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EGG FARMERS TO DEMAND COMPENSATION IF CAGE EGGS END EARLY

Concerned Aussie egg farmers will demand state government compensation packages if Australia's agriculture ministers bring an early end to cage eggs across the nation.

The warning comes ahead of a joint meeting of the federal and all state agriculture ministers in Perth on July 13.

The meeting was expected to endorse a national update of the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry* (S&G) – which governs the way hens are cared for on free range, cage and barn laid egg farms.

Egg Farmers of Australia CEO Melinda Hashimoto said the peak egg farming body had asked the S&G review panel to delay an end to conventional cage egg farming until 2046. Phasing out an egg production system will lead to higher egg prices for consumers.

“The concern is, that as the draft document currently reads, the new standards would set a deadline of 2036 for an end to conventional cage egg farming practices. That’s 10 years earlier than the egg industry had requested,” Ms Hashimoto said.

“This will impact on the livelihood of current cage farmers – who say they will demand compensation from their relevant state government, if their agriculture minister rubber stamps the review panel’s recommendation.”

Egg Farmers of Australia Chair Bede Burke said cage egg farmers in states like NSW had wanted extra time to allow them to adjust financially. The proposal for a staggered five-year phase out is unrealistic.

“We want them to hold off on any phase-out of conventional caged eggs until 2046. That’s because it can take 30 years to pay-off bank debt on existing cage infrastructure,” Mr Burke said.

“As it stands, the new draft S&G guidelines mean this phase out would be a decade early and that could financially ruin some family egg farms. If the document is not changed, then cage egg farmers would expect state government compensation - just like the seafood industry obtained when their livelihoods were ruined by new state rules,” Mr Burke warned.

Currently, cages make up 50% of the nation’s total egg production. Mr Burke said there was further concern that any early phase-out of cages would cause future egg shortages.

“It’s critical that all state agriculture ministers around Australia thoroughly review the draft S&G document. They must realise that they will damage the lives of cage egg farming families, if they don’t push the phase-out of conventional cages further back to 2046,” he said.

“If they don’t, the ministers better start budgeting millions of dollars for compensation packages to help cage farmers transition into new egg production methods or exit the egg industry altogether.”

Media Contact: Melinda Hashimoto 0434 999 600 CEO Egg Farmers of Australia info@eggfarmersaustralia.org

