

**PIMC 2/02 Communiqué**  
**10 October 2002**

**Primary Industries Ministerial Council Meeting**

**Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Capability**

Ministers agreed that Exercise *Minotaur* had been successful and very worthwhile. The Exercise had involved people at the highest level of both government and industry and had significantly increased awareness of the many complex and serious issues that would arise if there was a real major national animal disease emergency in Australia. Importantly, the Exercise had highlighted a number of areas where improvements could be made to improve Australia's capability to deal with an outbreak should one occur. Ministers agreed that these matters, which include development of a far more effective national information management system and rapid and accurate tracing of animals, should be dealt with as a matter of high priority.

Ministers also discussed BSE and re-affirmed the importance of maintaining surveillance at a level which satisfies the demand of international markets as well as the importance of implementing bans on suspect material which could enter animal feed.

Ministers reinforced their commitment to maintaining Australia's status for being free of bovine tuberculosis. In particular, they stressed that each jurisdiction must remain vigilant and fully discharge their responsibilities regarding bovine tuberculosis in Australia. They supported the extension of the tuberculosis freedom assurance program for another four years.

As an adjunct to these decisions, Ministers also considered options for development of an effective system for identification and tracing of national livestock. Council agreed that a high-level working group, including representatives of peak industry bodies, be asked to review the national livestock identification system and existing State livestock identification systems and report back to Council on options for a nationally-based system.

**Exceptional Circumstances**

Minister Truss offered further Commonwealth initiatives as part of the Exceptional Circumstances (EC) Reform package, focussing on funding of business support, and reaffirmed the Commonwealth's commitment to EC reform. Council reconfirmed its support for a new framework for EC and highlighted the other contributions that State and Federal Governments make to assist farmers and rural communities outside EC funding. In this context, heads of agricultural agencies recently agreed to provide information on state drought programs so that the Commonwealth could develop a dossier of support measures.

Minister Truss proposed that the Commonwealth continue to contribute 90 per cent of the cost of business support in the first year, with the States contributing the balance, and proposed that the States/Territories and the Commonwealth provide matching funding for the second and any subsequent year within a five year period.

The Commonwealth's offer to the States is a further attempt to improve the EC process. It would build on the improved accessibility already achieved through the use of predictive modelling and the availability of interim income assistance, announced by Minister Truss in September, for areas that have a demonstrated prima facie case for exceptional circumstances

**International Agricultural Trade**

Council also reviewed recent developments in the area of international agricultural trade. A number of significant recent trade policy developments were noted by Council including the

position put forward by the United States and the Cairns Group to the WTO agricultural negotiations and the European Commission's proposals for mid-term review of aspects of EU farm policy.

### **Live export trade**

Ministers discussed a number of recent incidents in the livestock export trade involving unacceptably high mortality of sheep and cattle. All Ministers supported the initiatives being taken by government and industry to meet community expectations in regard to the welfare of animals involved in the trade.

Ministers were also briefed on the review of the live trade undertaken by the Independent Reference Group which was initiated by the Federal Minister, the Hon Warren Truss. The IRG has been requested to advise both government and industry on future initiatives to improve animal welfare outcomes in the livestock export trade.

### **Australian Forestry Standard**

Ministers endorsed the Australian Forestry Standard, which will provide a basis for voluntary and independent third-party certification that supports a continual improvement towards sustainable forest management practices in Australia.

The Standard seeks to provide an assurance to purchasers of Australian timber that it has been sourced from sustainably managed forests. The Standard was developed by forest owners and managers, indigenous, scientific and community representatives and contains environmental, social, economic and cultural forest management performance criteria and requirements.

The New Zealand Minister provided a strong statement of support and endorsement for the Australian Forestry Standard as recognition of the sustainability of Australian and New Zealand forest practices.

### **Forestry and Forest Products Issues**

#### Regional Forest Industry Development

Council recognised the importance of forestry and regional forest industry development to many regional economies and noted that a Forest Industry Regional Development Conference would be convened during 2003.

#### Forest Plantations

Ministers endorsed the revised Plantations for Australia: the 2020 Vision as the national plantations strategy, with the goal of increasing Australia's plantation base to 3 million hectares by 2020. The Vision has been implemented since 1996 as a partnership between governments and industry, and the increase in private ownership has significantly increased investment opportunities and developed a more competitive industry. Council also noted that Regional Plantation Committees had an important role in implementing the Vision and endorsed a strong message of support for RPC's.

#### Forest Environmental Services

Council also noted opportunities to better integrate forestry and agriculture and the need to work together and with the NRM Ministerial Council, to develop proposals and solutions to benefit both sectors, particularly through forest environmental services such as salinity mitigation, water quality, surface and ground water flows, biodiversity conservation and carbon sequestration.

### **Carbon Accounting**

Council noted that Standards Australia had developed a nationally consistent carbon accounting standard to provide a basis for ensuring that the major premises underlying marketable carbon rights are satisfied. Council agreed to adopt the standard on an interim basis until June 2004. Council requested that Standing Committee undertake through its Forestry and Forest Products Committee a review of implementation in January 2004 and report back on any possible amendments to the interim standard.

### **Forest Fire Management**

Recognising the severe bushfire season Australia may be facing, Council noted the Commonwealth's offer to provide up to \$5 million for up to half of the direct costs of leasing and locating three Erickson Aircrane heli-tankers for the 2002-03 fire season. Council also noted the Commonwealth's offer to pay half of the \$800,000 cost with New South Wales of air transportation of two of the heli-tankers urgently to Australia to meet current emergencies.

Council noted that a decision on the establishment of a Cooperative Research Centre for Bushfire will be made in 2002.

Council also congratulated the Australian fire control officers who travelled to the USA in August/September to assist US authorities combat the severe outbreaks that marked its 2002 fire season. Council also took the opportunity to express appreciation and acknowledge the efforts of the forest services, rural fire authorities and emergency services personnel and thousands of volunteers, in battling fires in Australia and New Zealand each summer.

### **Aquaculture Industry Action Agenda**

Council noted the importance of the aquaculture industry and its potential to become a major contributor to the Australian economy. It noted work that had been undertaken with the aquaculture industry as part of the Commonwealth Government's Aquaculture Industry Action Agenda to identify a work program for the Council responding to impediments in resource planning and management. Council agreed to a number of key areas to be addressed, in particular the development of a National Aquaculture Policy Statement.

### **Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan**

Council at its last meeting in May 2002 endorsed the Primary Industries Action Plan for Reconciliation as a framework document for preparing detailed Implementation Plans for Council's consideration. This work was undertaken in conjunction with the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council. Council agreed to the Primary Industries Implementation Plan for Advancing Reconciliation.

### **Genetically Modified Crops**

At its previous meeting in May 2002, Council agreed to ask that its members be consulted by the Gene Technology Ministerial Council prior to any decisions in relation to policy principles on the establishment of GM-free zones. This process had been put in place. Council noted that it would have an opportunity to comment on the draft policy prior to its consideration by the GTMC.

Council also agreed that work should be undertaken to advise on industry's preparedness for self-regulation of the introduction of GM crops and guidelines that might underpin government monitoring of industry performance.

### **Grapevine Leaf Rust**

Council considered the occurrence of grapevine leaf rust in Darwin and funding for an eradication program. Council acknowledged the significance of the disease in terms of potential impact on the Australian wine and grape industry overall. Council agreed to funding of \$1 million in 2002-03 to support an eradication program in Darwin. The issue of industry support and funding will be taken up with respect to funding pests and disease eradication in future years.

### **Routine Tail Docking of Dogs - National Co-ordination**

Council considered the issue of developing a nationally consistent approach to routine tail docking of dogs for cosmetic purposes. Council recognised that a wide range of views existed within the community that needed to be recognised in considering this matter.

Council agreed in principle to a nationally co-ordinated State and Territory ban on the routine tail docking of dogs for cosmetic purposes. Recognising the diversity of views on this matter, however, Standing Committee was requested to facilitate further consultation in each jurisdiction on this issue and report back to Council's next meeting.

Council also agreed that its Standing Committee should report at the next meeting on what role the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (as compared to other Ministerial Councils) should have in the broad area of animal welfare beyond that relating to production animal industries.