

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué

PIMC 10

20 APRIL 2006

Primary Industries Ministers from across Australia met in Sydney on Thursday 20 April 2006 to consider issues impacting on Australia's primary production sector. This was the Tenth meeting of the Primary Industries Ministerial Council. Specific issues dealt with by the Council are detailed below.

Drought Policy Reform

Council received a presentation from the Bureau of Meteorology on current and projected climatic conditions in Australia.

Council noted progress made by a reference group of key government and industry stakeholders. The reference group has used the newly piloted National Agricultural Monitoring System as the basis for a proposal for jurisdictions to adopt a more streamlined and consistent approach to drought declarations. Council requested the reference group to further develop this proposal for consideration at its November 2006 meeting.

Council also requested the reference group to further develop options for improving farmers' ability to prepare for and manage future droughts. This work will include considering areas where existing drought preparedness and management measures might be improved and where new measures could potentially be introduced. Recognising the complexity of this work, Council requested the reference group to provide a final report for Council to consider at its November 2006 meeting.

Consistent with the position at its October 2005 meeting, Council accepted that the reference group will not be considering changes to the income support arrangements for exceptional circumstances drought in its final report in November.

Drought Policy Reform – National Agricultural Monitoring System

Prior to its meeting, Council launched the 'live pilot' version of the National Agricultural Monitoring System (NAMS) website, designed to streamline Exceptional Circumstances application and assessment processes. Council noted the significant progress made toward successful implementation of the NAMS, and that the 'live pilot'

(April - June 2006) will provide a platform for testing the robustness of the NAMS and ensure the system meets the needs of key stakeholders. A fully operational version of the NAMS for use in decision-making will be available in July 2006.

Council noted that funding from all governments is being provided until June 2008 to ensure implementation and maintenance of the NAMS, including investigating the inclusion of irrigated and intensive agricultural industries. Council also noted that a proposal will be developed for consideration by Standing Committee on potential improvements to NAMS and a timetable and costings for their implementation.

State of the Egg Industry – Layer Hen Housing Legislation

Council noted that the ARMCANZ decision in August 2000 to introduce new standards for layer hen cage sizes from 1 January 2008 provided industry with a transition period of almost eight years to meet the new standards.

Council agreed to maintain ARMCANZ's decision to mandate the increased layer hen cage sizes with effect from 1 January 2008 and the decision of PIMC 7 (December 2004) that the lead time was adequate and "avoided the need to provide specific adjustment assistance."

Council also noted that some jurisdictions had already enacted the necessary legislation to mandate the increased cage sizes with effect from 1 January 2008 and that those jurisdictions which had still to enact legislation all confirmed that they would have the necessary legislation in place before the 1 January 2008 deadline.

Promotion of Agriculture to Schools

Council noted a NSW paper on progress on a national approach to the promotion of primary industries to schools and the resolutions arising from a national workshop in November 2005. Council encouraged State and Australian Government involvement in conveying in schools a balanced appreciation of the role, responsibility and value of primary industries and promoting effective links between schools, industry, training and tertiary education sectors.

Council agreed that New South Wales and Queensland would lead, in consultation with industry, the preparation of a paper for Council consideration on a co-ordinated approach.

Horticulture and Wine Industries Overview

Council discussed the key issues currently facing the Australian horticulture and wine industries including industry competitiveness, market access and the implications of current surplus wine production. A Summit is to be held to deal specifically with concerns in the wine grape industry.

Agricultural Trade – Review of Developments

Council received an overview of recent developments in the agricultural trade area. Council noted progress on the Free Trade Agreements with China, ASEAN, Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates and encouraged Australian agriculture and food producers to continue to engage with Government in this process. Council welcomed outcomes on technical market access for meat, horticultural products and dairy products in a number of markets.

Council noted the challenges in the WTO Doha Round of agriculture negotiations and agreed on the need for Australia to work closely with the European Union, United States and partners in the Cairns Group, with a view to achievement of successful outcomes providing real commercial benefit to Australian farmers.

Council noted the outcomes of the NSW sheep meat forum which emphasised the importance of gaining improved market access for Australian sheep meat exports to the EU market.

Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group Report

Council received a presentation from Mr Peter Corish, Chair of the Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group, on the Group's report titled "Creating our Future: Agriculture and Food Policy for the Next Generation". The Report identifies a number of obstacles and foundations for success for the agriculture and food sector. Council noted the report's recommendations, in particular in relation to research and development, biotechnology, food regulation, biosecurity and quarantine, drought and adjustment, and education and skill development, and that the Australian Government is currently preparing its response to the report for release later in 2006.

Progressing Mitigation Initiatives and Adaptive Management to Address Climate Change

Council received a presentation from Professor Stephen Schneider of Stanford University on current developments in climate change, research and risk management strategies. Council noted the work being undertaken by the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council in developing a strategic framework to address the risks of climate change in agriculture.

Research – Investment in Primary Industries

Council supported initiatives by jurisdictions and primary industries to collaborate to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of research, development and extension (RD&E) and agreed to a set of principles to guide collaboration or consolidation of RD&E efforts nationally. Council noted that continuing investment in RD&E is essential to provide Australia's primary industries with the necessary capability (people, infrastructure and information) to improve productivity and sustainability. Council noted that approaches of this nature have been supported in the Corish Report and that the

Report's recommendations will be used as an "audit tool" as part of Standing Committee's ongoing work on RD&E.

Council requested a further report on developments on RD&E at its next meeting.

Australian Biosecurity System for Primary Production and the Environment (AusBIOSEC)

Council noted a progress report on the development of the Australian Biosecurity System for Primary Production and the Environment (AusBIOSEC). Council agreed that pre-agreed, and capped, national cost sharing arrangements are fundamental to timely and effective responses to biosecurity events. Council noted that effective national biosecurity arrangements are in place for the primary production sector, but few arrangements exist for managing invasive species with environmental impacts.

Council endorsed progress in developing national arrangements for managing a biosecurity event, such as a new incursion, where there are predominantly environmental impacts. Council endorsed in-principle a preferred national cost-sharing option for the public good component of a biosecurity event, noting that New South Wales and the ACT reserved their position on whether State and Territory shares should be population-based where a risk-based approach is not possible.

Council requested that the joint PISC/NRMSC Steering Group report in November 2006 on progress in the development of AusBIOSEC, and agreed to consider the content of a possible Intergovernmental Agreement for implementation of AusBIOSEC.

Exercise Eleusis '05 Evaluation Report

Council considered the Exercise Eleusis '05 Evaluation Report and endorsed its detailed recommendations. Ministers acknowledged that Exercise Eleusis '05 was an important test of the effectiveness of a whole of government and industry approach to respond to an outbreak of avian influenza. Council noted advice that action has commenced to formalise joint action plans and to immediately implement urgent improvements to strengthen Australia's capacity to respond quickly and effectively to an emergency zoonotic disease outbreaks.

Council also noted a Queensland paper on its response to a potential outbreak of avian influenza.

BSE/FMD Forum

Council noted significant developments internationally in regard to bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). Council agreed that the outcomes of the 2005 government/industry BSE/FMD forum should be incorporated into the Emergency Animal Disease Business Plan. Council also noted the upcoming European Commission review of BSE risk reduction measures in Australia.

National Livestock Identification System for Sheep

Following on from previous decisions, Council noted that the phased introduction of an NLIS system for sheep commenced on 1 January 2006. Council agreed that a review of exemptions under NLIS Sheep would be conducted in July 2007 with the over-riding objective to achieve a nationally consistent approach. In doing so, Council noted that Queensland will continue its “no exemptions” policy. Council also agreed that a full operational review of NLIS Sheep would be undertaken in 2008.

Animal Welfare Strategy and Standards

Council endorsed the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) National Implementation Plan as a basis for developing sectoral action plans. Council noted that Animal Health Australia (AHA) has developed a draft Business Plan for managing the future review and development of Australian Welfare Standards for the livestock sector, which will be presented to Standing Committee for endorsement. Council agreed that the development of national animal welfare standards for the transport of livestock (for both domestic and export) will need to be a high priority in the future under the proposal developed from the Animal Welfare Code Review.

Council also adopted resolutions of an earlier meeting of animal welfare ministers that requested Standing Committee to:

- develop proposals for a nationally consistent approach to the development, implementation and enforcement of Australian animal welfare standards;
- develop options for a nationally consistent approach to dealing with illegal activity aimed at disrupting animal production;
- provide advice on the proposed United Nations Universal Declaration for the Welfare of Animals; and
- to report to the next Council meeting on these matters.

Council also agreed that the primary focus of its work on animal welfare should continue to be on issues associated with production agriculture.

Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals

Council endorsed the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Land Transport of Poultry* and the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Husbandry of Captive Bred Emus*.

National Policy on Genetic Resources

Council agreed to the establishment of a National Genetic Resources Centre (NGRC) to coordinate the operation of Australia’s Plant Genetic Resource Centres (PGRs). Council noted that the establishment of the NGRC forms the key component of a National Policy on Genetic Resources.

The Australian, State and Territory governments have been endeavouring for many years to find an effective and mutually acceptable framework to secure the future of the PGRCs. Subject to the finalisation of a transitional approach for rationalising the PGRCs, Council also endorsed a Statement of Strategic Intent as the basis for the establishment of the NGRC. In doing so, Council noted that NSW would also seek to have Council endorse out-of-session the recommendations of a jurisdictional and industry steering group.

Council also agreed that the development of a Business Plan and organisational structure for the NGRC be progressed for further consideration by Council in November 2006.

Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA) – Payment of a Voluntary Levy by State/Territory Agencies

Council supported the development of FWPA - an industry owned company that will undertake Research, Development, Marketing and Promotion activities for the Australian forest industry. Council endorsed in-principle the payment, by State and Territory forestry agencies, of a voluntary contribution of 5¢/m³ of harvested timber to support the activities of FWPA. Council also noted that the details of any arrangement will need to be negotiated with individual State and Territory government business enterprises.

Contingency Planning for Eucalyptus Rust

Council noted that the establishment of eucalyptus rust in Hawaii significantly increased the threat of this pathogen reaching Australia and endorsed the preparation of the eucalyptus rust prevention and contingency strategies as a matter of urgency. In doing so, Council requested Standing Committee to assess current research capability and future options.

Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan

Council endorsed a new framework for the 2006 Annual Report of the Working Group for Advancing Reconciliation, due in November 2006. Council noted the practical actions being undertaken by each jurisdiction to advance reconciliation under the nine previously agreed “themes”. An interim report has shown a collective emphasis on creating and sustaining employment in Indigenous communities by providing skills and management training and assistance with the development of small business enterprises