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MLA shapes up for more reform

By BRAD COOPER

MEAT and Livestock Australia (MLA) managing director Scott Hansen says the remodelling of MLA remains a work in progress, but he's satisfied with the current shape of the organisation.

Mr Hansen said the organisation charged with the responsibility of managing the levies of Australian beef, sheep and goat meat producers was lacking this clarity of purpose – at least in the eyes of the public and media – when he returned to Australia last year after two years working for MLA in the United States.

The glare of community scrutiny generated by the live export shutdown raging at the time made it obvious MLA was carrying excess baggage, overburdened with the responsibility of acting as the industry's voice and defender of its reputation.

MLA's uncomfortable position jug-

gling the misplaced labels of quasi-political lobby group, government agency or regulatory authority – as it was variously referred to in many mainstream media reports – was clearly undesirable as it was unsustainable.

Mr Hansen's mission since has been to put the company through a type of corporate bootcamp, as he works to re-assert a 'back-to-basics' style that will produce a leaner, more fit-for-purpose organisation with the strength and flexibility to respond to market forces.

"I'm not sure the live ex shutdown fundamentally changed the direction MLA was headed in anyway, but it certainly ensured the clarity of our role and drove the discussions we were having with producers and stakeholders at the time about the type of organisation MLA needed to be," Mr Hansen said.

"Again that message was simply this – MLA must not waiver in its key role of delivering marketing and R and D with the sort of excellence

our stakeholders expect. Our goal is to continuously provide the type of services the industry requires of its R and D body as efficiently and effectively as we can.

"As for the other the peak industry bodies, I believe the industry through such organisations as the Australian Live Exporters Council and Cattle Council, has a far more co-ordinated framework in place, which will help ensure they feel confident in taking a public leadership role and are speaking on the issues relevant to their members."

It has been a deliberate strategy to place Scott Hansen as the recognisable frontman of MLA, leaving chairman Rob Anderson to run the board and play a strategic role in setting policy agenda priorities.

As both a former communications manager and regional marketing manager for the organisation, fine-tuning MLA's operations in these areas has come naturally to Mr Hansen who started in the industry working for the Victorian Depart-

ment of Primary Industries.

Possibly his boldest move in his first 12 months in the job has been the overhaul of MLA's worldwide marketing team, which now reports to global marketing general manager Michael Edmonds, regarded as a brands specialist recruited earlier this year from the snack food and beverage sector.

His latest move has been to elevate former industry communication and engagement general manager David Pietsch to a newly created position called general manager business capability to focus on initiatives to improve MLA's internal capabilities, including planning, measurement and evaluation, knowledge management and people development.

Mr Hansen says the restructure has been tied to aligning MLA's strategic objectives.

"MLA has a specific role to play in creating the opportunity for companies within the red meat supply chain to increase their returns and, or, decrease their production costs – that is our role at its most basic," he said.

Live Export Fallout

MEAT and Livestock Australia (MLA) and LiveCorp are the targets of a potential class action from live exporters seeking financial compensation for the abrupt suspension of the live cattle trade to Indonesia last year.

The claim, detailed in an article in the latest Law Society Journal, doesn't specify the amount being sought or name the exporters making the claim but in it, Norman Hunt of Hunt Partners says exporters are considering a case against the two industry bodies alleging they "knew of the inhumane treatment of animals in Indonesian abattoirs".

He says MLA and LiveCorp did nothing to remedy the situation or let their levy paying members know the "time bomb was ticking".

MLA said it was aware of Mr Hunt's claims but no legal notice had been served upon them in relation to the matter.

■ Full story at www.theland.com.au