



Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework

Consultation Synthesis

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National
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The AASF Team would like to thank all stakeholders that participated in the consultation process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Stakeholders strongly supported the need for the Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework (AASF) to evolve into a more permanent and operational structure. However, views diverged on the appropriate governance model. Industry and farm groups favour maintaining strong industry leadership, while research and environmental stakeholders prefer independent or government-supported models to ensure scientific integrity and public trust.

There is agreement that the AASF must not duplicate existing sustainability frameworks but should add value by supporting consistency, data integration and market credibility. The development of indicators and a well-governed data ecosystem were also seen as essential for the AASF to deliver meaningful sustainability outcomes across the sector.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework (AASF) is an industry initiative, led by the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) with support from the Australian Government. It provides a common language to describe sustainability in Australian agriculture and supports the industry to demonstrate its sustainability story, domestically and internationally.

The AASF is evolving from a program of projects to a coordinating entity that can support sustainability services across Australia's agricultural sector. To support this transition, a formal consultation process was undertaken between December 2024 and March 2025. The process aimed to test key elements of the Framework project and gather stakeholder views on proposed governance models, enhancements to the Framework's content, the future of the data ecosystem and the development of sustainability indicators.

This document provides a synthesis of stakeholder feedback, grouped according to the four chapters of the consultation paper, and reflects a diversity of views across industry, government, research, environmental organisations and commercial participants.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Chapter 1: Governance, Strategy and Operations

Stakeholders were invited to comment on four proposed governance options: maintaining status quo within the NFF, creating an independent entity, forming a joint venture, or transitioning to a Commonwealth Corporate Entity. Views varied significantly based on stakeholder type.

Farm groups and diverse industry representatives strongly supported industry-led models, either remaining under the NFF or evolving into a joint venture. They valued the continuity and practical alignment with existing commodity programs and were wary of increased bureaucracy or costs arising from other governance models.

Commercial stakeholders preferred governance that supported market credibility and transparency but emphasised the need for a cost-effective structure. Research institutions and environmental groups favoured full independence or a public-interest model such as a Commonwealth Corporate Entity, citing concerns over industry self-regulation and the need for scientific integrity and public accountability.

Despite divergent preferences, there was agreement that the AASF entity must be transparent, strategically focused, and enable the delivery of meaningful sustainability services. The most critical functions identified included supporting data consistency, market-aligned reporting, cross-sector coordination and benchmarking. There was strong caution, particularly from industry, about creating a structure that added a reporting burden or duplicated existing frameworks and initiatives.

Chapter 2: Framework Enhancement – Materiality Assessment

Stakeholders were asked to review findings from the AASF double materiality assessment and respond to recommendations. There was strong support for continuing to use materiality assessments as a mechanism for evolving the AASF to reflect global environmental, social and governance (ESG) expectations, stakeholder interests and real-world risks and opportunities.

Respondents endorsed the need to review and update the existing principles and criteria, provided this process is transparent and grounded in both evidence and lived experience. Some feedback warned against making the Framework complex or prescriptive, especially if it made alignment with existing industry frameworks and schemes more difficult. Respondents indicated there was interest in refining and clarifying themes, such as “nature positive agriculture”, “climate adaptation” and “circularity” in Australian agriculture. Many stakeholders highlighted the need to ensure the revised Framework reflects production realities, sector-specific needs and Australia's trade context.

Overall, the NFF's proposed responses to the materiality assessment were supported.

Chapter 3: Data Ecosystem

Stakeholders broadly supported the goal of building a more connected and trusted agricultural sustainability data ecosystem under the AASF. There was strong consensus that a national approach to data standards, indicator catalogues and technical interoperability would reduce duplication and support credible sustainability reporting.

Producers, industry groups and data providers emphasised the importance of practical implementation. They called for data integration that reduces on-farm reporting burdens and enables alignment with existing programs. Government stakeholders were especially interested in how the ecosystem could support national and international ESG compliance and trade requirements.

The AASF Data Ecosystem Report was recognised by respondents as a useful starting point. Stakeholders cautioned that technical design must be matched with strong governance, funding certainty and streamlined user engagement. There were calls for greater clarity on how the data ecosystem would be governed, what role the AASF would play, and how participants would be supported to engage with it.

Chapter 4: AASF Sustainability Indicators

Stakeholders strongly supported the development of indicators to translate the AASF's principles and criteria into measurable outcomes. There was widespread agreement that indicators must be scientifically credible, internationally aligned and practical.

Stakeholder groups widely supported having a common set of indicators, and that indicators are necessary to ensure credibility, support alignment and meet emerging market and regulatory expectations. A limited number of stakeholders expressed concern about whether the AASF should venture into developing indicators at all, questioning whether this was an appropriate role for the Framework or if it risked duplicating the work of existing commodity-specific schemes.

Feedback called for AASF indicators to be aligned with existing sustainability reporting systems, and flexible enough to accommodate different scales and geographies. Stakeholders stressed the need for indicator development to be collaborative, iterative and transparent. Many advocated for the creation of a committee with representation from industry, science, government and the community.

Concerns were raised about how indicators would be verified, governed and kept up to date. Some respondents highlighted the importance of linking indicators to incentives, such as sustainability-linked finance or preferred market access. Others urged caution about moving too quickly, recommending that an initial small set of indicators evolve over time based on practical testing and user experience.

CONCLUSION

The consultation process confirmed strong support for the AASF to evolve into a coordinated national sustainability initiative, provided it remains grounded in practicality, transparency and inclusivity. Stakeholders want a model that adds value, avoids duplication and supports a consistent and credible sustainability narrative for Australian agriculture. While governance preferences differ, there is shared interest in ensuring the AASF remains relevant, operationally robust and aligned with both domestic needs and global expectations.

The findings from this consultation process will inform the next iteration of the Framework, as well as further design work on the AASF Data Ecosystem, finalisation of a five-year governance and strategic plan and next steps for operationalising the AASF.

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