

NSW Farmers Association concerns on lack of layer cage legislation

The NSW Farmers' Association has raised with the state and federal ministers for agriculture, respectively Macdonald and McGauran, the current and projected plight of egg farmers in NSW resulting from uncertainty over animal welfare standards for hens.

That plight is as follows:

- The NSW Ministerial Steering Committee on layer cage reform has made good progress in providing the Government advice on regulations under the NSW Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act for changes to egg production systems. However those regulations are not yet a reality and egg farmers are not aware of the Government's intentions.
- Egg farmers need to know of the Government's intentions as at 1 January 2008 and beyond in order to assist production planning, the placement of chicks, the building of new working capital and a forecast of supply.
- The delay by the NSW Government in creating regulations for layer hens means it is likely that many egg producers will be unable to comply with the regulations if they are enacted on 1 January 2008 as per the ARMCANZ agreement.
- Egg producers in NSW have made business decisions without guidance from clearly defined legislation and this has therefore placed batches of birds in cages that may be legislated out of production in the near future.
- By 1 January 2008 some producers will have birds too young to be removed from their existing cages as they will not have reached the end of their productive life.
- Current projections of egg oversupply from continued production in old cages threatens prices which in turn threatens capacity to invest in reform.

What the Association is doing

- The Association has urged the ministers to provide an 'open letter' to NSW egg farmers which clearly states the NSW Government's intent to fulfil its commitment to:
 1. Legislate the agreed changes prior to 1 January, 2008 and
 2. Enforce the legislation from 1 January, 2008.
- To include in that legislation an adequate phase in period to protect the industry from legal action from animal rights groups.