

Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper Submission

Date submitted

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Name of Organisation/Individual

Gem Murray

What are the top policies from the Green Paper that the Government should focus on in the White Paper and why?

I have read, support and endorse "Voiceless's" submission dated 12/11/2014.

Voiceless has highlighted a number of concerns in the Green Paper and has proposed several recommendations that the Federal Government ought to reflect in the White Paper.

The core concerns and recommendations include:

Animal Welfare

The Green Paper demonstrates the Federal Government's reluctance to take responsibility for animal welfare issues.

It states: "The Australian Government recognises that animal welfare is a concern for the Australian community ... Each State and Territory government is responsible for implementing and enforcing domestic animal welfare legislation. It is important that States and Territories drive reform in this area..."¹

This reluctance is reflected by a number of policy decisions that have removed the Federal Government from having any responsibility for animal welfare matters, including:

- the abolition of the Australian Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AAWAC) as part of its drive to cut 'unnecessary and inefficient regulation';

- the handing over of responsibility for the delivery of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) to states and territories; and

- the rejection of the Gillard Government's proposal to create the position of an Inspector General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports.

In our view, the Federal Government cannot legitimately and responsibly promote the competitiveness, productivity and profitability of primary industries without considering how this may impact on animal welfare.

Increased productivity often coincides with declining levels of animal welfare, as is the case with factory farming practices which see animals confined at high densities in stressful conditions in order to lower the cost of their production. If the Federal Government seeks to develop policy initiatives to promote the productivity of primary industries, it must also take responsibility for engaging with State and Territory governments to strengthen animal protection laws and their enforcement.

Wild dogs

The Green Paper makes a number of references to the need to control wild dog populations in Australia, with \$10 million flagged for pest management.² While dingoes may have a financial impact on graziers, this expense must be weighed against the significant animal welfare concerns associated with lethal methods of population control - such as 1080 poison baitings - which are often cruel and result in severe animal suffering.

Many domesticated dogs and other small native mammals meet a slow and painful death each year as a result of the 1080 poison baiting campaigns. These innocent animals are “collateral” in the Government’s violent campaign against dingoes. In addition, these methods are driving extinction rates and the erosion of primary productivity due to the release of smaller predators (cats and foxes) and herbivores, which will have a flow on effect for smaller native predators and herbivores.

Voiceless is opposed to all lethal means of managing or controlling animal populations, irrespective of whether they are classified as “pests” by the Government. Non-lethal measures such as sterilisation, relocation and the use of guard animals offer sustainable and economically viable alternatives; these should always be favoured over indiscriminate killing.

Further, Voiceless recommends that a percentage of the \$10 million which has been flagged for pest management should be reallocated to trialling and implementing more ethical, economical and non-lethal approaches to population control.

Legislation targeting animal activists

The Green Paper also endorses State and Territory governments to implement laws which target animal activists and agricultural surveillance – laws consistent with US-style ag-gag legislation.

It states: “Without detracting from the fact that no government should condone animal cruelty, it is also important that the States and Territories take action to protect farmers, their homes and their places of business from disruptive and illegal activities undertaken by animal activists”.³

Ag-gag laws are draconian measures which seek to 'gag' animal advocates, employees, whistleblowers and the media from making public evidence of illegal animal cruelty. Typically, ag-gag legislation makes it a crime to distribute images and videos gathered covertly on factory farms to the media or the public.

Voiceless has written extensively on the dangers of ag-gag laws, not only from an animal protection perspective, but also in terms of free speech, freedom of information and freedom of the press.

The Voiceless submission urges the Federal Government not to advocate for the introduction of ag-gag laws. Further, their submission notes that ag-gag laws are problematic as they stifle transparency within the agriculture sector rather than addressing the core animal welfare issues that underlie this level of activism, namely:

- inadequate animal protection laws that permit cruel factory farming practices;

- a lack of transparency in the way in which food animals are treated and the conditions in which they live in factory farms; and

inadequate monitoring and enforcement of animal protection laws at a State and Territory level.

It is in these areas that Voiceless submits the Federal Government ought to consider reform.

What policies from the Green Paper don't you support and why?

See above answer

General Comment

I have read, support and endorse "Voiceless's" submission dated 12/11/2014.