



**Office of Colin Boyce MP**  
**Federal Member for Flynn**

*Reference: 231013/Biosecurity Submission BOYCE/K*

Thursday, 13 October 2023

Senator the Hon Murray Watt MP  
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry  
Australian Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

*By upload: <https://haveyoursay.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-protection-levy>*

Dear Senator,

**RE: Biosecurity Protection Levy**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my input to the Implementation of the Biosecurity Protection Levy, expected to collect around \$50 million per year from our Australian farmers and producers.

My submission follows for your consideration.

Regards,

**Colin Boyce MP**  
Federal Member for Flynn



# Introduction of the biosecurity protection levy: consultation paper

## Delivering sustainable biosecurity funding

The addition of another tax to the farming industry shows the complete lack of understanding of the agricultural industry by the Labor Government. Farmers are the growers of the quality meat and vegetables that Australians enjoy safely on their dinner tables.

Threats to the Australian agricultural industry are increased with the importing of products into our country. Our farmers have no control over what is imported. They have no say in an importer deciding to bring in cheaper bananas, cheaper citrus, cheaper meat – and then they must deal with the biosecurity risks that are created by the importer.

It is grossly unfair to expect our farmers and producers to have pay another 10% tax to protect themselves from this.

At 50c tax per transaction, each head of cattle will realistically have an added \$2 cost. 50c from the breeder, 50c to the buyer, 50c to the feed lotter and 50c to the meatworks. Not bad if you're the one receiving the money, 4 times over on a single item. With the current drop in the cattle markets, this will mean the difference between a profit or a loss. And multiplied by the amount of cattle sold each year, this is where the Government makes their \$50 million contribution from the farmer.

## Who sets the prices?

Farmers are not price setters. They don't get to decide what their produce is worth to the consumer. They are forced to receive the price from the middleman or exporter of their product, with little input or choice as to the value of their product. Often it is cheaper to bury their product in the paddock or feed it to the neighbours' animals than to market it with the prices offered by the big supermarkets and exporters.

This again impacts the end user. Added costs to the farmer means less produce and less supply available in the supermarket. The rising cost of living will again be impacted. The farmer will not earn a single extra cent with another 10% charge. How can we expect our \$90 billion industry to thrive when we keep slugging them with extra costs that don't increase their output or income?

## Added Labour Costs from Labor

Labor is currently destroying the agricultural industry by interfering with previous labour hire schemes that worked to bring Pacific nations employees to assist with harvesting crops. By enforcing a minimum 30 hour week and overtime provisions, there is no possibility of sustainable employment. These workers come here to work hard and previously had to average the 30 hours, which worked well, and the workers and employers were able to plan their work around this. Now, the employers cannot afford to harvest their crops on the weekends. They cannot afford to have the added overtime requirements on their input costs, as the cost of fruit and vegetables is not determined by themselves.

Labor states that they will discuss these issues and address them, but do they really understand that harvesting is a time-based issue? When the crop is ready, it needs to be harvested as quickly as possible. And the neighbour is just as likely to be ready at the same time, so they cannot shift between farms if there isn't 30 hours at one location.

Labor also fails to recognise that rainfall is often widespread – you cannot shift the workforce to the neighbour if it is raining, they are probably too wet too. And these are not considered “exceptional circumstances” – this is the harsh reality of farming.

It will rain during harvest. It will need to be picked as soon as possible. This is farming. Delays cost money. Farmers are not making excess money with the labourers, and this will cut their margins even further.

## Strengthening Biosecurity

When will the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry support the farmers? There is a budget commitment of \$1 billion over 4 years for biosecurity strengthening (\$250 million per year), yet the farmers are also expected to co-contribute \$50 million per year. That's one fifth of the government's contribution. As an added tax to those who have no say in how it will be spent, or how the improved biosecurity will be delivered? Many farmers are already paying between 20-30% tax on their income.

While I welcome the added charges to importers, this shows that the risk creators had added an average price increase of 28%. This is only a cost recovery calculation.

This does not include the impact on growers who were affected by inferior quality imports, introducing diseases such as citrus canker which decimated many orchards in my electorate in recent decades.

We have fire ants in Queensland, white spot disease, Bovine Johne's disease (BJD) – all threatening our agricultural industries. Last year there was the campaign to “Throw Your Thongs” when returning from Bali, in an effort to contain the risk of Foot and Mouth Disease from Indonesia. These threats to Australian farmers need to be addressed by the government. Of the government's generous assistance of \$14 million, \$5 million of this was to help Indonesia improve their testing and laboratory abilities. \$9 million went to 18 more biosecurity officers at Australian airports.

Yet a [statement by Senator Watt](#) said that the highest risk of Foot and Mouth disease entering Australia is by animal products, meat products and dairy products. This is where the money needs to focus – by preventing these products from being imported from a country with this level of risk.

We also have the problem of people making false declarations, that state they are not bringing in these products from Indonesia. While our Border Force is extremely good at checking suspicious passengers, this is not enough. Footbaths could have strengthened our fight against the potential for carting it in on footwear, yet this was not put in place at our airports.

The impact of FMD is conservatively assessed at \$80 billion for our agricultural industry. Travellers need to be “inconvenienced” by, at the very least, washing their shoes for the sake of our Australian fresh food and produce.

### Farmers are Struggling

The farming industry continues to be targeted by these added costs on every calf and every apple, thereby increasing the mental health issues for our farmers and often determining the industries that their families choose to work in. Many farmers watch their families head off to boarding school, with the knowledge that their farms will not be able to support them after they finish school. This leads to a reduced workforce, and the aging population of our farmers.

The increased pressure to take an easy handout from the wind and solar industries is also falling on our farming families. For many, it seems too good to be true – a payment without any costs attached. But for Australia as a whole, we need to be able to produce good quality food and fibre to keep our growing population fed and clothed.

The footprint of these massive projects will impact directly on the farming industry, with little opportunity for co-existence with agriculture. The 28,000 km of new powerlines needed for grid connection are also planned for our grazing and farming lands. Where is the government assistance to keep agriculture thriving? Where is the help for our struggling farmers who face droughts and floods as part of the risk of their business? At the end of the day, our Australian producers are selling millions

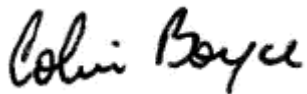
of head of cattle, and this levy of potentially \$2 per beast will get burnt up by officials and paperwork and delivers nothing in practical terms.

### Summary

When we export our products, we pay the costs imposed by the receiving country to meet their biosecurity charges. We should be increasing the charges for imported products into Australia and using these costs to strengthen our country's biosecurity.

Why does the farmer have to bear the burden of biosecurity to protect the nation, not just his own farming interests?

I urge the Minister and his department to reconsider this additional tax on our agricultural industry and increase the costs to those importing instead.



**Colin Boyce MP**  
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