

RDC Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
LB2 Collins Street East  
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

25 June 2010

Dear Sir, Madam

### **Inquiry into the Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) model**

RSPCA Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission with respect to its inquiry into the RDC model. The RDCs are particularly pertinent to RSPCA Australia's work in the area of farm animal welfare, equine welfare, and other rural animal industries. When referring to RDCs in this submission we mean: Australian Egg Corporation, Australian Meat Processors Corporation, Australian Pork Ltd, Australian Wool Innovation, Dairy Australia, LiveCorp Ltd, Meat and Livestock Australia, and animal-based programs under the Rural Industries RDC (chicken meat, horses, deer and new animal products).

Rather than address specific questions in the Issues Paper, we provide the following general observations/comments:

1. There is an urgent need to direct more funding specifically towards animal welfare-related research, particularly research that is relevant in the Australian animal production context and which addresses the growing public demand for more humanely produced food and the impact this will have on the future of animal production in Australia. However, we believe there is no need to repeat overseas research that has been conducted within a controlled environment (e.g. caged layers in tunnel ventilated shed) and from which the outcomes are generally accepted
2. Government funding of RDCs should be contingent on broadening the level of stakeholder consultation in setting R&D priorities. This would ensure that individual RDC program objectives balance the needs of industry and other stakeholders.
3. More effort must be made to publish research results in peer-reviewed journals as well as in plain English industry publications to ensure that optimal benefit is achieved from the knowledge gained and that the overall quality of research is raised to a high, internationally competitive level.
4. Consideration should be given to the need for Government funding of Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) projects, in particular whether this project funding could not better be directed towards the RDCs. This would leave the AAWS to focus on facilitating discussion among stakeholders regarding research priorities (particularly cross-sectoral priorities) and allowing the relevant RDC to manage any project(s) flowing from these discussions.

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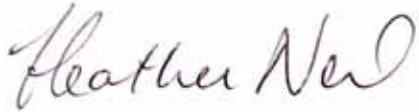
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5. Government should actively encourage R&D and continued Government support is required to ensure the livestock production sector remains profitable but, importantly, is using best (welfare) practice to do so, thus accruing wider community benefits.
6. RDC governance structures should ensure that there is no conflict of interest between R&D projects and personal/business activities of company directors. Effort should be made to ensure that governing bodies are made up of complementary individuals with expertise in governance-related matters.

RSPCA Australia believes that, if the above concerns are addressed, the RDCs will be able to continue to fulfil an important role in the provision of research for the animal production and related sectors. And, from a consumer perspective, with Government and industry demonstrating that animal welfare research is high on the agenda, the public will have confidence that a progressive livestock industry is addressing their concerns about how their food is produced while at the same time remaining productive and profitable.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heather Neil". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Heather Neil  
Chief Executive Officer  
RSPCA Australia