

# Regional Workshop: Cohuna

Workshop Output Report



# Background

The Cohuna regional workshop is one of 23 regional workshops designed to contribute to the development of the Australian Dairy Plan – a nationwide plan for a profitable, confident and united dairy industry. This report captures the discussions held at that workshop. It is intended to provide a record for workshop attendees and a basis for those who could not attend the workshop to contribute to the conversation. This report will be combined with the reports of the other 22 regional workshops in the development of the Australian Dairy Plan.

## Workshop sessions

1. **The Set-Up: Why will this Plan be different?**
2. **How big is the appetite for change?**
3. **What needs to change?**
4. **What needs to be done?**
5. **What is success for the Australian dairy industry?**

## Workshop details

**Date:** 3 June 2019

**Location:** Northern Districts Community Health,  
25 King Edward St, Cohuna

**Facilitator:** Stephen Petris – Nous Group

**Coordinator:** Murray Dairy, UDV

**Attendees:** 35 participants, including 21 dairy farmers, as well as service providers and representatives from UDV and Dairy Australia

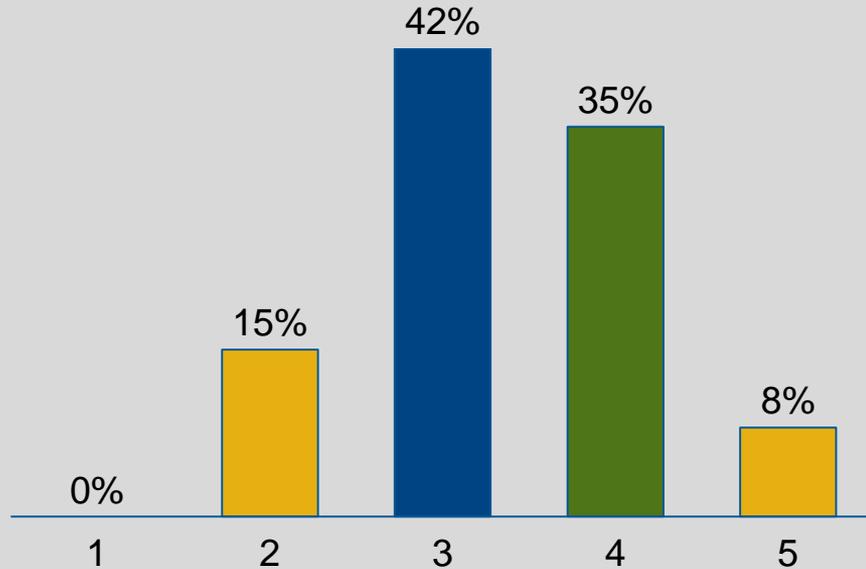
# 1. The Set-Up: Why will this Plan be different?

## The facilitator set out the purpose of the Australian Dairy Plan and the workshop

- This is a great opportunity to shape the future of dairy by contributing to the development of the ADP
- But you've heard this before - what's different about this Plan? Why get involved?
  - The key players are working towards one national dairy plan, one set of national priorities, one voice in championing these priorities – that gives us more ability to drive change
  - This time the plan is being built from the 'bottom-up' i.e. by the people with 'skin in the game' – you!
  - The partners are committed to turning the plan into action through their individual strategic plans

## 2. How big is the appetite for change?

Participants voted on “how much change is required to get the industry to a better place”



N=26

1 = minor change, 5 = major change

### In discussing the results, we agreed...

#### *Why we need to change:*

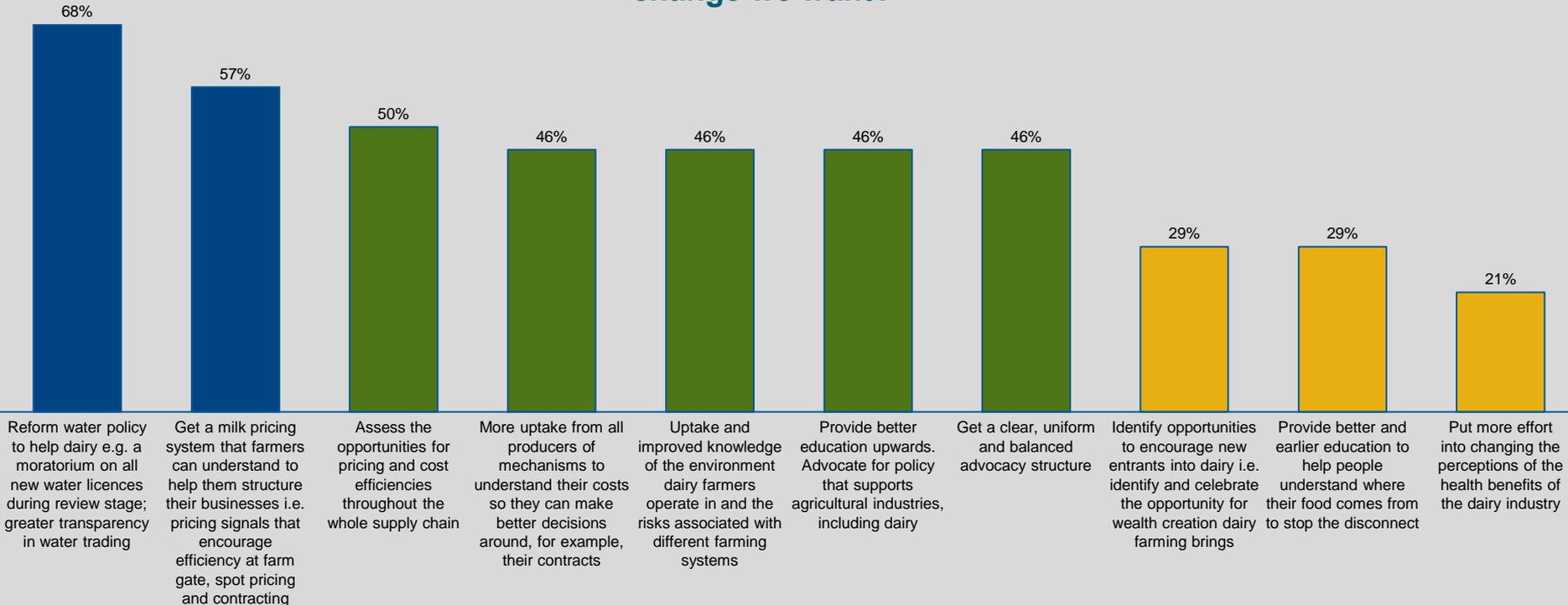
- The operating environment has changed substantially and we are struggling to adapt.
- We are consuming more than we produce – yet we are taking a much greater proportion of dumped foreign products. Everyone else is growing, but we are going backwards.
- Structural issues are holding us back – the lines are blurred between the responsibilities of the different organisations – there is a poor understanding of who does what in our industry.
- We are not getting young people into the industry – nor would we want them to come in the way things are going – people are very tired of trying to stay in the industry.
- There is a need to change from pasture-based feed, to more intensive forms of production (although more capital intensive forms of production make it harder for new entrants).
- Let's recognise that farming is a profession – we need to promote the talent we have.
- We need to change our approach to consumers – let's acknowledge what our consumers want and engage with them positively on sensitive issues – we need to promote the great things we are doing and get on the front foot.
- A big challenge is that government doesn't support dairy – we do not have the same influence as other industries e.g. we don't get recognition of the level of protectionism of dairy in other countries.

#### *On the other hand:*

- There are things that need changing – education and promotion, and especially the funding of advocacy needs attention – but this doesn't mean we need massive overall change.
- This region is perfect for dairy farming – when we have water!

# 3. What needs to change?

Participants voted on “where should we be focusing our efforts and energy to get the change we want?”



N= 28

Top 10 ideas by votes, as a percentage of participants voting on their Top 5

# 4. What needs to be done?

We further developed our top 5 prioritised ideas by thinking about what success would look like, how we might get there and what might hold us back.

## Reform water policy

- We need to keep up the pressure on water policy - especially on pricing and charges – for the productive use of water.
- The policy should look to reduce the water footprint, and get the price down to at least \$200 per mega-litre, and include a review carryover of water.
- We need to grow community understanding that dairy is part of the water eco-system and that we are important environmental stewards. This could be acknowledged through environmental water credits.
- Let's include our role as environmental stewards in our advertising (i.e. we co-exist with native species), and describe how irrigation brings wealth to the community.
- We need to look at ways to ensure Investors carry more of the costs of water management.

## Opportunities for policy/cost efficiencies through the supply chain

- Look to rationalise milk processing and collection across the country to gain greater efficiencies in the supply chain. This can be achieved through common quality policies across all processors to allow greater concentration of production in fewer processing plants to decrease the cost of milk collection.
- Less factories producing more milk will ensure milk supply better matches capacity at the processor sites.
- Our big idea is to develop common milk quality standards that are coupled with high quality pricing incentives.

## More update of mechanisms to understand the costs and risks of different systems

- We need a single body/source of information (peer reviewed) that provides greater understanding of dairy business costs, and what the strengths and risks are of the many farming systems we might use. This could be through improvements to Dairy Base – currently it is hard to use.
- Investigate ways to improve uptake of these tools through, for example, greater ease of access to tools and programs. Farmers need to better utilise the tools already in existence.
- Find ways to enable farmers to take the time to use those tools – low adoption rates are holding us back.
- The biggest effort should be put into understanding why some farmers are not using it. Processor extension officers should work to encourage usage and adoption of benchmarking.

# 4. What needs to be done?

## Clear, balanced and unified advocacy

- Our goal is to have an efficient and effective common voice that is recognised nationally.
- We need to look at restructuring all our organisations. For too long it has been a no-go zone but the timing is right to tackle this.
- Advocacy is significantly underfunded and reliant on big farms – we should look at the statutory levy.
- Advocacy needs better engagement from all farmers – only 40% are members of advocacy organisations but they advocate for all.
- Seek government match dollar for dollar for advocacy.

## Get milk price systems that farmers can understand

- We need more transparency and simplification of dairy pricing systems.
- Create milk pricing systems that translate the complexities of dairy pricing into simple, farmgate pricing – giving more control back to farmers and re-building trust.
- There is a need for greater engagement from processors – they should share the “why” for each of their options more clearly. ADF and ADPF can play a role in driving this.
- Vested interests and unhealthy competition will hold us back.

## 5. What is success for the dairy industry?

Imagining the future of the industry, we articulated our vision by developing the front page of the industry newspaper.

# ***THE DAIRY TIMES***

June 2025

**In this issue, we look at dairy's journey to 2025 & celebrate the people and successes that have got the industry to where it is today.**

A lot has changed since 2019. In 2025 dairy farmers have reaped the rewards of reform. It is now the agricultural industry of choice – a profitable and professional industry.

“ It was the best decision we made to start dairy farming. We can plan ahead. This industry is physically and financially rewarding.

”

- Dairy farmer

“ We are confident in our farmers' high quality and reliable production. Our farmers are the most efficient in the world and we enjoy paying them a profitable price for their amazing products

”

- Processor

“ Dairy is pivotal to our economy. It's the new superfood. It was a good decision to return water back to agricultural use.

”

- Minister for Agriculture & Water Resources

# Appendix. What needs to change? (full list of results)

## Participants completed a survey on the workshop

- Reform water policy to help dairy e.g. a moratorium on all new water licences during review stage; greater transparency in water trading
- Get a milk pricing system that farmers can understand to help them structure their businesses i.e. pricing signals that encourage efficiency at farm gate, spot pricing and contracting
- Assess the opportunities for pricing and cost efficiencies throughout the whole supply chain
- More uptake from all producers of mechanisms to understand their costs so they can make better decisions around, for example, their contracts
- Uptake and improved knowledge of the environment dairy farmers operate in and the risks associated with different farming systems
- Provide better education upwards. Advocate for policy that supports agricultural industries, including dairy
- Get a clear, uniform and balanced advocacy structure
- Identify opportunities to encourage new entrants into dairy i.e. identify and celebrate the opportunity for wealth creation dairy farming brings
- Provide better and earlier education to help people understand where their food comes from to stop the disconnect
- Put more effort into changing the perceptions of the health benefits of the dairy industry
- Improve practices that generate negative press i.e. bull calves. Are there new industries that can grow from this?
- Review the inordinate power supermarkets have
- Publicise the value per capita of each dairy farm to GDP, local community and secondary industries, to highlight the significant contribution dairy makes
- Build awareness globally of dairy's on-farm challenges
- Be proactive in how we provide RD&E and do so in two segments, large and niche suppliers. For example, industrial relations, which becomes more complex on a large scale
- Encourage more longer-term arrangements with processors
- Use social media better to improve the perception of Dairy. Educate the broader population on the great stuff we are doing
- Identify more scientific ways to extend lactation without calving