

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Communiqué

PIMC 13

17 APRIL 2008

The thirteenth meeting of the Primary Industries Ministerial Council was held in Melbourne on Thursday 17 April 2008 to consider issues affecting Australia's primary industries sectors.

Climate change initiatives arising from the Ministerial Forum in Cairns

Council today agreed to work with the Australian Government Minister for Climate Change and Water to inform primary industries sectors on the impacts of emissions trading. The program will follow the Australian Government's announcement later this year on the coverage of the emissions trading scheme.

Council also emphasised the need to advance strategic mitigation and adaptation issues for the sectors. This will be achieved through activities such as regional and sectoral climate change vulnerability assessments and collaboration on research. It was agreed that, as a priority, an economic and industry assessment and analysis of the benefits and costs of scheme coverage for the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector should be undertaken.

In relation to mitigation research, Council identified four priority areas for consideration:

- means to reduce methane emissions from livestock and nitrous oxide emissions from cropping and fertiliser use
- the life-cycle emissions of primary industries
- carbon sequestration in forests
- better soil management practices.

Drought policy improvement – future directions

Council noted that much of Australia remains drought declared and the evidence of long term climate change is increasingly clear. The need for drought policies which improve resilience of our farming systems and preparedness and flexibility to adapt is widely acknowledged.

Council considered a comprehensive process to review and improve drought policy with the aim of supporting farmers to better prepare for a changing climate and to increase profitability, sustainability and self-reliance. The issue of exit packages for agricultural producers facing barriers to exit would be considered as part of the review.

Council agreed on the importance of consultation with stakeholders in reviewing drought policy.

Council noted that the National Rural Advisory Council's (NRAC) review of expiring exceptional circumstances (EC) declarations is not related to this review of drought policy and will proceed as an independent process.

Council agreed that the rules for receiving assistance would not change for those producers in EC declared areas and areas where EC declarations are extended.

Agricultural productivity – issues affecting growth and agricultural value chain analysis

Council agreed that to maintain long term competitiveness, agricultural productivity growth must continue. Primary producers face a range of challenges to increasing productivity and the impact of climate change is an added pressure.

Council agreed to further examine three areas key to agricultural productivity growth:

- workforce
- skills and training
- land use intensity and planning issues.

Council recognised the importance of water management for productivity growth. They acknowledged the considerable amount of work being done in this area and will consider a report on this work at their next meeting in November 2008.

Council also agreed on the importance of value chain analysis in identifying impediments to productivity growth and priorities for government and industry investment. Ministers will consider the initial results of value chain analysis for one national agricultural industry at their November 2008 meeting.

National Primary Industries Research and Development & Extension (RD&E) Strategy —future directions

Council acknowledged that effective research and development is essential to continued productivity growth. To use research resources more effectively and achieve better outcomes for industry, Council agreed to accelerate the development of a National Research, Development and Extension Strategy. The further development of the Climate Change Research Strategy for Primary Industries was supported and will serve as a guide for developing and collaborating on R&D plans.

National approach to plant and animal quarantine

In recognising the need to work cooperatively to deliver an effective quarantine system that is consistent with Australia's international obligations under the World Trade Organization Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Council members reaffirmed their commitment to the partnership approach adopted through the Memorandum on Animal and Plant Quarantine Measures signed in 1995 and subsequent amendments made in 2002.

Progressing market access

Australian Government, state and territory ministers agreed to work collectively to open overseas markets to Australian produce by seeking the removal of unjustified policies and regulations in those markets that impede the productivity and competitiveness of our agricultural industries.

Battery cage production systems

Council noted that in the near future, when Western Australia implements the layer hen welfare reforms as agreed at ARMCANZ 18 (August 2000), all states and territories will have implemented the new standards.

Layer hen adjustment payments

Council noted previous discussions on structural adjustment issues in the egg industry and that existing Australian Government programs may provide some support for producers wishing to leave the egg industry.

Pork industry – Productivity Commission report on safeguards

Council noted the key findings and recommendations of the Productivity Commission's Safeguards Inquiry into the Import of Pigeat. In particular, Council noted the findings that the pigmeat industry is facing considerable difficulties at present as a result of higher domestic feed costs and increased imports of pigmeat and that safeguard action is not warranted.

Honeybee industry

Council noted that Biosecurity Australia will be requested to review the import risk assessment for the import of overseas bees and their products.

European house borer

Council agreed to extend funding for Western Australia to complete current activities to contain European house borer while a review of the technical feasibility of successful eradication is undertaken. The program is a cooperative effort between the Australian, state and territory governments and the timber industry.

National co-existence framework for GM crops

Ministers noted a national framework to develop co-existence strategies for GM and non-GM crops that provides a nationally consistent, non-legislative framework for development of industry-specific, market-driven strategies based on the principle of industry management with government oversight for those states that have endorsed the use of GM crops.

Promotion of primary industries to the education sector

Council noted progress on, and industry support of, a national approach to the improved co-ordination of the promotion of primary industries to the education sector. Council agreed to support the development of a national entity for the promotion of primary industries to the education sector, which will provide this coordinated national framework.

Update on the equine influenza outbreak and the success of the response from the combat states' perspective

Council welcomed the successful eradication of equine influenza from Australia as a result of the cooperation of all parties and a genuine national response effort. Council congratulated all involved in dealing with the outbreak, particularly horse owners, industry and the broader community who assisted in containing and eradicating the disease.

Council also agreed that the response would be subject to an extensive post-response review, to ensure the valuable lessons learned during this response are captured to inform preparedness and planning for future incursions.

Development of the organic industry

Council noted key issues and developments for the Australian organic industry and that a draft National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Products was scheduled to be released for public comment by Standards Australia in June 2008 prior to finalisation of a new standard by December 2008.

Agricultural trade – review of developments

Council noted recent developments in agricultural trade, including intensive discussions aimed at reaching convergence on some of the many outstanding issues in the World Trade Organization Doha Round of agriculture negotiations. Council also noted progress on prospective Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Chile, China, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Malaysia and Japan, and negotiations for a regional FTA between the Association of South East Asian Nations and New Zealand.

Food regulation issues

Council noted key food regulation issues of relevance to primary production and food industries currently being progressed by the Australia New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council (ANZFRMC) and the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), including primary production and processing, mandatory fortification of food and front of pack labelling.