



27 September 2013

Our Ref: 05-010-02-0002
Your Ref: PAL

Hon Liz Behjat MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Public Administration
Parliament House
Perth
Western Australia

Dear Hon Behjat

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Pastoral Lease Inquiry and for the extension of time granted to the Western Australian Local Government Association (the Association).

The Association is the united voice of Local Government in Western Australia, and is an independent, membership-based group that represents and supports all 140 Local Governments in Western Australia. The comments contained in this submission have not been considered or endorsed by the Association's State Council, as such, please be advised that this is an interim submission and that the Association reserves the right to modify or withdraw comments as directed by State Council.

Terms of Reference - Environmental Damage

There is a need to protect and enhance the significant environmental and economic importance of pastoral land in Western Australia. However, this statement does not represent the situation in the Southern Rangelands, where small stock such as sheep and goats predominate. Due to drought and wild dog activity, all pastoral leases have been running stock at levels well below the allowable stocking rates specified in current leases.

In October 2012, a consultant prepared a business case for the Proposed Murchison Region Vermin Cell. As part of this work, the consultant surveyed 73 Southern Rangelands pastoral properties and found that sheep stocking levels were 24 percent of total allowable carrying capacity, with a projected reduction of 14.5 percent per annum if wild dog numbers were not substantially reduced. The result of these low stocking numbers has allowed pastures to regenerate. Stock induced environmental damage is not occurring in the Southern Rangelands at this time.

Terms of Reference – Proposed Pastoral Lease 2015

The complex method used to calculate the lease periods being offered to pastoralists in 2015 is creating uncertainty, and threatening the viability of many pastoral operations. There is significant variation in lease length ranging from seven years to

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50 years. For those with lease periods on the shorter end of the spectrum, there is little incentive to invest and little likelihood of banks and others providing finance. All pastoral leases from 2015 onwards should be for 50 years, with five year pastoral inspections to ensure that lease conditions are being met. As an incentive for good management, a successful five year pastoral inspection should result in the lease period being extended to, and maintained to the 50 year term. If pastoral inspections consistently show that lease conditions are not being adhered to, then the leases should not with extended, and in severe cases, withdrawn.

The Association recommends that current draft leases are withdrawn, and the process is restarted with a timeframe that allows for structured consultation, and a process that ensures all affected parties, including pastoralists have power in the decision making process.

Terms of Reference – Any Other Matter

In response to increased wild dog populations, some pastoral lessees have converted from sheep to cattle farming. However, little investment into infrastructure upgrades were made, and numerous fences do not adequately prevent livestock trespass. Local Government is concerned about the human safety risk when cattle are loose on roads and highways. This is an ongoing issue for Local Government and to date there has been little response from State Government to Local Government calls for assistance.

The short timeframe of the inquiry has prohibited many pastoralists from having the time to give a considered opinion and many are not in the position to do so, given their current difficult circumstances. The Association proposes that a public hearing is held in a central location to increase the number of participants in the inquiry.

For enquiries please contact Julia Beijeman, Environment Policy Manager, on telephone (08) 9213 2039 or email jbeijeman@walga.asn.au

Yours sincerely



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