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Friday 22, July 2022

The Hon. Murray Watt  
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
Commonwealth Government of Australia  
GPO Box 858,  
Canberra ACT 2601, Australia

Dear Minister Watt,

#### Foot and Mouth Disease

I write to you in my capacity as Acting Mayor of Southern Grampians Shire representing one of the densest populations of broadacre livestock farming in the world, with in excess of 1 million lambs, 2.3 million sheep and 120,000 head of beef cattle. We proudly stand, regionally, as Australia's number one area for agricultural gross value production. Furthermore, the Council owned, and operated, Hamilton Regional Livestock Exchange is one of the largest saleyards in Australia based on annual throughput numbers. The protection of this regional industry is paramount to not only the wellbeing of our community, but also the health of our national economy.

The recent reports of FMD in Bali have created considerable anxiety in our community. I understand there is in the vicinity of 260 flights a week between Australia and Bali, which, together with trade and other movements, represents a concerning opportunity for the disease to spread to Australia, the consequences of which, as I am sure you will appreciate, would be catastrophic.

We write on behalf of our community seeking clarity on a number of points relating to our border protection and readiness for an outbreak of FMD in Australia.

#### **On Ground Response**

Council acknowledges the Federal Government Australia's response plans call for the rapid detection, diagnosis and eradication of this devastating livestock disease. There is, however need for detailed clarity on the incident response roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders including farmers, local government and the broader industry. The Southern Grampians community, similarly to other communities across Australia, request as a priority, clear details about the roles and responsibilities for all parties. This includes advice and training for farmers and stocker managers as there is significant levels of confusion in the community.

#### **Compensation For Farmers**

We understand that in the event of an emergency disease outbreak, the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA) sets out a cost sharing arrangement between Industry and Federal, State and Territory Governments. We note that FMD is categorised as a Category 2 Disease, meaning Government will fund 80% of the cost sharing, including salaries and wages, operating expenses, capital costs and compensation.

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Importantly, we note the EADRA does not determine when compensation will be paid, nor to whom. We also note the agreement raises more questions than it answers in terms of cost calculations, and relies heavily on the multiple government agencies, Federally and at State and Territory level, to work together quickly, and efficiently, a level of co-operation which we have not seen through the COVID Pandemic.

We would appreciate if you could respond to the following:

- Will the Federal Government provide compensation payments to farmers for the loss of stock?
- To support farmers financial planning, can you advise, in the current market, what the reality of the cost sharing formulae in terms of dollars would be?
- Are you confident that, in the event of an outbreak, Governments in Australia will be able to work co-operatively and quickly to support farmers?
- Have any pre-planning or preliminary discussions been held with State and Territory Governments, and Industry representatives that would assist a quick financial response in the event of an outbreak?
- Are the bureaucratic resources and processes needed to implement the EADRA in place?

As noted above, we are somewhat surprised that FMD is a Category 2, a category that acknowledges FMD could cause “*major national socio-economic consequences through very serious international trade losses, national market disruptions and very severe production losses in the livestock industries that are involved*”. On this basis, we ask the Federal Government, particularly given its responsibility for border protection, to consider that Government agencies should be responsible for 100% of the cost of this disease in the event of an outbreak.

### **Border Security**

We strongly encourage the Federal Government to tighten Border Security. The cost of this would be negligible compared to the impact of an outbreak of FMD. I would suggest Australia’s winter is a peak time for travel to Bali. Travellers from our region are reporting mixed experiences in terms of bio security measures in place at airports, with accounts varying from full searches of baggage to no scrutiny at all.

We commend the Government for investing in 18 new biosecurity officers in airports and mail centres, however, question whether this is sufficient given the number of flights and mail between Bali and Australia.

We ask the Government to consider:

- The development of an information card for all outbound travellers providing advice on the risk to Australia from FMD and precautions that can be taken.
- An advertising campaign educating the public on the risk to Australia and precautions that can be taken.
- Increased resourcing at airports to ensure appropriate scrutiny is in place for returned travellers.

### **Vaccines**

We note a policy statement from the Australian Government’s Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry which states that “*Given the developments in*



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*vaccine technology, changing international attitudes and the recent experiences of countries experiencing foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreaks around the world, Australia no longer views vaccination as a measure of last resort".*

We were pleased to read the Federal Government's proactive response in supporting the Indonesian Vaccination program. We believe it is important for our farmers to understand the status of Australia's capability to administer a vaccination program in Australia.

We seek clarification on the following:

- How many doses of the vaccine are available in Australia?
- Does the Government intend on implementing a broad vaccination program in Australia in the event of an outbreak?
- Does the Government have advice or a view on the benefits of administering the vaccine ahead of a possible outbreak?
- Is there a resourced program in place that would allow for the quick administration of the vaccinations in Australia?

Council acknowledges the Federal Department of Agriculture has established some useful tools on the Department's website, however, regular updates and communications to the community, Local Government and livestock facility operators are imperative to alleviate concern and allow appropriate planning. This current situation reinforces the vital need for all levels of Government to work together and to have clarity on the plan in place to protect Australia. We look forward to your response and stand ready to support the Federal Government in any way we can on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robertson".

**Cr. David Robertson**  
**Acting Mayor**