



**LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION  
THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MHR  
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR WARRINGAH**

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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MHR  
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E&OE.....

Thanks very much, Jock. Thanks very much, ladies and gentlemen. It's great to be here, great to acknowledge everyone present and yes, Jock, may all who do not appreciate Australian agriculture receive an electric shock to wake them up to the good things that Australian farmers are doing for our country. I acknowledge you, I acknowledge Matt Linnegar, your CEO. I acknowledge David Crombie, the immediate past president of the NFF. Most of all today, ladies and gentlemen, I want to pay tribute to the farmers of Australia and to reassure you that a Coalition government is utterly pledged to make your life easier, not harder.

Farming is a critical part of our national economy. There are some 130,000 farms in this country, almost all of them family-owned and run. There's some \$50 billion of GDP created at the farm gate, including \$32 billion worth of exports. Throw in the rest of the agricultural supply chain and you've got a sector that employs 1.6 million people and creates 12 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product. So, agriculture in the broad is critical to our national economy. In fact, it was only because of growth in the agricultural sector that we avoided going into recession as part of the global financial crisis. So, I acknowledge your importance and I thank you for your hard work for our country.

But Australia's farmers are not just a vital part of our economy. Australia's farmers are a part of our psyche. Farming is part of our soul, not just a part of our economy, as is testified to by the poems of Lawson and Paterson and ballads such as *Waltzing Matilda*. An Australia without a vibrant, dynamic, growing farm sector wouldn't be the country that we all know and love. So it's very important that the farm sector be supported and encouraged by government, not hindered by it.

Unfortunately, what we've seen over the last few years is a government which does not appreciate Australian farmers as it should. Under the current government, portfolio programmes in agriculture have shrunk from \$3.8 billion a year to just \$1.8 billion a year. There have been cuts to the CSIRO. There have been cuts to the agricultural cooperative research centres. There have been cuts to biosecurity spending. There's been the fiasco of the live cattle ban on trade with Indonesia and I have to say that on at least three occasions I've been to the Northern Territory to talk to the cattlemen of the Territory about what I can do and what government can do to improve the cattle trade to the Northern Territory. Just a week or so back, I was in Indonesia on the outskirts of Jakarta and I visited abattoirs and feedlots there to reassure myself that this was a trade that could humanely be conducted; could be conducted without embarrassment to our people or to those involved in it. Then from this government we've had the ongoing mishandling of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and the slowdown in investment in our largest single agricultural

area. Finally, of course, we've got the carbon tax which is going to be a double whammy on most farms because all farms use power, all farms use transport, and it will be a triple whammy on some farms because those farms not only use power and transport but also use refrigeration.

I want to make it crystal clear that as far as I am concerned, Australian farmers are environmental stewards, not environmental wreckers. I utterly reject any suggestion that Australian farmers are not our first and our best conservationists. This idea that farmers do not want to preserve the land they live off, that fishermen don't want to protect the oceans they live off, that foresters don't want to preserve the forests that they live off, is just wrong and yet so many people associated with the current government perpetrate the myth that the people who live off the land are somehow destroying it rather than conserving it. I reject that myth and I want to work with the farmers of Australia to preserve our land.

But what would members of the current government know given that there is not a single member of the current Cabinet who lives outside a metropolitan area? By contrast, eight out of the 20 members of the Shadow Cabinet live outside metropolitan areas and while I cannot say myself that I am a farmer or a son of a farmer or have lived in a regional area, I have seen plenty of farms over the years. I've holidayed on farms, I've helped out on farms and most recently, as Jock Laurie has told you, I have been on farms looking at what farmers are doing to improve the environment without a carbon tax and I congratulate you, Jock, on what you are doing to improve pasturing on your property. I congratulate Cam McKellar, whose marvellous property at Spring Hill near Tamworth is a living, breathing example of how agricultural productivity can be improved by using more carbon-friendly ways of farming; by moving from chemical to organic fertilisers. These are all things that farmers are doing because they are the practical conservationists of our country.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I can't promise overnight changes. I can't promise rivers of gold should there be a change of government because above all else what governments must be is fiscally responsible. You understand that because each one of you has got to manage a business, often in difficult market circumstances and so after the four biggest deficits in Australian history, after this government has turned \$70 billion in net Commonwealth assets into some \$140 billion of net Commonwealth debt, there is a very tight fiscal position that we are dealing with. Nevertheless, I can promise you that we will listen to you, that we will respect you and we will never make changes that affect you without talking to you first.

Now, you have got to know many members of my Coalition team. You've got to know Senator Richard Colbeck, the Shadow Parliamentary Secretary. You've got to know John Cobb, the Shadow Minister for Agriculture. You know how much they want to work with you. You know how much they respect you. You know the amount of time that they have spent trying to understand your problems. They live your problems, they don't just study your problems and that's the approach that a Coalition government would bring to the consideration of agricultural issues. We will never make decisions vital for the futures of the people of our country without talking to them first.

What I want to do now, ladies and gentlemen, is just talk about some of the ways in which Australia will be different and better under a Coalition government. Not all of these changes affect you specifically as farmers but you are citizens as well as farmers and the great thing about the farmers of our country is that you've always been patriots and you always want our country to advance.

First, there will be no carbon tax under the government I lead, and when I say that, I am telling the truth. You know, if you wanted to boost Australia's GDP by a cumulative \$1 trillion between now and 2050, the easiest way to do it is to abolish the carbon tax. If you wanted to boost Australia's gross national income per head by \$5,000 a year by 2050, the easiest way to do it is to abolish the carbon tax. Why can I say that with confidence? Because the Government's own figures, the Government's own modelling, shows that the cumulative reduction in GDP with a carbon tax is \$1 trillion by 2050. The reduction in gross national income per head with a carbon tax is almost \$5,000, and it doesn't actually reduce emissions. If you look at the Government's own figures, Australia's emissions are up, not down. Up by eight per cent, our domestic emissions knocked down by five per cent by 2020 despite a carbon tax that will by that stage be \$37 a

tonne. I will never sacrifice the Australian economy to make a futile, green gesture. That's why there will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.

There will be no mining tax under the government I lead. Now, I know that miners aren't always the most popular people in a room full of farmers but most farmers understand that under most circumstances, mining and farming can coexist and most farmers also understand - because they are practical people who deal with markets all the time - that you don't speed up the slow lane by slowing down the fast lane. You don't make the less effective and the less successful operations better by hamstringing the more successful operations and that is the philosophy at the heart of the mining tax.

Government spending would be under control under the Coalition. We wouldn't, as we learned yesterday, be spending an extra \$20 million just to advertise the National Broadband Network which so far has just 6,500 live fibre connections. So far, the National Broadband Network has paid its CEO more than it's actually received in revenue. How do you think a farm would go operating on that basis? I mean, seriously, ladies and gentlemen, this is the current government's approach to running things that they have paid the CEO of the National Broadband Network more than the broadband network has currently raised in revenue.

You wouldn't have, under the Coalition, the kind of border protection blowouts that we have seen so much of under this government, and there was another \$1.2 billion added to the border protection bill as revealed just yesterday.

Under the Coalition, productivity would be up because we would deliver \$1 billion worth of red tape savings every year. There will be a one-stop-shop when it comes to environmental approvals.

We will curb industrial militancy by restoring the Australian Building and Construction Commission which delivered \$5 billion a year worth of productivity improvements in that industry alone and we would restore the balance in workplace relations more generally.

We will get participation up by getting serious again about programmes such as work for the dole which this government has largely abandoned, and yes, there would be a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme, because the women of Australia need a genuine choice. We need the women of Australia to be economic contributors as well as cultural and social contributors.

There would be real environmental protection. Our emissions reduction fund will make money available for tree planting where that's appropriate, for better soils through soil carbon where that's appropriate and through smarter technology. There will be a Green Army – 15,000 strong, helping with the land care efforts that sometimes prove beyond farmers, councils and volunteers.

There will be modern infrastructure under the next Coalition government. We want to see cranes over our cities. We want to see the bulldozers at work improving our roads. We will ensure that the Pacific Highway is fully duplicated between Newcastle and the Queensland border, well before the end of the decade and we'll have more to say about improving the Bruce Highway, one of the vital arteries of our country; certainly a vital artery for the development of our north.

There will be better schools and hospitals, because we will restore community control to these vital institutions. Every single one of you who grew up in a country area would know how much better your local hospital was when it was under the control of a community board and not under the control of distant bureaucrats.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, there will be real engagement – with Asia under a Coalition government. You know, just last weekend I was in a room in Bali with one staffer, a former Prime Minister of Australia, the current Foreign Minister of Indonesia and two of his senior officials and the incoming Indonesian Ambassador. Seven people in that room – three Australians, four Indonesians – six of those people had been educated at Australian universities. This is such an opportunity for our country, so under the Coalition there

will be a new Colombo plan. It will be a two-way street Colombo plan that will take our best and brightest to Asia as well as bringing their best and brightest to our country.

I want to assure you that as far as the Coalition is concerned, agriculture is not the old economy. Agriculture is part of our new economy. We all know of the opportunities that are emerging to our north. Indonesia now has 50 million middle class people. China now has about 300 million middle class people. Within two decades, 70 per cent of the middle class people of the world will live in our region. They will all want to be fed. They will all want to eat better than they do now. This is an extraordinary opportunity for the Australian agricultural sector.

We're all proud of what our mining and resources sector has done over the last few decades. We all appreciate how much we have depended on the exports of that extraordinary sector, but one day, the mineral resources will be less significant. One day, some of the mineral developments will be winding down, but our farms will still be there. Our agricultural land will be productive for thousands of years in a way in which our mines and our gas fields and our oil fields will not. That is why this is always going to be an industry of the future. That is why in the years ahead, I am confident that this will be a bigger not a smaller part of Australia's future. That is why I am confident that over time, there will be fewer grey heads at a meeting of the Nationals Farmers Federation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to leave you on that optimistic note. We are a great country, we are a great people. We can be better than we are and I am confident that with a different government we will be better than we are right now.

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