

6 July 2020

Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Minister for Home Affairs
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Via email: Peter.Dutton.MP@aph.gov.au

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Dear Minister,

RE: Prioritisation of Artificial Insemination (AI) Technicians to enter Australia for critical work

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic it is our understanding that people can only travel to Australia if they are an Australian citizen, a permanent resident, an immediate family member of an Australian citizen or permanent resident or New Zealand citizen who is usually a resident in Australia. The Commissioner of the Australian Border Force may provide an exemption to these criteria for people who have critical skills for an industry or business. These exemptions can be granted via your department's online application system at <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/travel-restrictions-0>.

Australian dairy farms produce around 9 billion litres of raw milk valued at \$4.4 billion per annum. A key input to generating this value is AI. In southern regions of Australia, this involves each year from July to December an AI technician or trained farmer detecting female cows that are on 'heat' and inseminating the reproductive tract with sperm collected from a male bull for the purpose of conception. Around 87 per cent of Australian dairy farms use AI due to superior genetics, animal health and occupational health and safety benefits as compared to traditional breeding techniques.

AI is a specialised unit of competency in the Australian Government's tertiary education system (AHCAIS303A - Artificially inseminate livestock). It involves skill and training in preparation for insemination, observation of animals on heat to detect correct insemination timing, preparation of equipment and work sites, selection and thaw semen for insemination, animal insemination and data recording after insemination. AI services are not commonly delivered by veterinarians.

An AI technician is generally contracted for 8 weeks to perform between 5,000 to 6,000 inseminations. Unfortunately, each year the Australian dairy industry experiences a shortfall of around 20-25 AI technicians to perform this task. In the past this gap has been filled by AI technicians predominantly from New Zealand and to a lesser extent the Americas and Europe.

The National Herd Improvement Association is the peak body for AI service providers in Australia. They have been advising their members to use your department's exemption process and are updating them on developments such as steps to cross state borders (<https://www.nhia.org.au/blog/overseas-ai-technicians->). Those who have used your process have experienced process delays and some difficulties with travel logistics.

As the peak body representing dairy farmers in Australia, we are writing to request that applications made for AI technicians to enter Australia are elevated to high priority assessment and finalisation. Our industry is now in a relatively small window for this critical task of inseminations to be performed. If the 20-25 AI technicians are not permitted into Australia during the window period, the following negative outcomes are estimated as a result of farmers finding work arounds such as DIY insemination:

1. Reduced reproductive performance – For every 1% decline in 6-week in-calf-rate = \$4/cow/year and 1% increase in not-in-calf rate = \$10/cow/year (takes 2-5 years to recover). This is an overall cost of \$2-4.5 million to industry.
2. Increased use of herd bulls - 26,000-42,000 cows would require 420-680 bulls. If AI technician shortage results in 75% of these cows serviced by herd bulls only 230-370 additional herd bulls required @ \$2000/each. This is an overall cost of \$460-740k to industry.

3. Reduced milk production - If there is a loss of 3 weeks of missed joining due to AI in 25% of cows and consequently shorter lactations, 10,000-16,250 cows would miss 1.75kg MS/day over 21 days = 370,000-600,000 kg MS. At the current farmgate milk price of around \$6.50, this is an overall cost of \$2.4-3.9 million to industry.

On 30 April 2020 the Minister for Agriculture's office was informally briefed by our organisation on this matter. We understand this advice has been appropriately progressed by Mr Mark Tucker to the COVID-19 Commission and other relevant agencies in the Australian public service. Despite these efforts the gap in our industry has not been filled, elevating this matter to an urgent priority. This letter ensures you, as the lead minister, are formally briefed on the situation for appropriate action with the Commissioner and other relevant personal.

Should you require any further assistance on this matter please contact Mr Craig Hough, Director Strategy and Policy on chough@australiandairyfarmers.com.au or ph. 0437 057 022.

We look forward to resolving this matter with you soon.

Yours sincerely,



Terry Richardson
President
Australian Dairy Farmers

Cc: Via email

The Hon. Alan Tudge MP, Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure;

Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash, Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Businesses;

The Hon. David Littleproud MP, Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management.