



The Secretary  
Public Accounts Committee  
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### **TFGA Submission: Inquiry into the Government's Financial Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the leading representative body for Tasmanian primary producers. TFGA members are responsible for generating approximately 80% of the value created by the Tasmanian agricultural sector. TFGA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry into the Government's Financial Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges globally, Nationally, and at a State level. Governments have been faced with difficult decisions in an extremely uncertain and evolving situation. Determining appropriate responses to mitigate the serious risks of COVID-19 to public health and the economy has been difficult. The Australian response has been unique with a largely State by State based response model with State Governments working independently to protect their citizens from COVID-19.

The measures taken by the Tasmanian State Government have proven effective with the near elimination of the virus within the State. Tasmania is in an enviable position and the response by the Tasmanian State Government in their reaction to COVID-19 is to be commended. However, the virus continues to cause significant issues in other areas of the country and overseas and the threat of the virus to public health and economic recovery remains very real.

COVID-19 has impacted all industries to some extent, including the agricultural sector with impacts likely to continue into the short and long-term future. TFGA members have already been impacted by COVID-19 with difficulties in sourcing labour due to border closures, decreases in processing capacity potatoes, and decreased wool prices. Some members have indicated losses so far of up to 40% of their business income compared to the same time last year and with COVID-19 continuing into the foreseeable future, these losses may further increase.

When TFGA members were surveyed on the financial support they have received from the Tasmanian State Government the majority (81%) indicated they have not received support. Of the 19% that had received support, they indicated it was through the State Government Small Business Hardship Grant, apprenticeship support as well as delays in electricity payments. A majority of survey participants (71%) also indicated they had received JobKeeper and 14% also accessed Rural Business Tasmania (RBT) and 14% used the Tasmanian Public Health Hotline. These results suggest that Tasmania producers are accessing support available but there are lower numbers accessing support that may be beneficial to them such as RBT and the Small Business Hardship Grant. These support measures are important, and we believe the promotion of these services to producers is needed to help them understand what support is available and how to access it. This communication needs to be simple and clear and must continue for the foreseeable future as more producers may need support.

Encouragingly the majority of TFGA members surveyed (81%) indicated that they believe the Tasmanian State Government has provided enough financial support during the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of producers (88%) also indicated that they do not believe they will need financial support in the next 12 months due to COVID-19. This is encouraging and suggests there is some optimism in the Tasmanian agricultural sector from some producers. However, the impacts of COVID-19 in the months to come to agriculture are unknown and some industries are likely to be more impacted than others. It is therefore important that the situation is constantly monitored, and the State Government continue to receive feedback from the Agricultural sector on the issues they face. The Agriculture Consultative Committee has proved an extremely valuable asset during the pandemic in ensuring the agricultural sector can raise concerns with the State Government. With the pandemic ongoing, this committee is invaluable to the agriculture sector and we believe it must remain in place for the foreseeable future.

A majority of TFGA members surveyed (88%) also indicated that they believe the information the State Government has provided on COVID-19 has been clear. The information provided has therefore been successful in ensuring producers are kept up to date on COVID-19 and the changing rules and regulations. This clear communication must continue and reviews in place to ensure people are receiving the correct information and understand any changes in restrictions.

TFGA members were also surveyed on if they have implemented a COVID-19 Workplace Plan and a majority of respondents do have a plan in place (81%). Feedback from producers on the plan, however, was mixed. Some producers indicated that the plan was time-consuming and that it had impacted on their work in areas such as shearing. Others, however, indicated that they believe that the plan was reasonably easy to complete. The COVID19 Workplace Plans are extremely important in allowing Tasmanians to return work safely. It is therefore important that the implementation of the plan is as simple as possible and communications are clear to help people understand how to complete them and why they are important. It is also important to continue to work on the plan to ensure they are suitable for each industry, including agriculture.

Overall, the feedback from TFGA members on the State Government's response to COVID-19 is very positive. Most surveyed believe that the State Government has communicated clearly and that the State Government has provided enough financial support at this point. The situation with COVID-19 is constantly evolving and it is therefore important that the Tasmanian State Government continue to respond to these changes and communicate them. The Agricultural Consultative Committee has proven a vital link between the Tasmanian agricultural industry and the State Government during COVID19 and this Committee should remain in place for the foreseeable future.

Yours sincerely,



**Peter Skillern**  
Chief Executive Officer

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