



9 November 2011

Dear Editor

Last week the NFF Members' Council – the Presidents of all our member organisations – met in Canberra for our annual AGM and policy debate.

One of the issues on the agenda was the proposed Bill by Independent MP Tony Windsor to amend the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act 1999) to include a water trigger in response to the massive expansion of coal seam gas (CSG) exploration.

Many farmers believe that this Bill may benefit farmers, but our concern is that it also poses a potential threat to the agricultural industry in the longer-term. Which is why, after rigorous debate from our Sustainability Committee, our Water Committee, the Mining and CSG Taskforce and the NFF Members' Council, the majority of our members voted against supporting the Bill (and subsequently a similar Bill proposed by Greens Senator Larissa Waters) for two very clear reasons.

Firstly, there is a major concern among many of our members about the potential ramification of such Bills on agriculture under the EPBC Act. The Bills as they currently stand propose tightening of water restrictions for petroleum companies under the Act. Many of our members are concerned that down the track, these restrictions could easily be legislated across the board – meaning that farmers could in fact have additional restrictions in accessing water under the Act.

Secondly, some members are very concerned with the concept of the Federal Government coming in over the top and adding another layer of regulation and red tape for farmers. What they want is a commitment from their respective State Governments to getting the regulation around CSG right via a tightening of legislation. The majority of our members believe that the CSG issue can be dealt with at a State level, with Federal Government input to ensure consistency of legislation across the country.

In considering the issue, NFF Members' Council was extremely mindful and aware of the impacts of the CSG industry on water quantity and water quality. In the end, the majority of our members did not see the proposed EPBC Act water trigger as the right solution.

Our members' position in not supporting either Bill was made after very careful consideration of the impacts of such proposed legislation on farmers and the agricultural sector across Australia both now and in the future. We know that this decision may not prove the popular one in the short-term, but are confident it will prove the right one in the long-term.

Jock Laurie
President, NFF