

MEDIA RELEASE: FEDERAL POLICY PROPOSAL

FEDERAL POLICY PROPOSAL National Right to Farm and Agricultural Land Protection Act

Farming is a cornerstone of Australian identity and a vital contributor to our economy, but in recent years, rural producers have come under increasing pressure — not just from droughts or markets, but from their own neighbours, planning systems, and land-use conflicts. While some states, like New South Wales, have introduced limited Right to Farm laws to shield farmers from nuisance complaints, there is no consistent federal framework to protect the rights of farmers or the long-term future of agricultural land. It's time for a national approach.

This proposal calls for the establishment of a National Right to Farm and Agricultural Land Protection Act — a federal framework designed to safeguard lawful agricultural activity, protect productive land from speculative or incompatible development, and uphold the right of farmers to make a living from the land without harassment or legal risk. The act would embed several key principles: protection against nuisance claims, stronger land-use planning safeguards, the agent of change principle, community education, dispute resolution, and a national agricultural land register.

Under this plan, lawful agricultural activities — such as cropping, grazing, spraying, and the use of machinery — that are conducted in line with accepted industry standards would be protected from nuisance claims at the federal level. This would ensure farmers aren't punished for doing their jobs simply because new neighbours find the noise, dust or smell inconvenient. This follows the precedent set in the NSW Right to Farm Act 2019 and would harmonise protections across all states and territories.

We also need to address land use planning. Increasingly, high-quality agricultural land is being lost to urban sprawl, subdivisions, and developments that are incompatible with farming. This policy would require all levels of government — especially local and state planning authorities — to prioritise the retention of agricultural zones and limit rezoning for non-farm uses unless there is a clear public benefit. Building on successful models from states like Victoria, where the Victorian Farmers Federation has called for better land-use protections, this would help keep productive land in the hands of those who work it.

The proposal also introduces the agent of change principle into federal planning law. This means that if a new development — such as a housing estate or rural lifestyle block — is established near an existing farm, it is the responsibility of the developer or landholder to manage potential conflicts (e.g. noise barriers, legal disclosure of nearby farming activity), not the farmer. This principle protects long-standing rural industries from being penalised simply for existing.

To build understanding and reduce tensions, the federal government would work with industry and local councils to roll out public education campaigns aimed at people moving into rural or peri-urban areas. These would promote awareness of what standard farming practices involve and explain the importance of agricultural production to the local economy and food security.



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To further reduce conflict and ease legal pressure on farmers, the act would establish a national agricultural ombudsman — an independent body to mediate disputes between farmers and other parties. This would provide a faster, cheaper, and more accessible pathway to resolve land-use conflicts than going to court.

Lastly, we propose the development of a National Agricultural Land Register to track and protect high-value agricultural land. This register would inform federal funding decisions, infrastructure planning, and future development controls, ensuring we're making decisions with food security and rural livelihoods in mind.

By enshrining the Right to Farm in federal law, we send a clear message: farmers should be respected, not penalised, for putting food on the table. This policy will give rural communities greater certainty, protect our agricultural future, and strike a fair balance between development and the needs of our farming families.

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