

South Australian Sheep Advisory Group

Meeting Summary

Friday 24th February 2006

NOTE: At the time of distribution, the Minister has not approved the outcomes listed in this document. Any misuse of information by individuals or associations will cause this service to be withdrawn.

The meeting commenced at 9:35 am.

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed all members and guests to the meeting.

2. Attendance

<i>Andrew McTaggart (Chair)</i>	<i>Sheep Industry Representative</i>
<i>Janet Hall</i>	<i>Sheep Industry Representative</i>
<i>Geoff Power</i>	<i>Sheep Industry Representative</i>
<i>John Symons</i>	<i>Sheep Industry Representative</i>
<i>Ian Pfeiffer</i>	<i>SA Meat Sheep Societies Representative</i>
<i>Francis Andrews</i>	<i>SA Stud Merino Sheepbreeders' Association Representative</i>
<i>Greg Ingham</i>	<i>SAFF Sheep Industry Representative</i>
<i>Neil Buchanan</i>	<i>Ministerial Representative (PIRSA)</i>
<i>Trudi Goodwin</i>	<i>Executive Officer – Livestock Advisory Groups (PIRSA)</i>

Guests

<i>Jack Van Wijk</i>	<i>Manager, Disease Control (PIRSA)</i>
<i>Tim Woonton</i>	<i>Senior Animal Health Officer - NLIS (PIRSA)</i>
<i>Jack Reddin</i>	<i>OJD Program Manager (PIRSA)</i>
<i>John Weaver</i>	<i>Manager, Animal Disease Surveillance (PIRSA)</i>
<i>Elena Petrenas</i>	<i>Manager, Livestock Advisory Groups (PIRSA)</i>

3. Apologies

<i>Michael Pocock</i>	<i>Sheep Industry Representative</i>
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4. Confirmation of SASAG Meeting Minutes – 25 November 2005

The minutes from the SASAG meeting held on 25th November 2005 were accepted as a true and accurate record subject to identified amendments.

5. Matters arising from Meeting Minutes/Actions – 25 November 2005

Action Item 6.2 (Identifying alternative funding sources for the OJD Control Program)

The OJD program-funding ratio is sourced from 65% industry and 35% government. Members were informed that the source of OJD funding is under an extensive internal review. Traditionally the private/public benefit funding formula is 80% industry and 20% government. This ratio is based on programs where industry directly benefits as a result.

The Animal Health (AH) Executive has sought to find alternative funding sources. The amount sought is considered insignificant for Treasury bilateral approval, and subsequently PIRSA is expected to contribute at least 20%. A proposal has been forwarded to the Executive Director and Chief Executive outlining that AH is not able to absorb the expected shortfall. No formal response has been received to date, and is subject of ongoing discussions. This option appears to be not supported at an Executive level, mainly due to fixed program budgets. If this position continues to remain, the Executive Director has offered to meet with SASAG.

PIRSA has offered to manage OJD funding, however members argued that the program has been well managed consistently over last 8 years. N. Buchanan requested for ongoing support from SASAG, and reinforced that the matter is under intensive review. Members were also advised that the most difficult components of the OJD fund, relate to the management of staff salaries and 50% of laboratory charges.

6. Business

6.1 Sheep Industry Fund

The Sheep Industry Fund (SIF) financial report was provided, detailing income and expenditure by month against programs. The following information was highlighted:

- interest varies and currently is slightly below normal (usually about 4 % rate);
- income is positive, with no signs of change;
- expenditure – at least \$2,000 outstanding for sitting fees etc;
- auditing fees – currently outstanding;
- NLIS project – two payments are scheduled this year and will be drawn in June 2006;
- footrot program – program is not accepting past figure corrections, and an update will be provided in the future;
- Sheep lice, dog fence and box flat programs – should be reflected in Feb/March 2006

OJD Budget

The OJD commitment budget was tabled, which is by month against funding source and actuals (refer to February 2006 agenda pack). Currently the OJD budget looks healthy, however the actuals have not been updated for two months (annual leave circumstances) and \$42,786.53 is to be withdrawn. The OJD fund is predicted to reach a total of \$335,007.08 by the end of January 2006; with OJD staff salaries (approximately \$70,000) are due to be withdrawn in June 2006.

OJD Budget Alternatives

Members unanimously agreed to leave the levy at the status quo of 40 cents during the 2006/2007 financial period, after considering alternative levy options.

Discussion was raised on the possibility of using SIF monies to leverage R&D programs to benefit sheep production in South Australia. This idea will remain under consideration.

6.2 OJD

6.2.1 Disease Control Program Update

A report was presented on the 1 to 40 year prediction on the final stages of the Ovine Johne's Disease. It was highlighted that there is currently only 6% OJD infection in South Australia. There were 6 -7 annual detections recorded during 2005-2006 (including Kangaroo Island) and it is believed that this figure will reduce to 5 -7 per annum until a more sensitive test is available.

Australia is the only country that differentiates between the C and S OJD strains. The genetic components of OJD allow it to secrete chemicals in sheep to make the host not recognise there is a disease present. Scientific evidence indicates that 15% of sheep cannot recognise the OJD.

OJD subclinical productivity losses:

- 17% of weaned lamb loss;
- 10% of fleece weight loss.

One of the first subclinical symptoms in lactating ewes is considered to be loss of milk production.

OJD clinical productivity losses:

- 46% lamb weight loss;

- 15% fleece weight loss.

Sheep properties in NSW previously had an OJD infection rate of 50%, which is now down to 37%, equating to 70% of farmers currently vaccinating for OJD. Victoria and Western Australia prefer to use the farm gate scoring system, and not continue with abattoir surveillance. NSW do not support this and PIRSA is aiming to eradicate the disease and eventually manage at the farm gate. It was also noted that SAFF is able to identify that farmers are starting to receive a premium for vaccinated sheep.

Members were reminded that there are virtually no heavily infected flocks in South Australia as a result of previous de-stocking programs. SASAG members were challenged to consider and identify improved methods for OJD extension opportunities and outlined the following issues:

- 10 to 15 year cycle to go from infected to 'clean' status;
- OJD can survive in the soil for over two years.

South Australian Sheep Health Statement

A revised alternative to the South Australian Sheep Health Statement booklet was tabled, which is intended to reach the target audience and to replace the old version (come to an end). Feedback is sought from members on the revised document and for subsequent approval.

6.2.2 Future Funding for OJD Program

Members were reminded that the end of the 2005/2006 financial year has been a time to consider the management of OJD and in particular reviewing abattoir surveillance on two levels:

- sourcing of OJD program funding following June 2006; and
- has abattoir surveillance been accurate enough to maintain prevalence area scores?

The states of Victoria and Western Australia have shown preference to discontinuing with an OJD program or at the very least the prevalence area scores (which would make the abattoir surveillance redundant). They have maintained that OJD is a farm gate issue and believe that disease awareness, management and biosecurity should be now up to industry to control.

South Australia has effectively reduced OJD to only 6% prevalence, with science clearly demonstrating that the disease is under control. This OJD program is supported by the sheep industry levy, which has been in place for a decade. South Australia maintains a healthy position while waiting for improved testing and vaccines (appear to be 5-7 years away).

Feedback from sheep farmers has clearly indicated the need to prevent OJD from being introduced in South Australia. The acceptance of the South Australian Animal Health Statement is close to 100% and the OJD section most often completed correctly. Agents have also recognised the need for abattoir surveillance, and agree that with careful management the disease will be contained.

An opportunity was raised to launch a biosecurity awareness extension program, in conjunction with AH Surveillance and T&R. Discussions have commenced, and this can be achieved through combining AH disease surveillance programs with the OJD program, by simply upgrading current software. NSW currently have a similar program in place, with abattoir line results being fed back to farmers.

Information collected through the South Australian program could include test results of OJD, sarco, CLA, injection abscesses, various worm species, grass seeds fevered carcass, jaundice, arthritis and footrot and lice could be included in the future. All results would be provided back to the farm gate; and positive results accompanied with a flyer indicating the purpose of the information in addition to:

- how results may be affecting their livelihood; and
- strategies to improve animal health, prevent reoccurrence; and
- maximise the end product value, to increase profitability.

Members were reminded that the abattoirs, agents and farmers see value in biosecurity and enhancement measures. In conclusion, members were encouraged to consider funding for:

- animal health surveillance;
- abattoir surveillance; and
- extension activities to maximise economic growth.

Revised OJD Model

A pictorial overview and components of the revised OJD model was presented to members. The model incorporates contact rates, biosecurity rates by regional areas, and sheep movements.

The model, and a report is expected to be available by late April 2006. The report will be presented to SASAG and it is intended to stimulate discussion. Ideally, approval would be in conjunction with the OJD committee (their role is to advise SASAG), therefore a combined SASAG/OJD meeting is proposed. It was also highlighted that the AusVet group is preparing a cost benefit analysis of OJD program over a 30-year period, similar to footrot review program.

The core of the model is to the prediction of disease spread, identifying costs and level of controls (low or high). Six alternative programs are considered in the model, which identify the rate of disease spread. This will assist to understand and highlight the effects of discontinuing the OJD program. The alternative model options include:

1. Provide vaccine for all sheep in the SE (would be costly).
2. Continuing with the current OJD program (status quo).
3. Provide no vaccine subsidy, reduce abattoir surveillance to 1,000 lines, while incorporating the remaining OJD program and tracing data.
4. Implement the Victorian model, with the same level of abattoir surveillance as the previous model, and incorporate a voluntary vaccine approach.
5. Only maintain abattoir surveillance (low cost).
6. Withdraw all OJD program activities.

South Australia has one of the best OJD programs in the world, and the level of OJD control in other states directly impacts the biosecurity of South Australia. Through adjustments the emerging model allows for different control levels and options are being identified and explored. It was suggested that the model option could incorporate a quarantine element for infected sheep (placed under order). Members were advised that other alternative scenarios could be evaluated and also suggested that of the \$200,000 of funds not being spent on vaccine, \$24,000 of which could be used for this proposed model.

A trend was discussed regarding the Naracoorte sheep sales meat price being affected by the OJD score (ie score from 4-7 can equate to 10% to 15% of loss) with approximately a \$10 per head loss observed (by I. Sanderson).

OUTCOME

SASAG supports the drafting of a letter to D. Plowman reinforcing that a commitment has been made with the OJD program, emphasise the need for a state contribution of \$285,000. Also provide an invitation to attend the next SASAG meeting to further discuss the issue.

6.3 NLIS Progress Report

A report on the Sheep and Goat NLIS was tabled, which explained that the national program commenced on 1 January 2006. The following key program elements were highlighted:

- registration of all sheep and goat properties;
- mandatory movement documentation;
- ear tagging of all lambs and kids born after 1 January 2006 with a breeder tag before they leave property of birth; with
- subsequent movements either recording all PICs within consignment on NVD/Waybill; or

- application of a pink post breeder tag; with
- interim exemptions applying to animals consigned direct to slaughter until 2008; and
- all sheep and farmed goats must be tagged from 1 January 2009.

Supporting legislation has been approved by Cabinet and is currently in the final drafting stage prior to official publication.

The SA Government subsidy (of \$700,000) on NLIS ear tags is progressing soundly with approximately \$100,000 (15%) committed since the system commenced on 1 December 2005. Subsidies are automatically deducted by the manufacturer from the price of tags at the time of purchase, and manufacturers are experiencing their busiest off-season period. This should continue until 6 million tags are sold, with the majority of buyers are ordering two years in advance.

Saleyards will be expected to ensure maximum numbers of animals are compliant (on departure of property) whilst having minimum impact on operations and agents. At this point in time the mob-based philosophy of identifying every animal on saleyard departure, is not practical. Instead, non-compliant pens will be noted but offered for sale as normal, and the main driver of compliance will be the use of expiation notices. The use of emergency tags is not proposed, as such tags would provide little to the overall objective, in comparison to issues associated with detecting and tagging animals on a given sale day.

The official position of agents is that whilst an exemption remains for lambs traded over the hooks, they do not support the NLIS. However, agents are expected to provide copies of movement documentation (asked by buyers of sheep and goats), which is a market driven expectation.

A review of the effectiveness of the visual tag system has been nationally brought forward a year to 2007. An industry/government working group has been formed to set up monitoring procedures, coordinate monitoring activity, audit against national performance standards, develop and oversee the 2007 review. Results will be provided to SAFEMEAT through the National NLIS Sheep and Goat Management Committee.

There is approximately \$2.5 million of Commonwealth Grant funding for NLIS sheep and goats, which will be administered by DAFF. Key priorities will include:

- benefits to industry through communication/extension activities and training;
- system compliance monitoring and performance testing;
- identification and resolution of technical and operational barriers; and
- development of electronic identification device standards.

NLIS Tagging Issues

There have been approximately six complaints from sheep producers in relation to tags purchased prior to 31 December 2006, however these have since been resolved.

6.4 Update on 'Animal Welfare Legislation' Meeting

The Animal Welfare Legislation meeting was held in Adelaide on 27 January 2006, to discuss issues affecting livestock production in Australia. The list of invitees included South Australian livestock producers, Livestock Advisory Group representatives and other industry stakeholders such as SAFF, the Department of Environment and Heritage and the Australian Veterinary Association. Two SASAG members (A. McTaggart and G. Power) attended.

Principally presentations provided attendees with an update on what is happening on the international scene in relation to animal welfare and how Australia is responding to ensure that our livestock industries are protected and market access is maintained. On this latter issue, participants were made aware of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) and working group and the importance of working with the livestock sectors to review, and where necessary, update the model welfare codes of practice, as well as standardise legislation across states.

A subsequent overview was then provided by the Department of Environment and Heritage (Dr Deb Kelly) about the process undertaken to review the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985*.

Members were informed that the meeting reinforced the necessity for a national approach. In addition, they both recognise the need and importance for all states to progress in unison. Australia is considered to be largely based on outcomes, however evaluation needs to be more rule based (ie clear time restrictions for transport of livestock).

The South Australian Code of Practice (COP) is covered by legislation, however these guidelines cannot be legally enforced due to wording. The COP will be revised by incorporating the word 'must' throughout the document for legislation purposes, and developed into a national minimum standard, dictated by trade.

6.5 PIRSA Disease Surveillance Activities

The PIRSA Animal Disease Surveillance Manager provided an overview of the PIRSA Animal Health's disease surveillance program. In summary, the presentation described the need for surveillance, the level of resources currently employed in these activities, the differences between passive, scanning and target surveillance and how this information is used to alleviate certain public health concerns.

A program has commenced to collect samples from Kangaroo Island and Lower South East sheep enterprises, which are waiting for data input and analysis. Samples are taken initially from maiden ewes and then again during their working stages. The AH surveillance team is looking to expand the program to include the Mid North area and data will be available for circulation in the near future.

Feedback was sought from SASAG members on possible issues within the sheep industry, which could benefit from targeted surveys. A question was raised on the relationship between AH surveillance and AQUIS. In addition, the effectiveness of export trade controls as pig producers have demonstrated concern about import controls of raw and cooked meat (Canadian imports). J. Weaver considers the two departments to have close relationship and share information on unusual slaughter reports, and condemnation rates. In relation to the export trade he is not aware of any problems, and in particular considers the standard of the red meat trade barriers to be satisfactory.

Further concerns were raised on disease surveillance gaps in relation to interstate movements. J. Weaver considers this to be more of a disease control issue and added that notification of interstate exotic diseases reach authorities within 24-36 hours. Endemic disease information is shared via Chief Veterinary Officers, and then disseminated to the public via technical bulletins which are usually produced on a quarterly bases and provided to the media. This area of disease notification could be strengthened and the sheep industry will see improvement with the introduction of NLIS electronic tagging.

6.6 Industry Liaison Officer Training Update (ILO)

The most recent ILO (Industry Liaison Officer) training day was held on 6 February 2006. G. Power and J. Hall attended the day and provided the following report:

Animal Health Australia is seeking to train a total of 1000 ILOs nationally, across all production industries. In an Emergency Animal Disease response, the role of ILOs is to:

- provide advice on the nature of the local industry to assist with disease risk assessment;
- assist with development and implementing plans for disease eradication/control;
- provide advice on the economic and other consequences of proposed actions; and
- act as a focus for consultation and advice to the local industry.

The workshop also covered issues such as procedures for handling telephone calls and strategies to deal with potential stress. ILOs will be appointed for a period of five years, followed by a review and updated if necessary. Both attendees agreed that the ILO training workshop was beneficial to industry and worth the effort.

Discussion was raised on the chicken disease outbreak in Newcastle resulted in the excavation of a 'soccer oval' sized trench for disposal of the slaughtered birds. There were 2000 individuals managing the outbreak, with a total cost of \$30 million.

In addition, Germany has experienced a Classic swine fever outbreak, which resulted in the design of a V belt, where pigs were electrocuted and subsequently buried.

6.7 SA Sheep Industry Outlook Conference 2006

Members agreed to postpone the event previously scheduled for 2006.

6.8 Project Applications for 2005/2006

SASAG members unanimously agreed to not advertise for new 2006/2007 project applications.

OUTCOME

Until the State funding position for OJD is determined, the issue of funding new projects will be placed on hold until further consideration.

7. Other Business

7.1 SA Merino Field Day

A promotional stand has been offered to SASAG for free (in Elders marquee) at the SA Merino Stud Field day to be held on Monday 20 March 2006 at the Burra Oval.

Information needs to be provided to inform producers of how the 40 cent sheep levy is used. Posters need to be prepared, which will provide an overview of the Sheep Industry Funded (SIF) projects and statical data.

7.2 National Approach to the Management of OJD Meeting

A. McTaggart tabled an email received from Lorna Citer (AHA Manager, JD and Training Service), which invited representatives to attend the meeting on National Approach to the Management of OJD (NAOJD). The meeting is to be held in Canberra on 22 March 2006 and will focus on funding for the continuation of the OJD program.

Ideally a technical advisor and a SASAG representative with knowledge of SA OJD funding should attend.

A. McTaggart is unavailable to attend the NAOJD meeting, therefore members unanimously recommended for J. Symons to attend the meeting on behalf of SASAG (J. Symons accepted).

7.3 Dog Fence Program

A. McTaggart visited the dog fence project 10 days ago and observed that the program is continuing well, and the fence is being adequately monitored and maintained. There is a new section of straight fence (15 km) constructed to suit the flat areas of land. Fencing at Wertaloona to the length of 10 km is also being re posted and the existing fence is to be reattached to reduce costs. An additional 10 km needs to be upgraded, with materials ready to go and is expected to be completed at the end of June 2006.

Fencing material to the value of \$100,000 is always kept on hand in the event of a crisis (such as a flood). A storage shed has been built at Mt Lyndhurst (in township) costing \$100,000, which is equivalent to one year of materials stored at Tolls. There is a portion of material out of the shed, which is occasionally taken by fencing contractors.

7.4 Footrot Vaccine trial

Members were advised that four properties have been selected for footrot vaccine trials, being two Kangaroo Island, one South East and one at Gumeracha. With an additional property in the South East currently being sought. Footrot disease strains are being typed and vaccine is currently being

manufactured. It is expected that by the end of March 2006, properties will have their first vaccination. Depending on the results, field days may be organised by June 2006.

7.5 SA Sheep Industry Fund Consultation Forum (AGM)

The SA Sheep Industry Fund Consultation Forum will be held the morning of the next SASAG meeting on 26 May 2006. The purpose of the forum is to consult with industry on the ongoing use of the Sheep Industry Fund and assist the Minister to fulfil SIF management requirements. Information gathered through this process will be included in the 2006 update of the Fund's five-year management plan.

The forum, known as the 'SA Sheep Industry Fund Consultation Forum' will be widely promoted to South Australian sheep producers, along with sheep industry organisations and committees as is required under the *Primary Industry Funding Schemes Act 1998*. An advertisement will be placed in the livestock section of the Stock Journal three weeks prior to event (including RSVP).

Additional notes for 2006 Sheep Industry Fund Consultation Forum are:

- possible duration 2 hours;
- event should be promoted at Burra and Lucindale;
- describe SASAG – including use of SIF;
- SA Sheep Industry – economic overview;
- overview of OJD program/budget;
- overview of NLIS and dog fence programs; and
- overview of Footrot/vaccine trials.

7.6 SASAG Website

Members were recommended for SASAG reports such as meeting summaries, annual reports, financial audits to be uploaded onto the SASAG website in pdf format. This will ensure that documents of a sensitive nature cannot easily be modified. Non-sensitive documents (such as general SASAG information) can be uploaded in HTML format, which could be modified.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for **Friday 26th May 2006** from 9:30am – 4:00pm in the Seminar Room, Level 1, Primary Industries and Resources SA, 33 Flemington St, Glenside.

Meeting closed at 4:02pm