



AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE

Submission on the Victorian Sheep and Goat Duty Review

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About the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA)

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is a farmer-led civil society organisation made up of organisations and individuals working together towards a food system in which people can create, manage, and choose their food and agriculture systems. AFSA is an independent organisation not aligned with any political party. We have around 700 farmer, individual, and organisational members, with approximately 40% of our members being farmers.

AFSA provides a balanced voice to represent farmers. We connect small- and medium-scale Australian farmers for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, work with all levels of government for scale-appropriate and consistent regulations and standards for agriculture, and advocate for fair pricing for those selling to the domestic market.

We are part of a robust global network of civil society organisations involved in food sovereignty and food security policy development and advocacy. We are members of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), La Via Campesina – the global movement of peasant farmers, and Urgenci: the International Network for Community-Supported Agriculture, and work regularly with Slow Food International and many of its Australian chapters. We also support the Australasian representative on the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM), which relates to the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Our vision is to enable regenerative and agroecological farming businesses to thrive. Australians care now more than ever about the way their food is produced, including its social and environmental impacts. Food produced on small- and medium-scale regenerative farms is increasingly in demand, and government is bound to heed changing community expectations and facilitate and encourage the growth and viability of regenerative agriculture, thereby protecting the environment and human and animal health.

As a key stakeholder and representative body of small- and medium-scale producers Australia-wide, AFSA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the review of the Victorian sheep and goat duty.

Summary of AFSA's Recommendations

Recommendation 1	Subject to Recommendation 4, AFSA recommends the adoption of Option 1 - that the current sheep and goat duty amount of 12c per head be increased to 19c initially, then increased by 3c-4c yearly for 5 years
Recommendation 2	The funds should continue to be used to subsidise the costs of electronic IDs for sheep and goats
Recommendation 3	AFSA recommends that funding for programs and projects that benefit the industry continue, subject to Recommendation 4
Recommendation 4	We request transparency in all SGCAC funding application and allocation recommendations so we can be sure that small to medium-scale farmers are being represented fairly

Recommendation 1 – Staggered Increase from 12c to 35c per Head

AFSA notes that the duty has not been increased since 1999 and generally supports a staggered increase to 35c per head as suggested by Agriculture Victoria as “Option 1”.

However, we have concerns in almost tripling the current duty amount if the current framework for funding allocations is not also reviewed. As such this Recommendation 1 is subject to our Recommendation 4 below requiring greater transparency in both funding applications and subsequent funding allocations.

Tripling the duty amount will mean a substantial increase in the total monies available to the compensation fund. Our concerns with the current governance model are set out in Recommendations 3 and 4 below.

Recommendation 2 –Subsidised Electronic IDs

AFSA supports the continued subsidisation of electronic tags for sheep and goats. Subsidisation means that a flat price is available to farmers whereas if subsidisation were not provided the tag prices would increase subject to market supply and demand. Subsidisation provides farmers with budgeting certainty, something that is important in all businesses and for AFSA's member farmers, many of whom are small start-ups, particularly.

Recommendation 3 – Programs and Projects

AFSA notes that under the relevant legislation the primary aim of the fund is to have available a pool of compensatory funding for losses caused by certain livestock disease.¹ It is not clear under the legislation how this has extended to providing “financial support to programs and

¹ Section 1 (Purpose) *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 (Vic)*

projects that benefit the sheep and goat industries.”² While the legislative basis for using compensation funds to finance programs and projects that benefit the sheep and goat industries is not overly clear, AFSA generally supports the principle, subject to our Recommendation 4 outlined below.

Recommendation 4 – Transparency of Funding Applications and Allocation Recommendations by the Sheep and Goat Compensation Advisory Committee

AFSA has concerns with the fact that extra stamp duty will mean a greater pool of funds for the Sheep and Goat Compensation Advisory Committee (SGCAC) to make allocation recommendations on.

AFSA notes that the majority of the members of the SGCAC are Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) members or affiliates. While noting that this membership representation has been prescribed by legislation³, AFSA questions if this accurately reflects small to medium scale farmers, many of whom are disenchanted with the mainstream farming approaches traditionally espoused and supported by the VFF.

Further, in considering the available “Sheep and Goat Compensation Fund Summary of Projects”⁴ it is abundantly clear that a significant amount of the stamp duty funds are directed to VFF projects. This has been noted by the media in the past⁵. It is highly unorthodox in such a governance framework to have an advisor being able to submit an application for funding, and then be a key decision maker on whether that application is granted. At best it hints at a conflict of interest, and at its worst poses a risk of corruption. AFSA recommends that this aspect of the scheme be examined to determine if this represents best practice. At a minimum AFSA advocates for full disclosure of all funding applications in the annual report, so that farmers have visibility of which projects received funding and which did not.

In conclusion, AFSA looks forward to further debate on this topic and would welcome the opportunity to discuss further if required.

² Agriculture Victoria – Sheep and Goat Duty Review – Background (<https://engage.vic.gov.au/sheep-and-goat-duty-review>)

³ Section 79I Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 and reg 78 Livestock Disease Control Regulations 2017

⁴ Sheep and Goat Compensation Fund mid-year report December 2017, Sheep and Goat Compensation Fund Summary of Projects 2016-17, Sheep and Goat Compensation Fund Summary of Projects 2015-16 (WORD - 1.2 MB)

⁵ “Victorian Farmers Federation Stamps its Claim on Sheep and Cattle Sales” Weekly Times August 23, 2017

About Food Sovereignty

“Food sovereignty asserts the right of peoples to nourishing and culturally-appropriate food produced and distributed in ecologically-sound and ethical ways, and their right to collectively determine their own food and agriculture systems.”⁶

The core of food sovereignty lies in the following principles:

- Food is a human need and a basic right, rather than a commodity.
- Food systems should be democratically constructed, responding to diverse social, cultural and environmental conditions.
- Food systems should be based on a strong commitment to social justice: for farmers, food system workers, and the most vulnerable members of our society who experience food insecurity.
- Resilient food systems require long-term environmental sustainability, transitioning away from dependence on fossil fuels and chemical inputs.
- Resilient and sustainable food systems will be more localised and regionalised.
- Trade in food and agricultural products can enhance economic and social well-being but should be conducted on the basis of international solidarity, respecting and not undermining the food sovereignty ambitions of other peoples and countries.⁷

⁶ The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, <<https://afsa.org.au/?s=food+sovereignty+>>.

⁷ Patel, R. (2009). What does food sovereignty look like? *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 36(3), 663-671.