

Checked against English transcription

**Statement by His Excellency Gregory French
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to FAO
40th Session of the FAO Conference, Rome, Italy, 3-8 July 2017**

Mr Vice Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

There is a strong sense of community that exists among farmers. In Australia, it is a community that extends across vast distances of Australian bush, uniting families over four thousand kilometers apart.

As Australia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, the Honorable Barnaby Joyce said here yesterday farming is a noble profession feeding and clothing all of our people. He greatly appreciated the opportunity to respond to the Frank McDougall Memorial Lecture at the opening ceremony of this conference.

Global food consumption is set to rise 11% per person by 2050. Humans will consume more calories in the next fifty years than in the whole of human history. As food demand increases, improving agricultural productivity and creating new market opportunities for farmers will be essential to global food security. What we learn from each other will define our success.

What we can learn will help each nation to face its challenges and help farmers meet those demands. Australians have a unique set of agricultural challenges and so a unique perspective on the theme of this Conference "Climate change, agriculture, and food security".

With respect to climate, we have a large but sparsely populated and mostly arid land mass. Climate will always be a critical factor in our agricultural production. Australian farmers have always had to manage and adapt to a variable climate and will need to prepare carefully for the climate risks forecast in the coming years.

Farmers must remain resilient and keep improving productivity in the face of increasing climate variability.

Drought. We live in the driest of all inhabited continents. By necessity, we have learned to place a high value on water.

Central to meeting the demands on agriculture have been effective preparation for drought and developing robust risk management strategies. We do not throw farmers to the wind when times get tough. The better our farmers can prepare for, manage, and recover from adverse conditions like drought, the stronger the sector's contribution to rural communities and the national and international economies.

In recent years, our government has focused on delivering better seasonal forecasts to help decision making on the farm, encouraging investment in drought preparation and planning and extending financial support to farmers and communities that are doing it tough. We have done this while providing the second lowest level of support to farmers among OECD nations. Properly functioning agricultural markets are one critical way to support global food security.

Onto water. We have also made a long-term commitment to water security for our nation. Australia is not alone of course in this. Too much or too little water is a central dilemma for agriculture in all parts of the world.

In Australia, we have worked hard to put into practice the idea that water is a scarce economic and social good to be allocated and used efficiently and wisely to the benefit of all. We have learned to value water and where appropriate, our laws allow market mechanisms to decide where water can provide the greatest economic value.

At the same time, we have set policies and regulations that protect as much as possible, individual farmers, rural communities, and the environment.

Australia's water management governance and policies have come a long way over the past few decades but there is still a lot of work ahead for us. Across the globe, the role of good water management has never been more important and the challenges we face never clearer.

We live in a world in which billions of people still lack access to basic water supply and sanitation and rising demand for water, for agriculture, industries, cities, and the environment is increasingly threatened by water scarcity, drought, flooding, and pollution.

These are not problems that any nation can solve in isolation. On a global scale, better coordinated policies for water management will be vital to meet the challenges of food and water security alike.

Partnerships. So partnerships and collaboration are essential. Agriculture, fisheries, and water remain a major focus within our international development assistance programme over the coming years. We are committed to helping our partners strengthen markets, productivity, sustainability, and governance.

With some 70% of the world's poor living in rural areas and many of those working in agriculture, these themes will be central to improving food security, driving employment growth, and supporting stronger economies.

A key partner in this work is of course the FAO. Australia greatly appreciates the work this organization does to support agriculture and food security across the globe, in particular, the focus on technical, science, and evidence-based support of food security.

In conclusion, ultimately as individual governments and sovereign nations, our commitment must remain with the farmers. We can create an environment for them to succeed without government telling them how to farm. This includes making available new and improved technologies, including genetic modification within the appropriate regulatory safeguards.

It is the knowledge, skills, flexibility, and judgment of our farmers that will allow them to build resilience and improve food security for every person on earth.

As a global community, we must make sure that our farmers are prepared for the need to apply that knowledge and judgment. Our future together depends on it.

Thank you, Mr Vice Chairperson.