

Submission from Greenpeace Aotearoa, SAFE, SPCA NZ, Animal Law Association, Animals Aotearoa

The National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC)
Animal Welfare,
Ministry for Primary Industries,
PO Box 2526,
Wellington 6140

29 June 2022

Via animal.consult@mpi.govt.nz

To whom it may concern,

Re: Dairy Cattle Code of Welfare Review - End Intensive Winter Grazing

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on the Code of Welfare: Dairy Cattle (the Code). This review is overdue as the number of dairy cows farmed in Aotearoa New Zealand has doubled over the last thirty years, and farming has intensified. The intensification of winter grazing has created significant welfare risks for dairy cattle. As acknowledged by NAWAC, the social license of these and other various practices (such as calf-cow separation and the routine slaughter of young calves) is rapidly waning.

This is a joint submission from Greenpeace Aotearoa, SAFE, SPCA NZ, Animal Law Association and Animals Aotearoa.

Linked [here](#) and in support of this submission is a petition signed by over 12000 people calling for an end to intensive winter grazing.

Our joint submission calls for an end to intensive winter grazing (IWG) through the Dairy Cattle Code of Welfare review. The regulations proposed by NAWAC, which aim to address the welfare risks created by intensive winter grazing, must progress with urgency.

Conventional, intensive winter grazing practice does not allow cows to display normal patterns of behaviour and is therefore incompatible with the Animal Welfare Act 1999. Where cattle are grazed in winter, it must be done in ways that protect their welfare.

The particular concerns about the effects of intensive winter grazing on cow and calf welfare have already been well articulated by the Winter Grazing Taskforce, Winter Grazing Action Group, and NAWAC. As stated by the Winter Grazing Taskforce, originally convened by the Minister of Agriculture: *"It is clear to us that animal welfare is not sufficiently prioritised, by anyone along the supply chain: we see this as the key barrier to adopting good or improved practice."*

The specific animal welfare concerns include:

- The prevention of normal lying behaviour. Cows are strongly driven to lie down. Up to 12 hours a day lying time is critical for cows' health, including rumination, digestion and rest. They are averse to wet muddy lying surfaces - which affect the duration and quality of rest and other essential functions.
- Calves being born in mud. Wintery, muddy conditions, especially in Southland, cause suffering and sometimes mortality for calves.
- The prevention of normal birthing and maternal behaviour. Cows should be provided with warm, sheltered refuge, with a comfortable, compressible, dry surface, away from other cows if desired, to give birth.
- Spontaneous humeral fractures in replacement heifers – in up to 25% of herds – is of significant concern. Increasing evidence ties this syndrome to mineral deficiencies from fodder beet.
- Water contamination and difficulty accessing water in winter grazing systems. The Winter Grazing Taskforce, a panel of experts convened by Minister O'Connor, stated that in all winter grazing systems, all cattle must have continuous and convenient access to fresh water.

We urge the Ministry for Primary Industries to progress all three of the regulations proposed by NAWAC to address intensive winter grazing. These are: access to clean water; sufficient lying space; and the prevention of calves being born in mud.

We request a clear timeline and transparent next steps in order to protect cow welfare, provide assurance to concerned New Zealanders, and assist farmers to prepare for these changes. We agree with NAWAC that these regulations should not set a transition period.

In addition, we support the recommended changes to the Code which correctly identify and seek to remedy the negative welfare effects of intensive winter grazing. These include the following Minimum Standards, Example Indicators and Recommended Best Practices:

- A minimum of 10m² space for each cow, and enough space for the whole herd, to lie down and rest on comfortable, free draining (dry), compressible surfaces.
- Mobs of cows due to calve around the same time must be provided with an effectively sheltered, dry, refuge to give birth, at least 14 days before calving dates.
- Access to sufficient clean water must be provided - unimpeded by mud, in troughs within 20m of the herd.
- Cattle do not show signs of lying deprivation - lying is not impeded by mud, surface water, effluent accumulation or by the hardness of the surfaces
- Normal free movement and access to feed, water and lying areas is not impeded by space restrictions, excessive competition, mud, surface water.
- Contingency plans must be developed and implemented, to address the effects of adverse weather conditions on cows.

These changes must be part of continuous animal welfare improvement - which DairyNZ publicly states they are committed to - and coupled with effective compliance.

A failure to meet address intensive winter grazing erodes the social license of dairy farming, and risks New Zealand's reputation as a sustainable and ethical producer of animal products.

It also consigns cows, acknowledged by New Zealand law to be sentient beings, to less than a life worth living.

New Zealand has set a vision to be a world leader in animal welfare. If we are to meet this goal, it is clear that intensive winter grazing practices that result in poor welfare must end.

We look forward to the timely progression of all three proposed regulations related to intensive winter grazing.

Yours sincerely

Greenpeace Aotearoa, SPCA NZ, SAFE, Animals Aotearoa and the Animal Law Association

Bios of organisations signing on to this submission:

Greenpeace Aotearoa

[Greenpeace](#) is a global, independent campaigning organisation that acts to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace. Greenpeace is one of the world's largest and oldest environmental organisations, operating for half a century, since 1971, and now works in more than 55 countries. The New Zealand branch of Greenpeace (Greenpeace Aotearoa) was founded in 1974 and has grown to represent 35,000 financial donors and many tens of thousands of supporters.

SPCA NZ

[SPCA](#) is the preeminent animal welfare and advocacy organisation in New Zealand. The Society has been in existence for 150 years with a supporter base representing many tens of thousands of New Zealanders across the nation. With 32 Centres nationwide, we are the country's biggest animal charity. Our mission is to improve the welfare of all animals in New Zealand.

Animal Law Association

The [New Zealand Animal Law Association](#) is a coalition of lawyers, law students and law graduates working to improve the welfare and lives of animals through the legal system.

We currently have over 500 members signed up throughout the country, from Whangarei to Invercargill, spanning various practice areas, including lawyers working for large commercial law firms, criminal and civil litigators, in-house counsel, lawyers working for government and the judiciary, and include a Queens Counsel.

SAFE

[SAFE](#) is New Zealand's leading animal rights charity. SAFE's vision is a world where animal rights are valued. We work to achieve that vision through our mission to end the exploitation of animals.

That future isn't far away. With the help of our supporters, every day we are making massive wins for thousands of animals, and each step forward brings us closer to an Aotearoa where all animals matter.

Animals Aotearoa

[Animals Aotearoa](#) is a registered charity, whose mission is to end the suffering of farmed animals. They currently focus on improving the lives of chickens bred for meat, by securing welfare commitments from food businesses and raising public awareness of the suffering caused by the way chickens are bred and farmed.