



STATE OF THE LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

Spring 2014

Livestock SA board members have started a new quarterly initiative – *State of the Livestock Industry* – to keep the broader community up-to-date on the industry's seasonal outlook, activities and issues to a broader audience.

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AFTER a dry autumn and wet winter, it's looking like another dry spring in the Upper South East but we're still hopeful for some catch-up rain to salvage our hay crops and boost our pastures to give us feed in the paddock going into summer.

By early October, all of our autumn lambs will be sold, with the major exception of our first cross ewe lambs to be sold as breeders in late spring. Lamb pricing this year has been frustrating and challenging, with our two main lamb consignments, booked a few weeks apart, differing by more than \$1/kg in price. However, the outlook and feeling in our district for the lamb job is positive.

Beef prices have also been interesting this year for a number of seasonal and market driven reasons. I'm struggling with the concept of some manufacturing beef prices making as much as prime young cattle. It's potentially a chance for producers to turn over older bulls for newer genetics without a big change in price with the bull-selling season not too far away. There continues to be talk of strong beef prices going forward and we are starting to see these promises come to fruition, with better prices being even more welcome if the spring continues to be dry.

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GIVEN the tight spring finish in the upper and lower South East, many producers may choose to wean cattle and sheep earlier than usual. Rather than progeny competing with mum trying to source good feed, calves/lambs can be put out to prepared pastures and mothers will recover condition score ready for rejoining. Young cows might also be pregnancy tested, drenched and 'empties' moved on while prices remain above average. Farmers will also be weighing up fodder reserves. Many crops have been frosted and with no soaking rains in sight, farmers that won't be able to cut as much pasture hay will be seeking out frosted cereal

hay. Assessments/budgets on grain reserves and feed grain prices should also be at the forefront of producers' minds with the following options:

1. Confinement feeding ewes in early autumn.
2. Confinement feeding lambs on a maintenance ration in autumn
3. Production feeding lambs. Many sucker/feeder lambs will be coming onto the market with the unseasonably dry conditions. Generally this should drive prices down so producers will need to carefully consider selling options and do the maths.

Our saving grace at the moment is that mutton, grinding beef and feedlot entry prices are still holding up at above average prices. For farmers short on paddock feed and who do not wish to gamble on what prices might do next year, then there are still plenty of options.



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SEASONAL conditions are variable at the moment ranging from dry but fair to extremely dry and complete drought in some areas for the past 24-36 months. This is not ideal heading into summer without any indication of rain on the horizon.

Good news

A joint effort by a generous York Peninsula farmer and 'Buy a Bale' enabled the delivery of 30 tonnes of donated round bales of hay which was distributed among five properties in the Oodnadatta area in September. The bales were delivered by a YP freight company and in doing so, has enabled these pastoralists to hold their stock during mustering where feed reserves in their holding areas have been depleted over the last two to three inconsistent seasons.

The rolling out of the Water Infrastructure Grants has started and there is a steady trickle of grant applications. Some pastoralist have received their deed of trust agreements and will be well on the way with their projects before summer hits. This will give successful applicants a chance to do much needed maintenance to water infrastructure, increase water supply efficiency through transfer from diesel to solar or spread grazing pressure by extending water access to stock in the upcoming summer where we hope the grip of dry conditions will be broken with seasonal summer rainfall soon.

Pastoral Board

Disbanding the Pastoral Board will be a topic for conversation over the next few months. Some points to ponder are:

- Where do pastoralists go now to remediate issues regarding property management planning?
- Pastoralism is a small business and cannot afford to be held back by inefficient government decision-making. Confidentiality is paramount.
- Pastoral lease assessment process are up to four years behind. Will the alternative be better funded or will it be expected to do more for less?
- What will happen to the Pastoral Land Management Act? Will it still be relevant or will it be abolished? If the Act is to be abolished will there be even more environmental regulation for pastoralists and the way leases are monitored? Will this change the way rent is determined?
- If changes are proposed, will the new board be more in favour of producers and production rather than environmentally biased? Pastoralists and local natural resource management boards must be given the trust they deserve in order to manage their natural resources in sustainable and profitable manner.

Cattle producers are buoyed by the prospect of exceptional cattle prices in the future - if only we can all see some good seasonal conditions to make the most of these market predictions. We hope that

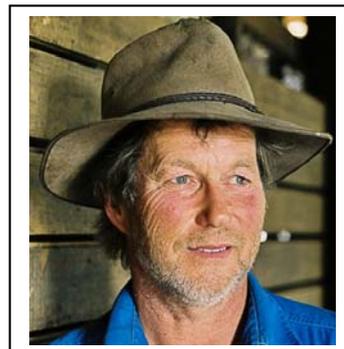
'bureaucratic process' does not get in between business and sustainable profit which will aid in the future recovery for beef producers in the pastoral industry.

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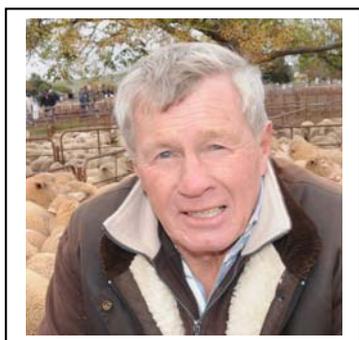
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I attended the Barossa Improved Grazing Group's (BIGG) pasture walk in September, looking at a range of pastures from properties from the northern, eastern and southern Barossa Valley. There was an impressive range of pasture paddocks visited from clover dominant to some diverse perennial pastures in the higher rainfall areas. The high dry matter (DM) yields are the result of the early break. There is a broad range of kilograms of dry matter per hectare per 100 millimetres of rainfall – from 1207kg to 119kg.

Pastures still have plenty of potential with plant available water still adequate however the current dry conditions are heavily drawing on the reserves. With such great early break, it will be disappointing if the season doesn't finish with spring rains. Some paddocks did have a good clover germination that was recorded in March, but a combination of dry autumn, insect and virus attack has decimated the clover percentage and pasture dominated by geranium (storksbill).

The Eden Valley fire burnt a considerable amount of the eastern hillslopes. There has been a reasonable recovery of native grass pastures, though annual grasses are a lower percentage and broadleaf plants have thrived. BIGG has been funded to set up some monitoring sites to assess the recovery and management of the native grass pastures after the fire. The group has a project with three weather stations across the region including soil moisture probes. These allow monitoring of available moisture and, in time, may be able to estimate the dry matter potential and adjust stocking rates to suit.



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ONE of the biggest issues in the Upper North and Rangeland Pastoral areas is the wild dogs. Livestock SA and landholders are working with the Natural Resources SA Arid Lands, Natural Resources Northern and Yorke and Natural Resources Murray-Darling Basin to create a coordinated approach to wild dog control. I chair the South Australian Wild Dog Management Advisory Group, set up by Minister for

Sustainability, Environment and Conservation Ian Hunter to advise him on wild dog control. Part of that advice has been to develop a State Wild Dog Action Plan. This plan has been presented to the Minister and we are awaiting his reply before the plan goes to public consultation.

If we do not get on top of this problem, we will lose a vibrant, sustainable sheep industry in the pastoral areas and adjacent rangelands. There have been other states before us where this has happened. The pastoral area of Western Australia previously supported an industry of around 6 million sheep, in present times less than 200,000 sheep remain. Queensland had up to 20 million sheep 25 years ago, and now is down to 2.5m, mainly due to wild dog predation.

The issue will move further south which will result in a peri-urban problem with wild dogs menacing livestock and native animals around the Adelaide Hills and encompassing parklands. An example of this the Morton Bay District Council that butts into the CBD of Brisbane which destroys up to 90 wild dogs per month.



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It has been a pretty tough run season-wise for livestock production in the past month. Like many other areas, the upper South East is just been hanging on and in some areas, frost has done a lot of damage on the lighter soils, reducing pasture growth.

Despite this, stock are in reasonable condition and lambs are getting to more saleable weights after a dry autumn and slow pasture growth. As we head into summer and autumn, feeding and planning how to manage ewes and cows will be of great importance.

The new Livestock SA board held its first meeting on September 18. I was re-elected as president, Jack England re-elected as vice-president and Alexander MacLachlan took over as treasurer. Issues discussed included biosecurity with a presentation from chief veterinary officer Roger Paskin, South Australia's input into a national meat industry strategic plan, the natural resources water levy in the Western Mount Lofty Ranges, drought in the pastoral region, and transport.