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22 July 2013

Animal Welfare Standards Public Consultation
Locked Bag 3006
DEAKIN WEST, ACT 2600
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RE: Public Consultation for the Draft Animal Welfare Standards & Guidelines - Sheep

I am writing to provide Sheepmeat Council of Australia's (SCA) submission to the above public consultation. The attached includes a statement about SCA's role and how this relates to issues surrounding animal welfare on farm.

The Council is committed to improving animal welfare. This is demonstrated by the publication of a Producers Guide to Sheep Husbandry Practices¹, continued R&D², disease control programs³ and participation in the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy⁴ (AAWS).

SCA have supported and been actively involved in the development of the Standards and Guidelines (S&G), with the objective of achieving nationally uniform animal welfare regulatory outcomes. We have provided extensive resources to the process to ensure that the Standards are practical and achievable if implemented nationally.

SCA will remain engaged in the development and implementation process. However, despite supporting the development Council wishes to express some reservation about the implementation of the draft S&G.

Harmonisation has always been a fundamental condition of industry engagement in the process. Council seeks a commitment from state regulators that they will engage with industry in the implementation process; provide further information on how each state plans to ensure harmonised standards without compromising any of the agreed Standards; and how compliance will be carried out in the future.

Council is also concerned about the ability of the states to commit the resources required to finalise the process. There have been delays in the implementation of the Land Transport Standards and Guidelines. The delayed National implementation of the Land Transport Standards accompanied by a lack of extension resources provided by jurisdictions does not instil Council with the confidence that the Standards if implemented will be consistent and effectively communicated. More 'red tape' without adequate extension is a major concern.

¹ <http://www.mla.com.au/News-and-resources/Publication-details?pubid=6106>

² <http://www.target100.com.au/Welfare>

³ <http://www.ojd.com.au>

⁴ <http://www.australiananimalwelfare.com.au/content/about-aaws>

SCA seeks commitment that any proposal to change current guidelines into Standards must go through the full process, including industry engagement and public consultation.

It is also important that guidelines within the 'Standards and Guidelines' provide guidance for meeting the Standards. This was the accepted approach in the Land Transport process. Where guidelines are included that do not meet this criteria then they should be taken out of the 'Standards and Guidelines' and provided as a separate document.

The submission attached provides comment on the Standards in the Draft Animal Welfare Standards & Guidelines - Sheep

Please contact Kat Ferme, kferme@sheepmeatcouncil.com.au or by phoning the SCA office if you require further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian McColl', written in a cursive style.

Ian McColl
President, Sheepmeat Council of Australia

Submission to the Public Consultation for the Draft Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines - Sheep

1. SUMMARY

This submission focuses on the Standards and Guidelines in the draft documents that affect the sheepmeat industry, and does not attempt to cover issues of the wool industry.

The draft S&G must meet the aim of harmonising and streamlining livestock welfare legislation in Australia. If the draft Standards are to be implemented then SCA request that there be national consistency of administration by state departments. Greater coordination and effort is required to ensure that this occurs.

2. BACKGROUND - SHEEPMEAT COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

SCA is the national Peak Industry Council representing and promoting the needs of Australia's lamb and sheepmeat producers.

The objects of SCA are;

- to represent and promote the interests of Australian sheepmeat producers;
- to function as a specialist sheepmeat industry organisation with concern for the livelihood of all sheepmeat producers;
- to carry out activities necessary for the advancement of the sheepmeat and live sheep export industries;
- to collect and disseminate information concerning the sheepmeat and live sheep export industries;
- to co-operate with appropriate organisations at the state and national level and overseas;
- to maintain a high level of liaison and co-operation with its Members, relevant Government departments and authorities at Federal and State levels, with local government, and with other relevant industry organisations;
- to promote the development of the agricultural and pastoral industry and resources of Australia;
- to act as the Prescribed Body for the sheepmeat industry in Australia within the Red Meat Industry MoU under the Australian Meat and Livestock Act 1997 (the Act).

SCA represents all sheepmeat producers in Australia and provides an efficient mechanism to bring a diverse range of issues and needs to the policy making process. The Council draws on many formal and informal processes to achieve this. Principal amongst these is input from the state farming organisations, and their networks within jurisdictions.

As the recognised peak body for the sheepmeat industry under the Act, SCA sets the strategic objectives to be pursued by the levy funded organisations Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), Animal Health Australia (AHA), and the National Residue Survey (NRS), and examines and approves their programs and budgets. We are involved in priority setting for industry R&D and marketing activities both domestically and internationally as set out in the Red Meat MoU. Under the MoU SCA assesses the performance of services delivered by expenditure of lamb and mutton levies.

Australia's sheepmeat industry is committed to livestock welfare, and the development of nationally consistent mechanisms to ensure the welfare of sheep through each sector of the sheepmeat supply chain. The development and implementation of such mechanism will underpin access to overseas markets and reinforces Australia's international leadership in livestock welfare.

3. MATTERS RELATED TO THE DRAFT STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Chapter Three - Risk Management of Extreme Weather, Natural Disasters, Disease, Injury and Predation

Standard 3.2 *A person in charge must ensure the inspection of sheep at intervals, and a level appropriate to the production system, and the risks to the welfare of sheep.*

Given the diverse range of production systems across Australia, it is not appropriate for a time frame to be stipulated. Anecdotal evidence in the sheep industry has shown that in some production systems frequent monitoring and interventions can lead to more welfare problems compared to no intervention or monitoring. The effect of inspection depends on flock behaviour. Disturbing a flock could lead to desertion, mismothering, and starvation. Educating producers about prevention of dystocia will result in better welfare outcomes than enforcing monitoring, intervention and correction. For these reasons this draft Standard should become a guideline. The sheep industry has committed significant resources to RD&E for reducing dystocia, and will continue to do so.

Chapter Five - Handling and Husbandry

SCA acknowledges that Standard 5.1 has been taken from the Land Transport Standards for consistency. Australia leads the world in animal welfare practices and the vast majority of producers uphold the best care of their animals.

Further, the Standard provides an incomplete list of the abusive practices that might be contemplated by an unreasonable person. In explicitly specifying a list of banned practices there is a risk that any practice not on the list may be implicitly regarded as acceptable. Guidelines, as distinct from Standards, retain their validity in providing examples rather than complete lists of acceptable or unacceptable practices.

SCA recommends that either:

- 1) The entire standard become a guideline as Standard 1.1 *A person must take reasonable action to ensure the welfare of sheep under their care* and the existing Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act or its equivalent in each state / territory makes this standard redundant; or
- 2) S5.1 becomes *A person must handle sheep in a reasonable manner* with the actions listed below included as guidelines;
 - 1) *lift* off the ground by only one leg if the sheep is over 15 kilograms or *lifted* by only the head, ears, horns, neck, tail or wool, unless in an emergency; or
 - 2) throw or drop except to land on its feet from a height less than one metre; or
 - 3) strike in an unreasonable manner, punch or kick; or
 - 4) drag by only one leg that are not standing, except in an emergency to allow safe handling, *lifting*, treatment or humane killing; or
 - 5) drag by the ears, tail, or wool; or

- 6) drag by mechanical means, except in an emergency for the minimum distance to allow safe handling, *lifting*, treatment or humane killing.

Chapter Six - Tail Docking and Castration

Proposed standard S6.3 – must leave a docked tail stump of a sheep with at least two palpable free joints remaining.

SCA is aware of anecdotal reports that the current sheepmeat industry practice is for the majority of tails to be docked between 1 and 3 palpable joints. Neither the regulatory impact statement nor the research provided to the Standards and Guidelines development process can differentiate the regulatory costs, or welfare outcomes between 1 and 3 palpable joints. However, the proposed standard would require a greater level of communication / education of producers than variation C6.

Variation C6 as costed in the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) requires docked tails to have at least *one free palpable joint* and this provides a variation on proposed standard S6.3 (which requires that a docked tail stump have *two palpable free joints*).

Variation C6 would lead to improved animal welfare outcomes; *Tail docked sheep that would otherwise be left with no palpable joints in all states and territories would receive welfare benefits. Tail docked sheep with at least one palpable joint would not receive welfare benefits.* Variation C6 would *not provide any additional welfare benefits than Option B* (proposed standard) as there is no documented welfare difference in going from one to three palpable joints when tail docking.

Variation C6 would result in the same level of reduced regulatory burden as Option B.

Identical to Option B, Variation C6 would be effective in promoting national consistency in relation to tail docking. This would reduce the unquantifiable regulatory burden in relation to this matter for businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions and which currently have different approaches to these matters.

It is not always practical in the field during the tail docking procedure to be able to assess the difference between 1 or 2 palpable joints. As the lamb matures, physiological factors (musculature, fat) can alter the observed length of the tail. A lamb with a tail docked at 2 palpable joints may be observed as only exhibiting 1 palpable joint at a later age. This presents significant difficulty for regulators in enacting the legislation.

Therefore SCA supports variation C6 becoming the proposed standard as the guideline 6.20 *The docked tail should be long enough to cover the vulva in female lambs, and be of similar length in males,* provides the additional guidance.

Chapter Nine - Intensive Sheep Production Systems

SCA recommends that the definition for intensive sheep production is clarified in the main document and that it is clear that pre-export facility standards are covered under the Australian Standards for Exporting Livestock and are not considered intense sheep production systems for the purpose of this Standard.

Chapter Ten - Humane Killing

*Proposed standard 10.6 A person must only use *bleeding out* by neck cut to kill a conscious sheep when there is no firearm, captive bolt or lethal injection reasonably available.*

SCA believes that a person (farmer) may have the relevant knowledge, experience and skill to perform the bleeding out method to humanely kill an animal, but not have a licence or relevant knowledge, experience or skill to use a fire arm even if they are reasonably available. There are also times when the use of a firearm in a confined space or where the shooting of multiple animals can result in unintended consequences. SCA believes that the method should be at the discretion of the person in charge.

SCA believes that this proposed Standard should be converted to a guideline. The stated welfare objective where humane killing is necessitated, that is ‘Where it is necessary to kill sheep, it is done promptly, safely and humanely’ – is achieved through S10.1 – S10.5. Stipulation of how the objective is to be achieved (such as in the proposed S10.6) may unnecessarily limit the options of persons across a broad range of circumstances that are difficult to foresee.

Glossary

Inconsistency in the use of the terms cryptorchid and cryptorchidism;

The glossary has a definition for Cryptorchidism (action of making the animal a cryptorchid by applying a rubber ring) but S6.4, G6.3 refer to the ‘*use of the cryptorchid method*’, and ‘*made cryptorchid*’ respectively.