

To: Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce

Could you please include the following subjects for consideration in the "competition of ideas" being received by your taskforce:

1. Effective Auditing of the Food Safety Levels in Imported Food Products:

Whereas Australia is justly proud of our "clean green" status in terms of our food products, and this status is supported by regulations and appropriate regulatory process, including the efforts of the APVMA, one does hear stories about food products entering Australia that would not meet our own standards for export.

Some of these products contain levels of chemical residues that are at dangerous, certainly levels that exceed those that are permitted in this country. There are also reports of products, mainly fish, where they may contain antibiotic resistant disease organisms as a result of the liberal use of antibiotics to control various diseases in the country of origin. It is not clear to what extent the importers of food products, including our major supermarkets, particularly products originating in Asia, scrutinise these food products for food safety.

Suggestion:

That if food importers are not already subject to regulations requiring an effective audit of the food safety of the food products that they import, consideration be given to addressing this deficiency by establishing an obligation to conduct verifiable audits in this area.

2. Biosecurity Legislation

In recent years there have been deliberations concerning our national biosecurity arrangements with a view to updating the present federal legislation that dates back to 1908. Consideration of relevant draft legislation was shelved in the run up to last year's federal election. Prior to that various reviews including the Beale Review, that followed on from the outbreak of equine influenza, had recommended that a separate specialist statutory body be established to determine appropriate quarantine standards and procedures.

In essence the establishment of this statutory body would have created something of a "separation of powers" so that DAFF, that now oversees both trade deals and quarantine arrangements, would no longer be subject to any conflict of interest situations (and has had access to the "Eminent Scientists" group for advice concerning quarantine arrangements).

However, although the initial response to the Beale Report was for proposed draft legislation to be prepared to allow for the establishment of this separate statutory authority that part of the draft has now been scrapped. It is also understood that the role of the Eminent Scientists group is expected to be weakened under that draft legislation. The underlying concern seems to have been that DAFF would be too seriously inconvenienced by the restructuring required to accommodate this proposed separation of powers.

Suggestion:

That when this subject returns to the parliamentary arena serious consideration be given to reviewing the recommendation that this separate statutory body be established. As the saying goes, *"An ounce of prevention is worth a truck load of cure"*.

3. Fracking Chemicals

The use of various fracking chemicals to assist in the harvesting of coal seam gas is the subject of considerable debate. A major underlying concern in this area is the possibility that our underground aquifers may be contaminated by toxic substances. It is understood that there are in excess of sixty chemical combinations that can be employed as fracking compounds, but that only a minority of them have been fully analysed to ascertain their toxicity or otherwise. It is understood that at least some of these chemical compounds are non toxic.

Suggestion:

That there be a program to analyse all chemical compounds that are intended to be used as part of the fracking process and that it be illegal to use any of these that endanger the safety of our aquifers.

Yours faithfully

Alix Turner

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.