## INQUIRY INTO PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AMENDMENT (RESTRICTIONS ON STOCK ANIMAL PROCEDURES) BILL 2019

**Organisation:** Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD)

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## Pastoralists' Association

of West Darling Inc.

## Registered under NSW Government Fair Trading

30th July, 2020

Portfolio Committee No. 4- Industry Parliament of New South Wales PortfolioCommittee4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Committee,

The Pastoralists Association of West Darling (PAWD) has been representing the interests of pastoralists in the far west of NSW since 1907. The majority of our members run merino sheep, which benefit greatly from mulesing for flystrike prevention. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Restrictions on Stock Animals Procedures) Bill 2019, introduced by Mark Pearson MP of the Animal Justice Party - which seeks to ban mulesing - has come to our attention. PAWD's position is that the passing of this Bill would be counterproductive to the intent of improving animal welfare outcomes.

PAWD strongly supports mulesing, in association with the use of pain relief, in order to confer lifetime flystrike protection to sheep, until such time that a superior alternative method of protection is developed. A majority of producers now use pain relief as part of the mulesing process, with the availability of analgesics and their uptake by woolgrowers increasing over time. Industry is working hard to develop more effective methods of permanent flystrike protection. However, banning mulesing before alternative methods are widely available will leave sheep unprotected from flystrike and at risk of death.

Producers should be allowed the freedom to undertake necessary animal husbandry procedures at their discretion if these procedures are in the best interests of animal welfare, and the prevention of flystrike in sheep is most certainly a positive animal welfare outcome. The adoption of the Bill introduced by Mark Pearson MP would actually deliver poorer animal welfare outcomes for sheep, as sheep producers would have no choice but to cease mulesing. This would in turn greatly increase the incidence of flystrike, and the subsequent suffering and death of millions of sheep every year would be an unavoidable reality.

Mulesing is only performed on sheep that are most susceptible to flystrike in order to provide an effective means of permanent flystrike prevention. Nowadays, far less sheep are mulesed than what were historical norms, as merino wethers are typically now sold as lambs instead of being retained as wool growers, and some new breeds of sheep do not require mulesing by pure virtue of not growing wool. However, merino ewes are retained as breeders for five or more years, and the reality of sheep production in pastoral areas is that mulesing provides a level of protection over the lifetime of the animal that is superior to all other methods that are currently available.

It is totally impractical to rely on alternative methods of flystrike control on large pastoral holdings. The incidence of flystrike is usually precipitated by wet weather, which invariably makes it difficult to muster sheep in for shearing, crutching or chemical treatment. Wet weather aside, the window of opportunity for treating flystrike on sheep unprotected by mulesing before losses are sustained during a "fly wave" is impossibly small. Flystrike can kill in a matter of days, but undertaking shearing, crutching or chemical treatment on large properties typically takes weeks as a bare minimum. Additionally, chemical treatment carries with it obligations to adhere to wool and meat withholding periods and protect workers from exposure, and is of no use whatsoever to organic producers. Flystrike chemicals also lose their effectiveness over time as blowflies develop resistance, necessitating the time consuming development of new chemicals. Furthermore, securing workers in remote areas to complete mustering, dipping, crutching and shearing is becoming increasingly difficult, with this situation greatly exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions. Meanwhile, mulesed sheep are always benefiting from effective lifetime flystrike protection in all weather conditions, and are far less likely to become flystruck when conditions are conducive to its development.

Sheep producers will cease mulesing in a heartbeat when suitable alternative becomes available. They carefully consider the pros and cons of flystrike protection options and understand that mulesing is currently the best way to protect their sheep from an agonizing, distressing, traumatic death caused by flystrike. With this in mind, PAWD believes that a mulesing ban would be premature and counterproductive to the intent of improving animal welfare outcomes. Additionally, PAWD does not support the mandated use of pain relief for other animal husbandry procedures referenced in the Bill.

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