



**RICEGROWERS' ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA INC**

RGA Environmental Policy

Environmental Sustainability Committee

OBJECTIVE

To ensure that our growers implement Natural Resource Management practices that protect and enhance the landscapes in which they operate, leaving a legacy of a healthy environment while demonstrating the sustainability of the rice industry.

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RG WATER POLICY POSITIONS

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The Rice Industry Environmental Policy

The Australian rice industry cares about and depends upon a healthy environment. Water, soil, air, habitat and local communities are fundamental resources for the industry and the broader community.

We are working towards a better environment for current and future generations, by continually improving the management of our natural resources. We aim to achieve this through developing an improved understanding of our environmental challenges, innovative solutions, strong partnerships and appropriate practice changes.

The rice industry recognises that efficient and productive farming businesses are a necessary pre-condition for good environmental management and outcomes.

The environmental policy is a statement of commitment agreed to by the membership of the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia (RGA) to improve environmental management and stewardship in our region. The policy is supported by a range of industry environmental programs and delivered through the Environmental Champions Program.

This policy is overseen by the RGA Environmental Sustainability Committee with components of the policy managed by the other RGA committees. The responsible committees are noted against the areas of this policy within this document.

1. Policy goals

The Australian rice industry aims to implement an effective environmental policy that it will:

1. Leave a legacy of a healthy environment including productive soils, clean air and water, and diverse and robust natural habitats, rivers and watersheds.
2. Enable sustainable rice farms and regional communities.
3. Provide safe and high quality food and other products.

2. Policy implementation

The rice industry recognises the need to integrate environmental thinking into everyday farm management and decision-making, longer term farm strategic planning and the management of all non-farm aspects of the industry. The rice industry will continue to:

- a) Increase our understanding of environmental issues and the role and responsibilities of the rice industry.
- b) Promote environmental and resource stewardship with rice growers and the wider community.
- c) Build our capacity and skill base to meet environmental challenges by facilitating practice change and adaptive management.
- d) Form partnerships that serve common environmental understanding and outcomes.
- e) Develop showcases of rice industry best practice.
- f) Encourage environmental innovation.

The industry's environmental policy focuses on the five key areas of **water, air, soils, habitat and community**.

The delivery mechanism for implementing our environmental policy is through Rice Extension and the Ricegrowers' Association activities.

3. Water

The industry's policy on water management covers the following three elements:

1. Regulatory compliance
2. Water use efficiency
3. Water use planning and budgeting

3.1 Regulatory compliance

Ensuring rice growers are complying with the regulatory obligations concerning on-farm water use is necessary to avoid third party effects and maintain the broader community's support of the industry.

The RGA Policy Position:

The rice industry's policy seeks universal compliance with the following regulatory requirements:

- Whole farm water balance limits to prevent rising water tables and associated salinity issues. (where applicable)
- Drainage water management (chemical withholding and volume).
- Adhering to soil suitability requirements for rice growing.

RGA Committee: Water Committee

3.2 Water use efficiency

Improving on-farm water use efficiency reduces the volume of water required to produce each tonne of rice, ensuring the long term sustainability of the industry and continuing community support. Efficient water use also helps reduce the effect of rising water tables.

RGA Policy Position:

To ensure growers minimise water use by adopting best practice in the following aspects of crop management:

- Planning and implementing efficient irrigation layouts.
- Crop seeding techniques and timing.
- Recycling and storage infrastructure.
- Crop agronomy and crop rotation.

RGA Committee: Productivity and Industry Affairs

3.3 Water use budgeting and planning

Effective water use budgeting and planning enables rice growers to make sustainable resource management decisions.

RGA Policy position:

Our policy aims to improve irrigators' decision making about water use by improving expertise in the following areas:

- Gross margins and the opportunity cost of different water use options.
- Effective scenario planning to manage water availability risk.
- Knowledge of the water market and water trading rules.

RGA Committee: Productivity and Industry Affairs

4. Air

The industry's policy on air quality covers the following issues:

1. Responsible stubble burning
2. Preventing chemical spray drift damage
3. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions

4.1 Stubble burning

Ensuring rice growers burn stubble in a responsible way, to minimise the effect of smoke on community amenity, the health of nearby residents and on road safety, is critical to avoid third party effects and maintain local communities' support for the industry.

The RGA Policy position:

Our policy seeks to ensure all rice growers are aware of, and adhere to, responsible burning practices. These include:

- Using stubble management options other than burning.
- Burning during the middle of the day to avoid inversion layers.
- Achieving a hot burn with dry stubble.
- Burning with definite wind direction and velocity.
- Avoid burning when wind is likely to carry smoke over residential areas or roads.
- Recording stubble burning activity, including time of day and wind direction/speed.

RGA Committee: Environmental Sustainability

4.2 Chemical handling and application

Ensuring the proper handling and application of farm chemicals is necessary to maintain safe working conditions on farm. Minimising agricultural chemical spray drift is also important to protect nearby vegetation and waterways. It is also a mandatory legal requirement where there are adjacent sensitive crops.

RGA Policy positions:

Our policy aims to ensure all growers and spray applicators in the industry use best practice management when handling and applying chemicals. This includes:

- Ensuring chemicals are stored, handled and transported in compliance with regulations.
- Ensuring all chemical application is carried out in accordance with product labels.
- Understanding and monitoring conditions while spraying to prevent drift damage.
- Recording all chemical applications in accordance with regulatory requirements.
- Consulting with neighbours about chemical application intentions.
- Encouraging the use of closed intake systems for chemical induction.

RGA Committee: Productivity and Industry Affairs

5. Climate and Greenhouse gas emissions

The rice industry understands that the agricultural sector has an important role in mitigating the impacts of climate variability. This involves contributing to Australia's effort to reduce global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, including methane, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide. Under schemes to credit emissions reduction activities, there may also be the potential for rice growers to earn income from emissions reducing farming practices.

RGA Policy positions:

Our policy aims to maximise the number of growers who, on the basis of current and future scientific research, undertake practices that **reduce** their on-farm emissions. These will include the adoption of renewable energy technologies and management practices for irrigation, stubble and fertiliser that have been demonstrated to reduce GHG emissions.

This policy also aims for growers to undertake best practice energy use by carrying out energy use audits and implementing energy saving measures on farm to reduce CO2 emissions.

In addition based on the NFF policy the RGA supports:

- Adaptation that ensures that agricultural productivity and farm business profitability can be sustained with changing climatic conditions;
- a balance of production and emissions policies, by adopting the principle of emissions intensity for agricultural emissions;
- a focus on innovation and investment in climate research and development that drives innovation and builds resilience;
- embracing the opportunities for emissions reduction and sequestration in the farm sector and facilitate participation of farmers in carbon markets;
- acknowledge the role of vegetation in carbon sequestration while ensuring that vegetation management policies do not unfairly burden farmers with the cost of achieving emissions reduction goals, or unreasonably restrict development; and
- coordinated regulation and energy policy, so that growth in the use of renewable energy does not result in unintended energy price distortions.

6. Soils

The industry's policy on soils aims to improve soil health by improving the structure, fertility and biota of the region's soils. Achieving this will reduce the effects of agricultural activity on our soils and improve on-farm productivity.

The RGA Policy positions:

Our policy aims to ensure growers can improve their soil health by identifying best practice and facilitating adoption in the following areas:

- Stubble management. Maintaining stubbles in the soil to improve soil structure.
- Optimal crop rotations. Including 'green manure' crops to minimise synthetic fertiliser use.
- Tillage management. Minimising soil disturbance.
- Precision agriculture. Reducing inputs through soil testing, effective data capture, recording and review, and developing and applying prescriptions.
- Soil types matched to production systems.

Growers will be encouraged to trial innovative soil health practices and share outcomes with peers.

RGA Committee: Productivity and Industry Affairs

7. Habitat

There are a number of important benefits that can be achieved by the rice industry improving habitats and encouraging biodiversity in the rice growing region. These benefits are many and varied, including:

- Ensuring the industry's sustainability and leaving a legacy for future generations.
- Improving species diversity and their populations.
- Achieving better integrated pest management with the environmental benefit this brings.
- Providing important ecosystem services to the broader community including assisting in the recovery of threatened species including the Australasian Bittern.
- Improving social capital through collaborative restoration projects.
- Maintaining community support for the industry.

The RGA Policy positions:

The industry's policy aims to engage and enlist as many growers as possible to undertake important habitat management practices. These include:

- Understanding and complying with legislative environmental offset requirements.
- Preserving areas of remnant vegetation.
- Rehabilitating and re-vegetating areas in need.
- Managing on farm wetlands and waterways.
- Participating in community corridor projects.
- Undertaking pest species control.
- Developing and implementing endangered species protection and recovery measures.

RGA Committee: Environmental Sustainability

7.1 Bitterns in Rice

The RGA has led the research and engagement of rice growers and the broader community regarding the management of rice farms modified wetland habitats and the benefits these habitats provided for the nationally endangered Australasian Bittern.

The RGA Policy Positions:

The RGA believes it has a responsibility to research and promote best management of the surrogate wetlands that Riverina rice fields provide for the Australasian Bittern and other threatened species.

To support rice growers in adopting Bittern friendly management practices the RGA will pursue:

- Funding support for research
- Access of environmental water to enable sufficient ponding periods for Bittern habitat
- Access to incentives or premiums for growers that provide Bittern habitat
- Promote the rice industries provision of habitats that supports a diverse range of species including several that are threatened
- Promote the rice industry's contribution to the recovery of the Australasian Bittern

RGA Committee: RGA Committee: Environmental Sustainability

8. Community

The capacity of the growers and the broader community to improve skills and understanding, share knowledge and work collaboratively on environmental management is critical to achieving sustainable environmental conditions, economic stability and social amenity for the region.

The RGA Policy positions:

The rice industry's policy is to foster capacity building by enabling growers and others to improve and share their skills and knowledge. This includes the following:

- Maximising grower participation in learning opportunities.
- Preparing growers and other key community members for leadership roles.
- Engaging in community activities.
- Maintaining industry, social and cultural history.
- Building networks and partnerships.

RGA Committee: Environmental Sustainability and Productivity and Industry Affairs

9. Native Game Bird Management

Hunting is recognised as one of a number of tools used by rice growers in the sustainable management of native game birds.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries – Native Game Bird Management Program is responsible for licensing landholders and hunters to hunt native game birds. The Native Game Bird Management Team has issued a number of useful resources to help you understand your obligations, including the ‘Landholders Kit’, which can be found here: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/hunting/game-and-pests/native-game-birds

The RGA Policy positions:

The RGA only supports the use of hunting where non-lethal deterrents are ineffective and when best practice is used and all relevant legislation and regulations are complied with.

RGA Committee: Environmental Sustainability

10. Environmental Champions Program

The Environmental Champions Program (ECP) has been a very successful sustainability reporting program for the rice industry. A range of factors including a lack of funding, drought and changes in how rice farm businesses operate has meant that the original cluster group model has become unworkable. The RGA is currently working with SunRice to develop and implement an internationally recognised Sustainability-BMP program. This program will replace the original ECP. Until this is finalised important components of the ECP will be delivered by the RGA in conjunction with Rice Extension.

The RGA Policy positions:

The RGA supports the development of the internationally recognised Australian Sustainable Rice Platform.

RGA Committee: Environmental Sustainability

Key Partners

- Landcare NSW;
- Local Land Services;
- SunRice;
- NSW EPA;
- NSW Rural Fire Service;
- NSW DPI;
- Birdlife Australia;
- The National Landcare Program; and
- A range of research institutions and producer groups.