

**PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 –**

**INDUSTRY INQUIRY INTO PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AMENDMENT**

**(RESTRICTIONS ON STOCK ANIMAL PROCEDURES) BILL 2019 HEARING –**

**11 August 2020**

**Responses to Supplementary Questions:**

**Professor Emeritus Peter Windsor, 31/08/2020**

**1. If the bill were to pass in its existing form, mulesing would be banned by 2022. What are the available operation strategies for woolgrowers to achieve the new requirements?**

For woolgrowers that are currently dependent on mulesing with pain relief as their most effective means 'best practice' welfare approach to providing lifetime protection from blowfly burdens, to suddenly not be able to conduct the mulesing operation will have numerous impacts:

1. Higher levels of whole flock surveillance required, particularly in the extensive period of flystrike risk to identify and treat animals with 'strike' e.g. August/September through to April/May in the NSW central through southern tablelands. The costs of achieving this including increased labour, insecticide and fuel costs; these will likely be substantial.
2. Closer attention to managing risk of surveillance failures in achieving timely intervention. It is very likely that flystrike control failures will be high and the additional burdens of depleted wool clip returns and costs of carcass disposals, will impose socioeconomic losses that can have mental health and livelihood impacts.
3. Increased crutchings required with increased costs of labour and chemicals. The current practice of an annual 'crutch' preceding lambing and/or shearing, will need to be supplemented by one or two additional annual crutchings in many flocks, particularly due to the accumulation of 'tail dag' that compromises both shearing and lambing and substantially increases flystrike risk.
4. Increased attention to acaricide resistance is required as more chemical dependence suddenly emerges.
5. Increasing challenge of shearing. Shearers hate 'daggy sheep' as it is challenging not to injure the skin underneath the dags and it considerably slows the process of shearing or crutching. The increased numbers and costs of crutchings is potentially a substantial operational impost.
6. These above and the actual measurement of the increased welfare burdens from not mulesing, would require substantial investments in applied research, in my opinion.

**2. Could the outcome of the bill result in large numbers of merino sheep being offloaded to the saleyards? What would be the effect of this on the sheep and wool markets in NSW? Would a possible outcome be large scale slaughter of wool producing sheep?**

It is likely that some mainly Merino flock operations, especially in fine-wool country that is less suitable for cross-bred sheep or cropping operations, may well assess the wool industry is 'now all too hard' and be forced to adopt other production systems and commodities that are very likely to be less profitable for the type of country in NSW that is currently producing wool e.g. beef cattle.

The mass dumping of wool sheep into the market is a risk if there is a perceived high compliance risk with a mulesing ban. However, my understanding of the sheep meat export market (frequent interactions with Fletchers, Dubbo) is that the trade of sheep meat to the middle east has historically been shown to be a robust and resilient market and the processors may welcome additional product.

**3. If the bill were to pass in its current form would it trigger or require an Industry Adjustment Package from government? What would be the impact on employment in regional NSW?**

This is an issue for the wool industry producer groups and government to negotiate. However, a mulesing ban is a major impost on wool producers and would likely require a substantial incentive rather than threats of prosecutions for the practice change to be acceptable and successfully adopted. Financial assistance to meet the increased labour costs for the above issues could be one strategy and may help regional NSW employment, although with the exception of shearing and crutching, there is a demonstrable trend in modern sheep farm operations to invest in labour-saving devices and intensification practices (e.g. automated sheep handlers, rotational grazing systems, improved pastures etc).

Apart from use of drones to improve flock surveillance, it is difficult to imagine that even a ban mulesing would reverse the trends for decreasing labour imposts in sustainable sheep operations. There will likely remain a substantial risk that many producers will consider wool production without mulesing to be unsustainable.