

AWGA slams welfare draft



THE draft Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for sheep is outdated and unworkable and needs to go back to the drawing board, says the Australian Wool Growers Association (AWGA).

A 60-day period for submissions on the draft to the federal governing body, Animal Health Australia (AHA), closed on Monday.

AWGA director and large-scale NSW New England Merino producer, Martin Oppenheimer, said there had been a lack of consultation with industry bodies on the proposed new sheep

welfare standards and no public consultation.

"They are writing guidelines that will become law and we need to ask if the people involved are practical people and do they understand what they are talking about?" Mr Oppenheimer said.

He said more than two sheep and wool industry bodies - the Sheepmeat Council of Australia and WoolProducers - should have been involved in the consultation process.-

He said AWGA and the Industry Consulting Group (funded by Australian Wool Innovation) should be involved in "re-engineering the paper" and national road shows should be held to gather opinions from sheep producers before any paper was produced as a national standard.

Among AWGA's qualms with the the proposed AHA standards and guidelines were the handling and husbandry of sheep.

"References to muzzling working dogs (that are known biters) is nonsense, muzzling a dog to load sheep on a truck is unworkable.

"A lot of these guidelines challenge the right to farm and if it gets to the stage where you have to have a certificate to farm, then it doesn't encourage best practice and it will limit the commercial nature of our business," Mr Oppenheimer said.

AWGA was concerned new accreditation courses would have to be in place before farmers were allowed to farm under the proposed standards."The natural 'rights to farm' will be replaced by 'certified to farm'," he said.

Mr Oppenheimer said the paper also lacked scientific merit, particularly in regards to mulesing.

"There is absolutely no mention of genetics, the fact that AHA recognises mulesing clips as an alternative to mulesing shows their lack of knowledge, given mulesing clips have shown to increase flystrike by seven times in lambs," he said.

"Genetics and genetic tools that minimise breach and flystrike have been left completely off their radar.-

"The guidelines on mulesing are out of date and unworkable, they are completely impractical."-

Mr Oppenheimer said AHA had failed in its consultation and could damage the sheep industry's credibility.

"If the proposals in the guidelines and standards don't meet with best practice for the industry and don't have scientific backing then they are not worth the paper they are written on," he said.



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"If this draft does come to fruition then it could affect our credibility and how we trade.

"The Livestock Contractors Association (LCA) has lodged a submission with the AHA for mulesing accreditation to be officially recognised.

The draft guidelines state that operators performing mulesing should have relevant knowledge, experience and skills or be supervised by an operator with such.-

However, the LCA believed the guidelines needed to be strengthened to ensure all operators were accredited and had completed official mulesing training.

LCA president, Jack Briscoe, said mulesing was an essential procedure with no practical alternative at this time.-

"Without an effective alternative, mulesing must continue to protect sheep from flystrike and reduce rates of mortality," Mr Briscoe said.

"We believe that operators should be accredited to ensure safe and humane animal handling standards are maintained."

WoolProducers Australia president, Geoff Power, Orroroo, South Australia, said WoolProducers Australia (WPA) had been involved in the development and thorough consultation process for AHA standards and guidelines since 2009.

Mr Power said WPA sits on both the Reference Group and Writing Group for the Standards and Guidelines development process as WPA is the only wool industry member of AHA, and is therefore the recognised peak representative body for the wool industry.

"As the peak wool body we are responsible for the supervision of health and welfare levy dollars spent on behalf of the wool industry via AHA," Mr Power said.

Mr Power said the Standards and Guidelines Reference Group members relevant to the wool industry that consult the Writing Group include Australian Wool Innovation and Australian Wool Exchange, but whole of supply chain organisations including ALPA, ALMA, MLA and AMIC also sat on the Reference Group.

Mr Power said the public consultation stage had been extended and submissions were still being taken by AHA via the website.

He said WPA, in consultation with state farming organisations and other wool industry groups are finalising their submission into the process for changes they want made.

Mr Power said AWGA were at the March WPA board meeting where the Standards and Guidelines were discussed and made their position known.-

Sheepmeat Council of Australia chief-executive-officer, Ron Cullen, also confirmed AWGA were included in the consultation process.

"There has been quite an open and transparent consultation process and even the ubiquitous drovers dog even had a chance to have say," Mr Cullen said.

Mr Cullen said the Sheepmeat Council would be making a submission to AHA for changes to me made to the draft.

AHA said the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the sheep had been developed in partnership with industry, service providers, scientists, welfare groups and the federal, State and Territory governments.

The development process had been co-ordinated by Animal Health Australia using a business plan endorsed by primary industry ministers.