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Sheep and wool industry agreement needed on PETA and animal activists



WoolProducers president Richard Halliday

MORE agreement was need within the sheep and wool industry on how to counter animal activist attacks, according to WoolProducers Australia Richard Halliday.

In the latest edition of quarterly industry newsletter *The Sheep Producer*, Mr Halliday said while there is some agreement on how the industry can proactively move forward, "more agreement is needed on that messaging – not PR or half-truths, but genuine reflection and proactive stories."

"This doesn't take one group or person to make a difference – it takes everyone with an interest in wool to do their bit to ensure others see us and what we do in a fair light," he said.

Mr Halliday said the wool industry has been in the sights of animal activist groups again recently and there is much talk about industry needing to be on

'the front foot'.

"Growers have told us in our consultations that being proactive on activists is high on the priority list.

"However, as is the issue in the wool industry on so many topics and initiatives, there are so many versions of what the 'front foot' would ideally look like."

In April this year Mr Halliday initially declined to give *Sheep Central* his opinion of a PETA video that attacked shearers, shearing, mulesing and woollen garments.



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Mr Halliday then said WPA was working with Australian Wool Innovation as part of a strategy "to keep oxygen out of the issue," and letting AWI represent the industry on the issue, although an AWI spokesman said the body was forbidden under its Statutory Funding Agreement to directly represent the wool industry or speak on behalf of woolgrowers. WoolProducers Australia later issued a statement rejecting PETA's claims in the video.

Young farmers urged to become animal activists

Mr Halliday's comments in the newsletter came after farmers at the Victorian Farmers Federation Young Agribusiness Professionals' Ag-Formation Conference in Bendigo last week were urged to "get on the front foot" and become their own animal activists.

Mr Halliday assured WPA members that WoolProducers would continue to work on this issue and urged anyone with strong views on the topic of activists to email the organisation on admin@woolproducers.com.au

"It is frustrating when the hard work that livestock producers conduct day in day out to ensure the wellbeing of their animals is criticised by people who know very little about livestock, the practices that are undertaken and the reasons why they must be done.

"Looking at social media and speaking to producers, there is a lot of frustration and anger over these constant, ill-informed campaigns," he said.

"It's hard not to seem defensive when we know that the vast majority of wool growers and their employees do the right thing.

"Sometimes even the right thing can be cast in a bad light given current technology and worldwide connectivity."

Woolgrowers have an obligation to intervene

Mr Halliday said activists capitalised on people doing the wrong thing and not respecting the livestock, and on the husbandry practices farmers performed to maintain and promote sheep health and welfare.



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If people treated animals in the correct way then there would be no material to broadcast to the public, he said.

"It is important to remember that everybody has an obligation to intervene if someone you're working with is treating animals badly."

He said there was also a lack of understanding about the "genuine health and welfare ramifications" of not performing some animal husbandry practices.

Mr Halliday said the issues should be talked about in an open and transparent manner, "every chance we get".

"Even if it is a short conversation or a post on social media – put it into context for people.

"A measured and factual approach, told in your own way will go a significant way to improving these issues."

Mr Halliday urged members against making disparaging remarks, getting aggressive or poking fun at others "because of their diet choices", suggesting this would be "only driving the wedge further and people on the receiving end feeling even more justified in their beliefs because of the sledging they just received."

Bendigo delegates told to get their message to general public

At the Ag-Formation Conference, delegates were told farmers need to do more than just care for their animals, they need to become activists themselves who tell the world how much they care.

"We the farmers are the real activists, working to care for our animals," Australian Pork Limited and VFF Pig Group member Dr Pat Mitchell said.

"I'd call the people who raid our farms agro-terrorists not activists."

Deakin University public relations expert Ross Monaghan told delegates social media meant farmers and others in agribusiness could become journalists.

"You have to be proactive," Mr Monaghan said. "You need to go to extraordinary lengths to prove you are open, honest and transparent."

Mr Monaghan said arguing with activists was a losing battle, what mattered was getting your message out to the general public.



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"Activists argue on an emotional level and no white paper or scientific report is going to change their opinions," he said.

"Get on the front foot, because you are the media."

Activist response game has changed

VFF media manager Tom Whitty said the game had changed when it comes to responding to activists.

"We learnt this when we openly tackled the animal extremist group People for Ethical Treatment of Animals.

"We will always condemn acts of animal cruelty, but will never allow activists to fabricate lies about our farmers."

Mr Whitty said farmers were proud of their industry and take every step to the right thing.

"But extreme animal rights groups need to be called out for what they are – extreme. We exist to fight for our members and that is exactly what the VFF will do."

The VFF lodged an official complaint to the Advertising Standards Bureau against the online PETA online advertisement encouraging consumers not to buy woollen products due to concerns over animal welfare.

The advertisement featured Jona Weinhofen holding what was represented as a shorn lamb covered in blood and shearing cuts alongside the words "Here's the rest of your wool coat". In the campaign, PETA claimed that "25 per cent of the world's wool comes from Australia, and it's made from 100 per cent cruelty."

But the VFF said the fake lamb was grossly misleading and offensive, and the comments and allegations made by PETA misrepresented and damaged the industry.

http://www.sheepcentral.com/sheep-and-wool-industry-agreement-needed-on-peta-and-animal-activists/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Sheep+Central+news+headlines+June+29+2015&utm_content=Sheep+Central+news+headlines+June+29+2015+CID_49bd191668e984968287d7a27c8715c5&utm_source=eGenerator