

Opinion

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Amnesty will be a good start

THREE years ago, Victorian farmers made the unprecedented call for an amnesty of illegal farm workers.

Before then, the issue was shrouded in shadow: everyone knew it happened, but nobody really wanted to talk about it.

Today, we learn we may finally be making some headway on a problem that will continue to plague agriculture until it's actually tackled in a meaningful way.

Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud has committed to look at options for an amnesty, at the request of state ministers led by Victoria.

To be clear, this is an idea still very much in its infancy and, based on Canberra's previous approaches to immigration, it seems unlikely it would be adopted.

But it certainly warrants consideration as part of the wider question of addressing agriculture's workforce issues.

We can bring in more overseas workers, but figures suggest those numbers are still going to be way off what is needed for the sector.

We can offer incentives to get more Australians picking fruit, but history shows us it doesn't work to the levels required (though the Federal Government should adopt every proposed measure on this front, if only to put that argument to bed).

Even if the above options did succeed, the question of what to do with undocumented workers remains. We know they are here - replacing them won't make them disappear, it will just serve to push them further into the shadows and put an already vulnerable group of people at greater risk.

Enforcement and compliance will only ever go so far. This should be the start of a serious attempt to clean up the sector for good.

Advocacy groups are blocking out grassroots voices in favour of processors

Dairy truths mangled



The Australian Dairy Plan has ignored farmers' feedback, argues **BERNIE FREE**

THE Australian Dairy Plan offers opportunity to address the wrongs of the Australian dairy industry.

Disappointingly, I need to address ADP's failure to listen to the wishes of grassroots dairy farmers. Its claims of "grassroots led" and having "all cards on the table", have been false.

Driven by people who have been responsible for a 25 per cent reduction in production, a profitable industry creating thousands of jobs throughout the dairy chain has been needlessly decimated.



Turning point: Dairy farmers have voiced their concerns and want representative bodies to take notice. Picture: ZOE PHILLIPS

Southwest Victoria has many dairy businesses closing, with those remaining questioning the effectiveness of their advocacy groups Victorian Farmers Federation, United Dairy-farmers of Victoria and Australian Dairy Farmers.

Dairy farmers demand change. They want their advocacy presidents to listen and act on their wishes.

The four chairs of ADP and state

presidents have manipulated feedback from grassroots farmer meetings to enable processors to sit within the same organisation.

Their reasoning is that as farmers have questioned the sanity of spending thousands of dollars on advocacy, paying stipends for ineffective inadequate leadership that does not deliver, they would be happy for processors to come into a new combined organisation, ef-

Only prescribed burnings can avert fire calamities

THE Royal Commission's progress into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, as measured by its interim observations of August 30, is a disaster in the making.

It suggests the cause of extreme bushfires is climate change, without any valid scientific evidence to that effect. But even worse, consideration of appropriate forest management, initial attack and prescribed burning is diminished to almost nothing.

If the final report, due at the end of October, continues on the present course, the likelihood of future extreme bushfires killing our people, and animals, will be officially sanctioned by the Prime Minister and his Liberal Party team.

Incredibly, the Royal Commission states "three billion animals were killed or displaced" by the 2019-20 bushfires. True, this occurs in all widespread high-intensity bushfires and unless we manage them to reduce the extent and intensity in the future there will be dis-

The Bushfire Royal Commission is on a disaster course, argue **PHIL CHENEY, DAVID PACKHAM and TIM MALSEED**

astrous consequences for certain species of both animals and plants that may well lead to their extinction.

The solution to this problem has been known for decades starting formally with the 1939 Stretton Royal Commission.

In the 1960s, Western Australia began a program of environmentally sensitive and strategically planned hazard-reduction burns, which operated on five to 12 year cycles. These protected both the community and forest ecology.

Western Australia ultimately developed a high-tech version of the 40,000 year-old practice of Indigenous Australians, which reduce fuel loads to manageable levels. Their hazard-reduction burns are gentle, with a flame front you can step across.

The Royal Commission has not properly investigated the impact of current land management policies on forest fire suppression, particularly initial attack by dedicated forest firefighters. It has not mentioned those cases where fires were deflected or slowed by previously burnt areas.

Those who suggest bad bushfires are "natural disasters", effectively disenfranchise Aboriginal care for country.

Extreme bushfires are not "natural disasters", as the government claims.

They are caused by government's negligence towards hazard-reduction. The evidence for this can be found in the journals of Australia's first European explorers, who repeatedly describe landscapes of open parkland that were being constantly burned by Indigenous Australians.

fectively taking control. Farmers say "no, that is not what we said at 25 farmer meetings".

While processors and dairy farmers need each other to survive and prosper, processors have a fiduciary duty to shareholders to pay the lowest price they can. As two separate organisations, dairy farmers and processors can work together for the mutual benefit of the industry while keeping each other in check.

The Wannon Solution delivers control and representative accountability to grassroots dairy farmers, with any required expertise being employed in an accountable manner. It brings transparency and governance at every stage; credibility, which the ADF, VFF and UDV lack.

It enables all the dairy farmers of Australia to regain control of the wagging tail that is Dairy Australia, a mammoth that has been enjoying millions of dollars from taxpayers, levies from farmers with no accountability.

• **Bernie Free is a dairy farmer from Winslow in southwest Victoria**

The 2019-20 bushfires were exactly what Indigenous Australians warned Europeans about.

In January Prime Minister Morrison accepted the buck stops with him.

However, it is now becoming clear he is not interested in promoting skilled burning by trained people to achieve multiple objectives.

Deliberately reduced access, lack of resources and skilled personnel — not climate change — are all making the task nearly impossible.

His Royal Commission is on a disaster course, talking climate change nonsense and pretending that extreme bushfires can be managed without appropriate prescribed burning, which would make our forests healthy and safe.

• **Phil Cheney is a respected bushfire scientist, David Packham is a renowned bushfire expert and Tim Malseed is the president of firestickestate.com**

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