

FOREWORD

Australian agriculture— securing the future

by Michael Taylor



It is a particular pleasure to be invited to write the foreword for *Australian agriculture—securing the future*, a special issue of the Australian Journal of Emergency Management on Australian agriculture. Over 550,000 Australians rely on agriculture for their living. The gross value of Australian farm production for this financial year is predicted to be over

\$35 billion, and the value of farm exports will be over \$25 billion, or around 20 per cent of Australia's total exports.

Historically, we have had to deal with many animal and plant pest and disease emergencies affecting agriculture production and our trade. There have been associated human deaths. We have dealt with each of these incidents efficiently, effectively and successfully. Australia can be proud that it has established systems to protect its agriculture and environment, which are arguably among the best, if not the best, in the world.

As we become increasingly globalised, the risks to Australian agriculture multiply. We have recently witnessed a highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza sweep through southeast and east Asia, causing the destruction of tens of millions of poultry, devastation to the income of smallholders, and human deaths. Foot-and-mouth disease has caused serious damage in other countries, and rural people and the regions affected are still recovering. New diseases emerge and existing diseases are known to evolve over the years and more virulent strains, or strains that may suddenly directly harm people, are a clear and present risk.

The impacts of agricultural emergencies on industry, regions, consumer confidence, human health, the environment and trade can be very significant and are heightened if we don't detect control and manage emergencies rapidly and effectively. We must make

absolutely sure we're aware of the risk and have in place systems and people to manage emergencies. New science, technologies and methods emerge and must be utilised in the ongoing process of continual improvement to our capability.

We have developed, and we depend upon, partnerships between the Australian, State, Territory and local governments and industry. We, together with the community, work within systems and processes that have been acknowledged as world's best practice—but we cannot be complacent.

I would like to commend Emergency Management Australia for recognising the importance of agricultural risks and emergencies by dedicating a special publication to this issue. This publication will be used by professional emergency managers and the public at large as a reference document. I would also like to thank the writers for their efforts in producing good quality, readable articles.

Michael Taylor, is the Secretary, Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry.

