

**Statement by Permanent Representative of Australia to FAO
Ms Jo EVANS**

To the 39th Conference, 9 June 2015

Mr Chairman,

Director General Graziano da Silva, to whom Australia offers its congratulations.

Distinguished delegates, including those from the South West Pacific region, that Australia has the honour of co- chairing here at the FAO.

This year marks 70 years since the FAO was established. The FAO has always had high aspirations, including the common goal of eradicating hunger. Which is why all member countries of the FAO have high expectations of the FAO as an Organization. So Australia appreciates the significant effort of the Director-General, senior management and FAO staff to transform and refocus the FAO's work over the past two years.

The progress made is important. It is equally important to maintain this momentum because there is more to do. Together we need to increase global food production by 60 percent over the next 35 years, and together we still have to reduce the number of undernourished people from more than 800 million to zero if we are to eradicate hunger.

I said on Saturday that each of us has our strengths but it is what we do together that really counts. Australia sees the particular strengths of the FAO in the standard setting work that it enables, particularly through CODEX and the International Plant Protection Committee and its ability to grow and share know-how across the global community.

The FAO is also well placed to encourage innovation in food production.

The FAO and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture are critical in supporting global agricultural research.

Agriculture at the farm gate is just 3 percent of GDP in Australia but when you include all the businesses that depend on agriculture that grows to around 12 percent of our Gross Domestic Product. If that sounds small, relative to some of the countries I have heard in the last few days, be assured that Agriculture is iconic in Australia. It built our economy and is a foundation for our nation's story and our values.

Agriculture and forestry account for 63 percent of the 7.7 million square kilometres of land in Australia. It is one of the five pillars of our economy and will remain linked to the future of our nation. We are a nation of only 24 million people and we export two thirds of our agricultural produce, mainly bulk commodities like wheat and beef, but also premium produce.

We estimate that our exports feed around 40 million people. That's an important contribution but it's not really very big compared to so many other countries who have spoken before me.

So I say this with some humility. Australia also imports large volumes of agricultural produce because we can't produce all of the things our population wants and needs. We are very good at producing what we can and do produce and we stick to our strengths and rely on markets to provide the rest. Our broad approach to farming support in Australia is to deregulate agriculture as much as possible and remove distortionary support. We rely on trade. The standard setting work of the FAO is a key part of the trade architecture for agriculture.

Productivity growth has been central to the continued viability and competitiveness of Australian farm businesses. Like New Zealand who spoke yesterday, deregulation in Australia has increased productivity by allowing decision-making to become more responsive to market forces.

Australia advocates internationally, like here today, and acts domestically, to reduce trade barriers and promote open market, not just because we export, but because global competition makes our businesses more productive, innovative and resilient.

Improved trade flows are an indispensable part of our collective approach to reducing global poverty and hunger. Productivity also comes from investment in research and development. Australian agriculture has benefited a great deal from being able to bring in innovation from global sources.

We also have a domestic programme to support R&D in Australia with more than \$700 million invested through a combination of industry and government funding, every year. We expect this to generate benefits for the global community as well, including through the extension work via FAO.

In Australia, too, though we have to tackle the issue of rural poverty and hardship, particularly in our case when drought takes hold of otherwise productive land. In some parts of Australia in recent times they have experienced the worst droughts in history and the El Nino my colleague from Vanuatu referred to will exacerbate the dry in Australia.

In the last 18 months the government of Australia has enabled farming families to access general welfare payments. This keeps food on the table and provides dignity in the hard times.

I appreciate this is not as large a task for Australia as it is for others, but nonetheless we understand the impacts of hard times on family farmers.

So the challenges ahead remain many for all of us. FAO has made substantial progress in the last few years in readying itself for the task. Australia remains committed to supporting FAO just as we were 70 years ago as a founding member of the Organization. To achieve the outcomes we continue to encourage FAO to focus on its unique strengths.

I thank you, Chair.