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RE: STATE ELECTION PLATFORM

Dear Wade,

Thank you for seeking SA-BEST's views on your '2018 South Australian Election – Five keys to unlocking increased profitability in the grains industry for the benefit of all South Australians'.

Please accept our apologies for the delay in responding.

SA-BEST acknowledges the important role grain producers play in South Australia – as contributors to the economy, as a key part of the fabric of our rural communities and as custodians of much of our remnant vegetation and many of our water catchment areas.

1. Create infrastructure efficiencies for lowest-cost delivery to markets

SA-BEST understands that transport is a major cost for farmers. We also acknowledge the current '90-Day Change Project – Improving Road Transport for the Agriculture Industry' is making good progress in reducing the costs of first-mile access from farm gate to the supply chain in an efficient manner. SA-BEST has committed to continuing this important initiative.

We also support upgrades to key strategic transport linkages across the state including sealing of the Strzelecki Track, upgrade Yorkeys Crossing Heavy Vehicle Bypass Road, Penola Bypass, upgrades to the Mallee Highway, Browns Well Highway and resolving ongoing issues of River Murray Bridge access at Spring Cart Gully and Paringa.

SA-BEST's regional policy also calls for an increase in the share of arterial road maintenance budget to address the backlog of rural road repair.

SA-BEST would be open to further discussion with your association regarding an economic impact study on the benefits of moving to a demand-pull marketing system for the grain industry as well as a transport study for Eyre Peninsula to address the region's critical transport and supply chain issues.

2. Increase market access to boost returns to SA's economy

SA-BEST fully supports investigating options to improve access to containers to boost our export grain capacity.

We also fully support action to unlock cost-effective third-party access to export ports – as a priority - and providing producers with grain stocks being held at port terminals to help them make more competitive on-farm decisions.

We also recognise telecommunications are an integral part of grain farming and marketing operations. SA-BEST supports a significant increase in regional telecommunications funding to \$30 million to leverage Federal and private investment into mobile phone, internet and internet blackspots.

3. Invest in plant science research, technologies and biosecurity

SA-BEST is concerned at the significant reduction in funding for agricultural research and development over the past decade. Further advances in agricultural productivity - in the face of more droughts and changing rainfall patterns - cannot be made without advances in, for example, agri-technology, biosecurity, plant breeding, carbon management and soil microbiology. SA-BEST fully supports much stronger State commitment to R&D in order to leverage Commonwealth and private sector investment and support new advances in productivity and sustainability.

SA-BEST supports a strong, efficient, responsive public service, where decisions are directly connected to the communities, lives and livelihoods they impact upon. We don't support a centralised, bureaucratic administration. In relation to agriculture, we support calls to retain PIRSA as a stand-alone department, maintain close links to SARDI and preserve the important role of Biosecurity SA.

In relation to the growing of genetically modified crops, SA-BEST recognises the potential gains in productivity and viability through advances that can be made in crop yield and drought tolerance, for example.

However, we also recognise that farmers should also have the right to say no to GM and in doing so, need to ensure there are appropriate protections in place.

We note that GM implementation is an irreversible process, so extreme caution should apply before lifting the moratorium. SA-BEST would need a comprehensive and independent investigation that fully considers and evaluates the risks and benefits including advances in crop yield, and details how we would ensure there are safeguards in place for issues such as GM contamination to neighbours, patents, supply chain exclusivity, along with evaluation of the actual differentiation on premium prices for GM vs non-GM produce.

4. Build a stronger workforce with new entrants and skills development for current participants

Despite ongoing concerns about a lack of jobs in South Australia, SA-BEST fully understands the agricultural sector continually struggles to attract and retain enough workers. The ongoing struggle to attract and retain employees in agriculture is also exacerbated by a rapidly ageing workforce.

SA-BEST has committed to investigating a 'New to Farming' loan scheme, based on existing models in the United States and Canada, to encourage new entrants who have not previously owned a farm or agribusiness and who can demonstrate a viable business case.

More broadly, agribusiness has been identified as one of five "super growth" sectors of the next 20 years. We can't rely on centralised training and education systems to deliver the workforce we need to take full advantage of this growth. Many regional areas have suffered from the courses being delivered locally not necessarily meeting future industry needs.

SA-BEST is committed to helping our SA regions to grow their own, local workforce by developing regional tertiary education study hubs that integrate university and vocational education pathways, tailored to meet the needs of local industry and communities. The initiative is based on the 'Community Owned Tertiary Education Centre' (COTEC) model that has been successfully rolled out in Western Australia, NSW and QLD, with proposals already being developed in South Australia's Upper Spencer Gulf and Riverland.

There are many reports that have repeatedly warned that the lack of skilled capability in our regional areas is a key barrier to future growth and economic diversification. It also reflects a broader educational disparity with 31% people in urban centres holding a tertiary Bachelor degree, compared with only half this (15%) in outer regional areas and just 12% in remote and very remote areas.

Whilst we would fully support GPSA's call for a government-led review into the relevance and value of tools to help farmers to self-manage for times of risk, SA BEST has committed to implementing a five-year farm income protection (multi-peril) policy rebate, similar to that being considered in NSW. We also support a stamp duty exemption on multi-peril policies and will work with our Federal colleagues to provide 150% tax deduction for farm multi-peril crop insurance.

5. Balance agriculture with competing land uses

Less than five percent of South Australia's landmass is suitable for dryland agriculture to grow crops such as wheat, barley, canola, chickpeas and lentils and a further three percent for high rainfall grazing. We must protect it from competing land uses.

SA-BEST has committed to investigating all options to strengthen legislative protections for agricultural land to reduce land use conflict.

We also fully support calls for stronger access by farmers to a government-funded mining industry information resource within Primary Producers SA for help.

In closing, we sincerely thank you for your interest in our views and look forward to discussion with you in the future.

In the meantime, we have attached copies of our agriculture and regions policies, for further information.

Yours sincerely

The SA-BEST Team