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CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY FOR EGG FARMERS

- **Eggs farmers disappointed new hen welfare guidelines not finalised - after waiting over seven years**
- **Industry angry there is still no certainty for conventional cage farmers**
- **Farmers require Government support for exit and structural adjustment packages**

Angry Aussie egg farmers are dissatisfied the animal welfare guidelines released yesterday fail to allow the option for conventional cage egg production to continue for a further 24 years.

The standards and guidelines are an important issue for egg farmers impacting their livelihood and profitability. Egg Farmers of Australia and state farming organisations will carefully consider the document to progress a favourable outcome for industry.

Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for poultry include the care of layer hens.

Industry leaders today called for the federal and state governments to consider restructure and exit packages to help assist farmers should they be required to transition from conventional cage egg farming before 2046. Conventional cages contribute 50% of the nation's egg production.

Egg Farmers of Australia have not had any consultation on structural adjustment or exit packages and nor was this discussed with industry by those that were engaged to write the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS).

Egg Farmers of Australia CEO Melinda Hashimoto said the guidelines had taken over seven long years in process and given industry has not been listened to they are a 'slap in the face' for the nation's hard-working cage egg farmers.

"Unfortunately, the review totally ignored evidence on why conventional cages should continue until 2046," Mrs Hashimoto said. From the original draft it was explained that you can't close down part of a business due to the time cages are built and come back to shut another few sheds in later years.

"The document says conventional cage farming must cease with a timeline suggested as early as 2031 and at the latest by 2036. It's 10 years too early and could drive many family egg farmers to the wall. This is because bank loans can spread over 30 years for existing cages and equipment. Farmers now don't have time to pay-off that debt before they must dump their cages."

In agriculture the lifecycle for assets to be written off is 20 years and it is unprecedented that Government would consider closing farmers businesses in a short timeframe that could possibly be just 9 years.

Egg Farmers of Australia Chair Bede Burke said "A long lead in time to phase out cages was required to ensure farmers could exit without debt. Given our submission has been ignored by current Agriculture Ministers across the nation, state agriculture Ministers need to work through how an industry crossing borders can deal with changes to state legislation on the standards and guidelines.

"We could end up with different standards in different states which is not ideal and could have been avoided through AGMIN advising a timeline for implementation."

"Given that farmers borrow millions of dollars from banks to invest in cage eggs, the new S&G guidelines fail to allow them time to pay off current debt and re-invest in alternate farming methods," he said.

Mrs Hashimoto warned the move would contribute to a shortage of eggs in Australia in the future.

"According to the CSIRO, 40% of egg sales in Australian supermarkets were caged eggs. Without them, Australian families would face less choice, a shortage of eggs and higher egg prices," she said.

In comparison to barn or free range: cage eggs are cheaper and have the lowest carbon footprint of any egg farming method, she said.

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