

Date: July 9, 2008

RSM – Michael Burt

North coast events

17 July- Wingham branch meeting, Wingham Golf Club, 7.00pm start. Guest speaker from Gloucester RLPB

19 July Subtropical Farm Forestry Association and AFG field day, Blue Knob Road near Nimbin, from 8.45 am.

24 July- North Coast Avocado branch meeting, Norm Alridge's farm, Red Hill, 10.30am start

29-31 July- NSW Farmers Association Annual Conference, Sydney Olympic Park

21 August- Kyogle branch meeting, 7.30pm start

North Coast Natters

Urgent: Are you a private native forester?

The Association is seeking contact details for all private foresters in NSW. With the government about to begin the process of developing special legislation for Private Native Forestry it is vital that we have an effective means of communicating with you.

Private Native Forestry is a significant industry for regional NSW with strong potential for growth if the policy settings and regulatory framework are right. In 2007, the NSW Government placed private native forestry operations under the Native Vegetation Act. The Association and other industry groups opposed this, calling instead for an industry focussed regulatory model that supports sustainable use of this important resource.

To help the Association collect your views about the new legislation please enter your contact information into the online form.

If you harvest or intend to harvest native timber on your property for commercial sale you are a private native forester and we want to hear from you. Please pass this on to other private foresters you know and encourage them to also provide their details.

To access the online form, go

to http://www.nswfarmers.org.au/ag_update/crm/priority_issue_4/private_native_forestry_contact_database

Farm art – we want your talents!

The NSW Farmers' Association is calling on all Members to show their artistic streak. The Association is searching for the most outstanding photograph, painting and children's poster to display at this year's Annual Conference. Last year we ran a very successful photography competition, where farmers captured some amazing images of their life on the land, so the idea this year was to open this a bit wider.

The winners of the photographic and art competitions will receive a return flight anywhere on the REX airline, and the winner of the children's poster competition will win a Nintendo Wii.

There will be an exhibition of entries at the NSW Farmers' Association Annual Conference in July.

For more information, head to www.nswfarmers.org.au, or call 1300 794 000. The NSW Farmers' Association Annual Conference will be held from Tuesday 29 – Thursday 31 July.

Member Benefit Reminder

Beaurepaires

Call into your local Beaurepaires store for substantial discounts on passenger, 4WD, light truck and tractor tyres, wheels and batteries

Funding

Guidelines for the Northern Rivers CMA's River Reach program will be available on their website (www.northern.cma.nsw.gov.au) from the 16th June 2008. For further information contact the relevant CMA project officer in your area.

Policy update

Rural Lands Protection Board Review

On Wednesday 18 June 2008, the NSW Minister for Primary Industries Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, announced at the Rural Lands Protection Board ('RLPB') Conference in Coffs Harbour that he will modernise the State's Rural Land Protection Boards – including consolidating the number of Boards from 47 to 14 – and adopt the series of recommendations contained in an independent report. The Minister stressed that the changes do not affect frontline services of RLPBs, but rather focus at reducing costs and streamlining the organisation's governance functions. The Association has developed a document which analyses the recommendations contained in the report and this document is currently under consideration by Executive Council

NSW Drought Figures

The June 2008 drought figures were released during the week and they indicated a continued worsening in conditions, with 62.7% of the State now 'in drought' (up significantly from 48.4% in May 2008), with a further 23.7% of the State considered 'marginal'. It should be noted that only 13.6% of the State is considered 'satisfactory' from a climate perspective, much lower than the 28% reported in May, and down dramatically from the 45.6% reported in April.

Climate Change

On Monday 16 June 2008 the Association attended a Department of Climate meeting regarding the design of the Emissions Trading Scheme ('ETS'). A presentation was given by Treasury on the modeling which has occurred in relation to the scheme which is largely at a macro level, looking at general impacts on the economy of different emissions reduction targets. It was clear that the modeling process will have little impact on ETS design other than aspects relating to the trajectory of the cap. The modeling process will not provide the on-farm profitability impact analysis which is required by agriculture. The National Farmers Federation has subsequently contacted the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, the Office of the Federal Minister for Agriculture Hon Tony Burke and the Rural Industries and Research Corporation regarding the need for on-farm ETS analysis as a matter of urgency.

Horticulture Code of Conduct

The Horticulture Committee is pleased that their long campaign to highlight the behaviour of traders who declare themselves merchants yet behave as agents has caught the eye of the Federal Department of the Treasury as this behaviour affects the Government's GST revenue on services. The Committee understands this is a direct result of growers providing evidence to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission ('ACCC') during the Grocery Prices Review and the ACCC forwarding their concerns to the Government. The Committee is hopeful that this new interest will trigger change and it will be advising the Government of our policy.

Furthermore, the ACCC has commenced proceedings against a merchant in the Sydney Markets who has offered his suppliers a price range which is in contravention of the Horticulture Code of Conduct. The Committee has been arguing that at the very least, the ACCC needs to bring cases of non compliance to court but that the best scenario would be for the ACCC to have enforcement and inspection powers under the Code. The Committee hope that this current case will provide a clear signal to traders who declare themselves as merchants

Oyster Committee Teleconference

The Oyster Committee held a teleconference on Wednesday, 2 July 2008. Items on the agenda for the teleconference included their Annual General Meeting, Oyster Land Based Leases, Water Quality Issues and the Committee application process. At the meeting the Committee agreed to work with the Department of Lands proposal for the Leasing of Oyster Land Based Sites providing a number of concessions were made including:

- it is a term lease for 25 years
- the charge is negotiable following consideration of a more representative sample of Oyster Lease valuations
- the increase is phased in over 5 years
- there is an option to renew after 15 years
- there is an objection process for individual lease holders to question their Oyster lease charge

- the new leases are “ term” not “special”.

The Committee also agreed to raise at the Oyster AGM the process for Committee position nominations with a view to providing greater opportunity for Members to be elected to the Committee. The Oyster AGM will be held on Tuesday, 22 July 2008, in Port Stephens. The Oyster Committee is encouraging all Members to attend the AGM and be involved in the event.

New Guidelines Announced for the Australian Broadband Guarantee

This week the Federal Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, the Hon Steven Conroy, announced the guidelines for new phase of the Australian Broadband Guarantee program, beginning Monday 4 August 2008. Some of the changes included in the new program include:

- Up-front payments for large infrastructure deployments.
- Greater flexibility in subsidy levels.
- Improved consumer protections.
- A higher level of broadband service.

The Association has been actively campaigning Government to increase funding for the program, outlining its importance to rural and regional Australians via a number of submissions to various Government enquiries.

Emissions Trading Scheme

Professor Garnaut's report on the Emissions Trading Scheme was released on Friday, 4 July 2008. The report focuses on documenting drastic impacts of failure to act on climate change. It identifies agriculture, particularly dryland cropping and irrigation in the Murray Darling, as the sector most at risk from climate change, saying that climate change will have “a severe and costly impact ... by mid century the no-mitigation case is likely to lead to major declines in agricultural production across much of the country. Irrigated agriculture in the Murray-Darling Basin is likely to lose half of its annual output. This would lead to changes in our capacity to export food and a growing reliance on food imports, with associated shifts from export parity to import parity pricing. No mitigation will lead to a 92% decline in irrigated agricultural production in the Basin by 2100, affecting dairy, fruit, vegetables, grains.” Other key points include a proposal to auction off all permits and to give at least half of the proceeds to low income consumers. The report acknowledges that agriculture is the sector that would face the highest costs as a ratio to production value if required to purchase permits but offers no solutions in this regard. As does the Federal Government, the report advocates establishment of an international permit market, with prices driven by binding national emissions caps. In this model the abatement target is set and the carbon price is left to the market to determine. The report states that "Any effort prior to effective, comprehensive global agreement should be short, transitional, and directed at achievement of global agreement. " In other words, we should not lock into anything rash until the rest of the world signs up, however the report fails to explain, however, why nations will in fact sign up for a model that results in unbounded economic costs. Prominent dissenting commentators such as Professor Warwick McKibbin have argued that most nations will reject a market model that does not provide certainty about the carbon price. The Association is working with NFF to analysis the report, a copy of the report can be accessed from

http://www.garnautreview.org.au/domino/Web_Notes/Garnaut/garnautweb.nsf

Industrial Relations

Workplace Relations Ministers Council

The Workplace Relations Ministers Council met in Brisbane on 23 May 2008. At the meeting the participants agreed in principle to the Intergovernmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety (IGA). The Council also endorsed a governance framework for a uniform national workplace relations system for the private sector as part of Forward with Fairness. In particular the principles allow States to elect how and if they enter the national system. This includes the specific issues that the State wish to enter the national system. The principles include a commitment to develop a governance agreement to deal with any proposal to amend the system after 1 January 2010.

Education & Training

The Association's Rural skills team will conduct a pilot of presenting the initial chemical training online this week. This follows the successful introduction of online chemical refresher training in September 2008, with very positive farmer feedback. A recent VETAB (Vocational Education and Training Advisory Board) audit of the chemical training, including the online mode of delivery, was successful with no modifications required.