

The Fertilizer

News and information from the Fertilizer Industry Federation of Australia



Senate Fertilizer Inquiry Reports

The Senate Inquiry into pricing and supply arrangements in the Australian and global fertiliser market has handed down its report and made recommendations on fertilizer labelling, pricing information and the Trade Practices Act. [More...](#)

AFSA Conference, FIFA AGM and Changes to the Board

FIFA convened its AGM in conjunction with the August 2009 AFSA Conference in Coffs Harbour, NSW. The conference included presentations on a variety of relevant topics and the FIFA AGM elected a new Board and Chairman. [More...](#)

Fertcare on-line

Access to Fertcare Level A and B training has been enhanced with the availability of 'on-line' training and assessment options. While face-to-face workshops are still the recommended way of completing training, the new options will help those having difficulties in attending workshops. [More...](#)

Western Australian Government Declares Support for Fertcare

FIFA's work with the WA Government has proved an enormous success with the integration of Fertcare into the WA Fertiliser Action Plan. In launching the Fertcare Accredited Advisor Program, the WA Minister for Agriculture declared that he expected farmers to seek advice from Fertcare Accredited Advisors. [More...](#)

New Regulations for Fertilizer Use to Protect the Great Barrier Reef

In accordance with its 2008 election commitment, the Queensland Government will consider a Bill to place tighter controls on the use of fertilizers in priority catchments of the GBR. [More...](#)

Fertcare Promotional Resources

With funding support from the Australian Government, the industry has developed a range of resources designed to improve the awareness and understanding of Fertcare. All industry members are encouraged to use these resources when communicating with customers or supply chain partners. [More...](#)

Industry Environment Awards

The 2009 FIFA Environment Awards were presented at the AFSA National Conference in August, with winners in the Platypus and Kookaburra award categories. [More...](#)

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Senate Inquiry into Fertilizer – No Smoking Gun



The Senate inquiry into pricing and supply arrangements in the Australian and global fertiliser market has produced a final report but has not substantiated any instances of misconduct in the industry.

Several allegations of improper conduct were made during the inquiry, none have been substantiated and in several instances this is recorded in the report. The report reflects anecdotal 'evidence' of people being unhappy with price and supply issues, which is not surprising given the dislocation in prices that occurred and the effect on changing demand patterns.

The only hard evidence in the report is provided by the ACCC and clearly reflects that international pricing determined domestic pricing.

The inquiry, chaired by Senator Bill Heffernan (pictured above), made six recommendations:

- that the states and territories should consider, as a matter of priority, adopting uniform description and labelling of fertiliser products to ensure consistency between jurisdictions;
- that all state and territory agriculture departments should consider undertaking regular sample testing for specified ingredient levels, such as nitrogen/phosphorus/potassium (NPK) levels, in fertiliser products;
- that the Commonwealth review Part IV of the Trade Practices Act 1974 relating to restrictive trade practices with a view to amending these provisions of the Act so as to more effectively regulate anti-competitive practices and prevent abuse of market power;
- that ABARE: collect and publish international input price information on fertiliser products on a regular basis on its website; and disseminate this information widely to farmers through the ABARE website, farmers' organisations, the rural press and other appropriate avenues;
- that in the interests of transparency the industry improve its business practices to ensure that fertiliser companies: publish general information, including arrival of shipments, detailing the amount of fertiliser available in stock; and provide greater certainty in the filling of orders, especially orders for fertiliser products placed earlier in the season; and
- that, wherever possible, supply agreements between suppliers and customers be more structured and equitable, and, where appropriate, include standard contractual terms and conditions.

FIFA strongly supports the recommendation on uniform description and labelling and expect that it may speed up the adoption of the industry's proposed code of practice by State jurisdictions.

Member companies were subject to the same unusual market conditions as their customers during the last two years and no doubt will be moving to improve supply agreements with customers and to improve communication.

[Full report here](#)

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AFSA National Conference 2009



The NSW Branch of the AFSA was host for the 2009 AFSA National Conference and AGM, and Coffs Harbour was the venue.

The AFSA Conference included presentations on a range of topics – including the global issues of climate change and the financial crisis. Delegates were provided with information on the trends and likely scenarios for the Australian economy, and how these might affect Australian agriculture. The conference also heard about efforts to improve the quality of the nutrient recommendations made by advisors – for productivity and environmental outcomes, and learned ways to question the advice being given.

Interactive presentations were also provided to help industry members improve the performance of their businesses. Field trips were well attended to a nearby compost plant and the Dorrigo National Park.

One of the highlights of the conference was the official conference dinner, where a number of presentations were made. Diners were also treated to an inspiring display of acrobatics, including by the masked 'AFSA spreaderman'!

FIFA AGM and Changes to the Board



As part of the AFSA conference, FIFA convened its 2009 AGM where the election of a new Board was the principal item of business. Eighteen of the twenty-eight ordinary members were represented (64%) and more nominations than positions were received. From the ensuing election, a new Board was established, along with a new Chairman, Darryl Dent (pictured), and Deputy Chairman, James Whiteside. Darryl thanked the immediate past president David Ford for his professional and thorough approach to the position of Chairman over the preceding 3 years.

The new FIFA Board comprises:

Peter Cameron – Mosaic
John Lewis – Agrow
Josh McGregor – Landmark
Stephen Wolfe – Tennant
(*Subsequently replaced by Allan Joseland)

Darryl Dent – CSBP
Peter MacCuspie – HiFert*
Alistair Steven – Elders
Rod Abbott – AFSA

David Ford – Impact
Peter McEwen – Summit
James Whiteside – Incitec Pivot

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Fertcare On-line



Due to the difficulties that many people face in attending Fertcare training workshops, the industry has developed 'e-learning' options for Level B and Level A. Both approaches still rely on aspects of the existing training program, with the new options providing a more 'flexible' alternative.

The Level B on-line option was developed with financial support from the Australian Government's *Australian Flexible Learning Framework* program. Level B students must still work their way through an instructional CD and complete the assessment sheets provided on the CD. However, following the successful completion of those stages, students can choose between attending a workshop, or completing most of the assessment on-line.

As for other elements of Level B, the new on-line assessment option is available from the *Agsafe* learning management system. It contains some interactive learning but its focus is on assessment, mainly through multiple-choice questions and interactive sale scenarios. Unfortunately, soil sampling cannot be easily assessed on-line and is a key competency required for the unit. This aspect must therefore be assessed in the workplace with a supervisor or other appropriately skilled colleague.

For Level A, students now have the option to complete their training via a CD of self-paced instruction and learning. The training resource was developed by the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, with funding from the Australian Government *National Landcare Program*. Level A trainees must still complete the workplace assessment process that is currently in place.

Trials of both systems have been undertaken and the feedback has been positive. For example, Shane Dellavedova oversaw 5 of his staff trial the new CD-based system and he appreciated the reduced disruption to his business. Nevertheless, Shane warned of the importance for supervisors to guide and keep the pressure on staff to complete the computer-based training.

While the e-learning systems have been developed to improve the uptake of Fertcare, the workshop learning and assessment options are still the recommended option for completing Fertcare courses. Fertcare trainers remain involved in the assessment of the online courses just as they are for the face to face versions.

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F I F A

Western Australian Minister Launches Fertcare Accredited Advisor Program



In April 2009, the Western Australian Minister for Agriculture and Food, Terry Redman launched the Fertcare Accredited Advisor (FAA) Program. In launching the program in Harvey WA, the Minister stated that “Fertcare Accredited Advisors will play a vital role in advising farmers on the best practice use of fertilizer on their farm”.

The Fertcare Accredited Advisor program aims to ensure that plant nutrition advisors are able to demonstrate competence in soil and plant test interpretation to ensure that they meet standards for productivity, food safety and environmental risk management. To become a FAA, advisors must successfully complete Fertcare Level C training, demonstrate competence in making recommendations and then have their actual nutrient recommendations independently audited every two years. Competence assessment and audits can be performed on individual advisors, or through a company’s nutrient recommendation decision support system.

Minister Redman commended the fertilizer industry for its commitment to environmental responsibility and food safety, and made it clear that he expected farmers in sensitive catchments of WA to seek advice on phosphorus use from Fertcare Accredited Advisors.

The fertilizer industry has been engaged with the Western Australian Government for some years now in developing ways to minimize the risk of fertilizers entering the waterways of the Swan Coastal Plain. In 2006, the WA Government announced a ban on some phosphate fertilizers in certain regions of WA, and the industry was keen to promote a sustainable use model – principally through Fertcare. The WA Government has responded favorably to Fertcare, and it will be a key platform for the WA Government’s *Fertilizer Action Plan*.

The response by the WA Government to Fertcare provides a positive reinforcement of the importance of the program to the industry.

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New Regulations for Fertilizer Use to Protect the Great Barrier Reef



Towards the end of 2008, the Queensland Government announced its intention to regulate fertilizer use in the catchments of the Great Barrier Reef. Along with an extensive number of stakeholders, FIFA attended a Reef Summit in Brisbane where both the Premier and the Minister for the Environment stated that voluntary measures to improve fertilizer use were not having the desired effect on Reef water quality.

On 4 June 2009, the Queensland Government released a Bill to better control fertilizer and pesticide use in 3 priority catchments of the Reef. The Bill proposes amendments to the Queensland Environment Protection Act and will be considered in the next sitting of Parliament.

The Bill defines *agricultural environmentally relevant activities (ERA)* as:

- Commercial sugar cane farming; or
- Cattle grazing with more than 100 cattle units; in
- The catchments of: the Wet Tropics, Mackay-Whitsunday and Burdekin Dry Tropics.

If a farming operation meets this definition, then it must not apply N or P to the soil, unless it meets a number of requirements, most notably:

- The calculation of 'optimum' amounts of N & P, based on soil testing and;
- Using a prescribed (regulated) methodology; and
- Keeping and reporting (if required) records (eg. N & P usage, test results, optimum rates calculations).

In addition, if an agricultural ERA consists of sugar cane on more than 70ha in the Wet Tropics; or cattle grazing on more than 2000ha in the Burdekin Dry Tropics, then they must have an accredited *environmental risk management plan*. The main elements of which include:

- Details on who prepared the plan, the farm location etc
- Any identified environmental risk factors (eg. fertilizer use, erosion zones)
- A management plan for addressing those hazards
- Measurable targets and performance indicators.

Serious penalties for farmers failing to comply are proposed.

A number of Task Forces have been established to develop the details of the proposed regulations and FIFA is represented on all of those relevant to the industry. The role of Fertcare Accredited Advisors and the method for determining optimum nutrient rates will be of particular interest to the industry.

[Details and fact sheets here](#)

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Fertcare Promotional Resources

Through the generous funding of the Australian Government's National Landcare Program *Sustainable Industries Partnership Program*, the industry has been able to develop a range of material designed to promote Fertcare.



The most recent publication is a 12-page booklet (pictured right) that provides easy to read information about the program, including details about each component. It is designed for stakeholders who need to know more about the program than what is provided in the 'farmer brochure' (pictured left). The first dispatch of the new booklet was through the AFSA's *Fertiliser News* distribution. Copies have also been sent to federal, state and territory governments, as well as to each catchment management authority.

A number of industry members have begun circulating copies of the new booklet and the FIFA office has plenty more available for distribution.

The new booklet complements the other resources developed with *National Landcare Program* funding – including the display banners (pictured centre). The brochures and banners are ideal for field days, conferences, farmer and business partner meetings. Copies of the booklet and brochure are available from FIFA, and a set of the display banners is available in each State – through the relevant AFSA State Branch.

Also available from the FIFA office is a short PowerPoint presentation and an information sheet that are ideal for inducting new staff, and for explaining Fertcare to government and industry.

The industry has invested considerable resources in the development and adoption of Fertcare (c. \$3m), and it should be proud of this commitment to sustainable fertilizer supply, advice and use. It is our collective responsibility to inform stakeholders about Fertcare, and how it can help their sustainability goals. Please make use of the available resources as much as possible.

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Industry Environmental Awards

The Fertilizer Industry Environment Awards were presented in two categories at the 2009 AFSA National Conference in Coffs Harbour. The awards were presented during the conference dinner by the National President of the AFSA, Rod Abbott. The FIFA Environment Awards are available in four categories and aim to acknowledge the efforts of companies, and individuals.



The *Platypus* award is available to FIFA 'Ordinary' members with an annual turnover of more than \$150 million. In 2009, the award was presented to Incitec Pivot Limited.

IPL's award recognises its extensive efforts to reduce energy consumption at its manufacturing works on Gibson Island. IPL has completed a comprehensive assessment of its energy use, and implemented a range of works including advanced process control, insulation and energy monitoring systems. The energy efficiency projects implemented in 2008 have saved a whopping 140,000 gigajoules of energy.

This has resulted in positive outcomes for IPL's costs, and greenhouse gas footprint.



The *Kookaburra* Award is for FIFA Associate Members and Australian Fertiliser Services Association Ordinary members. The 2009 award was presented to Greenthumb Australia.

Greenthumb won the award for its work on water recycling and nutrient reuse at its fertiliser spreading premises – and their commitment to the Fertcare program. Greenthumb has ceased to rely on costly and highly treated town water by re-using wash-down water. This has resulted in significant cost savings as well as reduced risk of water pollution. The results of the project have been promoted to the local water authority, and to Greenthumb's customers.

The response has been very positive, and the project provides a water management model for others to follow.

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