



Stud Merino Breeders' Association of W.A.(Inc)

PO Box 135 Claremont WA 6910

Tel. (08) 9384 6466

Fax. (08) 9384 2606

Email: office@merinowa.com.au

www.merinowa.com.au

The Chair
Hon Dr Sally Talbot
Standing Committee on Legislation
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005
email: lccl@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Dr Talbot

Submission Animal Welfare Amendment Bill 2017

I am writing on behalf of the Stud Merino Breeders' Association of WA. As well as owning and breeding stud animals, the majority of our members are also commercial sheep producers whose livelihoods are dependent on the animals they breed. Merino's are grown not just for their wool but ultimately for the red meat market. As with most agricultural production the end product is destined for both the local and overseas markets.

Our Committee takes an active role in all aspects that concern the industry and seeks to engage with policy makers at every opportunity, both to provide expertise of farming practise and to try to ensure objective decision making is used to shape sustainable farming practise for the future.

Underpinning the sustainability of animal production and the future of all those invested in the industry is the welfare of animals. To infer otherwise is to show disrespect and undermine the integrity of those involved.

The first recommendation of the Easton review, the independent review into certain aspects of the administration of the Animal Welfare Act 2002 (WA) carried out in 2015, was that the Director General of the previously named Department of Agriculture and Food WA work with stakeholders to develop a strategic plan and overarching policy framework for animal welfare. This the review panel concluded would guide the implementation of the Act and the development of new policies. "A Policy framework provides the public sector, stakeholders and the community more generally with a clear understanding of the priorities and directions for the legislation, subsidiary legislation, codes and policy documents. Projects, such as proposals for legislative amendment, can be developed in accordance with the framework. In the absence of such a framework, proposals for legislative and policy change become piecemeal, if they are made at all... The overarching strategic plan and policy framework should include a plan for the development of the Act, subsidiary legislation, Codes of Practice, standards and policy that relate to domestic and commercial animals.¹"

Surely it is essential in the area of Animal Welfare, in which community expectations are so divisive and emotive, that the pathway to good policy is structured and transparent with a clearly defined consultation process integral to its success. With the framework in place and engagement with industry stakeholders, the standards and guidelines appropriate to commercial producers could be defined, informing the basis for generally accepted animal husbandry practice.

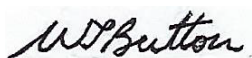
The Easton review found that there were problems with Public Service and NGO inspectors having different operating procedures and guidelines. The proposed amended Animal Welfare Act allows for another level of inspector, the Designated General Inspector, appointed by the Minister in a separate capacity from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the RSPCA inspectors and whose role and powers are indeterminate.

In October 2017 the Hon. Alannah MacTiernan tabled the Animal Welfare Amendment Bill 2017 which was then followed by a Animal Welfare Stakeholders meeting on Thursday 16th November 2017. With the Amendment Bill already tabled at this point, the purpose of the stakeholder meeting seemed unclear. What was clear however, was that many of the representatives from the companion animals' organisations have limited understanding of animal production systems. Without due regard, the divide in knowledge base, which was clearly demonstrated at the meeting, can potentially jeopardise the future of animal production in this State. This attempt at consultation after the fact also made it abundantly clear that the Minister is not interested in engaging with industry to ensure a sustainable industry. How then can we allow for any Minister present or future to have undefined powers enabled by the Act both to influence the provisions allowing defence to prosecution under S19 and the appointment and operations of inspectors through S35A. The Easton review found that voluntary compliance with the emphasis on education was the most appropriate method of achieving compliance with the Act and its provisions and this was supported by the Agriculture Department and the RSPCA. This does not obviate the need to prosecute for breaches of standards, as in society at large there will be those that do not act in the best interests of animals in their care. It is also reasonable to strive to prevent cruelty to animals taking place in the first instance. What is unreasonable though, is no clear direction in strategy for the formation of appropriate Codes of Practice, standards and policy, this leads to uncertainty for those operating in animal production industries.

Animal Welfare reform is bigger than politics and the Animal Welfare Act should provide for complete independence from the political arena and its lobbyists. If the purpose of the proposed amended Bill is to accommodate perceived community expectations and to completely ignore those whose lives are intrinsically bound with the welfare of animals, then this is an injustice.

When on 21st March 2018, the Minister referred the Animal Welfare Amendment Bill 2017 to the Standing Committee on Legislation, it was an admission of the failure of the amended Bill to position itself to improving the delivery of positive Animal Welfare outcomes now and into the future both at a state level and nationally, because the framework required for a successful piece of legislation has not been established.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wayne Button', with a stylized, cursive script.

Wayne Button