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E i-TAG NLIS FOR SHEEP? NO

The reported “E-tag push” by the Victorian Government is misguided and may actually hinder the establishment of a cost effective sheep NLIS system.

Sheep E-tags are currently commercially available, plus taxpayers and wool levy payers have already invested millions of dollars in the Sheep CRC E-tag research program. How can the Victorian Government justify using the \$1 million funding from Canberra, specifically for implementation of the sheep NLIS, to duplicate existing research or commercial practice?

The sheep NLIS system will only be successful if it is simple, cheap, effective, and is consistent across the nation. There has already been national agreement to use; year colour coded, visually readable plastic ear tags with PIC codes.

Processors have been seeking such a system to ensure continued market access and to meet growing food safety demands. If NLIS helps maintain or build demand by consumers for sheepmeat products, then producers can justify the added cost of 24c to 28c plus labour.

But producers cannot justify \$1.50 to \$3.00 for E-tags plus the inevitable associated readers and their myriad of different cables and chargers. Next will be the maintenance of a database, and the on going cost of updating technology.

I have some experience with E-tags because we put up to 1500 into our stud sheep every year. They may assist with seedstock animal recording but that has little in common with NLIS. Because of inevitable tag loss we always double tag, with the second tag being the plastic NLIS flock tag.

The sheep industry is continually being squeezed, like most agriculture, with more regulation and costs. Governments and service industries to the sheep industry would be most helpful if they encouraged lower costs of production (and compliance), and potentially higher value production. Pushing E-tags for sheep NLIS at this time will not help producers or consumers.

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