory responses more readily while further protecting the reef.
- This is in addition to DEEDI's ongoing investment in agricultural research, development and extension in cropping, fisheries, horticulture, livestock and value-added foods and underpins the profitability, productivity and reliability of the State's food production.
- It is also in addition to our Biosecurity efforts, which ensure management of animal and plant pests and diseases, and high standards of animal welfare, to support continued and growing access to domestic and export markets.