

# Barney still fuels angst

BY JOHN CHANTER

THE cattle market "by and large operates in a competitive fashion" but the ACCC's agriculture commissioner believes there are three areas that place competition at risk.

Mick Keogh told grass-fed cattle producers in Albury on Monday market reporting standards, over the hook grading and a lack of transparency at saleyards were the major hurdles in building confidence in the beef sector.

The ACCC released a Market Study into the cattle and beef market in March 2017 which made 15 recommendations to improve transparency concerns.

A 12-month review found little had been done to address issues raised.

"It is a very diverse industry and the interests of producers in north Queensland are very different to the interests in southern Victoria so that creates a real inertia in terms of change," Mr Keogh said.

"The major processes enjoy the situation where they have a lot more information

than the producers they're dealing with, in any negotiation it's always an advantage to have more information than the person you are negotiating with, that's human nature."

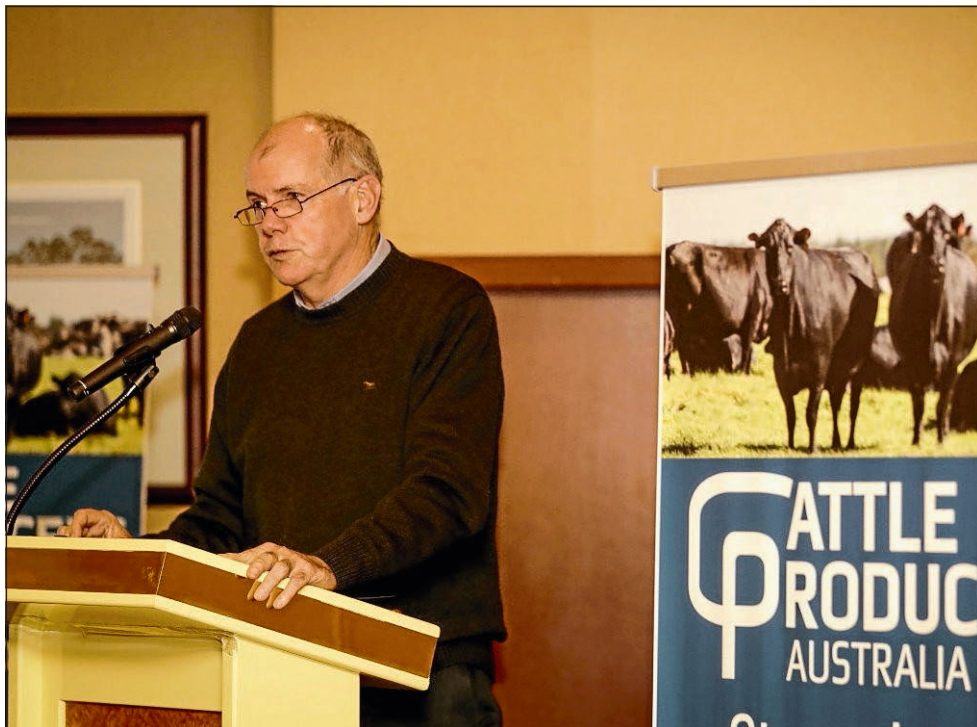
Monday's forum was co-hosted by Cattle Producers Australia, a new organisation for grass-fed beef producers, and the Ovens Valley branch of the Victorian Farmers Federation.

It was the first event held by CPA and brought together producers to discuss the most important issues facing farmers.

Still prominent in most attendees minds was pre- and post-sale weighing and the February 2015 Barnawartha incident, when nine meat processors collectively boycotted the prime cattle sale at NVLX's first sale.

NSW Farmers president Derek Schoen told the forum that incident, and the subsequent meeting at Barnawartha, were defining moments for the beef industry.

"There is unequal strength in the market place between the producers and processors, we are not asking for the



**SLOW ROAST:** ACCC agriculture head Mick Keogh says there has been some progress in the cattle and beef industry but it has been slow. **Picture: JAMES WILTSHARE**

world, we are just asking for a fair run." Mr Schoen said.

"This boycott was a fundamental turning point and an important milestone in the red meat industry. It is vital to keep the momentum going and apply pressure for reform."

CPA aims to rejuvenate

confidence within the industry and used the forum as a call for producers to become members.

It was formed to be a new representative democratic voice for Australia's grass fed cattle producers in accord with the recommendations of two Senate Inquiries.

"The forum shed light on the need for immediate progress and reform and believes that a democratic organisation will give hope to grass-fed cattle producers that their voice will be heard," the association's implementation committee chair, Paul Wright, said.

## NSW WATER CHARGES

TWO north-west NSW families accused of stealing water will fight the charges in court after entering not guilty pleas in the Land and Environment Court in Sydney. Charges against five members of the Harris and Barlow families were the first legal actions over water breaches since the *Four Corners* 'Pumped report. Both trials have been set down for November.

## SUNRICE PROFIT UP

RIVERINA'S SunRice has reported a net profit of \$45.1 million, a 32 per cent increase compared to the previous year. Consolidated revenue for the group in 2017-18 was up 6 per cent at \$1.2 billion. The company said financial results were driven by a combination of several factors that included: the largest Riverina rice crop in three years; ongoing success of selling premium Riverina rice into high returning markets and a rebound in medium grain rice prices.

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