

Diane Bishop  
Editor  
*Straight Furrow*  
Level 1  
300 Great South Road  
Greenlane

21 January, 2006

Dear Diane,

I refer to Dr Michael Morris' letter on phasing out "battery" cages for layer hens (*Straight Furrow*, Dec 19).

The *Animal Welfare (Layer Hens) Code of Welfare 2005* was issued under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, after thorough consideration by my independent advisory committee, the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC), of all the current evidence for, and against, various housing systems. NAWAC recommended the code to me on the basis that it was unable, from the available science, to draw definitive conclusions on the relative welfare benefits of alternative housing systems. Thus, NAWAC did not recommend an immediate ban on battery cages.

In the absence of definitive information on the relative welfare benefits and risks of the various systems, the Government continues to believe that it would be inappropriate to specify a date for a transition to as yet unproven alternative systems.

Other countries are confronting similar issues to New Zealand. Although the European Union has indicated its intention to phase out battery cage systems in 2012, the European Council is still awaiting final recommendations from the European Commission on appropriate housing systems. Australian states and territories have agreed in principle to introduce new standards (up to the current standards under the

New Zealand code) for battery cages, through a staged phase-in of requirements, but only some jurisdictions have yet enacted legislation to implement the changes.

Research into layer hen housing options is continuing and will be taken into account when NAWAC reviews the layer hen code in 2008/2009. NAWAC has already established an advisory committee to ensure that it is fully aware of the results of the latest research on the welfare of layer hens in alternative housing systems. This will enable us to agree to a transitional path that does not create unreasonable costs for egg producers and consumers and, importantly, ensures genuine welfare gains under New Zealand poultry farming conditions.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Anderton MP  
Minister of Agriculture