



National Farmers'
FEDERATION

26 March 2013

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
pwd@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: NEW POST ENTRY QUARANTINE FACILITY – SUBMISSION TO THE
PARLIAMENTARY PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE**

National Farmers' Federation (NFF) welcomes the opportunity to have input into the development of a new Commonwealth owned and operated post-entry quarantine facility proposed for Donnybrook Road, Mickleham, Victoria.

NFF supports Australia having robust and credible biosecurity arrangements that provide effective protection for our multi-billion dollar agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries from pest, weed and disease outbreaks and incursions. The ongoing management and maintenance of post-entry quarantine facilities has been a concern, and an upgrading of facilities in Australia is warranted. NFF supports significant new and ongoing investment by the government in this regard to ensure Australian industry can benefit from state-of-the-art facilities that provide the highest levels of biosecurity protection.

NFF understands that the government has made a decision to consolidate the operations of five existing post-entry quarantine facilities into a single facility in Melbourne. While appreciating the cost, efficiency and management gains to be made through this move, NFF is concerned about risks to the operations of the facility and potential for inadvertent release in the event of a major animal disease incident on the site. It is acknowledged that these concerns relate to any facility, old or new; the difference with Mickleham is its singularity: the impact of incidents is magnified when back-up facilities are limited or non-existent.

Specifically, NFF seeks assurances that:

1. there are sufficient safeguards in place through the design of the facility to protect against a repeat of the equine influenza outbreak of 2007 from the Eastern Creek quarantine station;
2. should an outbreak of any exotic disease occur at the facility, there are adequate provisions for unrelated importations already in the planning pipeline to continue while the new facility is shut down and being decontaminated; and

3. the risk of any disease spreading from one part of the facility to another during an outbreak is as close to zero as humanly possible.

NFF notes that the Melbourne facility is, in many cases, a significant distance from production areas, particularly those of northern and western Australia. While this is desirable from a biosecurity viewpoint, it raises questions about emulating the environmental conditions, and sourcing of appropriate skills and expertise for management of plants and animals, normally associated with arid, tropical and/or subtropical production zones. NFF would appreciate a description of the strategy intended to counter this phenomenon.

Finally, the availability of appropriately trained and qualified staff will be critical to the successful operation of the facility; NFF wishes to stress the importance of this being a significant consideration when developing the facility.

If you require further information from NFF, please contact me or NFF's Biosecurity and Animal Management Committee Secretariat, Justin Toohey (02 6684 7798).

Yours faithfully

Mr Matt Linnegar
Chief Executive Officer
National Farmers' Federation