



It's all in the PAG

Key points

- ✓ Policy Advisory Groups give farmers involvement in policy making
- ✓ Focus on five specific areas
- ✓ More farmers encouraged to be involved

AT Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) advocacy and policy is our core business. Lobbying for the rights of dairyfarmers is at the heart of everything we do.

Interim ADF chief executive officer John McQueen said most of the policy and advocacy work for ADF was carried out under five policy areas:

- Markets, trade and value chain.
- Farming systems and herd improvement.
- People and human capacity.
- Natural resources.
- Animal health and welfare.

"In order to develop, implement and review policies and projects for the continual improvement of dairyfarming in Australia, we engage directly with dairyfarmers through Policy Advisory Groups (PAGs)," Mr McQueen said.

"PAGs provide a mechanism for dairyfarmer members who want to be involved in policy development and the policy-setting processes of ADF.

"Farmer members have made a great contribution to dairy over the last 75 years, and we want this to continue."

Vice president of the Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation (QDO) and a member of the farm system PAG Ross McInnes said it was important that policy development had good representation from dairyfarmers around Australia.

"More dairyfarmers need to get involved, to ensure policies have strong linkages back to state dairyfarmer organisations and are consistent with different views and positions," he said.

"Being a PAG member means that I can be involved in the things I find interesting, such as advocating for new technologies for Australian dairyfarmers based on good science; I find it very fulfilling."

Each of the five policy focus areas has a dedicated PAG comprised of



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elected state farmer members. These groups are led by a farmer-appointed chair, working in collaboration with ADF policy officers to discuss priorities and strategic direction.

"Although PAGs are not the primary decision-making bodies at ADF, their advice and the perspective that they provide is invaluable in shaping ADF's national council including the board policy direction and advocacy efforts," Mr McInnes said.

"I encourage farmers who are members of their state dairy organisations to nominate themselves once the expression of interest application opens."

The PAG policy priorities for this year include:

Farming systems and herd improvement

Our policy priorities in the Farming Systems and Herd Improvement focus area aim to address the following issues:

- Continue to consider the current challenges in government and industry research, development and extension funding, their investment commitments and models for extension delivery.
- Implement the whole-of-industry herd-improvement strategy to drive change by maximising profitability for dairyfarmers and offering effective and highly valued services.
- Ensure dairyfarmers have choice in their production methods, including genetic improvement opportunities, to utilise systems that best suit their needs, farmland and farming systems.
- Improve the regulatory regime for agricultural and veterinary (agvet) chemicals to reduce red tape associated with their use and ensure they are readily available to dairyfarmers at an affordable cost.
- Paving the way for planning and environmental legislative frameworks that foster a consistent and inclusive regulatory environment for a diverse dairy industry.

People and human capacity

Attracting, developing, and retaining a highly skilled workforce is essential to driving Australian dairy's innovation and growing industry prosperity. Our policy priorities in the people and human capacity focus area aim to address the following issues:

- Like many other commodities, dairy faces a skilled labour shortage. We are working hard to improve policy settings and support tools that will help increase the size and capacity of the workforce through increasing access to overseas workers.
- The social and emotional wellbeing of the whole dairy workforce is a top priority. ADF supports and promotes organisations that deliver training and resources to the industry.
- Aim to instil a culture of safety on farm by supporting practical measures to achieve the dairy industry's vision that a culture of safety is seen as an investment — not a cost.

Markets, trade and value chain

The aim of the markets, trade and

value chain PAG is to maximise the potential for secure market access and ensure a competitive regulatory framework and sustainable and profitable industry value chain for both domestic and export markets.

Some key issues the markets, trade and value chain PAG is working on are:

- Competition policy — the PAG was instrumental in getting the Effects Test legislation introduced into the Federal Parliament.
- China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) — China is a massive and growing market. The PAG worked hard with a large number of stakeholders to ensure ChAFTA was achieved and that it was a good deal for dairy.
- Code of Practice — The markets PAG kicked off the development of the draft Code of Practice for Contractual Arrangements between farmers and processors. The code will ensure, among other things, that:
 - Pricing adjustments to farmers throughout a contract are clearly defined and that there will be no price changes made retrospectively.
 - All farmers receive payment entitlement that accrued over the term of a contract or supply agreement (including any 'loyalty payments').
 - If a farmer produces more milk than required or contracted to their primary processor, then they have the right to negotiate other supply options for the additional milk produced.
- Unfair Contracts legislation — the new Unfair Contracts legislation, which aims to protect small businesses, including farmers, from unfair terms in business-to-business standard form contracts came into effect on November 12. This new law will also help even out risk along the supply chain.
- The PAG will continue to work on competition and trade issues, with technical barriers to trade being a high priority in the trade space and \$1 per litre milk and its impact on dairyfarmers a continuing priority in the competition area.

Natural Resources

Responsible management of our natural resources upon which we rely on is key to the dairy industry's long-term growth.

Our policy priorities for natural resources this year is to aim to address the following issues:

- Ensuring that the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is in balance with environmental, social and economic factors. Advocacy in conjunction with state dairy industry



Queensland dairyfarmer Ross McInnes's herd. Mr McInnes is a member of the farm system Policy Advisory Group.

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bodies and in partnership with the National Farmers Federation and irrigation industry peak bodies.


- Adaptation of farming systems to climate change is the industry's highest priority as it will impact farm practices, productivity, and business profitability.
- Quality dairy industry research, development and extension on climate adaptation and emissions mitigation is ongoing. Government support and investment will be necessary for long-term research programs that enhance results for dairy farms.
- Establishment of Government incentive schemes and policies to encourage reliable low-emissions electricity, and the adoption of energy-efficient measures and renewable energy technologies.
- Improve policies and tools to support drought preparedness, including Farm Management Deposit schemes, farm business management training, accelerated depreciation and other tax measures.

Animal health and welfare

Healthy and well cared for cows are a priority for every dairyfarmer. To promote continued welfare improvement and nationally consistent welfare standards, as well as to protect the

sustainability of our industry, the ADF animal health and welfare PAG works with other dairyfarmers, processors, the Federal Government and other stakeholders to ensure this.

Some key issues the animal health and welfare PAG is working on are:

- Routine calving induction. In April 2015, following a series of meetings and consultation with farmers, vets and processors, the dairy industry agreed to phase out routine calving induction nationally. Following progress in the reduction of the use of routine calving induction, the dairy industry has recently set a revised limit for routine calving induction for 2017. The routine calving induction limit for 2017 is a maximum of 12 per cent of cows in a herd, unless an exemption is granted.
- Percentage of cows induced nationally has dropped from 2.6 per cent in 2012 to about 0.75 per cent in 2016.
- Building the Australian dairy industry's social licence to operate through improved relationships with consumers, customers and the broader community.
- Supporting the new Australian Animal Welfare Standard and Guidelines for Cattle, which were developed in partnership with animal welfare groups and government, and endorsing their uptake on a nationally consistent scale to ensure that all dairy herds remain healthy and maintain their welfare.
- Biosecurity, which covers from on-farm to our national borders. ADF encourages all farmers to invest in their on-farm biosecurity. 

New routine calving induction target set

- Key points**
- ✓ Routine induction target set at 12 per cent of herd
 - ✓ Inductions reduced nationally to 0.75 per cent of cows
 - ✓ Exemptions available for exceptional circumstances

FOLLOWING extensive consultation with industry experts, the Australian Dairy Industry Council (ADIC) agreed to a revised 2017 routine calving induction* limit of a maximum of 12 per cent of cows in a herd, down from the 15 per cent target set in 2016.

Interim ADF chief executive officer John McQueen said that although not all states used this practice, the revised routine calving induction target was still great news for the southern dairy industry.

"The Australian dairy industry wants to be as proactive as possible on measures to support excellent animal welfare outcomes and to meet the expectations of customers and consumers," Mr McQueen said.

The new target was set after reviewing 2016 induction data and following consultation with dairyfarmers, vets and processors through the Calving Induction Steering Group, the Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) animal health and welfare Policy Advisory Group (PAG), the ADF national council, ADF board and the Australian Dairy Industry Council (ADIC) board.

"Farmers are constantly reviewing and improving their practices through improved herd management, tools and technologies," Mr McQueen said.

"Dairyfarmers are dedicated to providing a high standard of care and to change practices when it is in the best interests of their animals.

"Caring for cows has always been a key priority for not only farmers but also ADF and processors, after all healthy, contented cows is our livelihood."

A survey of veterinary practices performing routine inductions in 2016 confirmed that induction was used in fewer herds and the number of cows induced (0.75 per cent nationally) was almost half the number induced in 2015.

The industry's approach is:

- The routine calving induction target for 2017 is a maximum of 12 per



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cent of cows in a herd, unless an exemption is granted.

- The 12 per cent limit will apply unless a fertility management plan has been implemented or dispensation is granted for exceptional circumstances beyond a farmers' control such as herd health issues, severe weather events (floods, fire), artificial breeding failure, as well as other issues.
- Farmers can apply to the Oversight and Engagement Panel via their vet for special dispensation to carry out inductions in excess of the 12 per cent limit for routine calving inductions.
- The ADIC realises that for farmers who calve their cows in autumn and carry out routine inductions there is limited time to achieve the 12 per cent target and this will be taken into

account in applications for dispensation.

Improving herd fertility is a fundamental requirement to reduce the need for routine calving induction.

Mr McQueen said the phasing out of routine calving induction involved a similar approach to the successful New Zealand strategy, where routine calving induction without exemption had now been banned following a long phase-out period.

"The industry wants to ensure all timeframes are achievable which is why a specific timeframe for the phase-out to reach zero per cent has not been set," he said.

"The timeframe for the phase-out will be reviewed annually and the dairy industry will work with farmers and their advisers to ensure the targets are achieved."

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ADF will continue to consult with industry and farmers to ensure that the timing, process and outcomes are right for all involved as the phase-out of routine calving induction progresses.

*Routine calving induction is all non-therapeutic inductions.

Fertility management tools available

Key points

- ✓ Fertility rates improving after long decline
- ✓ Select for bulls with high fertility ABV
- ✓ Result of extensive research

THE overall fertility of Australian dairy herds started declining in the 1990s, but has recently shown signs of recovery. The fertility rate is about five per cent higher now than it was for cows born before 2011.

The genetic trend started to turn around and improve thanks to the hard work by DataGene (formerly Australian Dairy Herd Improvement Scheme [ADHIS]), DairyBio (formerly Dairy Futures CRC) and the dairy-farmers who have been contributing fertility-related data.

Michelle Axford from DataGene said the Daughter Fertility Australian Breeding Value (ABV) was just one of the tools in the fertility management tool box and was an example of the gains that had been made through increased emphasis for fertility in Australian selection indices, particularly in the Balanced Performance Index (BPI) and Health Weighted Index (HWI).

“We can expect further gains as the focus on fertility in indices has increased further in the past couple of years,” she said. “On top of that, bull companies and farmers are paying extra attention to the Daughter Fertility ABV when making their final bull selections.

“We are now seeing the direct benefits on farm. Cows with higher daughter fertility ABVs get back in calf sooner — that is they have higher six-week in calf rates.”

The latest research indicated that dairyfarmers had been given more choice of bulls with better fertility ABVs and had more confidence in those bulls. It proved that the simplest way to improve the genetics of herds for fertility was to choose bulls with a high Daughter Fertility ABV (>104) from the *Good Bulls Guide* or app.

Mrs Axford said this measure was effective in monitoring genetic trends for fertility within a herd and for selecting bulls that would improve the herd over time.

“There is a strong and practical link between higher daughter fertility ABV and higher six-week-in-calf rate (even



The dairy industry has also been investing in new tools and resources to assist farmers improve their herds' reproductive performance.

if the heritability is low, this selection for fertility still works),” Mrs Axford said.

“The reliability of the Daughter Fertility ABV has improved significantly and there are more bulls with much higher Daughter Fertility ABVs to choose from. This is the outcome of collaborative work between DataGene and the DairyBio.”


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The job isn't finished. While DataGene and DairyBio continue to make improvements in this area, farmers are encouraged to record all artificial insemination matings and pregnancy test results. This data is important for DataGene's genetic evaluation system, which generates ABVs.

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tralia (DA) is working towards achieving the long-term industry goal to improve the median six-week in-calf rate to 60 per cent by 2022.

In addition to improving genetic selection for more fertile cows, the DA program InCalf has developed a range of practical resources for farmers to improve herd management in the key areas. These include access to highly skilled Repro Right advisers and publication of a new edition of the InCalf book for dairyfarmers.

There is also a number of extension activities available through the Regional Development Programs, such as InCharge Fertility workshops and on-farm discussions on heat detection, heifer management and transition cow management. 

Contact Regional Development Programs to find out more about InCalf extension planned in different areas (see contact details on page 106). Find out who are Repro Right trained advisers are in each region at website <www.dairyaustralia.com.au/reproright>. The Dairy Australia website also has a wealth of information about managing the herd for better fertility at <www.dairyaustralia.com.au/incalf>.