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NATIONAL AG EDUCATION STRATEGY WORKING GROUP GETS UNDERWAY

A Working Group, initiated by a National Agricultural Education Forum, has been appointed and is now underway. Its aim is to prepare a strategy to boost food and fibre education at a national level, in schools across Australia.

The initiative is backed by more than 50 peak council and RDCs, and has the support of the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Sen Murray Watt and the Assistant Minister for Education, Sen Anthony Chisholm.

Anthony Lee, CEO of major Queensland-based beef business, Australian Country Choice (ACC), addressed the Rural Press Club of Queensland's Ekka breakfast last August, arguing passionately for a stronger presence of food and fibre in the classroom – and for a well-funded, single peak body to drive the change.

On April 21, 2023, Mr Lee hosted a National Agricultural Education Forum in Brisbane, that brought together national food and fibre education leaders who are committed to expanding agriculture's influence in the Australian school curriculum. At the forum, a Selection Committee was appointed who would seek nominations for roles on a Working Group. It was agreed to support the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA) as the national peak body.

An Expression of Interest for the Working Group was initiated and members have now been appointed. The Working Group will work under the auspices of PIEFA and spend six months developing the strategy.

"We had an outstanding response to the Expression of Interest with many talented, committed and well-connected people indicating interest in being involved," Luciano Mesiti, PIEFA CEO said.

The Working Group is comprised of:

Chair: Ms Adele Loughton, CEO at Future Farmers Network

Corporate Representative: Ms Catherine Velisha, Managing Director at Velisha Farms and Managing Director at Veg Education

Education Representative: Mr Scott Graham, Head teacher of Agriculture at Barker College and PhD candidate in Agricultural Education at Charles Sturt University*

Research and Development Corporation Representative: Ms Maxie Hanft, Industry and Government Relations Manager at Grains Research and Development Corporation

Project Secretariat: Dr Bridie Schultz, Director at Sativus Pty Ltd

PIEFA Representative: Dr Cameron Archer AM, Chair at PIEFA

Project Manager: Mr Luciano Mesiti, CEO at PIEFA

** There was strong interest from the education sector and the committee decided to appoint a consultative group for Mr Graham to work with to develop the strategy from the school perspective.*

The Policy role within the Working Group will be undertaken by a number of people who will be enlisted as the need arises.

The group has confirmed its operating principles and terms of reference. It will align its structure in a general way to the current National Agricultural Workforce Strategy.

Mr Mesiti says, *“This strategy is well accepted and there are links to it regarding workforce and careers, but the school education strategy has a much broader remit relating to general education across all age stages and learning areas.”*

The Working Group agreed to prioritise researching and reporting on current initiatives that are underway, acknowledging the great work many individuals and organisations already do for food and fibre education – with the hope to build upon existing programs. This will help direct the Working Group strategy.

The Working Group also recognised the importance of providing students in all States and Territories greater opportunity to study agriculture in high school, as well as the need for many more teachers across both primary and secondary school to become confident in teaching food and fibre content.

These are long-term but essential strategies to develop.

“Its early days for the Working Group but the foundations are established for it to develop a sound and long-lasting strategy that will see real change to food and fibre education and the future of Australia’s primary industries.” Mr Mesiti said.

www.piefa.edu.au/food-and-fibre-education-plan

CONTACT:

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