



MEDIA STATEMENT

AECL responds to NZ Government moves regarding conventional cage egg production

7 December 2012

If there was good evidence that hen welfare was significantly improved in colony cage systems, Australia would already have made these changes.

Looking at animal welfare in its entirety and given current scientific research, the jury is still out as to whether such colony cages and furnishings in the cage improve welfare for laying hens.

The Coalition for Sustainable Egg Supply in the US is currently conducting major research comparing conventional with colony cage systems and AECL is monitoring the results closely.

Australia has a number of colony cage systems.

New Zealand is not banning cages, they are moving to furnished or enriched colony cages. The net effect for consumers in New Zealand will be that the price of eggs, on average, will increase.

AECL continues to invest in animal welfare improvements for all farming systems including cage-type systems.

Not all consumers have concerns about cage eggs as the vast majority of eggs sold in Australia are cage eggs – just under 70%.

Recent research by the University of Sydney suggests there is no difference in the stress levels of hens in barn, cage and free range farming systems. (<http://www.aecl.org/media-centre/research-into-hen-stress-levels-in-commercial-housing-systems>).

There are welfare advantages and disadvantages in each of the three farming systems. The advantages of cage farms are that hens are protected from inclement weather; protected from predators such as foxes, snakes and eagles; have access to clean food and fresh water; better protected from potentially dangerous diseases such as Avian Influenza (AI); protected from soil or manure-borne diseases; and less prone to bullying by other hens. The disadvantage is the hens have less room to move and display their full repertoire of natural behaviour.

Here is some information about the Coalition for Sustainable Egg Supply research:

<http://www2.sustainableeggcoalition.org/research>

And here is a video explaining colony cages:

<http://www2.sustainableeggcoalition.org/resources>

For further information, please contact AECL Communications Manager, Kai Ianssen, on (02) 9409 6909 or kai@aecl.org.