



October 25, 2010

Jeanette Radcliffe
Committee Secretary
Senate References Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100 - Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Jeanette,

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc.) (WAFarmers) thanks you for your letter of October 5, 2010 inviting our comments to the Senate References Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport's Inquiry into biosecurity and quarantine arrangements.

As background, the Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc.) (WAFarmers) is the State's largest and most influential rural lobby and service organisation. WAFarmers represents approximately 4,000 Western Australian farmers from a range of primary industries including grain growers, meat and wool producers, pastoralists, horticulturalists, dairy farmers, commercial egg producers and beekeepers.

Collectively our members are major contributors to the \$5.5 billion gross value of production that agriculture in its various forms contributes annually to Western Australia's economy. Additionally, through differing forms of land tenure, our members own, control and capably manage many millions of hectares of the State's land mass and as such are responsible for maintaining the productive capacity and environmental well being of that land.

WAFarmers notes the very tight 'post federal-election' timeline provided for the Inquiry, and in providing a timely response, has not commented on all of the Inquiry's terms of reference, but rather focuses on the issue of greatest importance to our members, the level of resourcing into biosecurity and quarantine arrangements, and its impacts on the implementations of the Beale Review.

In the letter to Minister Burke which accompanied his report, 'One Biosecurity – A working partnership' (September 30, 2008) Roger Beale wrote *"Australia's biosecurity system has worked well in the past, and is often the envy of other countries. However, the system is far from perfect and recent events have exposed a number of systemic deficiencies. The Report recommends far-reaching changes to rectify these problems while enhancing the good aspects of the system."*

Further he commented *"Australia's biosecurity agencies are significantly under-resourced. To achieve One Biosecurity: a working partnership, a funding increase in the order of \$260 million per annum—shared between business and taxpayers—is required. An investment of the order*

of \$225 million is also required to upgrade information technology and business systems for biosecurity.”

On 18 December 2008, the government released the report and provided in-principle agreement to the report's 84 recommendations.

As late as the date of this submission, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's website lists, on its 'Beale FAQ' page:

9. How will the government fund the biosecurity reforms?

The government has accepted all 84 recommendations in-principle. The Australian Government is committed to reforms to strengthen Australia's biosecurity system as outlined in the preliminary response released in December 2008. The Australian Government's response to these reforms is underway, however further changes will be subject to whole-of-government budget processes.

Yet despite the repeatedly stated commitment in this area, the Federal Government continues to significantly under-invest in financing the outcomes of the Beale Review.

The Labor Party's Agricultural Policy Statement, released pre election on August 17, 2010, identifies the extent of the shortfall in government funding the Beale recommendations, commenting that; *“the Government has agreed in-principle to all 84 recommendations in the Beale Review. Labor has invested \$14.7m to build an IT system that helps 75 biosecurity information systems to talk to one another, and \$20 million over four years to progress further reforms.”*

One effect of this underinvestment was most recently highlighted by the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee's Inquiry into the Management of the removal of the rebate for AQIS export certification functions (September 2009). The Inquiry's final report noted ongoing uncertainty and frustration for farmers, with the removal of government funding, a constant expectation that 'industry' will be required to meet the difference of this underinvestment and with the lack of consultation that accompanied the decision.

WAFarmers contends that these comments can be more broadly applied to the implementation of other aspects of the Beale Review and that as such the development of Roger Beale's proposed *“seamless biosecurity system that fully involves all the appropriate players—business, other nations, the states and territories and the Australian community—across pre-border, border and post-border risk management measures”* is a long way from being realised.

WAFarmers thanks you for consideration of this submission. WAFarmers would welcome the opportunity to discuss these further, should the Inquiry hold public forums at a later date. Should you wish to discuss this, or issues raised in our submission, please contact either WAFarmers Director of Policy, Alan Hill or I.

Yours sincerely

Mike Norton
President