

PIMC

Primary Industries Ministerial Council

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SUSTAINABLE PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Primary Industries Ministers from around the country, and including New Zealand, met in Hobart today for the first time as the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC). This new Council was set up by the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers to develop and promote sustainable, innovative and profitable agriculture, fisheries/aquaculture, food and forestry industries.

The background to the establishment of the Council is that for primary industries such as these to continue to exist, and for Australians in general to continue to enjoy a high standard of living, primary industries based on the use of natural resources must operate in a sustainable manner. The Council is chaired by the Hon Warren Truss, MP, Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The new Council will focus on the full breadth of primary industries and the issues that underpin them. Specific matters dealt with by the Council today are detailed below.

FMD/BSE issues

Ministers noted that “it is widely recognised that Australia has a sound animal disease emergency response capability. However, we must be constantly vigilant in ensuring our systems retain and improve upon animal health, production and emergency management systems. Failure to do so could not only be devastating for the agriculture sector, but also for the broader economy”. The Council heard that work on FMD preparedness and response capability was comprehensive and progressing and simulation exercises to test the whole of government approach will be conducted in September and evaluated by Ministers at their next meeting.

Ministers noted that “although the risk of BSE occurring in Australia is negligible and that Australia has been classified as among the lowest risk countries, we must continue to enhance our safeguards and surveillance in light of new knowledge”.

For both BSE and FMD, Ministers agreed that livestock tracking through a national identification system was a critical issue for disease control and market access and that improved systems that would rapidly and accurately track livestock will be progressed by Chief Executive Officers with a view to giving firm recommendations to the next Ministerial Council meeting in October.

Amendments to the Australian Standard for the Hygienic Rendering of Animal Products

The Council agreed to amend its *Australian Standard for the Hygienic Rendering of Animal Products* to require all rendered products derived from mammalian material to be labelled with the same warning, whether for domestic use or destined for export markets. This confirms Australia's commitment to effective global management of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).

This change clarifies the labelling requirements for rendered products. The amendment means that all products derived from mammalian material produced by the rendering industry, for example meat and bone meal, must be clearly labelled to indicate that the use of these products in ruminant (cattle, sheep, goats etc) feed rations is prohibited. The labelling requirement is part of the plan for managing the risks associated with BSE and is aimed at ensuring Australia retains its BSE-free status. It will be important in monitoring and auditing the legislative ban on the feeding of animal material to ruminants.

Exceptional Circumstances

Council members expressed general support for a proposed new package for arrangements for Exceptional Circumstances support, including maintaining the current eligibility criteria. There was general agreement to continue farm family welfare measures and to broaden the scope of farm business support to provide new flexibility so assistance will be more broadly accessible, benefiting more farmers. Without compromising the overall package for EC, details will be further developed by officials for consideration by Ministers. There was particular support for a new consultative and inclusive application and assessment process.

However, Ministers were unable to reach agreement on funding and it was decided that Minister Truss would write to the State Treasurers to outline the new proposals, the increased State involvement in the process and the requirement for a financial commitment from the States to match the increased responsibilities. State Ministers will also approach their Treasurers regarding EC funding.

There was also an agreement to review the Commonwealth's proposal that boundaries be more easily amended and buffer zones should contain no more than 10 per cent of the total number of farm businesses in the EC application area.

The Commonwealth indicated it was prepared to discuss issues separately with the States that are prepared to consider new EC arrangements if agreement to co-operate is not achieved.

Enhanced partnership between states/territories and the Commonwealth on quarantine policy

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to work co-operatively to develop effective nationally cohesive biosecurity policy. They agreed to confirm their partnership approach in an exchange of letters to supplement their continuing commitment to implementing the SPS Agreement as articulated in the 1995 Memorandum of Understanding on Animal and Plant Quarantine Measures.

The Council agreed that the current level of definition of Appropriate Level of Protection meets Australia's current needs. Council members from all Australian jurisdictions are

committed to addressing differences in regional pest and disease status and risks through early and comprehensive cooperation as part of the import risk analysis process.

Trade policy developments

Ministers were briefed on key international trade policy developments. It was acknowledged that the Doha World Trade Organisation (WTO) Round had a positive start. It will be important to continue the pressure for trade reform in line with the Australian and Cairns Group agricultural reform agenda.

The United States Farm Bill is a major blow to Australia's agricultural interests. Further detailed analytical work on the Farm Bill provisions will be undertaken to get a clearer picture of the dimensions of the likely impacts.

The mid-term review of Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will begin in July this year. Australia needs to keep pushing for a less trade and production distorting CAP.

Australia is pursuing a number of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). The possibility of a Free Trade Agreement with Japan puts the spotlight on the need for reform in Japanese agriculture. There are also proposals for FTAs with the US and Thailand, and a FTA with Singapore is progressing well.

Action plan for advancing Indigenous Reconciliation in primary industries

Today Council approved the Primary Industries Action Plan for Advancing Indigenous Reconciliation for implementation. Endorsement of the Action Plan sets in motion Council's firm commitment to addressing the economic and social disadvantage experienced by indigenous people, in-line with the Council of Australian Governments Framework for Advancing Reconciliation.

Council also highlighted that the development of the Action Plan was closely aligned with those of its associate Ministerial Councils – that is, the Natural Resource Management and the Environment Protection and Heritage Conservation Ministerial Councils. These linkages form an important foundation for achieving better coordination and outcomes across government in advancing indigenous reconciliation – which is a cornerstone of the COAG Framework.

Forestry issues

Council received a presentation from the Commonwealth Minister for Forestry and Conservation, Senator Ian Macdonald, on the Commonwealth's priorities for forestry over the coming 12 to 18 months. Senator Macdonald promoted the positive outcomes from the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process, which would be reinforced through robust five-yearly reviews for the Tasmanian, East Gippsland and Central Highlands RFAs. He advised Council of the Commonwealth's commitment to having a viable timber industry, recognising its importance to the many local communities. The Action Agenda for the Forest and Wood Products Sector would be an important part in developing a forward thinking and outward looking forest industry in Australia.

Senator Macdonald also advised Council that the Commonwealth's priorities for the coming months included industry development, including "Right to Harvest" and promoting investment, the continued implementation of the Plantations 2020 Vision, and the finalisation of the Australian Forestry Standard for certification of forest management and labelling of

forest products. Council also noted the opportunities for the forestry and agriculture sectors to work together, and with the NRM Ministerial Council, to develop proposals and solutions that will benefit both industries, particularly through environmental services provided by forests, including salinity mitigation, water quality and carbon sequestration.

Branched broomrape

Council agreed to continue shared funding, for another year, for the eradication of the weed, branched broomrape, in the Murray Bridge area of South Australia. \$2.3 million has been allocated for a comprehensive program that includes control measures, research and surveillance.

Branched broomrape is a parasitic weed that, should it become well established in Australia, would have a serious impact on market access for the grain industry and also reduce the productivity of various horticulture industries.

National Ovine Johne's Disease Control and Evaluation Program (NOJDP)

Ministers noted that Animal Health Australia, which manages the NOJDP on behalf of all stakeholders, had agreed at its recent Board meeting to recommend that the program be amended to facilitate the transition from an evaluation and control program to a national approach to the management of OJD, post-2004.

This follows the outcome of a recent reappraisal of the program undertaken by Animal Health Australia in response to a number of recent developments that potentially impact on the conduct of the remaining two years of the NOJDP. Recent developments include the difficulties being experienced by the national sheep industry in securing industry support for a levy to fund assistance measures. It also reflects a growing acceptance that eradication of OJD is not feasible in the short to medium term given current technology and that the focus will need to shift to on-farm management of the disease, supported by a coordinated cross-border approach to disease control.

Ministers encouraged Animal Health Australia to quickly consult with industry and other stakeholders on the proposed change in approach and to develop a revised Program Plan for the remainder of the NOJDP for consideration by the end of June 2002.

Domestic poultry animal welfare code of practice

Ministers endorsed a revised Model Code of Practice for domestic poultry, which encompasses recent decisions by Ministers on layer hen housing and egg labelling which are designed to improve hen welfare. The revised Code is a step forward on hen welfare and should be welcomed by the general community, consumers and industry.

The revised Model Code of Practice was developed in close consultation with key stakeholders from the poultry industry, animal welfare groups and state/territory agriculture agencies. Minister's congratulated all those involved in the development of the code for the spirit in which they approached a difficult task.

Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human consumption

In 1995 the then Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ, the Primary Industry Ministerial Council) commissioned a

fundamental review of existing national meat codes of practice relevant to human health. The *Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat for Human Consumption* was developed as a result of this work. It was endorsed in August 2001 and is an amalgamation of four earlier standards into a single comprehensive document.

The standard reflects the ARMCANZ directive that it be contemporary and embody national needs both in terms of human safety and international trade objectives. The standard must therefore be a 'living' document that is amended as necessary. Council has now approved an amendment to the standard that strengthens it and requires all meat businesses, as required, to participate in programs that monitor the presence of chemical residues in meat.

The standard has, as one of its benefits, the harmonisation of domestic and export standards of meat production. The process of implementing the Standard in all Australian abattoirs has now commenced and means that all meat producing companies will have the opportunity to market their products to overseas customers.

Meat Exported From State Regulated Plants

Council has now taken the important step of agreeing to principles that will enable the Commonwealth's certifying body, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), to provide certification for product exported from plants managed under state regulatory frameworks. The principles will ensure that all companies participating in the international trade in meat are treated evenly by the regulatory authorities and that Australia's international reputation as a first class meat exporter is protected.

Genetically modified crops

Most ministers agreed that the management of the risks posed by the new gene technology to agricultural production and trade should be primarily handled by industry self-regulation, with government monitoring and support. The success of this approach will be reviewed in two years time. On the matter of gene technology free zones within Australia, the ministers noted the public consultations that have taken place in the States already, as well as the work that the Commonwealth is undertaking on management of genetically modified products in the supply chain. The ministers agreed that the results of these consultations and studies should be considered before any national policy on gene technology free zones is developed.

Further inquiries:

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