

Hello from Down under !



Vincent HEBRAIL, Agricultural Affairs Advisor* for Australia and New Zealand

***CAA – French acronym**

You are the new (and first !) - Agricultural Affairs Advisor based in Canberra for Australia and New Zealand, effective January 1, 2022. What is your professional background ?

I first worked for 6 years on plant health and Ecophyto (France's national action plan to reduce the use of pesticides), at the Regional Directorate for Agriculture, Food and Forestry of the Centre-Val-de-Loire region, and then at the General Directorate for Food in Paris. I then coordinated the Brexit dossier for 2 years at the DGPE. Afterwards, wanting to go deeper into the subjects and to broaden my knowledge of the MAA's policies, I headed the Unit of Evaluation and Economic Analysis at the Center for studies and strategic foresight for 2 years. Then I took up my post in Canberra, in a context of international tensions that inevitably affect our links with Australia and New Zealand, including agriculture: the submarine crisis, the persistence of the Covid crisis, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia... But even in this difficult context, we have very promising works ahead of us !

In what context have you tackled international cooperation? on which country(s) or area(s) / on which theme ?

I have never managed a cooperation project before, and doing so here, on the other side of the world, will be a first for me in many ways ! But I've only been here a few weeks and there are already a plethora of interested parties: research and teaching institutions, professional federations, administrations... And the themes are just as numerous: carbon neutrality, biosafety, agro-ecology, digital agriculture, geographical indications...

What was your opportunity to join your role, function, mission...and why did you apply for a CAA assignment ?

International Counsellors for agricultural affairs allow MAA officers to defend French interests in all parts of the world. It is an exceptional opportunity to be able to serve my country thousands of kilometres away. And agriculture, agri-food, forestry and fishing are sectors full of opportunities, in which France is internationally recognized, knows how to inspire and be listened to. Being at the forefront, launching new projects, meeting with local authorities at a high level to influence them, bringing back to Paris useful information and analyses to help establish the positions of the French authorities... all these means of action characterize my daily life and constitute an obvious motivation !

In a nutshell, what are the goals you will pursue as a CAA?

One of the priorities is to re-establish a satisfactory relationship between France and Australia. Cooperation in the agricultural sector is a gold mine for this, as there are so many actors and subjects involved. Beyond that, my role is to facilitate the institutional and diplomatic relationship, and the access of French products to the Australian and New Zealand markets.

Can you share a line of cooperation that characterizes your new mission ?

It's hard to choose! I think the focus will naturally be on carbon neutrality or biosafety, initially. The Australian authorities, and the Australian and New Zealand trade federations, are very interested. Research and teaching institutions are also very interested. There is, obviously, enough material to start beautiful and productive projects. But this remains to be confirmed in the coming times.

In the particular context of 2022, how do you approach the organization of your mission, the "recovery / construction" of contacts with actors, members of the network and French and foreign partners ?

I am in the particular case of a newly created position. The network did not exist when I arrived, and I am building it as I go along. In practice, the local operators are delighted with my arrival. But building the network will take time, because of the size of Australia! 6 states, 2 territories, plus the federal level... that's as many ministries of agriculture, professional federations... Australia is simply huge: 14 times the size of France! It will take some time anyway to go around, but I am already very welcome. Without even mentioning New Zealand...

If you wish to develop a specific aspect of your position/mission/collaboration specific to your position.

Of course! One of the main characteristics of Australia and New Zealand is that the European Commission is negotiating free trade agreements with both of them. They are two major exporters of agricultural commodities, opposed to direct support for farmers, and who need to be convinced about the system of geographical indications. These trade agreements therefore represent a very high stakes for France and for the EU, and must be followed closely.

To finish on a cultural note – which reference is important to you (artistic, scientific, philosophical, linguistic, etc.) and represents, for you, Australia or New Zealand, Oceania in general.



Before coming to Oceania, it was Kylie Minogue and Crocodile Dundee... Now it is also the sound of the didgeridoo, James Cook, and the All Blacks of course!

G'day mate! Looking forward to chatting again soon!

Contact : Vincent, HEBRAIL, Agricultural Affairs Advisor for Australia and New Zealand, vincent.hebrail@dgtresor.gouv.fr