

Short time to consider welfare laws

NEW animal welfare laws for sheep under development by the Federal Government are likely to impose tight restrictions on mulesing and tail docking.

And sheep producers will only have 30 days to respond to the proposed regulations – part of the government’s Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Sheep – being finalised this month for public release in November.

The new laws are likely to include:

- Mandating use of pain relief for mulesing and laparoscopic artificial insemination and embryo transfer.
- Reducing the age of lambs when mulesed to less than six months.
- Banning single penning for wool production.
- Banning tethering (mostly for urban stock, not show tethering).
- Mandating a docked tail length of two free palpable joints.

These regulations were outlined last week by Animal Health Australia’s Kevin de Witte at WoolProducers Australia’s animal health and welfare seminar at Wool Week in Melbourne.

He said at a recent meeting, the government had requested both the sheep and cattle standards and guidelines be complete by April 2013 – the month of the next national meeting of Primary Industries Ministers.

A second draft of the standards and guidelines has been circulated to stakeholders on writing and reference groups involved in the project.

The standards will be enshrined in law and mandatory while the guidelines outline recommended practices to achieve better animal welfare outcomes.

The next step is to prepare a draft regulatory impact statement for public consultation, which starts on November 9 and closes on December 9.

“We anticipate there will be a fair bit of welfare interest to the contrary and welfare organisations will propose contrary positions to what is in the standards and they will mobilise their members to participate in public consultation,” Mr de Witte said.

WoolProducers is not happy with the 30-day consultation. President Geoff Power said he encouraged the government to rethink the consultation length to ensure all farmers and advocacy groups could be involved.

