

## Regulation of Australian Agriculture

I believe that with the increase in intensive farming in Australia together with the highly problematic live export trade, it is imperative to have a national independent office of animal welfare to ensure adequate animal welfare standards are developed and maintained for the humane treatment of animals.

I fully support the Commission's recommendation for an independent national body for animal welfare and agree that animal welfare regulations are not meeting community expectations for the welfare of farm animals.

Australian primary industry needs to respond to changing community attitudes. It cannot afford to ignore local or worldwide community concern as was seen with the mulesing issue in the wool industry.

I commend to Commissioners the proposal of the World Animal Protection organisation that an Independent Office of Animal Welfare (IOAW) be formed as a statutory body which would:

- Have a mandate to achieve excellence in animal welfare.
- Facilitate balanced consultation between all stakeholders on nationally consistent, evidence based standards to protect animals from cruelty and promote good animal welfare.
- Meet the expectations of the public and consumers with regard to animal welfare standards.
- Safeguard Australia's reputation and investment opportunities, by meeting international benchmarks for animal welfare.
- Reduce poor animal welfare incidences by taking a proactive, instead of reactive approach to animal welfare.
- Be staffed by policy, law & community consultation experts, and guided by a balanced advisory committee, with strong animal welfare expertise.

The establishment of a national body for animal welfare has broad community support. Galaxy polling undertaken by World Animal Protection in early 2016 found;

- 75% of people support the re-establishment of a national body focusing on animal welfare.
- 84% believe the federal government should set goals for animal welfare and have a plan to achieve them.
- A clear majority of Australian believe farm animals could be treated better, both city residents (73%) and rural and regional people (70%) alike.

The Australian community expects farm animals to be treated humanely and protected from cruel practices. Horrific footage of animals in the live export trade, both during transport and at slaughter, continues to shock Australians. The draft report discusses the difficulty in assessing community expectations related to animal welfare. It is safe to say the community expects better than this.

I would also like to express dismay at the suggestion in the draft report that State bans on cultivating genetically modified crops and regulations regarding mandatory labelling of

genetically modified foods, should not apply. I strongly disagree that GM regulation lacks a sound policy justification or that the successful coexistence of GM and non-GM crops has been demonstrated both here and overseas.

There are many considerations with GMOs. GM contamination cases have played out in courts in Australia and overseas and little is yet known about the persistence of GMOs in agricultural land. The rights and needs of farmers to use non-GM crops, particularly organic farmers, should be protected. Some markets prefer non-GM products and pay a premium for them. I believe it is to Australia's advantage to adopt a precautionary approach and maintain its clean and green tradition until more is known about the long term effects of farming and consuming GMOs. Deregulation is not a sound option. Once GMOs have been widely released we may not be able to remove them from farmland or the wider environment.

Regarding the labelling of GM foods, I believe that consumers have a right to be fully informed in their choice of foodstuffs, including country of origin and GM content.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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