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Farmers seek to step up biosecurity

The NSW Farmers' Association has stepped up its focus on biosecurity, calling for a moratorium on the introduction of the live foot and mouth disease (FMD) virus into Australia, at its Executive Council meeting in Tamworth.

Additionally, the Association's Executive Council has also moved to request a Senate Standing Committee Inquiry into the advisability of selling of Australia's only Government off-shore quarantine station to developers, and will be assessing the alternative propositions suggested by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

NSW Farmers' Association Exotic Disease, Quarantine, Plant and Animal Health Chair Peter Carter expressed his extreme disapproval of the recommendation to introduce live FMD into the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL), and the sale of the Cocos Island Quarantine Station.

"There is no doubt that the introduction of live FMD could be devastating to Australia, our livestock industries, and indeed, agriculture as a whole," Mr Carter said.

"We have expressed our concerns with the recommendation to introduce live FMD, as contained in the recent Beale Review into quarantine.

"The Beale Panel has provided a number of reasons as to why the recommendation was made, including that the import of the live virus will aid in diagnosis, is necessary for experimentation and is needed to develop vaccines.

"But the need for the live virus to aid in diagnosis has been strongly refuted by well-respected virologists.

"And there is already an agreement proposed by Animal Health Australia to allow the necessary experiments on FMD in Thailand, and calls for the renewal of an agreement for a multi-national veterinary pharmaceutical company to supply the FMD vaccine when required in a short space of time.

"Therefore the entire premise of the Beale Review recommendation is totally flawed. Most concerningly, the Panel didn't seek to have this information verified and the Government has continued to refuse to categorically rule out bringing the live FMD virus into Australia.

"We are therefore seeking a moratorium on the introduction of live FMD," Mr Carter said.

Mr Carter also expressed his displeasure of the proposed sale of the Cocos Island Quarantine Station.

"We are very concerned about the loss of our only Government-owned off-shore quarantine station. We believe having access to such a facility is essential in keeping diseases such as FMD out of Australia," Mr Carter said.

"For this reason we are calling for an inquiry by the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport into the advisability of selling off this station to developers, and the feasibility of the proposed alternatives suggested by the Government," Mr Carter concluded.

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