



Your strong and independent  
voice for livestock producers

**LIVESTOCK SA...**

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Dear Nathan,

**Review of the Veterinary Practice Legislation in South Australia**

Thank you for your letter of 30 November 2020 regarding the Review of the *Veterinary Practice Act 2003*.

Livestock SA appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the Review.

We have taken the opportunity to consult with the Livestock SA Board and members in addition to promoting the survey to all members. It is hoped that there has been some participation in the survey, given it was available over the Christmas/January period.

Livestock SA's submission is attached. If any clarification is required, please let me know.

I would appreciate if you could keep me informed on progress with this Review, and the opportunities to further contribute as the Act is amended.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Curtis  
Chief Executive Officer  
Livestock SA

## **Review of Veterinary Practice Legislation in South Australia**

Livestock SA appreciates the opportunity to make input into the review of the veterinary practice legislation in South Australia.

It is disappointing that with the *Veterinary Practice Act 2003* coming under the Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development, that livestock producers are not listed as one of the stakeholder groups, particularly given the importance of the livestock sector to the South Australian economy and the emphasis the State Government has put on the Red Meat and Wool program. The livestock sector doubtlessly is one of the largest single users of veterinary services in South Australia. And as the sector is committed to the highest standards of animal welfare, it has a vital and active interest in animal care and husbandry.

Indeed, livestock production appears to be largely ignored in the legislation, and as a result, often on the SA Veterinary Surgeons Board there may not be a member who is involved in livestock production. This has at times become an issue when the Board is asked to consider changes that can impinge on farming practices. For example, when at one stage the administering of Acepromazine (ACP) for the tranquillising of rams was being considered by the Board, it was being proposed that this could only be done by veterinary surgeons. As this could have created considerable logistical difficulties in the sheep industry, a then member of the Board with production experience was able to suggest an alternative more common-sense approach which was supported by the Board and is now being used.

Livestock SA would like this oversight rectified by the addition or insertion of a board member who represents the primary sector. A legislated seat on the Board would make sense.

**Livestock SA recommends that the Act be amended to firstly enable the inclusion of a representative of the primary sector to be included on the Board and secondly, the Act be amended to have the Minister refer to Primary Producers SA (PPSA) to seek a nomination of a suitable person for the seat on the Board.**

## **Veterinarians in rural South Australia**

Generally, livestock producers have good relationships with veterinarians. Their role in assisting with often very valuable animals is very much appreciated and valued by producers. There are rarely any concerns about their professionalism or willingness to participate at all hours if necessary. Indeed, the main complaint is often that there are not enough veterinarians, particularly in rural areas including but not limited to the pastoral region.

It had been hoped that the establishment of the School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences at Roseworthy over ten years ago would have assisted. While this reportedly provides world-class, hands-on education and training for future animal and veterinary scientists it does not appear to have provided or encouraged many more veterinarians to large animal practice in rural South Australia. There is in particular, a definite lack of younger veterinarians which is of concern for succession and the future servicing of the livestock sector.

Given the lack of veterinarians in some areas to assist with providing good animal health and welfare, consideration needs to be given to allow the use of more lay practitioners for some circumstances and certain procedures, especially for production animals. This could include graduates and non-practising veterinarians, as well as certain paraprofessionals. They should be allowed to assist for procedures such as:

- the treatment or prevention of a disease, injury or condition in an animal;
- the administration of an anaesthetic to an animal under veterinary advice via phone or tele conference;

- the castration or spaying of an animal – for sheep, cattle, goats (excluding the Willis (DOT) method where accredited practitioners are required);
- the carrying out of a prescribed artificial breeding procedure on an animal; and
- any other act or activity declared by the regulations to be veterinary treatment, for example use of electro immobilisers (can be done if trained).

Experienced animal producers should not be criminalised for providing care to their animals. They should be able to provide first-line treatment. This may even include the administration, but not prescription or supply, of some drugs. There is a real concern that producers may inadvertently be breaking the law while performing animal welfare procedures they consider necessary. At the end of the day, of critical importance is that producers must be accountable for their own decisions, actions and appropriate training/education, but also should not be prosecuted for conducting treatments that may be in the best interest of the animals in their care.

There is certainly a need to make changes. For example, a producer involved in administering of ACP for the tranquillising of rams has reported to Livestock SA that he was charged for a veterinarian visit and consult (although there was no inspection of the rams because it was too hot), and he has been sedating his rams for over 10 years. The annual consult should be changed to a visit every three years given the local veterinarian still will have confidence in the producer's ability to care for their animals.

At times it is not practical, safe, cost effective, or in the best interest of the animal to require a physical inspection. Livestock SA understands that in the past year, with COVID restrictions, alternate methods of inspection have been established in other States. Could provision be made in this State for alternate methods of inspection? By video call or phone? This could be particularly important in those areas where there is a high turnover of veterinarians and a lack of continuity.

If a producer did a basic assessment, would this allow further flexibility for remote and regional producers and veterinarian relationships? Perhaps basic assessments of such things as temperature, pulse, respiration – similar to what would be conducted by a vet nurse?

A number of local producers, who have looked to trial new drugs or methodologies (such as use of Numnuts for lamb marking) have found that there are few veterinarians willing to dispense drugs without also administering them – which becomes cost prohibitive. Should there be changes to regulations to allow for supply without recourse? Or use at own risk, if supplied without an exam/inspection for some drugs? There appears to be a general resistance from veterinarians to work with producers to trial new drugs(S4/S8) on any scale.

From dealing with veterinarians, producers are well aware that feelings of distrust with the current Veterinary Surgeons Board are common. In addition, veterinarians are concerned at the high cost to maintain their registration. Veterinary registration fees in South Australia are much higher than in other States and veterinarians are very concerned that the SA Veterinary Surgeons Board is the only board that is not a member of the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC).

Veterinarians are also concerned about the longevity of careers – with particular concern for overall health and wellbeing of individuals. Just as with the various incentives offered to medical practitioners to operate in rural areas, there is an urgent need for incentives to attract veterinarians to rural areas.

## **Sheep artificial insemination - AI**

One issue of particular concern for sheep producers is artificial insemination (AI). Currently the requirement for laparoscopic AI is for this to be performed by a registered veterinarian. Under the legislation, laparoscopic AI is a prescribed procedure. The industry would like this to be changed to allow this procedure to be performed by lay operators, who possibly could be accredited and/or affiliated with veterinarian practices.

Given the aspirations in the Government's productivity plan for agriculture, and in the SA Sheep Industry Blueprint, is to require sustained genetic improvement and production gains, AI is a big part of the opportunity and plan for the sheep industry. AI is a big contributor with top sires being able to be used in many more flocks with these genetics filtering down to commercial growers, for both meat and wool.

Currently the development of training and education at the Roseworthy campus for veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians gives the SA industry a tremendous opportunity to utilise these skilled people. Students gain a great understanding of the biology and physiology of a sheep through this education, making them ideal to be trained in the AI field. These well-trained people could expand the availability of AI services in South Australia through training from current AI veterinarians. These technicians could possibly work for the veterinarians that have trained them insuring a high level of competency and success for growers.

Many of the current AI veterinarians work 60 to 70 hours a week to cover the work load whereas with trained technicians, the human workload would be reduced.

Current AI veterinarians are very skilled, with many having years of experience. What happens when these people decide to retire with no young veterinarians coming through to fill the void? The gap between those retiring and any new veterinarians coming through that are competent in the process potentially hinder conception rates and program success, stalling genetic gain across industry.

In NSW and Victoria, technicians can perform AI. With the review of the Veterinary Practice legislation in SA, now is an opportune time to change the legislation.

**Livestock SA recommends that the legislation be changed to allow for laparoscopic AI to be performed by lay operators.**