



Your strong and independent
voice for livestock producers

LIVESTOCK SA...

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11 September 2020

Mr Matt Cowdrey OAM MP
Presiding Member
Economic and Finance Committee
Parliament House: North Terrace, ADELAIDE SA 5000
Email: EFC.Assembly@parliament.sa.gov.au

Dear Mr Cowdrey,

**Inquiry into essential production and supply chain security in the
context of emergency circumstances in South Australia**

Livestock SA would like to relate to the Economic and Finance Committee's Inquiry into essential production and supply chain security in the context of emergency circumstances in South Australia, our experience in relation to livestock producers and the challenges with COVID-19.

Livestock SA was formed in 2013 to represent the interests of beef cattle, sheep and goat producers across South Australia. Currently Livestock SA has over 3,500 members and who are involved with the majority of the State's livestock production.

The ever-growing agricultural industry occupies over 53% of South Australian land and contributes more than \$6.6 billion to South Australia alone, making agriculture one of the main contributors to the South Australian economy. The South Australian livestock industries (sheep and cattle) are the State's largest manufacturing employer, a major contributor to regional South Australia and the largest agri-food contributor to the State's economy.

It has been pleasing that in relation to disruptions in livestock production and its supply chain, disruptions have largely been minimal. In South Australia, agriculture has been classified as an essential industry, and restrictions on people movement have not had a large effect.

At times when there have been difficulties, particularly dealing with borders, Livestock SA has been greatly assisted through having strong liaison links with PIRSA. At the height of the restrictions there were daily briefings coordinated by PIRSA for various agriculture-related industries. These also usually included representatives from other State Government Departments. Not only have these briefings kept us informed so that we could assist livestock producers, but when specific issues arose it was relatively easy to get advice, or if necessary the issues dealt with by PIRSA working with their counterparts either within the State or Federal Governments.

At times there were issues in trying to cross state borders, but in the main these were due to ever-changing rules that producers and those in the supply chain, as well as the authorities policing the borders, had to interpret. But once these were known, in the main border crossings were relatively straight forward.

One of our members who has to regularly cross from South Australia into Victoria gave the following feedback at the end of July:

*“Border is sorted now. Took 3 weeks to get my approval but I got it.
My other 2 drivers one was approved the other wasn't but got approval on appeal.
You get stopped every time now they're fairly efficient easy to deal with.
They take your approval number and drivers licence.
We now have to get tested every 7 days which is fair enough did mine yesterday.
There could be improvement with access to the testing, but they will sort that in time, and we will get used to the system.
I got knocked back for doing export work which is bloody annoying but will work around it this time.
Will need to work on it for next time if things are still bad.”*

However, when the State Government announced tighter border controls on the South Australian/Victorian border in mid-August, the Livestock SA office received many calls regarding cross-border travel and the reduced border access for farmers. Producers had issues with applying for permits, causing a great deal of frustration. Subsequently Livestock SA welcomed the reintroduction of the 40-kilometre buffer zone along that border.

The National Cabinet has recognised the importance of finding a solution to the border restrictions by committing to the development of a national Agricultural Worker Movement Code. This Code will facilitate the safe interstate movement of agricultural workers.

Livestock SA is supporting the National Farmers' Federation's plea to the National Cabinet to develop a clear and consistent code as soon as possible to support livestock and agricultural cross-border movement. Primary production continues to be essential work and many industries require skilled seasonal workers who live in different states.

Availability of labour is important to ensure agriculture can continue to progress and thrive. In the case of the State's wool industry, usually about 180 shearers and shed hands from New Zealand come to South Australia for work every year. With the restrictions on overseas travel, even from New Zealand, Livestock SA has been working closely with the Shearing Contractors Association of Australia, WoolProducers SA and the State Government looking at ways to continue to bring at least some of these New Zealanders to South Australia.

WoolProducers Australia has been active on shearer shortage across Australia and in relation to accessing New Zealand shearers, have been lobbying at a Federal level since April. Whilst this issue has certainly gained a lot of traction both politically and in the media, it is somewhat frustrating that the Federal Government had not been more active in trying to resolve this issue when WoolProducers first raised it with them, as many of the measures including the addition of shearers to the critical skills list has now come too late to be of any practical benefit.

With the recent difficulties in Victoria, there has been some disruption to the supply chain where abattoirs and meat processing operations have either been closed or severely restricted in their work practices if they have become COVID hotspots. Minister Basham convened a meeting of South Australian meat processors and associated participants including Livestock SA to discuss COVID-19 preparedness and lessons learnt from Victoria.

One unexpected opportunity out of the pandemic has been the widespread use of videoconferencing (mainly Zoom, but also a range of others including Microsoft Teams). Not only has this shown that telecommunications and NBN have improved considerably with not a lot of access issues across the State, but it has opened up a cost-saving in communications, with considerable savings in both time and costs through not having to travel to meetings and other activities, and yet able to effectively conduct business remotely.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A Curtis', written in a cursive style.

Andrew Curtis