

SUMMER 2009

SHEEP HEALTH AND WELFARE UPDATE

WOOLPRODUCERS
AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the summer edition of the WoolProducers Australia (WPA) *sheep health and welfare update*. This is the second edition of our new publication and following positive feedback we hope you find the summer edition as informative.

WPA is the peak national body for the wool producing industry in Australia through our state farming organisation members. We are the national voice on behalf of producers, advocating their interests to the Commonwealth and industry stakeholders in Australia and abroad.

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WOOLGROWERS WILD ABOUT DOGS

Wild dogs are estimated to cost the wool industry \$70 million per annum in loss of production and control and they continue to be a growing problem for the industry. Managing wild dogs is a complex issue – as well as the many feral dogs, Australia is home to the dingo, which is originally a native of Asia.

Contrary to popular community beliefs that dingoes are wild native animals, while feral dogs constitute escaped or abandoned domestic pets which are only a peri-urban or agricultural problem, the *Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre* (IA CRC) cites research that concludes there are populations of hybridised urban dingoes existing in most cities of Australia. Adding to the complexity of the problem, livestock attacks are also known to come from uncontrolled domestic dogs that roam in packs at night.

Unfortunately, woolgrowers who have been facing the daily challenge of dogs have not been served well over the years by the lack of a nationally co-ordinated response to wild

dogs. There are many committed and talented individuals or groups at the state and local level working hard to tackle this problem, but there has not been a way of ensuring that the shrinking pool of national research dollars are prioritised in a way to get the 'best bang for the buck', or provide these groups with a forum to share ideas.

That is why WPA welcomed the development of the National Wild Dog Management Advisory Group (NWD MAG) during 2008 as part of the IA CRC wild dog program. Along with representation by WPA, the group is now chaired by AgForce Sheep and Wool President, and Senior Vice President of WPA, Brent Finlay. Brent's presence as Chair ensures that woolgrowers' views are front and centre within the group and that the NWD MAG can have a strong public grower voice when required.

While this represents the beginning of a very long road, there is optimism around the NWD MAG. Since the last meeting in December 2008, the group has generated

widespread media coverage to begin to raise the profile of the problem. The group has already got its first runs on the board, by securing funding under the *Commonwealth Australian Pest Animal Management Program* to develop guidelines for the use of guard dogs for the protection of livestock.

This small, yet growing, use of domestic dogs such as the Maremma has proven effective for some growers when given the right support, and is another way that the industry is 'looking outside the square' to tackle the problem of dogs.

Traditional methods for dog control remain essential tools for industry and need our ongoing political support. The lethal toxin 1080 is one such example. However, while the wool industry is dependent on 1080 for aerial baiting, some regulators have raised questions over its sustainability due to concerns over welfare, impacts on non-target native species and potential for losses of working dogs and pets. As such, progress by the IA CRC into additional lethal toxins are welcomed and highlight the need for ongoing research.

One agent worth noting is *para-aminopropiophenone* (PAPP), which is lethal to canids such as dogs and foxes. It has the potential for a more rapid death than 1080 to address welfare concerns and has the advantage of having an antidote available for pets or farm dogs which is an excellent advancement.



Barry Davies (Fmr Chair), Greg Misfud (National Wild Dog Facilitator) and Brent Finlay (Chair)

FMD AUSVETPLAN REVIEW

If an outbreak of an exotic animal disease such as FMD was to occur in Australia there is a series of planning manuals titled *Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan (AUSVETPLAN)* on which national, state/territory responses are based on.

Animal Health Australia (AHA) is the custodian of the AUSVETPLAN and as a member of AHA, WPA is given the opportunity to provide advice on manuals as they are drafted and reviewed. The most recent AUSVETPLAN WPA reviewed is the FMD manual – of all exotic diseases FMD has the most potential to devastate the Australian sheep industry if an outbreak were to occur. All AUSVETPLAN manuals can be viewed on www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au.

In other FMD news, many growers have been concerned to learn that there has been discussions around importing live FMD virus into the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) in Geelong to conduct trials, which would hopefully help prepare Australia better to respond to an outbreak. While WPA is very supportive of programs that will help us be ready if the unthinkable ever occurs, we do not believe this need outweighs the risk of bringing live virus into the country. We will continue to work with other livestock groups to ensure the importation does not occur in the future.

LIVE EXPORT IN SAFE HANDS

In November 2008 the WPA Executive and staff visited Wellard's Baldvis live sheep pre-export facility in Western Australia. The AQIS accredited pre-export facility is located 30 km south of Perth and has the capacity to house 75 000 – 80 000 sheep in elevated sheds.



WPA was given a tour of the 20 stand shearing shed which has the capacity to shear 3 600 sheep per day. The tour reconfirmed to the Executive and staff the importance of the live export industry to not only WA but sheep producers across Australia. Attendees were very impressed at the high standard to which the facility operated, with the health and welfare of the animals always at the top of mind.

WoolProducers Australia President
Don Hamblin inspecting the Wellards
Baldvis pre-export facility.

NATIONAL WOOL DECLARATION

WPA has welcomed the endorsement of the National Wool Declaration (NWD) by the Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) board, and urges buyers to heed AWI Chairman Wal Merriman's call to utilise the declaration.

Given that the position of the new AWI board on the NWD has been previously unknown, it is timely that the Chairman has clarified the position. The Wool Declaration was introduced in response to the market. It covers not only mulesing status, but also dark fibre contamination and chemical residues.

AWI is right to lay down the challenge to processors and retailers to make their purchasing decisions accordingly. By extension, this also sends a clear message from the AWI board to growers to fill out the declaration where appropriate.

Changing existing marketing conventions is a challenge. Buyers are not able to access the full benefits of the declaration until there is a critical mass of wool available, whereas on the other hand growers are waiting on the market for a price signal.

That means that change will be incremental and needs to occur on both sides, which again underlines the importance of AWI sending positive signals to customers about the availability of declared wool through the NWD, and to growers to declare where they can.

SHEEP WELFARE CODE REVIEW

WPA is closely involved in the review of the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – the Sheep* (the Code). Apart from the mulesing appendix which was updated in 2006, the Code has not been reviewed since 1991.

The purpose of the review is to update the content of the document and reformat the Code into *Standards and Guidelines*. The standards will be implemented consistently into State and Territory legislation while the guidelines represent good industry practice and provide a lot more detail than the standards.

WPA has attended two meetings of the Standards Writing Group – the committee with the responsibility of drafting the standards and guidelines. When the draft is at a more developed stage WPA will consult widely with industry for feedback on the proposed standards and guidelines.

There will also be a public consultation phase in 2010 so all wool growers can comment on the Code.

For more information on the Code contact Alex at WPA on amaclennan@nff.org.au

MAP REVIEW

The Johne's Disease Market Assurance Program (JD MAP) is currently undergoing a review initiated by the JD MAP Reference Group, of which WPA is a member. The purpose of the review is to assess the achievements of the MAP, identify factors which limit the attractiveness for participation by producers and determine if it is appropriate to include other endemic diseases within the MAP.

Randomly selected past and present MAP participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire as well as producers who have never joined.

Do you have a comment for us on the MAP review?
Send it to woolproducers@nff.org.au

FARM BIOSECURITY – ANIMAL MOVEMENTS

Practising good farm biosecurity reduces the risk of introducing disease onto your farm. One of the key areas to reduce this risk is to be vigilant with stock movements. All new or returning animals can introduce disease into your flock which has the potential to cost a significant amount of money to control.

Fencing

Broken fences can allow your sheep to mix with your neighbours' stock, this heightens the risks for the transfer of diseases to your property. Maintain boundary fences to keep your sheep contained and ideally double fence between neighbouring properties.

Taking sheep to shows

In public areas sheep can be exposed to many diseases by mixing with other animals or coming in contact with pens,

vehicles and equipment. When returning home show sheep should be quarantined for a period of time until you are satisfied that they have not picked up anything that could be harmful to your flock.

New Stock

When purchasing new stock it is important to keep records of where your animals came from and where they have been. Being able to trace the path of a disease quickly is important for its control. It is good practise (and mandatory in some states) to ask for a Sheep Health Statement and an NVD when purchasing sheep, these documents will give you a good summary of the health status of the animals.

If you see anything unusual on your property call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888. For more information visit www.farmbiosecurity.com.au.