



Wayne Shields
Peninsula Fresh Organics
National Organic Standard Bill 2024 Submission



Executive Summary

Peninsula Fresh Organics (PFO) strongly supports the National Organic Standard Bill 2024. As one of Australia's leading certified organic vegetable producers, we understand firsthand the challenges that arise from the lack of domestic regulation of the term "organic." The absence of a clear definition creates confusion for consumers, corruption with unscrupulous sales which undermines consumer trust and limits access to key export markets.

Australia is the last OECD country to implement protections for organic operators and consumers. The absence of regulation has allowed misleading claims, greenwashing, and unfair competition to persist. For example, a juice company recently marketed its orange juice as "organic" despite using completely conventional farming practices. This is not only misleading but problematic for consumers who choose organic products for medical reasons or sensitivities to chemicals used in conventional agriculture.

The Bill will also establish equivalency agreements with key trading partners, reducing compliance costs and the burden of audits for certified organic producers like PFO. With global organic markets booming, including the EU's significant investment and the USA's ongoing growing organic market, Australia must act now to secure its share of this opportunity.

The Australian organic industry urgently needs this Bill to ensure future growth, enhance market access, and protect certified organic producers like PFO. Without this reform, we face continued unfair competition and barriers to international trade that hinder the expansion of our business.



Background

Peninsula Fresh Organics (PFO) is a family-owned certified organic vegetable farm based in Baxter, Victoria, with over 40 years of farming experience. Established by Wayne and Natasha Shields in 2010, PFO has grown from an initial 3 acres to over 350 acres across four farms, supplying high-quality organic produce to wholesale markets, major supermarkets, and consumers directly via a farm gate shop in Melbourne's eastern suburbs.

Our key vegetable lines include leeks, broccoli, spring onion, lettuce, radishes, kale, chard, and Asian greens such as Pak Choy. We plant approximately 10 million seedlings annually, generating a weekly turnover of \$200,000, making us one of the largest certified organic vegetable producers in Australia. PFO supplies major markets, including Coles and Woolworths nationwide, and wholesale Markets on Australia's east coast. We hold certifications with Australian Certified Organic Standard (ACOS), National Standard (NS), HARPS, Freshcare, and Fair Farms, ensuring we meet the highest industry standards for food safety and sustainability.

Wayne Shields brings over 40 years of vegetable farming experience and plays an active leadership role in the organic industry. He has served on the board of Australian Certified Organic (ACO) for over 6 years, including 2 years as Chairman, leading the largest organic certifying body in Australia. Before this, Wayne served as President of the Victorian Farmers Markets Association for 4 years. His extensive experience and industry involvement gives him a unique perspective on the benefits of domestic organic regulation for the small end of the organic industry to the large end of the organic industry, making him as a strong advocate for the certified organic sector.

Natasha established Peninsula Fresh Organics with Wayne in 2010, after a career in IT at Toll Holdings. Natasha has been managing the marketing, sales and Farmers Markets side of the business since it started. She has won several awards: Chairman's Award, ACO, Bronze Award – Weekly Times Farmer of the year and Bronze Award – ACO Grower of the year for her work in organics and farming. In 2019, she was awarded the prestigious Nuffield Scholarship to investigate alternative packaging options and shelf-life outcomes for fresh produce to minimise the use of plastics in Australia's retail environment.

PFO is deeply invested in the organic industry, participating in trade missions to the USA, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, and attending industry forums such as Hort Connections and ACO events. We use Integrated Pest Management and have collaborated with RegenAG for 9 years to improve soil health and crop resilience.

Our business supports regional employment, we have over 40 full time staff with 45% of our workforce being women. Over the years, PFO has invested heavily and continues to invest in it's own production and development of the greater industry.



Impacts

Unfair Competition Due to Lack of Regulation and Greenwashing

Australia's lack of domestic regulation allows conventional operators to label products as "organic," misleading consumers and undermining the efforts of certified organic producers. This practice, known as greenwashing, creates confusion and erodes consumer trust. This is particularly rife in the South Australian market at the moment.

The Bill will provide enforceable protections, ensuring only certified organic products can be labeled as such, thereby protecting consumers and rewarding certified producers for their investment and commitment.

Surveys show that one-third of Australian organic consumers have felt misled when purchasing organic products. Additionally, 90% of consumers agree or strongly agree on the need for regulation to address this issue. Without a national standard and logo, consumers currently rely on various certification logos, which adds to confusion both domestically and internationally.

By introducing clear regulation and an enforceable standard, the Bill will protect consumers from misleading claims and greenwashing while ensuring that the onus is no longer on consumers to investigate product legitimacy.

Stifled Investment and Market Growth

Without domestic regulation, counterfeit organic products flood the market, discouraging investment in people, land, infrastructure, and equipment. PFO, despite being a significant player in the organic industry, faces challenges in growing our business due to this unfair competition. Clear regulation will curtail these counterfeit claims, enabling certified producers to confidently invest and grow.

Barriers to Export Markets

Australia's lack of domestic organic regulation has restricted our ability to access key international markets, particularly the USA and South Korea. These countries require equivalent domestic regulatory frameworks to establish trade agreements. Without such agreements, producers must undergo costly and time-consuming certification processes, creating supply chain inefficiencies.

Establishing domestic regulation will reduce compliance costs, streamline certification processes, and create opportunities for bilateral equivalency agreements, allowing Australian organic producers to compete more effectively on the global stage.



Conclusion

The National Organic Standard Bill 2024 is a vital reform that will protect certified organic producers, restore consumer trust, and enhance Australia’s access to global organic markets. By establishing a clear legal definition for "organic," this Bill will eliminate unfair competition, level the playing field, and unlock significant economic opportunities for businesses like Peninsula Fresh Organics.

The introduction of enforceable regulation will address greenwashing, protect consumers, and reduce the burden of international certification compliance. Australia must align with global standards to ensure our organic industry thrives and competes on the international stage.

Peninsula Fresh Organics urges the committee to support the National Organic Standard Bill 2024. This reform will secure the future of Australia’s organic sector, providing the regulatory certainty needed for businesses like ours to grow, innovate, and contribute to the broader agricultural economy.

We are very happy to discuss any of these matters further.

Wayne Shields



Peninsula Fresh Organics