

21.5.99

Mr Ian Dundas
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Dundas

Re: Standing Committee on Primary Producer Access to Gene Technology

The Cattlemen's Union received information about the above inquiry and we have been discussing the implications of gene technology for the beef industry and our members. I do realise that the time for submitting written comments has passed but I would be grateful if you could add the following comments to any others that have been made by members of the beef industry as our industry has particular problems not similar to other industries.

- Future value and importance:
 - * need for animals that produce meat to specific variations to suit market and QA demands,
 - * need for animals that produce well in different climates and conditions,
 - * the industry has been importing frozen semen and embryos from cattle overseas that have demonstrated an ability to survive in our climate and also to resist tick and fly infestation and these cattle have been bred with local varieties to improve herds and produce new breeds. It is necessary for the industry to do this and continually upgrade the ability of the cattle to produce in our environment in order to remain internationally competitive.
- Ability to compete:
 - * animals need a long time to become genetically modified and it is difficult to anticipate market signals with such a long run in time
 - * cost of genetically modifying animals is very high
 - * traditional products have been developed over years to suit consumer demands that have now changed and the costs of altering herds is high and time consuming
 - * Australian beef can still compete internationally but it is becoming more difficult
- Commercialisation:
 - * producer's cost to introduce new gene strains into established herds is very high and requires changes to breeding regimes and herd composition
 - * requires the selling off of already established herds, probably at a much lower cost than the cost of establishing the herd over a period of time
 - * reputation of particular properties for good animals built over a long time and not easily replaced.
- Cost of new varieties:
 - * very high
 - * very long term
 - * not necessarily suitable for long term use if consumer needs change
 - * each international market has different needs and producers find it difficult to choose which market to target due to changing economic influences throughout the world
- Other impediments:
 - * very little money being spent on research in the industry
 - * cost too high for small producers and they have to rely on industry funded research

- * producers are already tightly stretched trying to earn a living
- Assistance:
 - * none
 - * variety rights protected but small producers find it impossible to take advantage of new strains in short term
 - * once able to do so the commercial advantages have been lost
- Variety protection rights:
 - * As research into new breeds are commercialised when research is completed, this means that producers have to have a commercial interest in the initial research to be able to benefit from the new technology. Most producers are not able to afford this luxury.
- Opportunities to educate public:
 - * not particularly appropriate for animals as we do not focus consumers on the fact that animals have to die so they can eat meat.

I hope the above information is useful to the committee and, if you have any queries, please contact me on the above number. Once again, I apologise for the delay in responding.

Yours sincerely

Jean McRuvie

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER