

The Sheepmeat Council of Australia held its General Meeting at the Ambassador Hotel, Perth, WA on 3 and 4 August.

Following Rodney Watts' retirement from the Council, David Boyle, PGA of WA, was elected Treasurer. New Councillor, James Jackson, NSW Farmers' Association, was welcomed to his first meeting. Suzie Kidman, South Australian Director announced that this would be her last meeting. Council expressed their gratitude to Rodney and Suzie for their respective 8 & 3 year commitment to SCA.

Major issues discussed included:

NLIS (Sheep & Goats)

Council discussed the recently completed, but not public, CIE Report on NLIS (Sheep and Goats) Business Plan. Last year Primary Industry Standing Committee commissioned a consultancy to examine options, including financial costs and benefits, for improving the NLIS (Sheep & Goats). SCA is working to provide leadership for industry on the best way forward for the Australian sheepmeat industry. The report clearly identified that in the short term there are significant impediments to any widespread use of radio frequency identification devices, as well as the current high implementation and ongoing costs of the scheme. Council also recognises the threat of the states not resourcing their share of the visual mob-based system and that this requires consideration in any long-term response to sheep traceability. Council reinforced their commitment to the implementation of the enhanced current mob-based visual tag system as it is currently the only available viable approach.

A communications plan has been developed to communicate industry wide the requirement to record the movement of mobs of sheep between properties. This will be progressively rolled out through all States from 1 July 2010 and SCA will assist where it can.

Council also agreed to a recommendation to amend the LPA Standard to require compliance with the regulatory requirements of NLIS (Sheep and Goats).

Animal Welfare Objective Measurements presentation

Murdoch University presented current research on using qualitative behaviour assessment as another tool to measure animal welfare. The use of behavioural assessment is becoming increasingly common across the globe as society makes increasing demands on animal production systems. The Council discussed the implications of such developments for the industry.

Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Sheep

The Standards are almost at a stage where they will be subject to a Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA). However, in light of a lack of response from the state animal welfare regulators on how they will implement the proposed competency standards, SCA will not support the commencement of the RIA stage. There is significant concern within the industry about the potential ramification that might arise from the inclusion of "competency" in regulation.

National Consistency of Animal Welfare outcomes

SCA reaffirmed its commitment to the objective of national uniform animal welfare regulatory outcomes. The AHA Industry Forum and SCA have recently sent letters to Minister Burke requesting that the commitment to National consistency be re-affirmed by jurisdictions.

Animal Welfare Planning

Council is to undertake a review of animal welfare in the sheepmeat industry to identify the key priorities for action.

Grazing Industries Biosecurity Planning

Council reinforced the need for the implementation of biosecurity plans for the sheep industry and is in the process of reviewing the draft National Biosecurity Manual.

Industry Liaison Officer Training

SCA has been working closely with WoolProducers Australia (WPA) to implement a new sheep and wool Industry Liaison Officers (ILO) model to ensure that the industry has a strong pool of trained producers across Australia to assist in any future Emergency Animal Disease. A recent ILO training workshop was held in South Australia in June 2010. Planning is well advanced for the next workshop in Victoria in October.

Ovine Johne's disease

OJD Prevalence Area Changes

OJD prevalence areas are currently under review and face potential changes. SCA is working with WPA to ensure an effective communication plan for producers on the way producers can manage the risks of OJD.

OJD Management Plan Review

SCA discussed the need for a review of the OJD Management Plan which was implemented in 2007. SCA will oversight the development of a draft Terms of Reference for an independent review of the OJD Management Program in consultation with WPA.

OJD Research

OJD continues to be a significant threat to the industry and SCA discussed future areas for OJD research.

Media and Communications

SCA will continue to hold communication teleconferences with State Farming Members to discuss SCA policy developments. The next SCA e-newsletter will focus on changes to OJD prevalence areas and is due out in September.

Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL)

FSANZ has commenced a review of CoOL for unpackaged meat and meat products. SCA discussed meat-labelling issues, including the importance of providing consumers with clear and truthful information whilst not imposing unreasonable costs on the supply chain. SCA will canvas current policy positions in state farmer member organisation members before determining a policy position on CoOL.

Climate Change

There has been little action on this policy front. SCA will continue to work with the National Farmers' Federation to ensure the best outcome for sheep producers in any future policy decision.

TriLamb

The upcoming TriLamb meeting that will be held in Adelaide on 22 October following the Sheep CRC Conference on 20-21 October 2010.

Sheepmeat Industry Strategic Plan (SISP)

Council is coordinating the development of the 2010-15 SISP with input from an extensive range of industry players. Further development needs were discussed by Council. The SISP is planned for completion in September/October.

Agrisure

SCA discussed the potential to manage a phase-out of Flockcare and phase in of Agrisure. Currently, 196 producers are Flockcare accredited. These producers will be able to stay in Flockcare when Agrisure is introduced but it may be beneficial to encourage them to move to the new program.

Sheep CRC

James Rowe, CEO, Sheep CRC, attended the meeting and Council provided comment on range of issues including future genomics work, how to use genetics data to best deliver value to the sheepmeat producer, where results from the nucleus program should be directed, and the future of the information nucleus program. The Sheep CRC will undergo an important third year review commencing February 2011 and if this goes well may apply for a 5 year extension.

Meat & Livestock Australia

David Palmer, General Manager, MLA, addressed Council on changes in staffing within the Company, the evaluation review by Arche Consulting, Productivity Commission Inquiry into rural R&D, the development of the SISP, sheep industry projections, and 'Making More From Sheep' activities.

LiveCorp

Council provided comment on the evaluation of the LiveCorp, MLA and the Australian government partnership. The evaluation is focused on qualifying the collaboration and co-investment by the three partners in the Live Export Program and the Live Animal Trade Program. The evaluation, whilst not yet completed, is showing that the impact of the programs on the sheep industry have been very positive.

LambEx

Following the Council meeting, members took the opportunity to attend LambEx 2010.

Further detail/clarification is available from your SCA Councillor, or the SCA Office, refer www.sheepmeatcouncil.com.au for contact details and past meeting reports.