



March Edition (03/09)

Dear Member of Parliament,

It is with pleasure that the NSW Farmers' Association (the 'Association') forwards to you this edition of the Parliamentary Update Newsletter for March 2009.

Last week the Association's Executive Council (EC) met at Tamworth to consider a number of issues pertaining to the agricultural industry. The Executive Council is comprised of over 70 elected representatives who meet periodically throughout the year to discuss and decide key agricultural policy issues. The EC meeting attracted 56 different media reports over the two days. I would be happy to forward to you the outcomes of the 28 Motions that were discussed and/or debated at the Executive Council Meeting upon request.

Until next time,

Shaughn Morgan
Chief Executive

UPDATE

NSW FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

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Dairy Industry Downturn

The recent cuts in farm gate milk prices by Murray Goulburn and Fonterra have reduced the income of dairy farmers by approximately 37%. Producers are not seeking handouts but would like increased water allocations to enable them to grow more fodder and reduce feed costs. Dairy producers are seeking low interest loans and an extension of payment periods from banks, tax mitigation, extending Exceptional Circumstances and increasing the fodder subsidies cap. Also of concern to NSW dairy producers is the control South Australia has on water.

BJD

There have been recent outbreaks of BJD in NSW amongst beef only herds. Cattle are currently being traced and quarantined. The Association is concerned about the overall effectiveness of the BJD program given that the focus has been mainly on Dairy herds and it is evident that it affects both Dairy and Beef herds. The Dairy industry has implemented on farm management practices to ensure that BJD is eradicated. The Association is seeking the monitoring and development of an equally effective program for beef herds. Dairy producers are working with the beef industry to ensure BJD is effectively removed from both Dairy and Beef herds in NSW.

Q Fever

The Federal Government has established a taskforce to look into a national Q-Fever initiative. This would involve free Q-Fever testing and vaccinations with the aim to commence the program in July 2009 and last for 3 years. CSL are also updating their handbook on Q-Fever and this will be sent out to all hospitals, clinics and veterinary practices to raise awareness around the disease. The NSW Farmers' Association Dairy Section will be keeping in touch with CSL and the Federal Health Department to ensure that they and their members are kept well informed on any progress with regards to this matter.

Sustainable Milk Production Model

The Northern Dairy Industry Development Group's 'Sustainable Milk Production Model' has received a funding allocation under the Federal Government's 'Caring for our Country' initiative. The focus of the project will be to tailor the model to different dairy regions in NSW and eventually the whole of Australia.

Hurlstone Agricultural High School

The NSW Minister for Education, the Hon Verity Firth MP, announced on Tuesday, 24 February 2009, that the NSW Government would hold an independent inquiry into the proposed sale of land at Hurlstone Agricultural High School. The inquiry will provide an opportunity for the agricultural industry and the community generally, to illustrate the importance in retaining the land at the Hurlstone Agricultural High School site.

Exceptional Circumstances Declarations

Following the announcement on Thursday, 12 February 2009, by the Federal Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon Tony Burke MP, the Association has received a number of questions from Members who are concerned about the decision not to extend the Exceptional Circumstances declaration for their area. The Association is recording these concerns and will be forwarding this information to the NSW Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, shortly.

Mental Health Information Sessions

The final mental health information sessions were held last week with strong attendances at Leeton (35 people) and Lockhart (37 people). The information sessions were funded by a grant from NSW Health. A final report on the sessions will be prepared and the Association as part of the Rural Mental Health Network will consider any next steps.

Government Response to the Rural Telecommunications Review

On Thursday, 5 March 2009, the Federal Government tabled its response to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee ('RTIRC') Report. The Association lodged a submission to the RTIRC in December 2007, outlining the Association's position in relation to regional telecommunications issues in NSW. Generally, the Government's response to the RTIRC report was positive, with the Government agreeing with most of the recommendations outlined by the RTIRC. However, the Association is concerned that while being positive, the response generally failed in offering significant result based actions aimed at addressing the report's recommendations.

Regional Automatic Teller Machine Service

The Association has written to the Reserve Bank of Australia ('RBA') requesting better measures to protect customers in rural and remote areas as part of the Automatic Teller Machine ('ATM') Fee Reforms which commenced on 3 March 2009. The Association has requested that the RBA either cap the fees charged for using 'foreign' automatic teller machines ('ATMs') or develop regulations that make it illegal for banks to charge high fees for the use of these ATMs.

Perpetual Leases

The Association has recently written to the Minister for Lands, the Hon. Tony Kelly MLC, to request the continuation of the current concessional arrangements for perpetual leases and the waiving of future rent charges for land holders who have already made applications for the conversion of their perpetual lease to freehold status. The current concessional arrangements expired on Monday, 9 March 2009. There remain approximately 2,000 leases for which applications have not been lodged for conversion to freehold.

Economic Stimulus Package

The Association has developed a briefing note which summarises the Federal Government's \$42 billion economic stimulus package. The briefing note which is available from the front page of the Association's website provides an overview of the Government's recently announced 30% tax bonus scheme for small business investment. While the legislation supporting the tax bonus is still being drafted, if passed it will act retrospectively allowing small businesses to claim a bonus deduction of 10-30% (depending on timing of the purchase) on eligible assets costing \$1000 or more. In order to benefit from the full provisions, businesses need to have a turnover of \$2 million or less.

NSW Grain Freight Review

The Association's Grains Committee is preparing a submission to the NSW Grain Freight Review to emphasise the importance of having the least cost and most efficient pathway to market for grain freight in NSW. The purpose of the Review is to examine the grain freight supply chains considering institutional, governance and accountability arrangements (both public and private); and competition, pricing and asset management aspects of the NSW grain freight task.

Importation of Cavendish Bananas from the Philippines

Biosecurity Australia has decided that it is safe for Cavendish bananas to be imported into Australia from the Philippines. The importation of bananas may be permitted subject to the application of phytosanitary measures, allowing for import applications to be lodged. Biosecurity Australia has stated that a detailed operational plan between Australia and the Philippines will now be developed, which will need to be approved by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service before any import permits for bananas from the Philippines into Australia will be considered.

Biodiversity strategy

The Association has made a submission in relation to the NSW Biodiversity strategy. The submission highlights problems with prescriptive biodiversity controls and argues that sustainable development in rural NSW can be achieved through a) Rethinking biodiversity and planning legislation, b) Paying farmers at market rates for conservation services that go beyond their normal duty of care, c) Investing in sustainable production technology, d) A collaborative landscape planning process that enables effective participation of all stakeholders at local, regional, and State scale and f) A partnership approach between agencies, scientists and farmers for implementing solutions at the property or sub-catchment planning scale.