



Coolibah Herbs Pty Ltd
National Organic Standard Bill 2024 Submission
18th December 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Executive Summary

This submission highlights the critical importance of strengthening local Organic regulation to ensure a fair and transparent market that supports the continued growth, sustainability, and competitiveness of the Australian organic industry. As the CEO of Coolibah Herbs, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges posed by inconsistent domestic standards, insufficient regulatory oversight, and greenwashing, which undermine the integrity of the organic market. Strengthened local regulation is essential to protect consumers, support certified organic producers, and foster trust in the Australian organic sector.

This inquiry is vital because gaps in local regulation impact the entire horticultural sector, particularly producers adhering to rigorous organic certification standards. Without robust enforcement of organic claims and clear regulatory frameworks, businesses like Coolibah Herbs face unfair competition from products marketed as “organic” without meeting the same certification standards. By addressing these gaps, we can ensure a level playing field, enhance consumer confidence, and drive greater investment into organic production.

To achieve these outcomes, we strongly urge support for policies and legislative measures that strengthen local organic regulations. Specifically, we request that this inquiry prioritise initiatives that introduce mandatory organic certification for domestic products, improve traceability, and establish clear penalties for greenwashing. These measures are crucial to maintaining the integrity of the organic market, supporting sustainable farming practices, and ensuring the continued success of the Australian organic horticulture industry.

Background

Coolibah Herbs is a leading Australian horticultural business specialising in the production and supply of fresh, high-quality salad greens, herbs, and vegetables. Founded over 45 years ago, Coolibah Herbs has grown from a small family-operated farm into a significant player in the horticultural industry, supplying both domestic and international markets. With a steadfast commitment to sustainability and innovation, the business has become a trusted Organic supplier for major retailers, wholesalers, and foodservice providers.

Operating across several sites in Victoria, Coolibah Herbs employs over 250 direct staff and supports numerous indirect jobs along the supply chain, including logistics, packaging, and retail services. The business’s focus on quality and safety is reflected in its adherence to stringent organic certification standards, which require significant investments of time and resources to maintain.

However, the lack of mandatory domestic certification and enforcement allows uncertified products to enter the market with misleading organic claims. This not only erodes consumer trust but also places certified organic producers like Coolibah Herbs at a competitive disadvantage. Addressing these regulatory gaps would ensure that all products marketed as “organic” meet consistent, verifiable standards.

Impacts

The Bill is of critical importance to Coolibah Herbs as it directly addresses the challenges and inequities faced under the current domestic regulatory framework. In the absence of mandatory organic certification for domestic products, uncertified producers can market goods as “organic” without adhering to the same rigorous standards upheld by certified producers. This creates significant market distortions, where certified producers incur higher production costs while competing with uncertified products sold at lower prices.

For instance, Coolibah Herbs has experienced scenarios where organic-certified produce must be sold in the conventional market due to oversupply, while uncertified products claiming to be “organic” undermine pricing structures and consumer trust. This reduces the profitability of genuine organic producers and discourages further investment into sustainable farming practices.

The absence of robust local regulation also exacerbates the problem of greenwashing, where businesses exploit regulatory gaps to make misleading organic claims. This practice not only deceives consumers but also damages the reputation of the broader organic industry. Strengthened regulation, including mandatory certification and penalties for false claims, is essential to ensure that organic products meet verifiable standards and to protect the integrity of the market.

Furthermore, inconsistent domestic standards hinder efforts to improve traceability along the supply chain. Traceability is crucial for maintaining consumer confidence, ensuring food safety, and supporting sustainable farming practices. By introducing clear and enforceable standards, the Bill would enhance supply chain transparency and provide consumers with confidence that products marketed as “organic” meet genuine certification criteria.

The lack of a robust domestic regulatory framework also impacts regional economies and job creation. Certified organic producers like Coolibah Herbs invest heavily in meeting certification standards, which supports employment and economic activity across the supply chain. However, unfair competition from uncertified products reduces growth opportunities and discourages further investment. Implementing this Bill would provide a level playing field, driving economic benefits for both producers and the broader economy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Coolibah Herbs strongly supports the introduction of this Bill as a critical step toward strengthening local organic regulation and addressing the systemic challenges faced by certified organic producers. The arguments presented in this submission emphasise the importance of introducing mandatory certification, improving traceability, and addressing greenwashing to ensure a fair and transparent domestic market.

For Coolibah Herbs, the Bill represents an opportunity to level the playing field, protect consumers, and secure the integrity of the Australian organic industry. By prioritising these initiatives, the committee will support sustainable farming practices, foster trust in organic products, and ensure the long-term success of the industry.

We urge the committee to support this Bill and recognise its potential to deliver significant benefits to producers, consumers, and the broader economy. Coolibah Herbs stands ready to contribute to this vision and calls for swift action to implement stronger local organic regulation. Now is the time to act to ensure a thriving and credible future for the Australian organic horticultural sector.

Kind Regards,

George Arapoglou

CEO

Coolibah Herbs Pty Ltd