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Release of MLA report PR

Recently ABA chairman John Niven called on Cattle Council to release a report commissioned by MLA on its R&D. This audit, completed early June, has been kept in-house, away from the main stakeholders.

This veil of secrecy is in direct contrast to past MLA commissioned reports, which were gushing in their praise, and were quickly released to the public.

ABA has managed to obtain a copy of the current report. It leaves little doubt as to why Cattle Council and MLA are intent on keeping the results under wraps.

The report highlights many glaring inadequacies in MLAs management of \$70-\$80 million annually of R&D money, 50% of which comes from government investment. Most worrying is that, as it stands today, this standard of management is not viable, especially if MLA is to continue to deliver the technical advances the beef industry needs.

The writers of the audit felt that the policy framework for MLA investment was unclear. They also felt that MLA lack sufficient performance management systems or KPIs.

It was suggested that MLA should adopt a formal process where stakeholders (the producers) would have input, setting priorities for R&D. They emphasized that MLA urgently needs to develop a more inclusive culture, noting the needs and concerns of all key stakeholders, producers and research partners, as well as being more outward looking themselves.

It was felt MLA's efforts to implement new research, and to communicate on all levels were inconsistent and lacked transparency. Of major widespread concern to producers, this leads to the perception that some researchers were favourites, while others see the whole system as an exclusive boys club.

Cattle Council (CCA), says it has two distinct roles: one is to represent the interests of producers; and the other is to provide strategic policy advice and consultation with the MLA concerning investment of grass fed levies.

In theory this makes Cattle Council the producers' voice, the overseer of MLA's financial management, and the political advocate on behalf of producers. The reality is far from this. The 51 page long comprehensive report points out the \$80ml R&D has huge problems and reflects the larger problem with producer representation.

The truth is, CCA is compromised by their reliance on Animal Health Australia (AHA) and MLA, who contract Cattle Council to do paid work. This makes CCA subservient to the service organisations that they are supposed to be overseeing or managing.

ABA believes this current report further emphasizes the necessity to restructure Cattle Council, make it a producer elected and selected board, managing the whole grassfed levy, and managing R&D for the industry.



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MLA must become the service company it was supposed to be; answerable to those who are funding them, providing KPIs as any other business does to gain credibility and reputation. Those who are providing the \$millions of investment (producers and government) must be confident their money is correctly invested and utilized to forward the industry, not provide a sypher for everyone else's benefit.

Elected by all levy payers and answers to levy payers who can control all funding and ensure that producers get value for money. Imagine if you were a shareholder in a company that refused to make public a critical report. One must remember that taxpayers and levy payers share the cost of MLA R&D .The time for change is overdue and unless the producers can get a board elected by producers then we can expect more of the same.