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Great Barrier Reef Study
Productivity Commission
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COMMONWEALTH SUBMISSION - THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF INDUSTRIES IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF (GBR) CATCHMENT AND THE COST AND BENEFITS OF ACTIONS TO ADDRESS DECLINING WATER QUALITY ENTERING THE GBR LAGOON

Primac Elders Limited is a supplier of agricultural inputs and services throughout the catchment areas of the GBR. Specifically, Primac Elders supply seeds, fertilizers, plant protection products, capital goods and a range of services including agronomic advice, fertilizer spreading, insurance, finance, livestock marketing and fresh produce export.

In the catchment region, Primac Elders own and operate 16 branches which employ 125 local staff in towns from Bundaberg in the south to Mareeba in the North. To support these local staff, Elders employ a further 105 staff in Brisbane and Adelaide. The region is an important contributor to Elders overall national business with the local industries of horticulture, sugar and beef contributing \$480m in turnover to the company in F02.

Primac Elders is involved in the sale of farm inputs such as fertilizers and agricultural chemicals. Fertilizers and agricultural chemicals are often cited to contribute to declining water quality. The purpose of this submission is not to debate this in any way (for or against) but to communicate to governments and other industries that we recognise that these products need to be used with care and in line with industry developed standards. Furthermore, agri-businesses, such as Primac Elders, are investing considerable sums of money to help farmers be more precise in product use to improve farm and local environment sustainability. For example, Primac Elders is involved in the following activities with farmers and growers in the region:

- Conducting 100's of soil tests per year and working with farmers to develop plant nutrition programs which avoid over dosing of fertilizer while maintaining crop yield and quality.
- Spreading services for fertilizer and soil conditioners to improve application rate accuracy and technique
- Pioneering GPS based technologies that will enable variable rate fertilizer application

- Research, development and active promotion of active eco-friendly fertilizers such as NutriSmart, a natural fertilizer produce developed by CK Life Sciences
- Integrated Crop Management programs to reduce chemical applications and the introduction of new environmentally friendly pest control products
- Irrigation systems, drip tapes, soil moisture monitoring and associated advice to prevent over watering and leaching while assisting growers to use other alternatives to flood or furrow irrigation
- Supporting and extension of recommendations made by government and grower funded bodies such as the BSEB, HRDC and CSIRO

So, how can governments help the agri-business industry who are working with farmers and growers on a day to day basis?

1. Identification of specific research needs and a ramp up of funding of these.
2. Erosion is often an issue behind declining water quality and sedimentary build up. A government subsidised program for the construction of on-farm dams that will catch off-farm run off and enable re-use of this water for stock and irrigation is likely to attract strong interest.
3. Rapid R&D assistance for new eco-friendly fertilizers being developed by people such as the CSIRO and CK Life Sciences. Primac Elders is funding some of this work in the Burdekin this year with the BSES. Some assistance would be great to expand this work to other regions.
4. Some form of subsidy to provide grower incentives to use eco-friendly fertilizers.
5. Some form of incentive for the production and marketing of organic foods be they sugar, horticulture or beef.
6. Further investment in extension of research which has proven to be best practice for both the growers and the environment.

In summary, the GBR catchment regions represent an important resource and national treasure to us all regardless of where we live and work. Agriculture and Horticulture in the region are important not only to Queensland but to Australia. The crops produced in this region are unique and can not be grown in the same volumes anywhere else in this country. The counter-seasonal fruits and vegetables grown in the catchment region enable Australians to enjoy fresh foods on a year round basis. At Elders and Primac Elders, we are making contributions to both research and extension to find better ways to improve the performance and sustainability of our primary production regions. If the governments of Queensland and the Commonwealth can make any contributions in helping our industry continually improve we will be most grateful.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Barber
General Manager - Merchandise