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Dairy gains crucial support to reclaim milk label

For Immediate Release

DAIRY farmers have gained crucial political support to reclaim the word “milk”, with the Nationals voting at their Federal Council meeting this weekend to push for a ban on alternative and plant-based products using the term in labelling and marketing.

Peak dairy farmer group Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) praised the move as a vote of confidence in the industry’s efforts to ensure honest product labelling.

“We are pleased to see that the Nationals are on our side in wanting to ensure more transparency in food labelling,” ADF President Terry Richardson said.

“The dairy industry has long been fighting against the dishonest labelling and marketing of plant-based alternatives that are co-opting the look and feel of dairy and giving the misleading impression that these products are nutritionally equal to dairy.”

A 2017 survey by Dairy Australia showed 54 per cent of respondents bought plant-based milk alternatives because they perceived them to be healthier than dairy milk, while market research firm IBISWorld estimates Australia’s plant-based “milk” product industry has grown at an annualised rate of 4.1 per cent over the five years to 2018-19, to \$165.8 million today.

ADF previously wrote to Nationals deputy leader and federal agriculture minister Bridget McKenzie, arguing for a review of the Food Standards Australia-New Zealand and the development of regulations to prevent plant-based alternatives from ‘evoking’ the qualities and values of dairy.

"We are calling for changes to the food standards so that consumers trying to make a healthy choice at the supermarket have the benefit of transparent and accurate product labelling," Mr Richardson said.

“We’re pleased Minister McKenzie has expressed an interest in attending November’s meeting of the Australia and New Zealand Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation to receive and consider advice on how terms could be better defined or enforced.”

A ban on plant-based products using the “milk” label would bring Australia into line with other countries, after the European Court of Justice in 2017 mandated that dairy terms could not be used on plant-based products, even with clarifying terms.

A petition by the dairy farmer lobby has also gained more than 2,000 signatures. The survey is still active and can be signed at: <http://farmers.org.au/campaign/reclaimmilk/>

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