



NSW Fresh Food Pricing Parliamentary Inquiry Hearing

On Friday 22 June 2018, AFSA attended the NSW Fresh Food Pricing Parliamentary Inquiry Hearing at Parliament House in Sydney. Tammi Jonas and Sarah de Wit thank the Committee once more for allowing us this opportunity to participate in the Inquiry.

Questions on Notice:

NSW Farmers Association Proposal for an Agriculture Commissioner

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I know you said that you do not participate in selling to supermarkets but one of the proposals from NSW Farmers which you may have seen is for an agricultural commissioner, the idea being that you would have someone to advocate on behalf of farmers because of their lack of bargaining power in that relationship. Would you support such an arrangement, perhaps around giving them the ability to enforce minimum commercial standards?

Ms JONAS: I would probably have to take that on notice, to be fair. I did not see it—I must have missed that. Again the problems are quite different and I find that things that commodity farmers advocate for are not always going to be the same needs for the farmers we represent. I am happy to take that on notice and consider it with our committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you could think about whether you think having an agricultural commissioner would be important and what their role could potentially be—what you would like to see them do— that would be very useful for us.

Summary

At the Inquiry Hearing we were asked to respond to the NSW Farmers Association's proposal for "a state-based commissioner or advocate for the farming sector to address issues" relating to fresh food pricing. The Association made this proposal in their submission. We did not have a formal position on the proposal but took it on notice to consult with the AFSA Committee.

AFSA's Position on the Proposal

After the Hearing, the AFSA Committee discussed its views on the pros and cons of this proposal. We considered what an Agriculture Commissioner's role might be and came to the conclusion that we do not support the proposal. Such an initiative would simply be incapable of examining all externalised costs associated with food production accruing to all levels, including the

consumer level. The question of who would fund the Commissioner and what powers they would be allocated remains unanswered. Whether such an individual would be capable of genuinely representing the diverse interests of the sector and its many interrelated networks of suppliers and distributors also remains to be explained.

While AFSA notes that having an independent Red Tape Commissioner in Victoria has assisted in efforts to reduce regulatory burden in the state, we believe it would be impossible to create a role that genuinely is responsive to all scales of farming, as well as wholesalers, retailers and consumers effectively and independently. We are of the view that the NSW Farmers' Association's submission made starkly clear their emphasis on scaling up "paddock to port" infrastructure and increasing expenditure on export channels for monocrops. In making such intentions explicit, their submission blatantly missed the intent of the Inquiry by undermining *fresh* food access to NSW residents. We see their suggestion of establishing a food hub neighbouring the airport a hollow attempt at supporting domestic food exchange, as the area is inaccessible and impedes the Right to Food. In that regard, we believe the proposal will not serve NSW residents better access to fresh food, and nor will it better support democratic participation in the food system.

Other responses to the Committee (NOT a question on notice)

Should governments be more involved in Food Pricing

In general, AFSA does not believe government has a strong role to play in food pricing. However, where there are low-income communities in need of support to access nutritious, fresh, local food, government can play a role by paying local producers full price for their produce and then subsidising the sale of this food to low-income households, whether directly through models such as community-supported agriculture (CSA), or through local greengrocers or independent grocery stores, and/or through cooked meals at dedicated venues (similar to Belo Horizonte's 'popular restaurants', where lunch is \$1 no matter who is buying it).