



Tania Chapman, Voice of Horticulture: We are the Voice

Speech of Tania Chapman, Chair, Voice of Horticulture

Introduction to Horticulture Innovation Australia Ltd event, Parliament House, 19 March 2015

As Johnny said we are the voice...

1. The voice of 30,000 plus growers in the horticulture sector.
2. The voice of horticultural growers and businesses across fruit, nuts, mushrooms, turf, nursery, and cut flowers, who work every day to sustain us.
3. The voice of the second largest and fastest growing agriculture sector with a Gross Value of Production of just under \$10 billion per annum.
4. The voice of an industry with exports that achieved a record high of \$1.5 billion in 2014.
5. The voice of the largest employer in agriculture with over 57,000 employed, over one third of all agricultural workers.
6. The voice of the only agriculture sector who can truly argue that everything we do makes people's lives happier, healthier and longer.
7. The voice of the safest, greenest fresh produce of the world.
8. The voice of the biggest spender in regional Australia in the \$1 to 5m capital investments range.
9. The voice of dozens of unique, different horticultural commodities, that are mainly small to medium sized businesses that need a united voice on common issues.
10. The industry voice that has been missing and has resulted in our agricultural brothers in meat and livestock and broad acre receiving the lion's share of media and attention.

My message today, is that horticulture now has a voice, one that will educate and inform on the importance of the sector, fight for a fair deal for the sector in trade, reduced regulatory burden and improved government advice and assistance. Importantly the Voice will work with Horticulture Innovation Australia to ensure grower levies are allocated and invested both effectively and efficiently in necessary research, development and extension and necessary marketing – a true grower representative body.



Whilst ABARES may have a pessimistic view of the future of horticulture, our growers know the future can be rosy with the right assistance, aided by the falling dollar, labour and productivity improvements including significant changes in mechanisation and robotics, and a growing demand for Australia's safe, green produce. This is a critical time to ensure growers have a direct link to Horticulture Innovation Australia, politicians and policy makers to ensure their issues are heard, and the potential of our industry is realised.

As Johnny says "we will make a noise and make it clear".

While our growers will be invited to become members of Horticulture Innovation Australia, it does not have an advocacy role, and cannot represent the political interests of Australia's 30,000 plus producers – the backbone of Australia's rural and regional communities. This is the role of the Voice of Horticulture.

Unlike our agricultural brothers we need to focus on both farm gate profitability and post farm gate (pre-wholesale and retail) profitability. Once produce leaves the farm gate it generally goes to coolstores, sorting and packing facilities that are often owned by the growers. From here we deliver to wholesale, retail distribution centres, juicing and / or food processing facilities – so post farm gate is as important, if not more important, to horticulture. In the meat and livestock and broadacre sectors this process is generally independent and a non-related commercial business, often in foreign hands.

As the most labour intensive agriculture sector in Australia, labour laws, work visas, awards, mechanisation and work methods have a significant impact on both profitability and the potential for exports – the major area for growth in horticulture. The Voice will advocate on these issues and is preparing a submission on work visas as we speak.

The Voice applauds the success in negotiating Free Trade Agreements by the Government and we look forward to further work with India, another potentially huge market for Australian horticulture. We are here to work with the Department and the Ministers' Offices to assist in new market access, addressing changes to existing markets, reduce compliance costs, and promote a Team Australia approach to exports.

Growing horticulture is good for the Australian consumer, if we can encourage greater consumption of fresh food, and replace processed and snack food it will be beneficial to Australians and our growing health bill. Growing horticulture is also good for exports especially with Asia on our door step and a growing demand for safe, green produce. The Voice will advocate for greater focus on healthy food marketing, and greater market access in the interest of both our growers, Australian consumers and Australia's export earnings.



Voice of Horticulture

Understanding what is “Australian” in produce from food labelling is now more important than ever to consumers, and the Voice will advocate for realistic Country of Origin labelling on our products, an approach already taken with our advertising laws and enforced by the ACCC. “Made of Australian Ingredients” for juices, when the only Australian product is the added water is both deceptive and misleading. The use of “Made in Australia” to label food partly or wholly grown or produced overseas should be prohibited. We applaud the Minister’s push for effective Country of Origin Labelling.

The key to our future is maintaining our effective biosecurity screen to keep out exotic pests and diseases and the Voice will advocate to ensure the appropriate resources are applied to this area to maintain the integrity of the system, despite pressures to cut back government funding in this area.

The Voice will engage with APVMA to ensure a greater emphasis is placed on R&D to replace lost chemicals, ensure good science is applied to the justification of chemical phase out, cutting red tape in minor use permits. The Voice would like to see an eco-friendly growing program over the longer term, but the move there must be well managed, well justified and not hamper the industry in the process.

These issues and others including developing human capital will be the priorities of the Voice.

So when you sit down to enjoy this meal or every evening meal, think about the two thirds of the food on your plate, that is horticultural production, hopefully from Australia; and as you enjoy our healthy and nutritious produce, look over at the fresh cut flowers (hopefully not plastic), look out at the nursery trees in your yards, and admire the green turf, and you will appreciate what we think is the most important agriculture sector in Australia.

We are the Voice of Horticulture! We are here to make a noise and make it clear.

Contact

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