



# AGFORCE CANE YEAR IN REVIEW 2025



## Foreword from AgForce Cane President

2025 has been a defining year for the Queensland cane sector. Starting with the Tropical low and disaster response actions in early into 2025. AgForce General President personally calling on the Prime Minister to activate Category D - Disaster funding and Exceptional disaster recovery assistance of \$75,000. AgForce in collaboration with industry secured 'Replanting for Cane' - recovery funding (enshrined in legislation).

AgForce welcomed Niki Ford as its new Chief Executive Officer, replacing Mike Guerin after 8 years of strong and courageous leadership. Niki brings a wealth of knowledge from previous roles that will be advantageous to AgForce going forward. Additionally, Mark Pawsey was appointed as CEO of AgCarE, with extensive experience in Ag tech; Mark and the AgCarE board have reconfigured the AgCarE service delivery; AgCarE 2.0 - coming soon; focussing on protecting farm data and creating value sets for the sustainable advancement of the agricultural industry.

Our member engagement across the regions continues to remain a core focus, with AgForce hosting the Cane Roadshow, demonstrating the Ratoon Stunting Disease test-kits (RSD), supported ministerial announcements on primary producer definition changes at the Mareeba Field Day, SRA labs, contributed to the release of unallocated water, and hosted a series of practical workshops on chain of responsibility, Heavy vehicle safety, farm management, and participated in regional workshops/inquiries into biofuels, feedstock and water and electricity management.

Across policy: water strategies and security, including releases of unallocated water across the basins, cane bioenergy fuel pathways, reef regulation, biosecurity, farm data protections, and national competition policy, Heavy vehicle transport access, workforce, and productivity, taxation - unrealised gains in superannuation funds (agricultural exemptions). AgForce Cane has continued to advocate for practical, evidence-based and producer-focused solutions.

Cane producers confronted another year of mill under-performance (despite early start and shorter season), rising production costs, workforce constraints, and growing environmental and regulatory pressures, including recent announcement of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) laws. Against this backdrop, AgForce's advocacy has ensured members' voices were represented in every significant state and national process affecting our industry.

This Year's in Review captures the achievements of AgForce Cane's policy and advocacy work, underpinned by the Cane Charter, member contributions and supported by the work of the broader cross commodity - policy committees applicable to cane industry (excluding other areas of policy). It also recognises the ongoing effort of Cane Board Directors and the resilience of Queensland cane producers who continue to grow world-class food and fibre and feedstocks, for supply chains and renewable energy opportunities for Australia.

# AGFORCE CANE - POLICY ACHEIVEMENTS 2025

## 1. Competition in Sugarcane Markets

AgForce Cane continued to drive the need for stronger competition efficiencies, transparency and accountability within the sugarcane supply chain, including mill performance, season length, crush scheduling and cane payments.

### Key Achievements:

- Advocated through NFF and Treasury consultations for reforms ensuring fairer competition - particularly for **small business, stronger ACCC powers (a win)**, and greater market transparency.
- Contributed to national Competition Policy Review processes, including the 2025 Mergers and Acquisitions Reform and ACCC enforcement enhancements.
- **Promoted “competition in cane”- policy principles** specifically tailored to cane, adopted by the Cane Board in 2024 and advanced throughout 2025.
- **Producers Right to Repair Farm Machinery (a win)**, Treasurer, states, Minister Collins, and Assistant Minister Leigh have all public confirmed commitment to enforceable legislative outcome.
- *Notable information: Policy and Advocacy directed toward competition reform sits within broader AgForce Sustainability Committee (previously market access group) and National Farmers Federation - Economics Farm Business Policy committee.*

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## 2. Electricity and Water Management

Access to reliable and affordable water remains central to the long-term viability of cane production. 2025 saw major planning processes across Burdekin and North Queensland in which AgForce played a critical role.

### Key Achievements:

- **Burdekin Regional Water Assessment (RWA)**
  - representation on the Stakeholder Advisory Group, (now concluded), contributing to desktop analysis studies and guiding plan revisions toward 2026 draft release
  - Lodged submission to Draft Summary Report, ensuring:
  - 200 GL of water is prioritised for cane and agricultural growth.
  - Recognition of economic contribution of cane to regional development.
  - Consideration of on-farm and off-farm infrastructure needs.
- **Burdekin Basin Water Plan Review** – Participating in the Statement of proposals review and contributed feedback to the Alluvium (2025) Burdekin Basin water plan - sediment transport assessment.
- **Underground Water Impact Report (UWIR) 2025** – Submission strengthened producer representation on groundwater security, monitoring improvements and localised drawdown risks - produced by the AgForce Water Committee.
- Continued advocacy for reliable, secure and affordable electricity pricing and irrigation scheduling certainty - i.e., **Agricultural Tariffs**.
- **Smart Irrigation Demonstration** - provided supported to Aglantis' Future Drought Fund proposal on the AgForce Cane Seed Farm.

### 3. Burdekin Rising Groundwater (BRGW)

A longstanding challenge for cane producers, AgForce continued to advocate for implementation of the four-part BRGW Strategy.

#### Key Achievements:

- Reinforced the need for Government to stand up the BRGW Implementation Group and enshrine actions in regulation.
  - Continued to promote and monitor the progress of the four proposed industry solutions: dewatering, treatment and disposal, **modernisation of the H10 pipeline (a win)** - in progress, on farm irrigation automation, ground water extraction and conjunctive use. AgForce cane is also advocating for measured lowering of ground water tables.
  - Ensured BRGW considerations informed the RWA submission and broader regional planning processes.
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### 4. Farm Data Privacy and Protections and AgCarE

Farm Data sovereignty and protections is becoming a topical national issue, as mandatory emissions and supply chain reporting obligations approaches - expanded under climate and sustainability frameworks.

#### Key Achievements:

- AgForce Cane contributed to refinement of the **AgCarE Cane Module** and continues to progress toward digitisation, sequestration metrics and alignment with the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB), the Sugar Greenhouse Accounting Framework (S-GAF) and Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD).
  - AgCarE has developed an emissions reporting calculator for Cane - Know your emissions number, being rolled out in 2026 (see below). **(a win)**.
  - Continue to advocate for safeguards of agricultural data, including protections against unintended data access through supply-chain reporting.
  - Investigations into the use of blockchain technology for supply chain traceability and reporting.
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### 5. Reef - Quality Assurance in Science

AgForce reinforced that reef protection must be based on sound evidence, respectful engagement, and recognition of climate drivers.

#### Key Achievements:

- Submission to the Statutory Review of Regulated Standards under Reef Protection Regulations (**ERA Standards**) – emphasised:
    - Empirical evidence must guide regulation, not modelling alone.
    - The 2024 Scientific Consensus Statement identifies climate, not agriculture, as the primary driver of reef condition change.
  - Participation at the **Reef Advisory Committee** event (Nov 2025), presenting producer-focused recommendations, and that agriculture is the solution not the problem.
  - Submission to the **Reef 2050 Catchment Water Quality Improvement Strategy** consultation.
  - Promoted importance of support for reef audit compliance through trusted relationships and, helping cane members understand rights, obligations and representation options.
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## 6. Renewable Liquid Fuels / Biofuels Market Development

AgForce advanced sugarcane's profile as a renewable energy feedstock and bioenergy solution through state and national pathways.

### Key Achievements:

- Lodged major submission to the **Inquiry into Sugarcane Bioenergy Opportunities in Queensland**, positioning cane as essential to Queensland's renewable fuels future.
- Participated in **Queensland Feedstock Study** state and regional consultations and responses to draft reports.
- Contributed to the **National Bioenergy Feedstock Strategy** consultation.
- Provided submission to the **Queensland Industry Development Plan - Biofuels & Manufacturing** consultation.
- Continued advocacy to ensure biofuel pathways deliver value to producers, not only processors or downstream users.

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## 7. Finance, Tax, Superannuation & Succession Planning

### Key Achievements:

- Played a key role in agricultural exemptions to the **tax on unrealised gains within Self-Managed Super Funds (SMSFs)**, a major win for farm businesses. **(a win)**
- Engaged with Treasury on trust taxation changes, feedback to productivity round table and concessional finance frameworks, via the NFF.
- Submission to the **Queensland Agricultural Blueprint - Prosper 2050**, highlighting cane's opportunities in biofuels, water, energy, sustainability markets and diversification.
- Contributed to the definition of the review of the small business employer definitions.
- Moratorium on regional bank Closures for 2.5 years, and support for Armguard. **(a win)**
- Advocated for a First Farm Buyers Scheme through the Young Producers Council.
- Change to the Primary Producer definition in Queensland. More work is required to get this extended, beyond agricultural contractors. **(a win)**

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## AGFORCE GENERAL POLICY ACHIEVEMENTS 2025

AgForce lodged 32 Submission, held numerous briefings and departmental meetings, in 2025.

**General Policy impacting Cane industry, Aligned across the four AgForce Policy Committees:**

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### 1. Biosecurity Committee

#### Key Achievements:

- Strong representation in Parliamentary scrutiny of the proposed **Biosecurity (10 cent) Protection Levy Bill** - thrown out. **Major financial win for agriculture.**
- Progressed *Navua sedge* to Step 2 of the National Established Weed Priorities (NEWP). Advocating to protecting Buffel grass.
- Supported expansion of Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) self-treatment program after successful 2024 trials.
- Prepared and contributed to APVMA reviews (Vantacor, Paraquat, Diquat). The APVMA have **extended the review of Paraquat and Diquat into 2026.**



- **Ratoon Stunting Disease (RSD)** - in early 2025, Agetal and AgForce held regional demonstrations of the RSD on-farm test kits, newly developed by Ken Cunliffe's Agetal and continues to be available for purchase through Agetal. **(a win)**
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## 2. Vegetation Management

### Special Focus: Environmental Offsets

- Submission to the **EPBC Act Amendment (Reconsiderations) Bill 2025**.
  - AgForce strongly advocated for more reasonable, evidence-based offset conditions. A member case demonstrated over \$300,000 per year in mandated **environmental offset management** costs – an unreasonable burden that diverts resources away from productivity, innovation and community benefit.
  - Elevated concerns to state and federal agencies.
  - Highlighted the mismatch between policy intention and practical feasibility.
  - Called for a **moratorium on offset requirements** pending review.
  - Ensured offsets reform is now recognised as a priority issue for agriculture.
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## 3. Land Use Protection Committee

### Key Achievements:

- Submission to the Private Protected Areas discussion paper.
  - Submission to the Queensland Future Timber Plan 2050.
  - Advocated for **practical fire management** and improved vegetation preparation rules and better outcomes from national park management and public lands.
  - Input to National Native Title Act Review (Future Acts Regime).
  - Submission to statutory planning processes including Code 26 Solar Development, social impact assessments, and objections processes for resource projects.
  - Engagement in First Nations in Agriculture frameworks and Indigenous engagement pathways.
  - Submission, feedback to draft Renewables Regulatory Framework (**Landholder guide - Decommissioning Renewable Energy Projects, April 2025**).
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## 4. Sustainability Committee

*(This committee covers the broadest suite of policy.)*

### Climate/Environment/ Drought (Integrated Contribution)

- Continued participation in environmental accounting (Taxonomy, Accounting Standards, AIA's GAF tools).
- Ensured climate reporting frameworks do not unfairly penalise farmers or misrepresent agricultural practices.
- Climate Change Policy - Via the NFF, policy updates to influence framework for agriculture and land sector plans - 6 plans that support net zero.

## Transport & Infrastructure

- National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) Master Code Review.
- Heavy Vehicle National Licence (HVNL) Amendment Bill submission.
- **National Speed Limit Reduction Bill**- Policy submission, bill was dropped). (a win)
- **Heavy vehicle curfew** -Win - Townsville ring road -- Permit access approved for members. (a win)
- **Road manager and road user compliance** engagement and Collaboration with NHVR with Cane Grower Organisation to roll out risk management workshops.
- **QLD Freight Delivery Plan** - Participation in the QLD Freight Delivery Plan with TMR put forward the need to improve supply chain efficiencies through the road network, particularly progressing the expansion of Higher Mass Limit (HML) and Performance Based Standard (PBS) throughout QLD network. (A win - national recognition, more work to be done)
- **Gazetted roads** - working with TMR and councils to address first mile/last mile road networks, removing need for individual permits.

## Ag Business / Economics / Finance

- **National Food Security** - contributed state focussed Submission- DAFF Consultation 24 September 2025. The Federal Government to develop a National Food Security Strategy 2025-2026. following the National Food Security Strategy Preparedness Green Paper, released in April 2025.
- Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) - advocate for improvements to the AgriStarter Loan and for first farm buyers and farm succession planning, in line with the AgForce Policy Position - First Farm Buyers Guarantee Scheme.

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## CANE BOARD ACTIVITIES & GOVERNANCE 2025

- The board has had renewal of director representation with strong engagement from existing and new Directors.
- Industry Leadership - Cane Service Agreement modernisation, including consultations with mills, stakeholders to the reform for benefit of industry efficiencies.
- Strategic governance of seed farms, RSD test kit rollout, and Cane Water Perils Program.
- We continue to advocate strongly for individual member policy concerns, impacting broader membership.
- Strengthened AgForce presence in key regional and national policy forums and amongst stakeholders, engaging in positive industry messaging.

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## LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

- The Assistant Minister for Productivity, Competition has flagged a **review of the Sugar Code and Sugar Formula in 2026**, up for review 2027.
- Delivery of **modernised Industry cane service agreement**, in collaboration with mills, for industry efficiencies, productivity gains.
- Strengthened competition frameworks and sovereignty of cane supply chains, i.e., fertiliser and energy access.
- Finalisation of Burdekin Basin Water Plan (draft 2026) and progression of the Burdekin Regional Water Assessment Plan (draft 2026).

- Continued diversification advocacy for sugarcane into biofuels/renewable liquid fuels/Sustainable Aviation Fuel, other and producers' participation in value chains.
  - National Food Security Strategy implementation.
  - Environmental management offsets reform and EPBC regional bioregional and sector plans.
  - First Nations in Agriculture relationships.
  - Ongoing work to embed evidence-based Reef regulation.
  - AgCarE cane module and support for national data privacy safeguards for farmers.
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### AGFORCE CANE - MEMBER SERVICES - FOR 2026

- Membership set at 10 cents per tonne.
  - Crop insurance 6 cents per tonne.
  - Water Perils 1 cent per tonne.
  - Clean seed farms under renewed management structures.
  - Property valuation, land use and coexistence support.
  - Workforce training, IR support and heavy-vehicle compliance assistance.
  - AgCarE natural capital assessment services: Know your (emissions) number - Calculations tool - coming in 2026.
  - Member Corporate partner benefits - continues to benefit membership. To find out more call us on 07 3236 3100 or go to our website: [www.agforceqld.org.au/services](http://www.agforceqld.org.au/services)
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### CONCLUSION

AgForce Cane acknowledges and thanks our members for their strong support throughout 2025. Your commitment in numbers, enables AgForce to advocate confidently and effectively on the issues that matter most and assist us promote cane industry needs to all levels of government, stakeholders, promoting recognition of cane's critical role in feeding and fuelling Queensland and the world. Together, we continue to deliver a stronger future for Queensland cane producers and regional families.