

Chairman's Report

24 October 2008.

Welcome to the Nineteenth Annual General Meeting of the Tasmanian Agricultural Productivity Group. It would be hard to imagine another time in the history of our organization when such a contradictory range of emotions were being experienced by our members and, indeed, the entire agricultural community in Tasmania. The huge challenge of adapting to climate change combined with the impact of possible emissions trading is competing with the clear recognition of the enormous opportunity that the changing circumstances represent for Tasmania. Pivotal to our success in successfully managing this brave new world is the availability of water. How timely then that I welcome our guest presenters, Mr. John Lord, Chairman of the Water Irrigation Board and Mr. Jock Chudacek the Chief Executive Officer. While these guests will be more formally introduced later in our program I can assure them both that they will have our complete attention as they provide us with insights into proposed irrigation initiatives! There can be no doubt that our excellent attendance today is due in no small measure to the interest in your presentation and I take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your input.

Decision making of the highest order at all levels of government will also be crucial to the further positioning of Tasmania as a world leader in the supply of high quality produce. Accordingly, it is pleasing to welcome Greg Hall, Sue Smith, Norma Jamieson, Steve Kons, Ruth Forrest, Bryan Green, Lyn Laycock, Brenton Best and Mike Downie as representatives of the state's governance system.

We urge the adoption of visionary and co-operative statesmanship rather than shortsighted opportunistic political expediency as you are asked to decide on competing priorities for planning and resource allocation. Your constituencies expect nothing less of you at this momentous time and we would further suggest that Agriculture in all its many facets must be enshrined as a core component of Tasmania's future growth and development.

A very warm welcome is extended to all our TAPG members who are here today. Your ongoing support of the organization is greatly appreciated. We are a very diverse body with representation from most sectors of the agricultural environment and this breadth of coverage empowers us with huge legitimacy when we speak to government on matters of policy and practice. However, because of the unique nature of this “broad church” we represent there will always be times when the interests of our members are at odds with each other and our ongoing challenge is to continue to support all our members as they pursue their legitimate concerns. It is our experience that some of our best work has been done without public fanfare or high profile and the recognition by members of the effectiveness of this mode of operation is reassuring to the Board.

Equally welcome are non-members representing various other groups associated with agriculture. We are glad that our meeting today provides an interesting forum for all to share and participate. We are united in wanting the best for agriculture in Tasmania and we all have a part to play as we move forward together.

The TAPG has consistently maintained over the past two years that its highest priority for support has been Water Infrastructure. Where are we now on this topic?

The government has responded to this issue in a number of ways:

1. Formation of the Water Irrigation Board.

This appears to be a positive initiative both in terms of its composition and consultative processes adopted to date.

2. Meander Dam

Now completed it is expected that this project will make an important contribution well into the future. Importantly, it flagged the concept of farmers “buying in” to a scheme on a large scale.

3. Midlands Project

We will hear more today about this and the other, related, proposals.

4. Dam Approval Process

Action is being taken to streamline the process.

The TAPG continues to advocate a holistic approach to decision making related to agriculture.

Along with every other major player in agriculture the TAPG responded to the Aerial and Ground Spraying Policy proposal. Again, it is worthy of note that, because of our unique position, we were able to facilitate a Joint Industry submission as well as providing our own summative submission based on member input. A strong element of our submission was the proposition that an industry approved set of criteria be developed that were applied to all decision making proposals affecting Agriculture in Tasmania.

We also responded to the Policy Draft on Protection of Agricultural Land. ***In all dealings with government the TAPG advocates consultation with key stakeholders and welcomes the opportunity to represent member's views in constructive dialogue.***

At the organizational level we bid farewell to Bruce Williams and I wish to express both the Board's and my own personal appreciation of the excellent insight and commitment to the agricultural industry generally that he brought to our discussions. Chris Oldfield????????????

I would also like to thank our outgoing Executive Officer, Rowena Bell, for her work over the past two years and to welcome Terry Brient as he takes over this responsibility.

The Board have continued to provide excellent leadership and I wish to record my appreciation of their service.

Names/Roles Include????????????????????

To conclude my report I wish to comment on a number of the issues that I see emerging and requiring our attention:

1. I have already referred to Water, Climate Change and the proposed Carbon Trading Scheme as it may affect Agriculture in my earlier remarks.

2. The problems associated with Recruitment, Training and Retention of people to staff the shortfall of employees across all agricultural industries is with us already and appears likely to grow. An important sub-set of this issue is the particular challenges associated with Generation Y candidates how will increasingly change our historic understanding of the nature of work and company affiliation generally.

3. An informed debate needs to be commenced regarding the balance of land use in Tasmania. While traditionally this matter has been publicized as largely limited to farmland versus tree plantations it will need to be extended to include animal husbandry versus cropping. Within cropping itself the issue of production of bio-fuels versus food crops is only just beginning to emerge. If we add the new cost of reliable irrigation into this debate then it is clear that many widely held beliefs are going to be challenged as never before.

Tasmania is clearly poised to move into a new era of agricultural productivity. While our island status appears on balance to be emerging as an asset I believe we must not become insular in our approach. At the very least let's learn from the mistakes made elsewhere and hopefully embrace new initiatives as well. It seems to me that a group such as TAPG is ideally suited to play a key role in assisting the development of a government policy platform that can move Tasmanian Agriculture into a position that will bring economic prosperity to all Tasmanians for many generations to come.

Ian Blanden
Chairman