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Grower Concern about welfare guidelines



THE animal welfare standards and guidelines are shrouded in confusion and add another level of red tape according to WA livestock producers and industry representatives.

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.

The process has included a public consultation period which invited comment from industry groups.

But the public consultation period closed on August 5 and many farmers still have little or no understanding of what the standards and guidelines will mean for them.

Australian Wool Growers Association chairman Shane Edwards said many farmers who have read the document were horrified, but most had limited knowledge of what it actually was.

"The whole exercise has been kept on the quiet side to be honest," Mr Edwards said.

"It has been coming to State Farming Organisations but I don't believe at any point they have been disseminating what is proposed enough to their memberships."

According to Mr Edwards, the document needed tearing up and starting again.

"There are elements of the standards and guidelines that are unworkable for the sheep industry," he said.

"This has come about through Animal Health Australia (AHA) not having enough understanding of the wool industry."



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The standards and guidelines are set to eventually become legislation according to Mr Edwards, bringing an additional level of regulation and red tape into the industry.

"We already have Prevention of Cruelty Acts in each State, and there is nothing wrong with what we have got," he said.

"This document states you can be prosecuted for breaching a standard, but not a guideline.

"But it is not made clear what the difference is and I have concerns over if that claim will actually hold.

"For example if a producer does not follow a guideline is he not automatically in breach of a standard."

WAFarmers wool section president Ed Rogister said there was an enormous amount of overlay between the current Prevention of Cruelty Acts and the proposed standards and guidelines.

"Here we go again with another level of bureaucracy to inhibit our businesses," he said.

"Both State and Federal governments have said they wanted to reduce red tape for farmers.

"But to appease the people that are making the most noise we have had to go down this path."

But Mr Rogister said livestock producers could be confident that those involved in the consultation period, which included WAFarmers that submitted a number of proposed changes to the draft, had worked hard to ensure the standards and guidelines are as close to being practical as possible.

"I want to assure farmers that at all times, their considerations have been taken into account," he said.

The Stud Merino Breeders Association of WA (SMBAWA) did not support the introduction of the standards and guidelines as legislation and would prefer to see the codes of practice, currently in place, to be revisited if need be.

SMBAWA vice president Steven Bolt said the standards were far too open to interpretation to become legislation.

"We have serious concerns around the wool harvesting section of the document," he said.

Mr Bolt was also concerned with the way in which the public consultation period had been undertaken.

He said very few commercial producers would have had the chance to fully understand the document and its implications.

"AHA has covered themselves with this consultation period but the document was released in the middle of seeding and most growers, if they have heard about, wouldn't have read it," Mr Bolt said.

"And with the amount of pages involved, it takes a long time to get your head around what is exactly involved and what it will mean if the legislation gets through."

Mr Bolt said ultimately the buck stopped with each State's individual government.

"We want to ensure our government is well aware of the implications of this becoming legislation," he said.

"We don't want to see anything bought in that will make it harder than it already is for WA livestock producers."

But Pastoralist and Graziers Association beef and sheep producers committee executive officer Ian Randles said it was the current code of practice system that left accepted animal husbandry practices open to prosecution.

He said part of the current legislation said a person must not be cruel to an animal.

"Take tail docking for instance, we do it to sheep, but not to our pet cat or dog," Mr Randles said.

"The point of that is we have a bunch of people that would consider that cruel.

"They make a complaint, and it might be the magistrate will throw the case out and say people have been doing that for hundreds of years.

"But it might also be that the magistrate is a vegan, and maybe they say actually that is cruel and prosecutes the farmer.

"This is all about being more specific."



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Mr Randles said the standards and guidelines would draw a line in the sand and provide some level of protection for producers.

AHA released a statement in August that stated the purpose for developing the welfare standards and guidelines was to create improved and nationally consistent rules for the care and management of livestock across farming enterprises in Australia.

"More than 33,000 individual submissions were received for AHA's public consultation on the draft Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for cattle and sheep which closed on Monday, August 5," it said.

A spokesperson told Farm Weekly that AHA only facilitated the consultation for the draft of the standards and guidelines and did not determine the outcome and/or future implementation of the document.

<http://www.farmweekly.com.au/news/agriculture/livestock/sheep-general/concern-about-welfare-guidelines/2671860.aspx?storypage=0>