meat industry association

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MEDIA RELEASE

MEAT INDUSTRY REACTS TO THREAT OF MAF VETS STRIKE

"Government predictions of a bumper season for the farming sector will very quickly prove to be a pipe-dream if this partial strike action proceeds", said Brian Lynch, Executive Director of the Meat Industry Association. Mr Lynch was commenting on reports that Ministry of Agriculture veterinarians had given notice of month-long industrial action from 22 January to 23 February involving withdrawal of forty percent of their regulatory services.

"Meat companies are frustrated that this festering dispute between MAF and a group of its employees is still unresolved after more than twelve months haggling over a solution. Now they face the threat of major disruption at a critical time in the export season, in the lead-up to Easter when supply contracts to prime offshore markets, especially to the $1.4 billion dollar Europe lamb market, are at stake".

"With meat plants currently working to full capacity, loss of production through strike action will put $20 million a day in farmers income at risk. If stock have to be held back because no processing can be done for export markets, procurement prices will be affected. Besides, there is the added cost of lost wages for meat company employees put out of work by the strike. Others to suffer would be the suppliers of packaging, transport, utilities, and related services who rely on meat plants for a significant portion of their daily returns".

Mr Lynch said meat companies were angry that a group of professional public servants were showing so little regard for the long-term adverse impact their proposed industrial action could have on New Zealand's reputation as a reliable provider of quality meat products. "If strike action prevents meat companies meeting their contractural commitments the potential damage to that hard-won reputation will be enormous".

Mr Lynch said the Government had again been made aware of the meat industry's profound concern at the threatened strike. "We totally agree with Government's attitude that the vets pay claims exceeding 12 per cent are unreasonable. They get more than their counterparts in private practice, and are already among some of the country's highest paid public servants; 15 per cent get above $100,000 annually. Their claims would add more than $2.5 million to the salary bill which under full cost recovery meat companies are required to pay".

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