

1 September 2019

Dear Minister

### **Report and next steps from Winter Grazing Taskforce**

I am writing to you on behalf of the Winter Grazing Taskforce, which you announced on 7 August 2019 to address animal welfare issues with intensive winter grazing. This letter serves as our first report, which you requested by the end of August.

Firstly, thank you very much for the opportunity to Chair the Taskforce. We have already had some challenging and useful thinking put to this issue by the members, and I am pleased to have this role. I grappled with the many issues arising in our pastoral farming systems when I served as the Chair of the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, including livestock management over winter. It is good to see this issue getting a strong focus from the government.

Thank you too for your time at our first meeting, last Friday 23 August. It was helpful hearing your expectations on timing and our approach, and for you to reiterate your firm stance that practices need to improve, while acknowledging that farmers are feeling under significant pressure at the moment. This will have been reassuring to members of the Taskforce.

I am pleased to confirm that the Taskforce has agreed to its terms of reference, approach and next steps. These are attached, along with our draft meeting notes.

As a top priority this week, we have asked MPI to complete a stocktake of current education, training and extension initiatives available to pastoral livestock farmers on winter management. We are also expecting a 'process map' describing the different roles along the entire winter grazing process. From this, we will identify key gaps that need to be addressed, and intervention points. It has already been identified that arable farmers, seed merchants and rural contractors, for instance, are not receiving the same information as farmers – there is no united view and guidance on best practice. Similarly, the role of veterinarians as advisers on best practice may be something to explore.

We have also started inviting a range of speakers to two meetings in September, to inform and challenge our views, as you have asked. The speakers are being identified and suggested directly to your office, through social media to you, and to MPI. We will advise your office of the speakers once finalised, for your awareness.

At our meeting last Friday, you also discussed communication about our work programme. We are especially aware of criticism being levelled at the makeup of the Taskforce – which you also raised at our meeting, and concern that various views are not represented. Some members have raised their concerns about this contributing to the pressure being felt in rural communities. We are keen to reduce uncertainty over our work, and also to be as open and transparent as possible in our processes. We would encourage open communication from your office about our work, and are pleased that MPI has created a separate webpage for updates on our work programme.

You are expecting recommendations from us by the end of September. Now that we have determined the availability of task force members would appreciate the opportunity to finalise our recommendations to you at a planned meeting 2 October. If it is acceptable to you, we would aim to have initial recommendations to you by the end of September, and a draft report following the 2 October meeting.

I look forward to hearing from you. I'm happy to discuss any aspects of this report and our plans. It's best to reach me [REDACTED].

Nga mihi

John Hellström