



Terms of Reference: National Food Council

Overview

- The Australian Government has committed \$3.5 million over two years (2025-26 to 2026-27) to develop *Feeding Australia: National Food Security Strategy* (the strategy) to boost the productivity, resilience and security of Australia's food system.
- Under this commitment, the government is establishing a National Food Council (the council), comprising industry and community experts from across the food system.
- The council will advise the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) on the development of the strategy.

Context

Food is a fundamental human need and an essential part of our daily lives. The high-quality products our farmers produce provide sustenance vital for health and wellbeing. Food is deeply woven into our culture and economy. All Australians are part of the food system, starting with our farmers and fishers who draw on natural resources to produce food, through to our people and industries who transform, transport and sell food, and our families and communities who grow, buy, cook and eat food.

Australia is a food secure nation and plays a vital role supporting global food security through exporting around 70% of our agriculture production (ABARES, 2025). Our robust food system is a national asset – underpinned by strong food safety and biosecurity measures, essential not only for nourishing our own population but also for meeting the needs of our trading partners.

Nonetheless, food insecurity persists within certain segments of our community, particularly among low-income households and those living in remote areas. Cost of living pressures and supply chain disruptions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated these issues. Despite our strong agricultural performance, Global Food Security Index ratings have seen Australia shift from 12th in 2019, 32nd in 2021 to 22nd in 2022. One of the contributors to Australia's ranking is the lack of a food security strategy, alongside metrics associated with availability, sustainability and adaption (GFSI, 2022).

The development of a food security strategy follows the 2023 House Standing Committee on Agriculture's [Australian Food Story](#) and the 2025 House Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Resources' [Food for Thought](#). The 2020 House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs [Inquiry into food prices and food security in remote Indigenous communities](#) also recognised the need for improvement in the supply of affordable, nutritious and quality food in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Beyond government, reports from the CSIRO ([Towards a state of the food system report for Australia](#)), the Australian Food & Agriculture Taskforce ([Land of Plenty](#)), and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute ([National Food Security Preparedness Green Paper](#)) have all called for coordinated national action on food systems and security.

The strategy will consider linkages to initiatives across government, including but not limited to the [National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities](#), the

[National Preventative Health Strategy 2021-2030](#), the [National Biosecurity Strategy](#), the [National Defence Strategy](#) and Australia's [Net Zero](#) and [Future Made in Australia](#) agenda.

Council Objectives

The council's objectives include (but are not limited to):

- a. Supporting the development of the strategy.
- b. Providing leadership and fostering collaboration between government, industry and community to achieve the goals of the strategy.
- c. Providing coordinated advice to the Minister and DAFF on issues related to Australia's food system and food supply chains.
- d. Other relevant matters as they arise.

Council Activities

The council will undertake, support or contribute to a range of activities over its life. This includes but is not limited to:

- Developing a forward work plan;
- Providing advice on food security matters that could be included in the strategy;
- Participating in industry consultation or other events as appropriate;
- Providing feedback and advice on draft versions of the strategy or other products to support the development of the strategy; and
- Generally supporting the development of an effective strategy to benefit all Australians.

The council is not a decision-making body.

DAFF will be responsible for the overarching delivery of the strategy, including research and analysis, co-design and consultation and drafting of the strategy. The government will make the final decision on the matters that the strategy will address following advice from the council and broader consultation with industry and the community.

Further details on roles for the Chair, members and secretariat are available below.

Reporting

Following meetings of the council, communiques on meeting discussions and outcomes will be published on the DAFF website.

Council Membership

The council will be chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry or delegate. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry may elect to attend meetings at their discretion.

Members of the council were selected by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry following an EOI process. The following members have been appointed:

Dr Christopher Downs	Director, Food and Beverage Accelerator (FaBA), University of Queensland
Mel Gatfield	National Director – Food & Beverages, NSW Secretary, United Workers Union
Andrew Henderson	Principal, Agsecure; Senior Fellow – Australian Strategic Policy Institute
Barry Irvin AM	Executive Chairman, Bega Group
Dr Elizabeth Jackson	Associate Professor of Supply Chain Management & Logistics, Curtin University
Dr Leisa McCarthy	Deputy Director First Nations Engagement & Research Strategy, Menzies School of Health Research
Claire McClelland	CEO, Australian Fresh Produce Alliance
Su McCluskey	Chair, Crawford Fund for Food Security
Pat O'Shannassy	CEO, Grain Trade Australia
David Stout	Director of Policy, National Retail Association
Dr Tracy Sullivan	Independent Director, Yawuru Holdings Company & Primary Partners Pty Ltd Director, Australian Veterinary Semen Morphology

Additional members may be appointed at the discretion of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The Minister or Chair may also, at their discretion, invite other guest participants to attend meetings.

Appointment term

Appointment to the council is until 30 June 2027. The membership of the council may be adjusted or expanded as the council's workplan evolves and in response to emerging developments.

Remuneration

Members will not be remunerated for their participation on the council. DAFF will arrange and acquit travel for members, including flights and accommodation in accordance with the department's travel policy.

Roles

Chair

In consultation with members, the Chair:

- a. Ensures that the council operates in accordance with these Terms of Reference;
- b. Determines a forward meeting schedule;
- c. Approves meeting agendas prior to distribution;
- d. Chairs each meeting and:
 - i. ensures any conflicts of interests of members, the Chair or invited attendees are declared and documented at the beginning of each meeting;
 - ii. leads and facilitates discussion and participation by all members;
 - iii. ensures adequate discussion time is devoted to issues of significance;
 - iv. ensures unanticipated items of business can be discussed;
 - v. maintains the proper, courteous and respectful conduct of the council; and
 - vi. ensures a record of attendance, summary of the discussion and action items are maintained.

Members

Members have the following responsibilities:

- a. Attend meetings and participate in discussions;
- b. Consult as necessary to ensure that broad-ranging views and perspectives are considered by the council;
- c. Consider and provide views on out-of-session items as required;
- d. Disseminate information gained at meetings back to their group, organisation or sector;
- e. Attend and participate in related events or activities as required;
- f. Restrict issues and debates to matters that are within the agreed objectives of the council; and
- g. Respectfully accommodate the broad range of perspectives involved in the work of the council.

Secretariat

DAFF provides secretariat services to the council. The duties of the secretariat include:

- a. Liaison with the Chair and members;
- b. Notification of meetings to members and participants;
- c. Compilation and distribution of agendas and associated papers;
- d. Preparation of records of meetings and publish communiques;
- e. Administrative support to Chair during meetings;
- f. Facilitating effective follow-up of action items; and.
- g. Arrange and acquit travel for members.

Meetings and Administration

The agenda for each meeting will be prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Chair and members. The secretariat may also seek agenda items and supporting documents from council members. The secretariat will lead on minute-taking and disseminating documents and action items post-meeting.

The frequency and location of meetings is to be determined by the Chair. The group is expected to meet at a minimum quarterly each financial year. Meetings will be a combination of in-person and virtually via Microsoft Teams. Members may also be asked to attend events related to the strategy.

Each meeting must have a representative of the secretariat, and at least one-half of members present either in person or virtually.

Members may not pass on invitations to non-members. If a member wishes to send a proxy, they must seek the approval of the Chair and the secretariat.

In the event the Chair is unable to attend a meeting, another senior DAFF official may perform the role of chair, or a member of the council may be asked to chair the meeting.

Papers for meetings will be distributed by the secretariat one week before a meeting, and outcomes and action items from meetings will be distributed within two weeks following a meeting.

Deeds of confidentiality

All council members must execute and adhere to the provisions of the Deed of Confidentiality.

Australian Government representatives are not required to sign the Deed of Confidentiality due to existing obligations that provide for confidentiality under the Public Service Code of Conduct.

Where individuals or organisations participate in a council meeting on an ad hoc or temporary basis, they are required to abide by Chatham House Rule, or relevant equivalent.

Conflict of interest

Prior to gaining membership a Conflict of Interest (Col) form must be submitted to and receipt acknowledged by the secretariat.

Any further Col must be declared by resubmitting a Col form to the secretariat.

Council members must:

- a. maintain a high degree of integrity, fairness, impartiality, confidentiality, and good faith; and
- b. not engage in any activity that creates a potential, apparent or actual conflict of interest.

A conflict of interest means any instance where a council member has a direct financial or other interest which influences, or may appear to influence, the council's consideration of an actual or proposed matter. This includes the promotion of any corporate or other interests the member holds outside of the council.

Where a potential, apparent or actual conflict of interest arises, the member must declare the conflict of interest to the Chair and secretariat.

The Chair and/or the secretariat may then direct the member to:

- a. withdraw from discussions and decision-making processes on the matter, or potential matter, that constitutes the conflict of interest; and

- b. take any other action deemed necessary by the Chair to mitigate any potential, apparent or actual conflict of interest.

Termination of Membership

The potential grounds for termination include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. A breach, or potential breach, of these Terms of Reference.
- b. A breach, or potential breach, of the Deed of Confidentiality.
- c. Conduct that brings the work of the council or the strategy into potential/actual disrepute.
- d. Unprofessional conduct that disrupts the operation of council meetings or other engagement in development of the strategy.
- e. A member determines their ongoing membership in the council is no longer tenable.

Review/amendment of the ToRs

A review of these ToRs will take place every 12 months. The secretariat and Chair will also consider any ad hoc requests to review or amend the ToRs. The Chair may issue amendments to these ToRs at any time, following consultation with members.