



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS

| # | Member | Question | Hansard Reference |
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| NF01QON | Dr Mulino | <p>CHAIR: You've obviously received a lot of feedback off the record where people are comfortable talking to you about this, and so you're confident that this has the impacts we've talked about. Have you undertaken an anonymised survey or anything like that in a more structured way?</p> <p>Mr Denton: We're doing that at the moment for the poultry meat industry. We're doing an anonymised online survey and doing grower workshops. The challenge we find is that, even doing these surveys and doing these direct grower engagements, the threat of commercial retribution is so strong that even for something that is run by the National Farmers Federation with the option to be anonymous, they won't come forward and they won't give us their experiences.</p> <p>CHAIR: It would be great to get the results of that when it's done.</p> <p>Mr Denton: Definitely. We can provide that to you and brief the committee on what the results are, to give you that insight around what the feedback we're getting is. We're also happy to have that conversation with our members and brief the committee and do it anonymously and privately around what that experience looks like.</p> | Proof Transcript, 25 July 2023, p. 18 |
| NF02QON | Mr Van Manen | <p>Mr Denton: We've had conversations this year with farmers who will order new tractors. Those tractors are manufactured overseas. They come in and they sit at our ports for a really long period of time—time that can't be used on farm. If you're looking at a new harvester and that harvester is sitting in port and not during the grain harvest, that has a direct impact on the ability of that farmer to harvest and really get the benefit of that new tech on farm.</p> <p>Mr VAN MANEN: Sorry to jump in, but what do you consider a long time and how does the time that it sits at</p> | Proof Transcript, 25 July 2023, p. 19 |

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| | | <p>the port compare to overseas? What is the reason it sits at the port?</p> <p>Mr Denton: We'd have to take on notice as to what that time looks like in comparative countries.....</p> | |
| NF03QON | Mr Van Manen | <p>Mr VAN MANEN: What if any impacts on the agricultural workforce have there been from recent IR or proposed IR changes today?</p> <p>Mr Denton: That's a challenging one. I might have to take that one on notice and consult with our IR team. They can give you a more comprehensive answer than I can. The high-level thing I would say in that space is that we are still looking at what these changes are going to mean for farm businesses and we're still working through what that detail looks like, but I'll take that question on notice.</p> | Proof Transcript, 25 July 2023, p. 20 |
| NF04QON | Mr Van Manen | <p>Mr VAN MANEN: Why can't these transmission lines be used in existing road or rail corridors? I'm happy for you to take that on notice and put that on the table....</p> <p>Mr Denton: I'm happy to take those on notice.</p> | Proof Transcript, 25 July 2023, p. 20 |
| NF05QON | Mr Van Manen | <p>Mr VAN MANEN:The final one, which I'll put on notice as well, is: what is the impact of commercial-scale solar farms taking over agricultural land and therefore impacting on agricultural productivity and viability?</p> <p>Mr Denton: I'm happy to take those on notice.</p> | Proof Transcript, 25 July 2023, p. 20 |

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| NF06QON | Ms Lawrence | <p>Ms LAWRENCE: In the interests of time, I'm happy for this to go as a question on notice. Just continuing on the theme of research and development, you briefed Mr Charlton around some of the innovations in agriculture, but I was hopeful we would see a bit more around improving productivity and not just for domestic purposes but for export and in the context of climate change. I'm interested as to what the NFF sees as the investment needed for climate adaptation to ensure that we maintain and grow our productivity in agriculture, but also ensure that we remain competitive both domestically and for export as well?</p> <p>Mr Denton: I'm happy to provide more detail on that on notice.....</p> <p>Ms LAWRENCE: Could you provide any comparative analytical data on what other countries have invested and the results achieved as compared to where Australia is at and where it needs to be?</p> <p>.....</p> | Proof Transcript, 25 July 2023, p. 22 |

NF01QON

The NFF is continuing to deliver the project 'Exploring the potential for a Code of Conduct to increase price transparency and competition in Australian poultry meat supply chains'. The NFF has completed its stakeholder engagement with poultry producers but has not finalised analysis of the findings. The NFF is happy will organize a briefing with the Committee once this is complete.

NF02QON

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant disruption to global supply chains and increasing delivery times of products. It is estimated that for agricultural machinery, overall delivery times have been up to double their normal expected period. Normally, delivery times are approximately 6 months however, recently these delivery times have been closer to 12 months, an approximate doubling of port processing times is a contributor to these delays. These delays have been attributed to an increase in vehicle imports through Australian ports and an increase in the number of biosecurity failings.

NF03QON

The recent Industrial Relations legislation has a number of positive and negative effects that will impact Australian agriculture. There are a number of measures which the NFF can support, subject to their practical implementation. Those changes include the Small Business Redundancy Exemption and Strengthening Protection Against Discrimination. The NFF's support extends to the introduction of a criminal "wage theft" provision and increases to penalties for underpayments. However, that support is tempered with frustration at the missed opportunity to introduce a national labour hire licensing scheme — as Labor promised in the 2022 Federal election — and other measures to assist employers navigate the compliance trap which is the Australian industrial relations scheme.

Unfortunately, however, the Bill is not limited to those sensible reforms and includes a number of changes which our members find deeply concerning.

A new definition of Employment and changes to the meaning of Casual Employee will restrict flexibility in managing workplaces and deprive businesses of certainty without any clear rationalisation. The Bill will expand the reach, power, and role of unions at a cost to business. They will, inter alia, be able to drive and prosecute the 'casual employee choice' process, approve the repeal of Multi-Enterprise Agreements, apply for 'regulated labour hire' and alternate 'protected pay rates' orders, and prosecute the creation of regulated labour-hire arrangement avoidance measures. Furthermore, union delegates' rights will be enshrined — and in some cases funded by the employer. And most alarmingly, unions will have enhanced rights to enter farms unannounced, potentially intruding on personal privacy and creating biosecurity, animal welfare, and health and safety risks.

The Bill will give the Fair Work Commission power to make decisions reaching beyond traditional workplace arrangements, authorising it to dictate commercial arrangements. The Bill establishes a regime for dictating pay arrangements in labour hire circumstances which, despite claims to the contrary, will have a significant impact on the farming sector. It will directly impact large producers who make-up a significant part of the sector, while additional costs which are created within the supply chain — e.g. imposed on storage, packing and processing facilities — will flow down to smaller farms.

Finally, and perhaps most concerning, the changes generally will increase the complexity and obfuscate the industrial relations system, the risk and difficulty of small business compliance, and inflexibility in managing labour.

NF04QON

Questions of transmission line co-location with existing infrastructure corridors are best directed to the transmission line sector. The NFF continues to call on all companies to engage early with landholders so that sensible and logical design can be used to limit impact on agricultural land. To date, planning and construction companies prove they aren't prepared to do so.

NF05QON

The NFF has received anecdotal evidence that there are currently few productivity impacts experienced due to the development of solar arrays on agricultural land. This is due to many solar arrays still being in the planning processes. Additionally, many existing solar arrays have been installed through private arrangement between farmers and energy companies. This direct arrangement has allowed farmers to make decisions based on the viability of their individual farm and implementing practices and land-use planning that benefits the farm's operations.

The greatest impact currently witness is the result of uncertainty caused through public planning processes such as the Renewable Energy Zones. This uncertainty is having a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of farmers who may be subjected to new renewable energy installations. This uncertainty is compounded by the ineffective consultation processes from transmission line planners and construction companies.

NF06QON

The NFF supports increased investment in agricultural research and development to support farmers adapt to new and emerging challenges. New research and development is essential for increasing on-farm productivity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to the impacts of climate change and ultimately increasing farm business resilience.

There is long-term growth in total agricultural research and development funding in Australia. In 2020-21, total agricultural R&D funding in 2020-21 was \$2.20 billion. This has grown at an average annual growth rate of 4.35% from 2011-12 to 2020-21.

The NFF refers the Committee to data from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Science (ABARES) on productivity comparisons. This data shows that while Australia has lower rates of productivity growth compared to the USA and Canada, Australia's productivity growth has remained competitive despite challenges such as greater climate variability, remoteness from global markets and a smaller capacity for rural R&D.