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Mr Dan Coup, Chief Executive,

Deer Industry New Zealand,

PO Box 10702, Wellington 6143,

The Plans for AgResearch to Move the Deer Research Programme From Invermay to Lincoln : For Discussion at the DINZ Board :

You will be aware of the AgResearch plans to shift the deer research programme from the Invermay location close to Mosgiel up to Lincoln as part of the establishment of a “hub” at Lincoln. There is much disquiet within the industry about such a move particularly as the reasons given by AgResearch’s CEO are simply not logical for the Invermay site.

I have a good overview of the situation having built up Invermay as Regional Director of Agricultural Science for the Southern South Island, 1978 to 1986, based at Invermay. Further I was a Director of AgResearch from 1992 to 1999. Further I did two degrees at Lincoln (then College) and was the Bledisloe Medalist at Lincoln University in 2003. 1978 was an exciting time for the deer industry as the first deer came onto Invermay at that time. The contribution of Invermay science and practical management capability to the developing deer industry does not need reiteration here. There was a very high profile in the agricultural press and many scientists were successful in catalysing industry development and performance.

I make these points only to establish some credibility to comment on AgResearch’s plans which I believe are very detrimental to scientific and productive progress within our primary industries.

The Crown Research Institutes have not been a success as far as the contribution and dissemination of technology to industry is concerned, and the proposed changes from AgResearch will do little to remedy that. While the Ministry of Agriculture Research Division and then MAF Tech 1986 to 1992 had a stellar performance in transferring technology to industry, there has been a gradual erosion of that capability particularly in the last decade. Production has become a dirty word in science funding and we have concentration on the environment (important with intensification), climate change and sociology, the latter two providing little to the productive effort of the agricultural industries.

Dr Richardson has given three reasons (underlined) why the change is important, they do not seem relevant to Invermay

1. Modernising our science facilities : Invermay has more high quality modern facilities than they know what to do with. The new (5 years old) Christie building is only about half full, and the other main building opened in 1986, was deliberately built in a modular way to facilitate changes that are so often required as scientific requirements change. This building is therefore still of high quality for science. This large spacious building is also not full at present.
2. Co-locating our people : Invermay has built up close cooperation with Otago University over the past 30 years in the world class programmes in deer research and in genomics and genetics, particularly strong in sheep. There is the assumption that “co-locating” scientific groups will lead to greeter and higher quality output. Scientists work with each other within and across institutional boundaries because of the assessed scientific capability for mutual benefit. Changing geography and providing often poorer facilities for the proportion of staff that will move (many will not), will not guarantee higher performance.
3. Participating in agriculture innovation hubs with key collaborators and sector partners. The key sector partners for the Invermay programmes are the deer and sheep industries, and the developing dairy production in the south. The deer farm of about 1400 stock units will not be able to be replicated at Lincoln, and the industry herds with which AgResearch presently is closely associated are in Otago and Southland.

Further key collaborators are at Otago University, particularly in the deer health area with Professor Griffin’s group. It makes no sense to transfer Dr Macintosh’s position in deer health to Massey as indicated by AgResearch management. Mackintosh should be able to finish his career at Invermay over the next 3 years, and be able to train a new veterinary scientist there.

The destruction of the close cooperation with Otago University built up over the past three decades makes no sense at all.

The scientific compliment in the deer programme has been run down over the years, but not so completely as has the sheep reproduction and genomics area. There is a much stronger case for the building up of the scientific numbers at Invermay, rather than the almost total demise.

Previous attempts to shift a scientific group in recent times within AgResearch have been a scientific and financial management disaster. Some 30 people in the reproduction group were supposed to shift from Wallaceville to Invermay. In the end the world class leader of the group, Dr Ken McNatty took up a Chair at Victoria University, one third of the group shifted, and as of this week all but two of those will remain at the end of the year, after the last round of staff cuts. In addition approx \$18 million was spent on new buildings that are not full, and were in fact not needed at all.

There is every reason to reinforce the scientific compliment at Invermay in areas of science related to production, rather than walk away from such a big build up of infrastructure.

Certainly there are advantages for Lincoln University in having a stronger agricultural science capability juxtaposition to it, as there can be input of more skilled people into teaching and post graduate supervision. However this can still be achieved without the almost total gutting of the Invermay site.

It is my understanding that the topic of shifting the deer research capability to Lincoln has not been discussed at the DINZ board, and or with the Deer Farmers Association, the members of the production industry. To this end Dr Ken Drew, Professor Frank Griffin and myself have written to all deer farmers (attached).

The topic of the relocation of the deer research programme at Invermay with its balance of fertile flat land and hill country, proximity to an abattoir, close scientific relationship to the University of Otago and also proximity to commercial herds important to the research and extension programmes should be a topic of interest for DINZ. There are about 1,400 stock units on the Invermay deer farm, and investment in facilities has been ongoing since 1978. Such capability of scientific staff, deer herds and proximity to large commercial herds further south can not be replicated at Lincoln.

It is clear that a shift of the deer group and research herds to Lincoln will therefore result in a significant reduction in research effort and contribution to the deer industry by AgResearch for the future.

Consideration by DINZ is logically an integral part of deer industry consultation re AgResearch's announced plans for the future. Two members of the DINZ Board are so hopelessly conflicted consideration of their position and or influence on DINZ's view might be set aside. This of course is a matter for DINZ itself and I am sure that Directorial best practice will prevail.

For discussion by the DINZ Board, and subsequent analysis to AgResearch and Government if considered appropriate.

Yours faithfully,

Jock Allison