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FUTURE OF THE NATION'S CHEAPEST SOURCE OF EGGS STILL IN LIMBO

The future of cage egg production in Australia continues to remain in limbo with farmers no closer to knowing if they have a future in the industry.

The observation was made after the federal and all state agriculture ministers signed-off on new *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry* in Perth today.

After waiting 11 years, Australian egg farmers are relieved that a long-awaited update of standards governing the wellbeing of hens on their farms has finally been completed at a national level.

But Egg Farmers of Australia CEO Melinda Hashimoto said farmers in various states had mixed reactions.

“Our free range and barn laid sectors have the green light to expand, but cage egg producers are in limbo with no clear picture about their future in Australia’s egg supply chain,” she warned.

“That’s because the ministers voted to end cage eggs, but left the phase out time to each state to decide. This could be good news or bad news for producers – depending on how long the states allow cage eggs to continue to be sold. Consequently, we need clarity from states so that farmers can plan for their future.”

Cage eggs are the cheapest available and remain the most affordable protein for Aussie families. Compared to the other egg farming methods: cage eggs farming has the lowest carbon footprint; the lowest incidence of cannibalism among hen flocks; and the lowest incident of disease.

An earlier draft S&G document had set a deadline of 2036 for an end to conventional cages – 10 years earlier than the egg industry had requested to 2046.

Ms Hashimoto hoped that many states would now wait until to 2046 to cease cage production and warned that farmers would seek state compensation if conventional production ceased earlier.

Egg Farmers of Australia Chair Bede Burke said cage farmers in states like NSW had wanted extra time to allow them to adjust financially.

“We want until 2046. That’s because it can take up to 30 years to pay-off debt on an existing cage egg businesses. Any earlier time frame would financially impact on many family egg farms,” Mr Burke warned.

He said currently cages make up about 50% of the nation’s total egg production and a premature phase-out could spark future egg shortages and higher prices for consumers, already struggling with the cost of living.

State egg farming bodies will now work with their relevant state agriculture minister on the issue.

EFA egg farming representatives in your state:

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