

Good morning and welcome to the AAAC Outlook Conference for the 2016 season.

It is great to see a large audience here today with representatives from all areas of our agricultural sector. The conference provides an opportunity for you to network with others from areas such as finance, research, input supplies, government, and my fellow AAAC consultants.

I also welcome 16 new members to the Association, including five General members who are in the growth phase of their consulting careers. For our members, the AAAC provides cutting edge professional development, rich networking opportunities, and promotion of our profession. For those of you in your own consulting business, or in agribusiness, I would be happy to discuss membership to our association and our future vision.

While agriculture remains an exciting and vibrant industry to work in, we are reminded of the power which mother-nature can impose.

The recent tragic events around the towns of Cascades, Scadden and Salmon Gums have ripped a scar through the Esperance community which will take a decade to heal. The ag industry feels the pain for families and friends who lost loved ones, crops or farm resources. While the fires were a terrible event, the emotional response on a personal level through the WA agricultural network, is something we should all show pride in. It is this close connection to others in agriculture which sets our industry apart. Our thoughts are with the Esperance community, and also sadly South Australia, at this time.

In terms of our Conference today, I would like to recognise the individuals who organised this event. On behalf of the AAAC these members provide their time on a volunteer basis and I would like to thank Paul Omodei for being chief organiser, with great support from Nic McGregor, Rob Sands and Ben Whisson.

Across the state, the 2015 season was a rollercoaster but on the whole, most businesses will finish in the black. For some areas, this is on the back of two good years and places businesses back on an even keel. There is an air of optimism in ag as an investment class, with potential investors, both private and corporate, looking even more closely at acquiring assets which now present attractive returns relative to some other traditional investments in this uncertain economic climate.

The investment into northern areas of the state, or parts of our supply chain, such as in the cattle industry, by some of our leading business figures is creating positive headlines which prompts others to follow. At the very least, the image of agriculture gets a shot in the arm and the non-preferred image, of a farmer in old clothes and a terry towelling hat, is shelved.

The upswing in agriculture continues, and we should promote and be proud of the very successful family businesses who are achieving their goals and creating exciting opportunities for the next generation.

Today, I ask you to glean at least one positive story from the Conference, and use that story to promote agriculture to your city friends. Let's continue to fuel our industry with confidence and make 2016 another step forward.

The Outlook Conference is AAAC's flagship event for industry. I hope you enjoy the networking opportunities and today's speakers.

I will now hand you over to our MC and conference organiser, Paul Omodei.

Thank you.