National Farmers’ Federation media release sent out today commenting on the draft Productivity Commission report into regulation in agriculture:

Reduce regulation for real growth in agriculture

A new report, released today by the Productivity Commission, has confirmed what the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) has long said: that farm businesses are straining under heavy and unnecessary regulatory burden right across the supply chain.

The PC draft report into the regulatory burden imposed on Australian agriculture reaffirms the need to reduce duplication and excessive red and green tape to maximise the opportunities for Australian agriculture.

NFF CEO Tony Mahar welcomed the draft report on regulation, highlighting the complex and often overlapping regulation across three levels of government, and supported calls for continued consultation to better support farmers to understand their obligations.

“The draft report correctly identifies that reducing the regulatory burden and improving efficiency across all sectors is absolutely critical. Agriculture is particularly vulnerable due to its high dependence on international markets,” Mr Mahar said.

“Farmers aren’t against regulation. In fact, certain regulations have positioned the industry very strongly – for example, our strong biosecurity regime has reduced our overall risk of pest and disease.

“However, there are clear instances where regulation is unduly burdening farm businesses. In particular, transport, environment and employment are among the areas where regulation hits the hardest, ultimately reducing our competitiveness in the global market.

“With most Australian farms recognised as small businesses, the regulatory burden can have a significant and disproportionate impact. Today’s report represents an important step toward reducing ineffective red and green tape holding the industry back.”

Mr Mahar said there is preliminary support for a number of draft recommendations in the report. These include:

- Amending coastal shipping laws by 2018 to substantially reduce barriers to entry for foreign vessels, in order to improve competition in coastal shipping services
• Expediting implementation of a national control-of-use regime for agricultural and veterinary chemicals
• Recognising the environmental services that Australian farmers deliver to the community as a whole and reviewing the communication and engagement process with landholders about environmental regulations.
• Reviewing the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) as part of the planned review of the national transport regulation reforms.

“Critically, farmers need more effective consultation more often at all levels, covering both the need for regulation and how it will affect their businesses. This must be an evidence-based, clear process,” Mr Mahar said.

“Following today’s release, we will now consult with our members on the report’s draft recommendations and provide that feedback to the Productivity Commission, focussing on areas where reform is most pressing.”