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AWI seeks advice on welfare standards



INDUSTRY fears have been realised as Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) seeks legal advice on the animal welfare standards and guidelines.

AWI has taken on board the continued concern from wool producers that the standards and guidelines would have significant implications for the industry.

One of the primary concerns was that the guidelines in the document could potentially be used to argue the case of the legislated standards in court.

In a letter to the industry, AWI chairman Wal Merriman has outlined the result of extensive legal advice and said the standards and guidelines had the potential to undermine the profitability and productivity of the wool industry.

"As a result of this (legal) advice which states that these prescriptive guidelines could, and would, most likely be used to argue the case of the standards in a court of law, the AWI board feels obliged to share this advice and the potential risks the standards and guidelines may present to individual growers," Mr Merriman said.

The new set of standards and guidelines are still in the initial stages of development and are set to replace the current codes of practice for the welfare of animals.

Australian Association of Stud Merino Breeders vice president Jock MacRae said the industry's worst fears were realised with the revelation from AWI.

"The advice is of great concern to us," he said.

"We had been advised that the standards would be legislated and therefore enforceable but the guidelines would not be regulated and weren't enforceable.

"Our initial concern was if someone found themselves in a court of law the guidelines would be used by the magistrate to substantiate the standards.



AWGA - News Update

"And that has now been confirmed by AWI."

Mr McRae said the entire animal welfare standards and guidelines were not necessary and offered little benefit to the welfare of animals.

"It is interesting that when you look at the submissions made (during the public consultation period) whether you be on the side of the producer or the side of those who don't want people farming animals in Australia, one common theme in those submissions is that there will be no benefit for the animal," he said.

"With that in mind you have to ask why we are doing this?"

Mr McRae said the biggest matter of concern with the guidelines was that they were too prescriptive and far too open to interpretation.

"I am not even sure we prescribe a law on how to pick up a baby, but here we are with a pending law on how you pick up a sheep," he said.

"We fear this legislation will expose us to our detractors, tie us up in the courts and create another layer of bureaucracy."

Although there was a public consultation period, which closed on August 5, Mr MacRae said the level of understanding from producers was disturbing.

"Everywhere I go I talk to farmers about this and they just don't know," he said.

"In the last five years there as been so much regulation rolled out that I think they just overlook it now, but producers, particularly sheep producers, need to switch on."

Australian Wool Growers Association chairman Robert McBride said the standards needed to be taken back to the drawing board or scrapped altogether.

"To have a set of standards enforceable by law is terrifying," he said.

"When you get people in Canberra telling us how to run sheep it is seriously worrying.

"Having these as law could be critically dangerous to our industry."

Mr McBride drew attention to the Standard S5.1 in the sheep document that said a person must not drag a sheep by the wool.

"It says we can't grab a sheep by its wool, that means every time you turn a sheep over to shear it you will be breaking the law, we just won't be able to shear anymore," he said.

"I just think common sense has gone out the window."

<http://www.farmweekly.com.au/news/agriculture/livestock/sheep-general/awi-seeks-advice-on-welfare-standards/2675963.aspx?storypage=0>