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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.

Flood Recovery Grants

On Friday, 8 February 2008, the Federal and NSW Governments announced that grants will be provided to flood affected primary producers in the Central West and North Coast regions. The Association has been actively seeking the provision of grants for flood affected primary producers as an assistance measure under the Community Recovery Package as per the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements Determination 2007. The grants have been provided in response to the storms and heavy rain which occurred in late 2007 and early 2008 across the Central West and North Coast regions and this caused significant damage and losses to fences, sheds, silos, livestock, machinery and roads. A total allocation of \$10.2 million is available and primary producers are able to apply for a grant of up to \$5,000 for clean-up and immediate restoration costs including costs associated with damage to farm buildings, crops, livestock, fences equipment and other infrastructure. Applicants will be asked to provide copies of receipts and invoices, council rate notices and tax returns. Further information is available from the Rural Assistance Authority website www.raa.nsw.gov.au.

National OJD Management Plan 2007-2012

The WoolProducers Australia ('WPA'), Sheepmeats Council Australia ('SCA') and Animal Health Australia ('AHA') recently held an industry briefing outlining the new National Management Plan for Ovine Johnes Disease ('OJD'). The meeting received a presentation on the new prevalence areas throughout NSW and the associated ABC points. Other important information that was presented included the launch of AHA's OJD web site www.ojd.com.au and an outline of current tools for minimising the risk of introducing OJD to your property. The new plan comes into effect from 31 March 2008. WPA and SCA have undertaken an extensive consultation process throughout the development stage of the plan which has been ongoing for the past 16 months.

Bovine Johnes Disease

The NSW Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, has announced a commencement date for major changes to the way Bovine Johnes disease ('BJD') is managed in NSW. The new BJD approach reduces restrictions on dairy cattle trading and comes into effect on 31 March 2008. The Association is supportive of the changes as they will enable greater self-regulation for BJD whilst also satisfying our trading partners for beef cattle, particularly Queensland.

National Genetic Information and Evaluation Service for the Sheep Industry

New England superfine wool and sheepmeat producer, Philip Attard, has been appointed as the new Chairman of Australia's National Genetic Information and Evaluation Service for the Sheep Industry. Sheep Genetics services the meat and wool sectors of the sheep industry and was developed jointly by Australian Wool Innovation Limited and Meat & Livestock Australia together with industry.

Cattle Tick Advisory Committee

The Minister for Primary Industries has announced the establishment a new Cattle Tick Ministerial Advisory Committee to consult with industry and provide Government with advice on cattle tick management. The Committee will be Chaired by Nick Keatinge, in his capacity as Treasurer of the National Farmers Federation, with the Committee Members being Terry Toohey, representing the NSW Farmer Association; John Willey, representing the Rural Lands Protection Boards; Malcolm Reid and Patricia Holt, representing the beef industry; and Fleur Tonge, representing the dairy industry. The Cattle Tick Ministerial Advisory Committee replaces the former Board of Tick Control.

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.

Rail Branch Lines

On Monday, 11 February 2008, the Association met with Ministry of Transport ('MOT') representatives to obtain an update on the future of the rail branch line network and the Government's short and long term future plans for grain rail freight. This meeting follows the recent withdrawal by Pacific National Limited ('PNL') from certain rail grain freight in NSW and Victoria. The MOT indicated that the Ministry are willing to test any options or models, from either the private or industry sector, and that the Minister for Transport, the Hon John Watkins MP, supported the rail branch lines and continued use of the grain rail network. The MOT further outlined the best leverage they have now is via the Federal Government who announced on 14 November 2007 that if elected they would invest \$3 million to establish a high-powered taskforce of growers, handlers, the National Farmers Federation, the Australian Rail Track Corporation and the NSW Government.

Wheat Export Marketing Alliance

The Association has invited the Federal Government to attend a series of grain grower meetings being held by the Association at Young, Narrandera, Narromine and Narrabri in late February 2008. The purpose of the meetings are to inform growers about the Association's policy position in support of the Single Desk, the Federal Government's policy position on wheat marketing and to the Association's involvement with the Wheat Export Marketing Alliance. The NSW Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, called on the Federal Government to delay an overhaul of Australia's wheat exporting system until after the 2008 harvest. The Association has supported this call.

Fertiliser Inquiry

The Association has welcomed the decision for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to carry out an inquiry into fertiliser price increases. The Association has written to major fertiliser companies in order to request a meeting to discuss the expected fertiliser costs and supply in the short and long term, and what actions the companies are proposing to take to ease the pressure on the farming sector.

Wild dogs

The Association is consulting with NSW Department of Primary Industries ('DPI') regarding the research program to investigate the minimum effective rate for 1080 application. As noted in previous reports, the APVMA have provided a permit for one year for the continued application of 1080 at the current rate so as to allow research to be undertaken.

Egg Producer Meeting Tamworth

The NSW Department of Primary Industries ('DPI'), Australian Egg Corporation Limited ('AECL') and the Association met with Egg Producers in Tamworth. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the implications producers would face under changes to the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (General) Regulation 2007*. A clear and concise summary of the regulations will be provided to producers detailing what changes are required as well as provide producers with information regarding alternative markets and enterprises and contacts for financial and Centrelink advice. Information workshops are being organised to facilitate decision making.

Bushfire Risk Management Plans

In 2007, the risk management planning process was signed off, and the training of Bush Fire Management Committees and Region managers has been completed. In 2008, there are a significant number of risk plans due for review using the amended process. The Association is encouraging all its members to become familiar with the risk planning process which is undertaken through local Bush Fire Management Committees.

Special Conservation Scheme

The NSW Minister for Primary Industries, the Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, announced changes to the Special Conservation Scheme which is administered by the Rural Assistance Authority (RAA). The scheme provides incentives to primary producers through low interest fixed term loans for specific capital programs designed to improve land management practices. The changes to the scheme include an increase to the net asset limit from \$2.7million to \$5 million and the maximum loan limit will increase from \$100,000 to \$150,000, both increased by CPI annually.