

Dear Sir/Madam,

Cotton Australia is the peak body that represents the interests of Australia's 1,500 cotton growers supporting about 1,200 cotton farming families in NSW, Queensland, Northern Australia and now in Victoria. While our production can vary significantly from year-to-year, dependent on rainfall and water availability, it is worth on average \$2 billion in annual export earnings and employs approximately 12,000 people nationally

Cotton Australia is making this submission to emphasise the critical need for retaining key agricultural occupations within the Critical Skills Occupation List (CSOL) as part of Australia's overarching workforce strategy. The occupations under consideration, including 121511 Cotton Grower, 121599 Broadacre Crop Growers, 121711 Broadacre Crop and Livestock Farmer, 234114 Agricultural Research Scientist, and 234115 Agronomist, play an integral role in sustaining and advancing Australia's agricultural sector, which is pivotal for national economic prosperity, food security, environmental sustainability, social well-being, and national resilience.

At this stage, there is a lack of understanding regarding the rationale behind the proposed removal of these essential roles from the CSOL. If the intention to remove these roles persists, we would greatly appreciate a detailed briefing on the driving factors behind this decision. Understanding the motives and considerations behind such proposed changes is crucial for stakeholders to assess the potential impacts and provide informed feedback. Clarity on the drivers for the removal of these roles would enable constructive dialogue and collaborative efforts to ensure that Australia's agricultural sector remains resilient, competitive, and adequately supported by skilled professionals.

Australian farmers represent the cornerstone of our nation's agricultural industry, contributing significantly to food production, rural economies, and environmental stewardship. Retaining occupations such as Broadacre Crop Growers and Broadacre Crop and Livestock Farmer in the CSOL is imperative to ensure that our farmers have continued access to a skilled workforce proficient in the nuances of Australian agricultural practices. These occupations encompass a wide range of expertise, from managing large-scale crop production to integrating livestock operations, and are essential for maintaining the efficiency, productivity, and profitability of Australian farms.

Cotton production is a vital sector within Australian agriculture, supporting regional economies and providing essential raw materials for various industries such as textiles and feed for cattle production. The occupation of Cotton Grower is pivotal for sustaining a skilled workforce that can uphold sustainable practices, adopt technological advancements, and maintain global competitiveness in cotton farming. Retaining Cotton Growers within the CSOL is not only about supporting the cotton industry but also about ensuring environmental stewardship, water efficiency, and social responsibility within this sector.

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Agricultural Research Scientists and Agronomists play a crucial role in driving innovation, productivity, and sustainability within the agricultural sector. Their expertise spans a wide range of areas, including developing new crop varieties, enhancing soil health, improving pest management strategies, and mitigating environmental impacts. These occupations are instrumental in translating scientific advancements into practical solutions for farmers, thereby enhancing crop yields, reducing input costs, and promoting environmentally friendly farming practices. Including Agricultural Research Scientists and Agronomists in the CSOL is paramount for fostering a workforce that can drive continuous improvement, technological adoption, and adaptation to evolving challenges in agriculture.

Retaining these key occupations within the CSOL directly addresses critical skill gaps within the agricultural workforce. Skilled professionals in areas such as agronomy, crop management, and agricultural research are essential for meeting the evolving demands of modern farming practices, climate change challenges, and global market dynamics. Moreover, retaining these occupations supports ongoing efforts to attract and retain talent in the agricultural sector, which is essential for addressing demographic shifts, succession planning, and the need for a skilled and diverse workforce in rural areas.

The inclusion of these occupations in the CSOL not only supports individual farmers and agricultural enterprises but also contributes significantly to overall economic growth and rural development. Agriculture is a key sector in many regional economies, and retaining skilled workers in agricultural occupations ensures the sustainability and resilience of rural communities. It also fosters job creation, infrastructure development, and value-added opportunities across the agricultural value chain.

Australia's agricultural sector faces various environmental challenges, including water scarcity, soil degradation, and climate variability. Skilled professionals in agricultural research and agronomy play a crucial role in developing and implementing sustainable farming practices that minimise environmental impacts while maximising resource efficiency. Their expertise is essential for promoting long-term environmental stewardship and resilience in agriculture, aligning with national and global sustainability goals.

The retention of these key agricultural occupations within the CSOL also has broader social implications. By supporting rural economies, these occupations contribute to the vitality and well-being of regional communities. They provide opportunities for employment, skill development, and economic diversification, which are essential for maintaining vibrant and sustainable rural areas. Additionally, a thriving agricultural sector promotes social cohesion, cultural heritage preservation, and a sense of pride in rural identity, fostering a balanced and inclusive society.

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It is crucial to highlight that removing key agricultural occupations from the CSOL would be counterproductive to Australia's workforce strategy. Skilled migration plays a vital role in filling critical skill gaps, promoting innovation, and driving economic growth. Australian farmers and agricultural enterprises rely on skilled professionals to enhance productivity, adopt sustainable practices, and remain competitive in global markets. Therefore, Cotton Australia urge the Australian Government to prioritise skilled migration pathways for occupations such as Cotton Grower, Broadacre Crop Growers, Broadacre Crop and Livestock Farmer, Agricultural Research Scientist, and Agronomist to ensure the continued success and resilience of the agricultural sector.

The Australian cotton industry is currently facing a significant shortage of skilled workers in key agricultural roles such as Cotton Grower, Broadacre Crop Growers, and Agronomists. This shortage has been exacerbated by various factors, including demographic shifts, limited availability of local talent with specialised agricultural knowledge, and increased demand for skilled professionals due to technological advancements and sustainability requirements.

The removal of these occupations from the CSOL would further exacerbate this skills shortage, as it would limit the avenues for skilled migration and hinder the recruitment of qualified professionals from overseas. This shortage not only impacts the productivity and competitiveness of the Australian cotton industry but also jeopardises its ability to adopt modern farming practices, ensure sustainable production, and meet global market demands. Therefore, retaining these occupations within the CSOL is crucial to address the existing skills gap and support the long-term growth and sustainability of the Australian cotton sector.

Many of the occupations listed for either review or deletion from the CSOL are also featured on the Skills Priority List due to their shortage in Australia. This shortage is particularly acute in regional, rural, and remote areas where these occupations are vital for sustaining agricultural productivity and community well-being. Removing these occupations from the CSOL would exacerbate the existing shortage, leading to further difficulties in recruiting skilled professionals to these critical roles. Ensuring the continued inclusion of these occupations in the CSOL is not only crucial for addressing skill gaps but also for supporting the resilience and development of regional communities across Australia.

In conclusion, the retention of occupations related to Australian farming and cotton growing within the CSOL is paramount. It represents a strategic investment in a skilled workforce capable of driving sustainable growth, innovation, and resilience in the agricultural sector. These occupations play a fundamental role in Australia's workforce strategy, contributing significantly to rural development, food security, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, social well-being, and national resilience. At this stage, there's a lack of clarity on what is driving the proposed removal of these roles.

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If the intention to continue with their removal persists, we would appreciate a detailed briefing on the underlying drivers. This understanding is crucial for stakeholders to assess potential impacts and collaborate effectively in ensuring the continued success and sustainability of Australia's agricultural sector.

We respectfully urge Jobs and Skills Australia to recognise the strategic importance of these occupations and advocate for their continued inclusion in the CSOL to support Australian farmers, promote agricultural innovation, ensure rural prosperity, contribute positively to national and global sustainability objectives, enhance social well-being across the country, and strengthen national resilience.

Thank you for considering the significance of these occupations in Australia's workforce strategy and their broader impact on society and the economy of regional, rural and remote communities. If you would like to discuss any part of this letter of support, please call me on 0448 094 883 or by email on pauls@cotton.org.au

I look forward to hearing the outcome of this application.

Yours faithfully,

Paul A Sloman

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