

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué

PIMC 8

14 April 2005

Primary Industries Ministers from across Australia met in Darwin on Thursday 14 April 2005 to consider progress on issues impacting on Australia's primary production sector. This was the eighth meeting of the Primary Industries Ministerial Council. Specific issues dealt with by the Council are detailed below.

Agricultural Trade Issues

Council noted recent developments in the agricultural trade area and welcomed the entry into force of the FTAs with the USA and Thailand and the launch of FTA negotiations with both the ASEAN group of countries and the United Arab Emirates. Council noted progress towards decisions on commencing FTA negotiations with both China and Malaysia and encouraged Australian agriculture and food producers to take advantage of these opportunities as they develop.

Council noted that the WTO Doha Round agriculture negotiations are intensifying at a technical level and that Australia is working hard to achieve an ambitious outcome. It was noted that the target date for modalities to be agreed is at the December 2005 Hong Kong Ministerial meeting. However, Council observed the challenges ahead to achieving a timely successful outcome.

Food Regulation Ministerial Council

Council noted the outcomes of the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (ANZFRMC) meeting held in March 2005, including the review being undertaken of the requirements for developing and approving national food standards, and consideration of an enhanced proposal tabled by NSW for the regulation of biomarker maintenance health claims. Council also noted the progress on the development of primary production standards for the seafood, poultry and dairy sectors.

Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group

Council noted the appointment of a Reference Group to report by mid December 2005 on future directions in Australian Government policies and programs affecting the agriculture and food sector. It also noted that the Reference Group is being chaired by NFF President Peter Corish and includes people with a broad range of experience in the agriculture and food industries.

Council noted that the Reference Group will be addressing a mix of traditional and emerging challenges important to a sustainable and profitable future for Australia's agriculture and food sector. Council noted that the Reference Group will liaise with stakeholders including the States and Australian farmers and food manufacturers.

Drought Policy Reform

Council received short presentations from the Bureau of Meteorology on current climatic conditions in Australia, from the Chair of the Standing Committee's Industries Development Committee on the work undertaken to date on drought policy reform and from the Bureau of Rural Sciences on the development of a National Monitoring System to streamline Exceptional Circumstances applications.

Council agreed to revised objectives for the National Drought Policy that include recognition of the need for appropriate assistance to be provided to producers experiencing exceptional drought and for this assistance to be equitable, efficient and timely using best science and information. The objectives of the 1992 National Drought Policy relating to self reliance by farmers, maintenance and protection of the resource base and the need to facilitate early recovery from drought remain central to the new objectives.

Council agreed that the Australian, State and Territory Governments and the National Farmers' Federation should work together on the harmonisation of Australian and State/Territory support measures, while working to achieve a managed transition from drought business support to drought preparedness activities.

Council also agreed to the continued development, testing and implementation by July 2006 of a National Monitoring System for broadacre industries (livestock and cropping), overseen by a steering committee of representatives from jurisdictions to evaluate the performance of the System against objectives. The steering committee will also oversee the identification, development and feasibility of data needs for irrigated and intensive industries including horticulture and dairy.

Council agreed that existing drought cost sharing arrangements will remain in place for the duration of the current drought. As regards for future drought events, Council agreed to consider in October 2005, an Australian Government proposal for cost sharing of EC business support at 90:10 in the first year and 50:50 in the second and subsequent years, with States and Territories being granted credit for expenditure on measures from a pre-agreed menu of State/Territory drought assistance measures.

Research – Investment in Primary Industries

Ministers noted their concern about gaps in research capabilities, infrastructure and service delivery in Australia's current agricultural research, development and extension (RD&E) system. Council agreed to release the public Discussion Paper on *A Future National Strategic Framework For Primary Industry Research, Development And Extension* following a final review by Standing Committee. The Paper represents an initial step in a 12 month process for the Australian, State and Territory Governments to work with stakeholders on a national strategic framework and an action plan to deliver on priorities under the framework.

Ministers requested Standing Committee to provide a draft framework and action plan for consideration in 2006.

Forest Plantations: the 2020 Vision - Progress on Implementation

Council considered a paper outlining a range of additional actions at national and state levels to maintain progress towards the Plantations 2020 Vision target of 3 million ha of plantation timber. Council endorsed a number of recommended actions to ensure implementation of *Plantations for Australia: the 2020 Vision*. These actions included maintaining a positive policy environment for plantation investment and supporting early planning for infrastructure provisions to support existing and future plantations.

Council also agreed to establish a task force to develop an infrastructure strategy for forest plantations that addresses both infrastructure needs and mechanisms for funding.

Farm Forestry National Action Statement

Council endorsed in-principle a new Farm Forestry National Action Statement. The Statement outlines actions for the Australian, State and Territory governments and the forest and wood products industry to further develop farm forestry. Farm forestry has the potential to provide many positive economic, social and environmental outcomes for rural and regional communities. The Statement sets out a vision to increase the adoption of commercial tree growing and management as a widely accepted element of Australian farming and a component of regional natural resource planning.

Council also requested Standing Committee provide advice to Council's next meeting on options for full endorsement of the NAS proposed actions.

Australian Forest Certification Scheme

Council noted developments regarding forest certification in Australia, including that in October 2004, the Australian Forest Certification Scheme (AFCS) was awarded mutual recognition status by the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) Schemes, the world's largest forest certification body. This recognition will assist Australian timber producers gain or maintain access to markets in Europe and elsewhere which recognise and require PEFC certification.

Council noted that there are almost 1.1 million ha of forests in Australia already certified under the AFCS, including plantations and native forests, with a number of other forest managers actively seeking accreditation.

Animal Welfare Issues

Council considered a number of issues concerning animal welfare.

Council endorsed *Version 1 of the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock* which will replace the *Initial Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock* which came into force under Australian Government legislation on 1 December 2004. The new Standards reflect further input from stakeholders and the public and will reduce the risks along the export chain by establishing

minimum standards. States and Territories will continue to have responsibility for animal health and welfare within their respective jurisdictions

Council also noted that a revised appendix on mulesing to be included in the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Sheep* has been circulated for formal stakeholder consultation and agreed that compliance with the provisions of the Appendix, when it has been finalised, be a priority objective in all jurisdictions. This initiative will ensure a common approach to mulesing throughout Australia pending the complete phase out of mulesing targeted for 2010.

Progress in implementing the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy was noted including the allocation of \$6 million over four years by the Australian Government to assist the implementation. It was also noted that the States/Territories continue to have prime responsibility for animal welfare within their respective jurisdictions and may need to consider further investment in animal welfare activities as part of the Strategy's implementation.

Council agreed that Standing Committee would progress out-of-session consideration of the recommendations made to it in the *Review of the Australian Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals*.

Council noted that only three jurisdictions, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania, have implemented all the decisions previously taken by the Council to improve the welfare of layer hens. It was resolved that those jurisdictions yet to implement these decisions should now proceed to do so as a matter of priority.

Aquaculture Industry Regulatory Arrangements – Best Practice Framework

Council endorsed and agreed to publish the draft best practice framework of regulatory arrangements for the Australian Aquaculture Industry. Council noted the recommendations relate to improvements that can be made in the aquaculture approvals process and encouraged States and Territories to implement regulatory change in line with these recommendations to ensure the process is nationally consistent, transparent and sufficiently streamlined to support aquaculture growth and development. Council also requested that Standing Committee report back in twelve months time on implementation of the best practice framework.

AQUAPLAN 2005-2010

Council endorsed Australia's National Strategic Plan for Aquatic Animal Health – *AQUAPLAN 2005-2010*. *AQUAPLAN 2005-2010* is a broad, comprehensive strategy that outlines objectives and projects to develop a national approach to emergency preparedness and response and to the overall management of aquatic animal health in Australia.

AQUAPLAN 2005-2010 comprises seven strategies under which government and private sectors have identified priority projects to achieve the strategy objectives. Together these objectives will assist in maximising Australia's ability to control aquatic animal disease outbreaks, maintain market access, support quality assurance and improve the productivity and sustainability of Australia's aquatic animal production industries.

Livestock Identification and Tracing

Ministers noted that southern Australian jurisdictions have met their implementation date of 1 July 2004 for the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) of cattle. Council also noted that the Northern Territory will report back to Council on positive progress in implementing the NLIS radio frequency identification devices through working with Territory livestock producers and consultation with Queensland and Western Australia. Ministers also noted that that NLIS (Sheep) will be implemented by 1 January 2006 and requested that complementary arrangements are provided for the goat industry.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Council noted recent national and international developments in regard to BSE, and the significant implications these continue to have for Australia. Council agreed that the key outcomes and actions of the December 2004 government/industry BSE workshop should be progressed by relevant parties. The meeting also noted progress on measures previously agreed by Council to manage BSE risks.

European House Borer

Council noted the action being undertaken by Western Australia in relation to an outbreak of European House Borer and consideration being given to the matter by the Consultative Committee of Emergency Plant Pests.

Rural Financial Counselling Service

Council noted that the Australian Government had conducted a review of its Rural Financial Counselling Services. Council requested that Standing Committee report to Council on the possible arrangements for the provision of rural financial counselling services across Australia through a partnership between Australian and State/Territory Governments and local communities.

Farm Management Systems

Council noted that a paper will be prepared for consideration by Standing Committee and Council at their next meetings setting out a possible national approach to the uptake of Farm Management Systems, as a means of achieving natural resource management and profitability outcomes in the rural sector.