

MLA goes 'back to basics'

BY MELISSA MARTIN

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MEAT and Livestock Australia will bring the scope of its work "back to basics" following widespread misunderstanding of its role in the wake of this year's temporary ban of live cattle exports to Indonesia.

At the MLA AGM in Longreach on Thursday, both retiring MLA chairman Don Heatley and new MLA managing director Scott Hansen addressed the issue.

Mr Heatley said the live-ex crisis clearly showed there was confusion not only in the Australian public and media about what MLA does, but also within the industry.

"MLA is not an animal welfare agency, we do not have any legislative authority in export markets, we are not commercial operatives, we do not buy or sell a single head of livestock, we are not the industry's representative or policy body," Mr Heatley said.

"What we are is a marketing and research and development service provider to industry and what we do is at the direction of industry.

"Among other things, this issue has caused MLA to reflect on the source of confusion about its role - whether it has over-reached on its services to industry above and beyond those it was established to deliver.

"Since starting in the role of managing director in July, Scott Hansen and the MLA board are already working to bring the scope of MLA's activities back to basics."

In delivering his inaugural address as MLA managing director, Scott Hansen said it was clear the various roles and responsibilities of organisations within the industry had blurred over time.

"We are not the elected representatives of the Australian cattle, sheep and goat industries, rather, MLA creates opportunities to support supply chains in these industries," Mr Hansen said.

"We are not lobbyists, nor spokespeople for the Australian cattle, sheep and goat industries.

"I arrived back in Australia from the United States in June to have a various array of media, politicians and stakeholders tell me that we were an independent Indonesian abattoir accreditation agency, that we were an animal welfare agency, that we were a government department, none of which is correct.

"Our roles and responsibilities are clearly misunderstood by many of the stakeholders we deal with on behalf of our shareholders and I must say this has been reinforced in your candid feedback to me over the last couple of months, feedback which I have welcomed and appreciate."

Mr Hansen said MLA has now revised its mission statement, which is to "create opportunities across the cattle, sheep and goat supply chains by optimising the return on collective investment in marketing and research and development".

Mr Hansen said working to clarify MLA's roles and responsibilities in industry structures was one of three key actions it was undertaking.

"Firstly, we're working to enhance ours and industry's issues and crisis management response capabilities," Mr Hansen said.

"The key action here is we need to better equip producers, exporters and others in the supply chain to be able to be their own spokespeople, their own advocates.

"Nobody in this room will be a more compelling advocate for your practices and for your business than you.

"It is clear from these previous months that the strongest messages, the messages that resonated not only amongst us but with the broader community were the ones that came from producers and exporters with skin in the game that could talk from their heart and passionately in defence of their business and in defence of their industry.

"Secondly, MLA will continue to invest in expertise in the market to assist livestock exporters to secure their market access around the globe as the companies roll out the supply chain assurances now required under federal legislation.

"We acknowledge that the previous policy of investing in activities to deliver continued and incremental improvements in animal welfare practices to reach OIE standards is now clearly not acceptable to the Australian community.

"The likes of export industry and indeed the peak industry councils and MLA had never claimed 'mission accomplished' with regards to animal welfare in foreign countries or that animal welfare practices in overseas markets were adequate.

"In fact our investment and continued investment in on-ground presence in these marketplaces has been in recognition of the deficiencies we knew existed.

"And those on-ground staff, your staff, were delivering under the previous directive of incremental improvement."

Mr Hansen said those efforts of MLA and industry were acknowledged in the independent review into Australia's livestock export trade carried out this year by Bill Farmer.

In addressing how MLA spends producer levies, Mr Hansen said MLA seeks to drive producer levies further by pooling them with contributions from the Australian government, processors, wholesalers, food service operators, retailers and industry bodies.

“This funding model enabled us to raise \$167.4 million in total revenue from a base of producer levies worth \$96.1 million in 2010/11,” he said.

“In other words, we had 74 percent more funding available to invest in marketing and R&D than what we would have otherwise had in levies alone.

“Our total expenditure for the year totals slightly less than this amount at \$166.5 million with \$90.4 million in marketing activities and \$76.1 million in R&D.

“We need to invest in the right programs and ensure they deliver results to the industry.

“MLA commissions independent analysis of the return on investment for our programs to ensure we understand the value they create.”

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Do they know what they are? Do they unfderstand who pays there wages.

Posted by peter, 18/11/2011 9:45:02 AM

While on MLA getting back to basics, why does MLA not promote Carbon Grazing?

Applying the Carbon Grazing principle is the most fundamental aspect of making more money from livestock.