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## Australian Farmers Critical To National Security

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Having flown to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (Cop 27) in Egypt, Climate Change Minister Chris Bowen has been at pains to point out the Albanese government's commitment to US President Joe Biden's international pledge to reduce methane emissions by 30 per cent by 2030.

The pledge will impel greenhouse gas-intensive industries like agriculture which, owing to the digestive systems of sheep and cattle is responsible for about half of Australia's methane emissions, to curb their methane output.

If the target is legislated, the door would open for punitive regulatory measures to be placed on graziers running cattle and sheep.

Across the ditch, New Zealand is planning to impose a 'burp tax' on farmers by 2025 which, according to its own modelling, would force an estimated 20 per cent of cattle and sheep farmers and 5 per cent of dairy farmers out of business.

Such a policy in Australia would have the same result, with farmers compelled to de-stock, leading to a decline in food production and a skyrocketing of meat and dairy prices. The inevitable farm closures would devastate regional communities.

Why the Albanese government would commit to any measure that risks destabilising Australia's agricultural industry beggars belief.

In the current geopolitical climate, the lesson could not be clearer: food security is inextricably linked to national security – a point emphasised in a recent report from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute which outlines that 'robust and resilient food and fibre production systems are critical to political and social stability'.

One need only look as far as Ukraine to see the horrific results when food supplies become weapons of war. By mercilessly blockading Ukrainian cereal exports, Vladimir Putin has plunged millions in chronically malnourished regions in Africa and the Middle East into food scarcity and starvation.

Fortunately, Australia is one of the most food-secure nations on earth. Our \$83 billion agricultural industry produces enough food every year to feed Australia threefold. Surplus supplies go to our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region – home to half of the world's undernourished people.



The war in Ukraine, therefore, is a salutary reminder that, in any crisis to come closer to home, Australian farmers will play a crucial strategic role in bolstering not only our national resilience but peace and stability in our region.

The ASPI report argues that government and policymakers should take heed of ‘Putin’s war on global food security’ and examine how ‘national security can be threatened as well as enhanced by how we approach agriculture policy, investment and production’ in Australia.

Despite its strategic importance, few industries are as demonised by the urban green lobby or as burdened by environmental regulation as Australian agriculture, particularly the livestock sector.

Even before the methane pledge, Australian farmers were up to their neck in cumbersome environmental regulation.

Recent research from the Institute of Public Affairs has shown that the weight of Commonwealth environmental red tape, known as ‘green tape’, that farmers are forced to wade through, has grown 80-fold since 1971.

The effect has been to stifle the efficiency and productivity of Australian farmers.

IPA research shows that the Commonwealth’s environmental bureaucracy has grown at nearly three times the rate of the agricultural sector since 2000. In the same period, for every one job created in the environmental bureaucracy, 14 jobs have been lost in agriculture.

The excessive regulatory burdens placed on our farmers border on the ridiculous. To build a single irrigation pivot on private land requires no less than eight different permits.

Excessive green tape risks hampering our food security which, in times of crisis, is one of the most critical requirements to national resilience.

All of this reflects the growing tendency among policymakers to place lofty climate ambitions above the practical needs of our nation.

Despite paying for our social services, healthcare, and infrastructure, farmers – like miners – are increasingly enemy-number-one for the green climate lobby who paint them as environmental vandals. This despite the seemingly obvious fact that sustainable land management is unquestionably in the interest of every single farmer.

The reality in modern Australia is that fewer and fewer Australians have any connection to farming, agriculture or our rural regions. Worse still, few recognise that Australia is a secure, stable and safe nation largely thanks to the efforts of our farmers, both past and present. Not to mention peace in our region.

Our agricultural industry sits at the heart of our nation.



Recognising this, the Albanese government should act to cut unnecessary green tape, commit to no new taxes on farmers and, most importantly, celebrate the noble work our farmers do, not only feeding and clothing their fellow citizens but millions around the world as well.

This is now a national security priority. Just as Australia was built on the sheep's back, so too will we rely on our farmers in any dark times to come.

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