



MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Hon Julie Bishop MP

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**SPEECH AT CRAWFORD FUND FOOD SECURITY CONFERENCE
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA**

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JULIE BISHOP: I am very pleased to address this conference because you are focusing on one of the global challenges that we identified in our Foreign Policy White Paper that was released last November. That was designed to set out a framework of our foreign policy priorities and interests for the next 10 years or more. While we can't predict the future, we can certainly focus on our values as a nation - open liberal democracy committed to the rule of law, democratic institutions, human rights, an open export-oriented market economy, this standard of living depends upon our ability to sell our goods and services around the world.

I was particularly pleased to be here because I want to pay tribute to the Crawford Fund for supporting agricultural research internationally, but also raising awareness of the benefits of such research – not only to Australia and to our region but internationally – and research leading to increasing productivity which provides benefits for all.

The National Farmers Federation tells us that Australian farmers each feed 600 people - 150 people at home, and 450 people overseas. That is a remarkable statistic, showing enormous productivity on the part of our farmers. It is due to their hard work and enterprise but also to the agricultural research that enables them to embrace new techniques, and to innovate and to represent world's best practice in so many areas.

I want to take a moment to pay tribute to Australia's farmers, for many of them are struggling through one of the worst droughts on record. That's why the Turnbull Government has responded with a package of measures to support them at this time. You'll be aware that the Farm Household Assistance Scheme introduced in 2014 is already providing about 8000 farmers with support of about \$550 per fortnight. We have now announced two further supplements to that assistance, and this package of

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about \$190 million is on top of the \$386 million in drought relief. It also provides concessional loans. So we take a moment to think of how our farmers are doing it tough at present.

Of course, no-one controls the rain, and that's why Australian farmers have so regularly confronted drought, and so regularly come up with innovative ideas for drought resistance, for water management, and we really do lead the world in many of these areas. Yes, there are huge global challenges, but we in Australia have a great deal to offer, through our own experience, as tough as it can be, but also through our inquiring creative innovative minds, always prepared to take risks, push the envelope.

There is a huge global challenge ahead of us because of the increasing pressures on agricultural land around the world, and that has come about through growing populations, through unprecedented levels of urbanisation and also through growing prosperity - growing prosperity means a greater demand for food and water.

In fact, we have seen the greatest reduction in poverty in human history - hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty since the Second World War. That's a great news story, but it does have big challenges, including in relation to agricultural land.

One challenge for us is that our high-quality food is very much in demand overseas. The challenge is we have to ensure that we have access to established and new markets – preferential access for our agricultural exporters so that we can compete on a level playing field and that's why the Government has pursued a very ambitious free-trade agenda. Our Free Trade Agreements with China, Japan and Korea always take the headlines, but we are pursuing free trade agreements wherever we see benefit for Australian exporters, and given that we export two-thirds of our agricultural production, this is a vital underpinning for the Australian economy.

We should also note that much of our agricultural export is into developing countries, and trade is a key element of food security in developing countries. There was research last year – the ANU Development Policy Centre showed that for every dollar Australia invests in foreign aid, we receive back from that recipient developing country \$7 through our increase in exports. I think that is a figure worth recalling.

Another significant challenge, paradoxically, is malnutrition amongst agricultural sectors across the world. There are about 525 million farmers around the world - 475 million are considered to be smallholder farmers. Paradoxically, it is estimated that about half of them are suffering from malnutrition. Three million children die each year of malnutrition - many others are suffering from stunting, from decreased learning abilities, from a decreased level of immunity to disease, and these are challenges that no one country can face alone, and it is why we focus so heavily on partnerships – working in partnership with other governments, with the private sector,

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with civil society to ensure that we can assist, given our expertise and our level of agricultural production.

Our aid program includes a significant element of agricultural research. It is targeted to our region, the Indo-Pacific - it's specifically targeted to the Pacific. This is our part of the world. This is where we have a responsibility to build safe, and secure, and prosperous communities and societies, specifically within the Pacific but broadly across the Indo-Pacific where, coincidentally, our major trading partners are located.

This morning you heard stories of work that we are doing in Timor-Leste. I was in Timor-Leste about 10 days ago, in Dili, and I know that the Australian Government is working with Timor-Leste to help farmers access markets. For the country of Timor-Leste's size, with the economic and social profile that it has, it is extremely difficult for farmers to access markets, so we partner with them. It is in our interests as well as in the interests of the people of Timor-Leste to ensure that their farmers can grow crops that can be marketed, and that they can have access to markets, and take part in the regional supply chains, and the work we are doing in Timor-Leste is making a huge difference.

I also came across a great initiative, supported by the Australian Government. If you are in Dili, please go to Agora Food Studio. Its run by two Aussies and its mission is to produce clean, quality food that is fair to the producers and consumers and the population at large. They run a restaurant café and they source 90 per cent of the food – their ingredients – from smallholder farmers in Timor-Leste. They focus on uniquely Timorese herbs and spices and fruits and nuts – things I'd never heard of – and they turn them into the most extraordinary gastronomic delights. They are training young Timorese in the art of culinary delights, of being chefs and apprentices in the kitchens. They are also training baristas – in fact, one of their baristas is coming to Sydney for the international barista competition. They are working with Australia to support their producers to provide their ingredients, with better strains of cocoa and coffee, and they are branding Timor-Leste produce. It's giving livelihoods, it's providing nutrition and interesting food, jobs for local people, and I couldn't think of a better investment of the Australian dollar than supporting these young people to do such amazing things.

The focus of today's conference is about better and more food, with constrained resources, and we certainly see that across our region. That is why I want to pay tribute to ACIAR, to the work that the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research does as an integral part of our foreign aid program. ACIAR is a quiet achiever in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - not to suggest that everybody else is a loud achiever - but ACIAR gets on with some remarkable work that produces some remarkable results. Every time I read one of Andrew's reports – and he gives them to me regularly – on the work we are doing, Australians would be proud to see the difference that we are making. Of course, the research that we undertake has an impact here in Australia. We all benefit from this research.

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A couple of examples - in PNG last March, we went to Nago Island in New Ireland Province, and there ACIAR is working in what was a Japanese tuna canning factory that was discarded a long time ago, and through research, we are working with local people to produce sea cucumbers, and creating a business in exporting sea cucumbers particularly to China. They are also doing a side business of ornamental fish, like the little striped clown fish 'Nemo', and selling these little ornamental fish into the US market. Again, wonderful research about training up young people and giving livelihoods.

I know that ACIAR is also involved in developing aquaculture farms in PNG - there are now something like 16,000 aquaculture farms – but what we learn from our research in assisting PNG we can equally apply home here in Australia.

You also heard this morning about the Smart Food Initiative. This is something that we are doing with our innovationXchange – another quiet achiever in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Some years ago, about three and a half years ago, I was concerned that while we had targeted our aid program and it was focused on effective efficient outcomes, nevertheless some countries in our region, particularly countries where we have a special responsibility to support them – PNG – they were going backwards on some of the key socio-economic indicators. How could this be? It clearly wasn't a question of money. It was a question of how we were investing our aid dollar. So we set up an ideas hub, the innovationXchange. If you haven't visited it, please do. It's in a building opposite the imposing R.G. Casey building, and it looks like an ideas hub, which is what it is. I asked the people – we selected people from across the public service, from the private sector. we had people from the United States come into it from Google, from PWC – I asked them to focus on some of the intractable development issues in our region, but forget what we've always done, and start with a fresh piece of paper, and do something completely new and see if you can come up with an answer – using technology, using different ways of thinking, just be creative. As a result of our ideas hub, the innovationXchange, we now have 102 projects that have been selected on their level of creativity and their effectiveness across 32 countries in the Indo-Pacific. We are truly making a difference - things like using drones for identifying areas of need after a natural disaster, or using drones to deliver pharmaceuticals.

In the agricultural area we've had some really exciting breakthroughs and one of them was the Smart Food initiative you heard about today, which was one of our finalists in the LAUNCH Food challenge that the innovationXchange launched - that is, we came up with some seed funding, we came up with an issue – that is, agricultural yields, how to increase productivity in developing countries – and we asked for ideas from consortiums and individuals around the world, and Smart Food was one of them. They are focusing on types of grain that are resistant or adapted to climate extremes. This kind of innovation does transform societies.

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Something else that we have to offer the world is our expertise in water management. This is a real issue in terms of global and regional security. Half the world's cities and about 75 per cent of irrigated farms around the world are facing water scarcity. There have been more fights over water in the history of mankind than over religion, I dare to suggest.

Australia has particular expertise in water management. We are offering that expertise to others in partnerships - we are doing fantastic work in the Lower Mekong, in India, in countries where irrigation, water management, water scarcity really do lead to security issues.

Partnerships are the key. That's the way we have to do it - leverage the private sector, make sure the private sector is involved, work with other governments, work with civil society.

A great partnership that has just been announced is the Melbourne-based company Rubicon Water and they have entered into a joint venture in China to deliver irrigated water systems, and that's another example of a great partnership.

Ladies and gentlemen, all the very best for your conference. I'm about to go and vote. This is democracy in action!

- Ends -

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