

**Submission  
No 70**

**INQUIRY INTO LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF THE  
DAIRY INDUSTRY IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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## **Submission: Long-term sustainability of the dairy industry in New South Wales**

Thankyou for the opportunity to contribute to this submission process. I live on the North Coast of NSW, traditionally a dairy region since the 1890's, where you will find relics of the past, the old Butter Factory buildings in the local towns and villages and where farmers separated the cream from the milk and the skim milk was considered a by-product and was fed to pigs. When margarine was introduced in the 1960's and became a popular substitute for butter many farmers in the region left the dairy industry. As we evolve now there is a rise of plant-based milks and products due to consumers demanding more ethical, sustainable, healthy, environment and climate friendly food choices. Both the Dairy Industry and Government need to acknowledge the shift in consumer awareness and spending and the need for significant change.

I believe that the Terms of Reference are very narrow in their scope and do not factor in many contributors to the unsustainability of the Dairy Industry

My submission will however respond to the Terms of Reference by addressing :

### **(a)the nature of, and relationship within, the value chain between farmers, processors, logistics companies and retailers and their respective influence on price**

Prices are down -8% to -40% in most regions ( Dairy podcast 25 Situation and Outlook Report, June 2020- Dairy Australia ). Domestic and international markets are changing and retailers will be demanding more healthy, environmentally friendly and ethical food products. The rise of the plant-based milk market should alert the dairy industry to what is ahead in consumer demand.

### **(b) the impact of external influences on the dairy industry, including but not limited to drought, water, energy and price-setting,**

The Dairy industry is in crisis but if you factored in the real costs of dairy such as the intensive water use, land degradation, water pollution and methane emissions the industry's viability comes into question. A study based on the global milk supply and conducted in 2018 demonstrated that 628 litres of water are required to produce one litre of cow's milk. This is clearly not sustainable and I as a taxpayer do not want my tax dollars propping up an unsustainable and dying industry.

In Australia there are over 1.5 million cows kept and used in the dairy industry (RSPCA Australia 2020) with approximately 10% of those in NSW ( 155,000 in NSW according to Dairy Australia 2018/19) every one of which is contributing to environmental degradation and at the same time being exploited and killed at an early age, and all for a product that has questionable health benefits as dairy milk is designed for baby cows as opposed to adult humans.

The industry must acknowledge that the exploitation of animals for their body fluids intended for their own baby, which includes forced breeding, continual impregnation, painful procedures, deprivation of the mother/baby bond, the slaughter of babies within days of birth is becoming more unacceptable by the day and the industry is losing it's social license. Young calves being killed in the dairy industry as 'waste products' goes against community expectations. For dairy calves in their first week of life, to spend their last night on earth,

hungry and far from their mother's care in a crowded slaughterhouse is unconscionable. This is what the dairy industry needs to reflect on, not how to squeeze more dollars out of animals, the environment and the health of the community.

Despite recent reporting of generally improved seasonal conditions the industry must also take into account that our weather is changing along with domestic and global markets, and particularly with no action being taken by the Government to address the climate crisis. Below average rainfall with more droughts, and record temperatures as well as extreme weather events could become normal.

Challenges remain for farmers in regions where there is low rainfall, high cost of feed, urban growth, prone to flood/fire and the emerging and catastrophic effects of the climate crisis. But the Dairy industry itself has an impact on climate, deforestation, species extinction, etc and has unsustainable practices with intensive water use and land and water degradation and pollution. Industries such as this that contribute to the climate crisis, ecosystem collapse, and are water and feed intensive have no future. The world currently produces enough food to feed 1.5 times the current world population but instead chooses to feed an animal agriculture industry at the expense of the starving and malnourished.

**(c) the impact of previous policies, in particular, the deregulation of the dairy industry,**

Prior to deregulation of the Dairy Industry in 2000 the government supported domestic dairy prices, restricting imports and subsidising the industry with public funds. Deregulation has shown just how unsustainable the industry is and has only proved that the industry is not economically viable. The industry must realise that both domestic and international markets are changing in regard to their attitude to the dairy industry for ethical, environmental and also health reasons.

**(d) the role of government in addressing key economic challenges to the industry,**

Animal agriculture is inherently unsustainable both environmentally and economically. There has been a dramatic decline in the numbers of dairy farms in Australia, from close to 22,000 in 1980 to less than 6,000 in 2018 (Australian Dairy Industry Council 2019). 2018/19 saw an average net farm income for dairy farmers of -\$31,779 ( Dairy Farm Monitor Project 2018/19 – NSW Overview). Why would Dairy Farmers throw more good money after bad? With the National Dairy Farmer Survey showing that only 44 % are positive about the industry future, it is time for the Government to step in with meaningful action and help Dairy Farmers transition away from this unsustainable industry and towards more sustainable plant-based industries. This would also mean a megashift in the mental wellbeing of farmers as they will be farming in a more sustainable and ethical way. And when we do have catastrophic weather events there will be no bodies washed away in floods as happened here in the Northern Rivers in the 2017 floods.

When there are fires or drought farmers won't have to bury or dispose of bodies. Neither will they have to send animals off to slaughterhouses to be killed at a young age, when their bodies are spent or times are tough. They will also reduce their risk of exposing themselves and their family to contracting a zoonotic disease. And at the same time they can take advantage of new and growing markets, ones which future generations will be proud to follow suit. It is the Governments role to help farmers transition away from an industry in it's death throws and into a bright plant-based future.

**(e) the appointment, operation and effectiveness of the NSW Government's Fresh Milk and Dairy Advocate, and the Dairy Industry Advisory Panel,**

**(f) the operation, effectiveness and outcomes arising from the Commonwealth Government's Mandatory Dairy Code of Conduct, including whether additional protections, legislation or regulation are required in New South Wales to better support dairy farmers, and**

**(g) any other related matters.**

#### Ethical sustainability

The urban myth of farms being on rolling hills of green and cows spending their days grazing in the sun with plenty of trees for shade and lovingly nurturing their young who play gleefully beside their mothers is an absolute falsehood that has been perpetuated by advertising and marketing spin by the Dairy Industry. We are even told that farmers love their animals, and led to believe that they are valued members of their family. This could not be any further from the truth, with animals being killed when they are no longer of any economic value to them. Baby calves are taken away from their mothers on their first day of life and males are sent to slaughter when they are in their first week of life. They are primarily killed at approximately five days old (RSPCA Australia 2018)

This treatment of animals is not in line with community expectations and ethical thinking. These mother cows are pregnant for exactly the same time as human mothers are. Would you tear a baby away from their human mother on the day of birth and think that was acceptable? Let alone kill the baby because it did not perform any economic function. The Government must recognise the sentience of animals and their capacity to feel pain, fear and sorrow as well as happiness and joy.

Over the past fifty years, mainstream Western society has grown increasingly concerned about the treatment of other animals, particularly those used for food production (Buller and Morris 2003)

and concerns for the welfare of farmed animals is only increasing. Due to a lack of transparency in the industry and the use of creative but deceptive tools of marketing, many consumers in NSW have had limited knowledge of the common procedures and farm practices involved with dairy farming and the inherent cruelty in animal agriculture. But this perception is changing as routine but now unacceptable procedures come to light. Younger generations in particular are driving this trend for more animal friendly, ecofriendly and health conscious alternatives. It is no longer acceptable for profit to be driven by corporate interests and at the expense of other sentient beings and our shared environment.

Australian citizens are also becoming increasingly concerned about the general welfare of animals bred, used and ultimately killed for human food. Once upon a time people were ignorant to the fact that any animal died to produce dairy products, but they are becoming increasingly aware of the inherent cruelty in dairy production.

#### Environmental sustainability

Studies have shown that removing all animal products from the diet is the most optimal diet for the environment. Apart from the intensive water use and pollution and landclearing, Dairy production has a considerable effect on climate change due to emissions of greenhouse gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, and carbon dioxide. " We believe that sustainability should consider economic, environmental and social dimensions and holistically strive to delimit or remove adverse impacts" (Gunnarsson. 2020).

The land required to produce animal products covers over 80% of the world's available farmland, contributes close to 60% of food-based emissions yet provides "only 37% of our protein and 18% of our calories" (Poore and Nemecek 2018). Animal agriculture is simply not sustainable for a growing population on the earth's finite resources. We must start to consider all the other species that we also share this earth with. We are also dependent on healthy ecosystems to sustain us into the future.

### Zoonotic diseases and health

The current pandemic and ease of transmission of Covid 19 also demonstrates how dangerous it is to not seriously consider the ramifications of animal agriculture industries and their potential to create future pandemics. Landclearing for animal agriculture is the leading cause of deforestation on the east coast of Australia. Landclearing and the intensity of animal agriculture, particularly when animals are in confined and unhygienic spaces, and where profits are prioritised over animal welfare only intensify the risks in creating more potential zoonotic diseases.

The death rate from Covid 19 has also highlighted the risk associated with co-morbidities. Milk and other dairy products are the top source of saturated fat in diets, contributing to heart disease, Type 2 Diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and obesity. Studies have also linked dairy to increased risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer and prostate cancer. Dairy also contains lactose, a sugar which cannot reliably be digested by humans, leading to a high lactose intolerance in the community. I am one of those people who has a lactose intolerance and for years suffered from ill-health due to drinking milk.

Health Canada has omitted Dairy as a separate food group in their recent dietary guidelines which move away from meat and dairy requirements in a plant-based direction. Dr Hasan Hutchinson, Director General of Health, Canada's office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion said "We were very clear that when we were looking at the evidence base that we were not going to be using reports that have been funded by industry as well"

### **Recommendations:**

- The government must recognise that the Dairy Industry can no longer be propped up by tax-payer funds and has proven to be unsustainable, both environmentally and economically, and needs to assist dairy farmers to transition to sustainable plant-based agriculture.
- Dairy should be removed as a distinct food group on the Australian dietary guidelines and replaced with evidence based healthy alternatives.
- Any review of the Covid-19 epidemic here in Australia must explore the origins of zoonotic diseases causing pandemics and also examine the underlying comorbidities and the contribution of the meat and dairy industry towards the ill-health of Australians.

Thankyou for giving consideration to my submission.

Susie Header