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## Australian farmers can't advocate on their laurels

Australian farmers strongly believe that having effective farmers' advocacy groups will be essential for the future of farming in Australia, but are increasingly deciding not to join farmers' advocacy groups.

This paradox lies at the heart of the challenge currently facing farmers' advocacy organisations in Australia, and is the reason the Australian Farm Institute has carried out research which aims to identify ways that farmers' advocacy organisations can become more effective.

The research involved an analysis of both international farmer groups, and successful non-farmer advocacy groups in Australia, seeking to identify what factors made them more effective and attractive to members.

The research identified that the deregulation of the Australian agriculture sector which occurred during the 1980s and 1990s, in combination with the explosion in telecommunications over the past decade are probably the main factors that have contributed to the decline in membership of farmer groups. The deregulation of agricultural markets has meant that farmer groups no longer have direct influence over the prices farmers receive, and the telecommunications revolution also means that farm groups no longer have a monopoly over communications between farmers and policy-makers.

The analysis of international and Australian advocacy groups highlighted that most advocacy groups provide members with a range of direct benefits as well as conducting advocacy on their behalf, and that much of the attraction for members is the benefits and services available, not the advocacy activities. Farmers' advocacy groups in Australia have generally not developed a strong range of services and benefits as part of their 'offer' to members, and have struggled to retain members in a deregulated environment.

The research involved an examination of farmers' advocacy groups in New Zealand, Canada and France. It also involved an examination of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), and consumer group CHOICE. The research also included a survey of the perceptions of Australian farmers about farmers' advocacy groups, as well as a survey of journalists in the Canberra Press Gallery.

This research was carried out by Gaétane Potard and Mick Keogh from the Australian Farm Institute.

The report *Opportunities to improve the effectiveness of Australian farmers' advocacy groups - a comparative approach* is available [here](#).

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