

12 December 2014

Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2 600

By email: agricultural.competitiveness@pmc.gov.au

Dear Sir, Madam

Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation seeking input into the broad directions and the specific policy ideas raised in the Green Paper on Australia's Agricultural Competitiveness.

The RSPCA is disappointed to see that animal welfare considerations have not been adequately addressed in the Green Paper. Only one paragraph of the 172-page paper is dedicated to discussion of animal welfare issues and this is in the context of working with the States and Territories (p.23).

There is no consideration in the Green Paper of the relationship between animal welfare and productivity, industry competitiveness, market access or consumer confidence. We believe this is an oversight and encourage the Government to consider the role of animal welfare within the livestock industries in more depth when developing the White Paper.

We welcome the acknowledgement of the need for reform to animal welfare standards and enforcement to achieve good welfare outcomes but raise concern about the proposal to introduce tougher laws targeting animal activists. It should be acknowledged that these two issues are inextricably linked. When public confidence in the animal welfare regulatory regime, including the adequacy of animal welfare standards and government oversight, is low, the prevalence of activist-related activities increases. The solution to this is to restore public confidence through improving standards, not to legislate against or attempt to silence activists. Further detail is provided in the attached submission.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require further information.

Regards



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RSPCA Australia submission

Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper Public Consultation

The RSPCA submission is based on an interest in the welfare of livestock farmed for food and fibre. Our comments relate to a number of the broad directions and policy ideas raised for consideration in the Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper and are presented here in that order.

Infrastructure

The Green Paper mentions facilitating new or **intensified agricultural production** as one of the policy ideas under 'Infrastructure' (p. xvi).

The expansion of agricultural production is a valid aim and provides an opportunity for livestock producers to embrace methods of production that take into account animal well-being in addition to productivity measures. Livestock production should not come at a cost to animal welfare which is a potential risk if the Government were to help facilitate new or intensified agricultural production. Increased intensification of animal agriculture and the breeding of animals for enhanced production characteristics, for example, have led to immeasurable suffering of animals in high-confinement systems with no ability to express their behavioural needs. Animal production systems of the future must be designed to provide 'quality of life' for the animals concerned - from birth through to slaughter - while at the same time meeting the needs of the producer and the expectations of the consumer.

Working with the States and Territories

We welcome the acknowledgement of the need for **reform to animal welfare standards and enforcement** to achieve good welfare outcomes but raise concern about the proposal to introduce tougher laws targeting animal activists (p.23). It should be acknowledged that these two issues are inextricably linked. Public confidence in the animal welfare regulatory regime, including the adequacy of animal welfare standards and government compliance monitoring programmes, has a correlation with the prevalence of activist related activities. Low or no confidence in government's performance in this area can cause stakeholders to become disillusioned and to disengage from participating in the formal democratic and participatory forums and instead turn to more disruptive activities¹.

Therefore, we believe the best way to reduce the prevalence of disruptive activities is to strengthen animal welfare standards and the monitoring and enforcement functions of State and Territory governments. It is acknowledged that some activist activities will continue as they are ideologically opposed to the very notion of livestock farming but if government can demonstrate to the broader community that animal welfare is taken seriously and is protected through robust systems of inspection then any public support for such activism will wane and this will reduce its prevalence.

Taking the law and order style approach of imposing tougher penalties for activists is short-sighted and fundamentally reactive in nature. It will have potentially counterproductive results as it only seeks to address the *symptoms* of a lack of confidence in the government's performance and an unmet desire for greater transparency in production practices. It is unlikely that activists will be deterred from the prospects of higher fines or potential terms of imprisonment. The introduction of tough laws in the USA for example, in the extreme form of the *Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act*, has not reduced animal activist activities in that country. On the contrary, activism remains high

¹ Peter Parbery and Roger Wilkinson, *Victorians' Attitudes to Farming*, 2012, Department of Primary Industries, Victoria.

and laws like the *Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act* and state based ‘Ag-Gag’ legislation² are used to support their cause by showing that livestock industries ‘have something to hide’.

In this regard, we emphasise the important need for the Australian Government to reinstate its role in funding and coordinating a nationally consistent approach to the development of animal welfare policy and standards within Australia (see ‘Competition and regulation’ section below).

With respect to implementation enforcement, the RSPCA supports calls for the States and Territories to encourage industries to develop quality assurance (QA) programs to demonstrate that on-farm practices reflect good animal welfare standards (p.23). Industry QA programs have a role to play in achieving better animal welfare outcomes, but they should never be seen as a complete substitute for government oversight. The public expect government to play a compliance role to provide truly independent assurance that animal welfare standards are being met.

Current investment in animal welfare monitoring and compliance activities from State and Territory governments is not sufficient. More resources are desperately needed to be dedicated to these functions to assist in addressing community concerns regarding the treatment of animals in the production of food and fibre. We call on the Australian Government to strongly encourage State and Territory governments to provide greater levels of investment for animal welfare compliance programs and this need should be emphasised within the Government’s impending White Paper.

Competition and regulation

The Green Paper acknowledges the interests of stakeholders in developing a **nationally consistent approach to animal welfare standards** so as to reduce the regulatory burden on business (p.27).

The Australian Government’s recent withdrawal from leading national animal welfare policy and standards development is therefore disappointing. We strongly encourage the Australian Government to reconsider its support for the *Australian Animal Welfare Strategy* and the advisory and consultative committees required to oversee its implementation.

The Green Paper points out that stakeholders were concerned by **Country of Origin Labelling** (CoOL) potentially misleading consumers (p.27).

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry’s report on the inquiry into country of origin labelling for food was released in October this year and recommends improvements to the Country of Origin Labelling system. However, the RSPCA believes that product labelling is still completely inadequate when it comes to the conditions under which the animal was farmed and the issue of inconsistent labelling extends across all animal-derived food products - both domestic and imported - and needs to be addressed. Country of Origin Labelling is not sufficient for the consumer to be able to compare production methods between domestic and imported product. Current Country of Origin Labelling - particularly where it is permissible to use the term “local and imported” to describe product ingredients - also does not allow the consumer to compare production methods between countries. Each country of origin must be clearly stated on the product label to allow fair comparison. Consistent labelling provides Australian producers with an opportunity to differentiate their product and attract a growing number of discerning consumers looking to purchase more humanely farmed foods. However, Australian producers need to be able to work from a level playing field that ensures imported products meet the same production standards as required in Australia. Put simply, for example, imported pork labelled ‘free range’ must meet the same standards of production as required for Australian pork labelled ‘free range’. But even in Australia, these terms mean different things to different people. So, as a start, to achieve this level playing field domestically (i.e. preventing the misuse of such terms), nationally consistent definitions for each of these terms as relevant to the particular livestock industry must be developed, endorsed by States and Territories and subsequently enforced. Only

² Ag-gag legislation is a term used to describe laws which seek to hinder animal activist investigated and monitoring activities including through the prohibition of unauthorised filming or photography of livestock production practices among other methods.

then will consumers have confidence in the production method used and the minimum standards that must have been met to allow a certain product claim.

The Green Paper proposes changes to the regulation of **AgVet chemicals** (p.28).

The RSPCA has an interest in the registration of veterinary medicines and other products where their aim is to alleviate pain and suffering. It is certainly important to have a process in place that ensures that new products can be evaluated and will not have harmful effects on the animals concerned. However, the process (managed by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA)) should not result in long delays in product registration or reluctance by (international) companies to embark on the registration process due to the requirements for clinical trials, etc. in Australia. It is not uncommon for a product to have been in use worldwide with proven efficacy and with no animal health/welfare impact and yet the APVMA requiring Australia-specific trials.

The APVMA guidelines outlining the requirements for product registration must be reviewed and, indeed, these guidelines should reflect current thinking about the use of animals in research and the need to integrate the principles of the 3Rs (replacement, refinement and reduction). In addition, the APVMA's requirements for new product registration should not result in unnecessary animal suffering due to needless delays in the registration process. For example, there is currently a target-specific wild dog and fox bait awaiting APVMA approval that contains para-aminopropiophenone (PAPP) and which would offer a more humane method of pest control compared to the widely used poison 1080 which is indiscriminate in the species it affects and has no antidote.

Education, skills and training, and labour

The Green Paper states that the Government's preference is a strong agricultural sector that will create **rewarding jobs for Australians** (p.57).

The RSPCA's long-held view is that more job opportunities can be created in rural and regional Australia by transitioning the live export trade to an expanded meat trade resulting in growth of the meat-processing sector. A strong, resilient and future-focussed livestock sector that cares about animal welfare need not include the export of live animals for slaughter. The relatively small live export industry is one that comes with great reputational risk to the larger beef and sheepmeat export industries. Contrary to industry claims that thousands of jobs within the trade will be lost, the reality is that the vast majority of these jobs would remain and even more would be created. In fact, the live export trade has actually resulted in a net decrease in jobs throughout regional Australia through its impact on the domestic processing sector.

The RSPCA has provided more detailed information on ESCAS and the live export issue separately to the Department of Agriculture and the Minister for Agriculture. Additional information can be provided to the Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce if required.

Drought

The Green Paper states that the Australian Government is committed to delivering a number of drought support provisions to farmers (p.65).

Industry and government have an important role to play in raising awareness among livestock producers of the range of options available to them when it comes to planning and preparing for drought and how to come out the other end. Peak industry councils and state farming organisations, in particular, could take a more pro-active role in ensuring that such preparedness plans are in place and acted upon when the time comes. These bodies could also take a more active role in ensuring that where animals are suffering through mismanagement that the livestock producer is provided with practical assistance (e.g. through an extension officer) to ensure systems are in place to prevent a similar situation occurring in the future. The Livestock Biosecurity

Network could also play a role in education and awareness raising about the importance of preparing for emergency situations.

With regard to drought assistance packages, it is acknowledged that droughts are more frequent and may last a number of years when they occur. A livestock producer in a drought-prone area who has prepared for drought by, for example, ensuring feed and a reliable water source is available to livestock would surely not appreciate ongoing assistance being provided to a producer who has done no such thing and allows livestock to die. Assistance to such a producer could be seen as rewarding mismanagement rather than alleviating misfortune. Hence, ongoing assistance could take into consideration the extent to which a livestock producer has developed and implemented a drought preparedness plan and acted on the plan in a manner that avoids animal suffering.

Improved drought preparedness could be achieved through early intervention by governments, recouping government costs related to seizure/disposal of animals, as well as infringement penalties for mismanagement resulting in livestock suffering or death.

Research, development and extension

It is widely acknowledged that livestock industry research, development and extension (RD&E) is important to the long-term viability of the sector. The Green Paper points out that RD&E is recognised as a long-term source of new technologies and a key driver of productivity growth (p.85).

Improving animal welfare must be a priority in industry research programs. Current research often involves collaboration between peak industry councils, universities, industry R&D corporations and Cooperative Research Centres (CRC). An essential aspect of industry and government-funded research is peer-review and publication of research results. The development of animal welfare policy, for example, must be informed by the relevant science and it is not acceptable that decisions should be made on the basis of unpublished or non-peer-reviewed reports.

Ongoing investment in research will ensure that livestock producers have access to best practice technologies that will improve productivity, their long-term viability and, importantly, animal welfare. In that context, the livestock sectors need to ensure their RD&E programs reflect an awareness of emerging issues and a responsiveness to growing consumer expectations that may impact their industry.

Accessing international markets

The Green Paper points out that consumption growth in Asia and other emerging markets present Australia with the opportunity to be a supplier of premium product (p.100).

It is clear that a consumer's ethical values influence their purchasing decisions. Products with higher animal welfare attributes are gaining market share. The increasing retail market share of cage-free eggs, the growth in higher welfare chicken meat and pork - including those sold under the RSPCA Approved Farming Scheme - all reflect this.

Gearing Australia's livestock production systems towards higher welfare production could provide a competitive edge in current export markets and offer Australian producers an opportunity to access new markets where consumer demand increasingly favours those higher welfare products.

Achieving price premiums for Australian livestock products is key to the long-term viability of the industry.

END OF SUBMISSION