



January 2008 (Edition 1/08)

Welcome to the NSW Farmers' Association's Parliamentary Update. This Newsletter is provided to Members of the NSW Parliament to inform you of the issues important to rural and regional NSW. The Newsletter provides an overview on some of the issues in which the NSW Farmers' Association considers of interest to our members and their family farm businesses.

Callinan Inquiry into Equine Influenza

Evidence presented to the Equine Influenza ('EI') inquiry highlights the absence of enforcement and auditing by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service ('AQIS') at the airport and at the Eastern Creek Quarantine Station of biosecurity activities by the grooms, vets, farriers and sundry visitors. Lack of resources had left grooms in charge of biosecurity. The inquiry has heard that AQIS did not scrutinise the health records collected by grooms until the day of release from quarantine and relied on grooms making the decision as to whether a vet is called and relied on those private vets deciding if AQIS should know about a health issue. Private vets have not shown evidence of serious consideration of EI as a differential diagnosis nor an understanding of the importance of assuming the worst in a quarantine environment. There has been evidence of inadequate verification of off shore certification. The inquiry progresses towards identifying the agent responsible for the escape of the virus after hearing evidence of numerous opportunities for biosecurity breaches.

Review of OJD Management

As part of a review of OJD management in NSW, the Hon Richard Bull has been holding a series of meetings with Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPBs) around the State, in addition to these meetings producer meetings were also held in Yass, Bathurst and Armidale. The meetings provided an opportunity for Mr Bull to hear from RLPB's and producers on how the current OJD management practises are working and what changes are needed. Another key area of the review is the future of the Transaction Based Contribution Scheme (levy) which was suspended at the end of October 2007 by Minister Macdonald. The Association has recently met with Mr Bull to discuss the Association's concerns and the areas that are in need of improvement.

Centrelink Rural Services Officer

In early December a Centrelink Rural Services Officer ('RSO') commenced working from the Association's head office for 2 days per week (Tuesdays and Wednesdays) for a period of three months. The RSO will be able to provide our members with greater access to information and assistance on a wide range of programs. The Centrelink RSO can be contacted through the Association's Member Service Centre phone 1300 794 000. An example of some of the information and assistance which is available from the RSO includes enquiries and claims for Exceptional Circumstances (EC) Income Support, Age Pension/Disability Pension, Professional Advice and Planning Grant, Farm Help income support (those farmers considering exiting the industry), EC Exit package, Murray Darling Basin Irrigation Management Grant and EC Small Business Assistance.

Landlearn

The NSW Farmers' Association, together with the NSW Department of Primary Industry and the Royal Show Society have been developing an educational internet portal to promote agriculture to students. The concept originated from the three organizations seeking to make factual information about agriculture readily available to students. This was in recognition that the internet is flooded with anti-farmer and confused agricultural messages, which students and teachers access to inform themselves on Australian agriculture. It is anticipated that the LANDLEARN initiative will be launched at the 2008 Sydney Royal Easter Show.

UPDATE

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2008 NSWFA

Legislative Priorities

Enhanced Rural Communities

Rural decline is nearing crisis point with widespread breakdown of rural services and the fracturing of rural communities. The Association supports policy to promote the economic and social needs of rural and regional communities.

Reduced Red Tape Farmers want to farm, not fill in forms. The Association urges the reduction in the high cost of regulatory compliance and excessive mandates, fees and taxes.

Continued Sustainable Farming

Farmers are environmentalists too. They are leaders in conserving native vegetation, soil and water. Conservation and sustainable production go hand in hand.

Improved Country Roads and Rail

Farming families are heavily dependent on good quality road and rail infrastructure. The Association seeks a sensible framework to dramatically improve rural roads and rail services.

Guaranteed Water security

Urban centres use more water with little attempt to reduce wastage and implement basic efficiencies such as recycling. New urban water demand must be met by urban water savings and not from agricultural supply.

On Farm Fumigation Exemption

The Association met with WorkCover NSW and the Department of Primary Industries in order to discuss the continuation of an exemption to sub clause 12 of clause 266 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation that allows farmers to use the on-farm fumigants aluminium phosphide and chloropicrin without obtaining a WorkCover Certificate of Competency. The Association and the Department of Primary Industries both believe that the current mechanisms provide management of the risks associated with the use of on-farm fumigants in stored grain and for vertebrate control. The outcome of the meeting was an agreement to integrate certain performance criteria from an appropriate fumigation unit of competency into existing chemical user training. This would enable training based on performance criteria from both the existing training units of competency and the fumigation competency to be undertaken concurrently. Safety information would also need to be distributed to users of on-farm fumigants.

Climate Change

The Association has contributed to the Submission which the National Farmers Federation is intending to lodge as part of the federal consultation paper on early abatement incentives. The paper lays out the arrangements under which firms can apply for greenhouse gas abatement credits prior to the establishment the Australian Emissions Trading Scheme. The Submission raises a number of concerns and can be found at: <http://www.nff.org.au/get/2445962014.pdf>.

The Association lodged a submission to the NSW Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change). A central issue addressed in the submission is the role of NSW Government in the design of the Australian Emissions Trading Scheme (AETs). Consultation undertaken with the agricultural sector to date in relation to the AETs does not reflect the impact that decisions in this area will have on the agricultural industry, and on the broader economy. If poorly designed, an AETS has the potential to impact negatively on the sustainability of many individual farm businesses, with flow on effects throughout regional economies.

National Report on Water Governance in Australia

The National Water Commission has released a report titled "Australian Water Governance 2006" which is an online resource that outlines how water is managed across the states and territories in accordance with the requirements of the National Water Initiative. The report covers areas such as water policy/planning, pricing, markets and quality. The report is useful in illustrating the complex legal and institutional arrangements within and between states and territories. The report is available at the following web address <http://www.nwc.gov.au/>

Murray Valley irrigators

The NSW Government has announced that NSW Murray Valley Irrigators will receive a further 5 per cent of the water suspended in 2006/07 accounts, and that a further five gigalitres has been set aside for critical human needs in 2008/09. This means that 50 per cent of the water suspended in NSW Murray Valley irrigators' accounts in 2006/07 has now been re-credited and 30 per cent of critical human needs for 2008/09 has been met.

Roads and Traffic Authority meeting

The Chairman of the Association's Business Economics and Trade Committee, Tom Smith, and the Chairman of the Grains Committee, John Ridley, held a meeting on Monday, 10 December 2007, with the Roads and Traffic Authority ('RTA') as part of the ongoing dialogue between the two organisations. Issues discussed included the new Road Transport (General) Amendment (Heavy Vehicle User Charges) Bill, truck dimension limits in regards to cattle crates, the upgrade of Hume Highway, progression of the 2007 grain harvest, closure of inspection stations and 4x4x8 hay bale widths transported on trucks.

Rail Infrastructure

Pacific National has announced that they will withdraw from Victoria, Tasmania and reduce their NSW operations to a 'bare minimum' therefore effectively closing down their grain operations and expanding their coal network into Queensland, to rectify financial losses. The Association expressed concern about the announcement due to the impact it will have upon the grain network to transport grain from farm to port or point of sale. The Association and other grain industry stakeholders have been working hard for several years on highlighting the need for the Government to invest in the restricted rail branch line network. The decision by Pacific National will be carefully reviewed by the Association. The Association has requested to meet with the Minister for Transport, Hon John Watkins MP, in order to discuss the need for a viable rail network for the transport of grain.