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## Call for brands register to be integrated with PICs

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THERE ARE so many good reasons why the Brands Act 1933 should not have been repealed by the State Government.

Firstly, stock identification. We cannot visually identify the origin of livestock without brands and earmarks – and all the arguments put forward by the government to say otherwise are wrong.

A Property Identification Code on a tag is next to useless and so is any legislation to enforce its validity because it can be removed from any animal at any time. Without any other sort of visible identification to link the animal to its tag and property of origin there is no way of knowing whether the tag has been removed and replaced.

Secondly, proof of ownership to avoid stock theft. Since there is no way of knowing whether a tag has been removed, there is no way to prove the theft of an animal.

While it is all well and good for Minister for Agriculture Leon Bignell to say we may keep branding to identify our stock, if there is no legal recognition or record of registration than the effort is wasted.

The National Livestock Identification System is a tool that helps track the honest movement of stock around Australia but stops far short of proving ownership of the animal, just like a number plate on a vehicle can be stolen and swapped. However just as we had registered brands in the livestock industry, we have a vehicle identification and chassis numbers stamped or 'branded' into our vehicles.

Without the Act, the ability of law enforcement agencies and Biosecurity SA officers to monitor and identify stock movements across the state and over its borders has been seriously diminished.

Thirdly, biosecurity to trace the origin of an animal carrying an exotic or ordinary disease. Relying on tags that can be removed means there can be illegal movement of livestock across quarantine borders.

Livestock do not have individual identification unless they have been branded and earmarked and those brands and earmarks need to be registered to a regulatory authority. There needs to be legislation that supports such a system to protect industry jobs and the integrity of our biosecurity system to protect our domestic and international markets.

It is true that Livestock SA was approached to takeover and upgrade the system. PIRSA advises the initial cost would have been \$300,000 plus an annual maintenance cost of \$20,000. However this is out of our budget and frankly not our core business. We are an advocacy group not a regulatory authority.

While we were told that government did not wish to maintain the registration system, we were not told that the legislation that upholds the old paper-based brands system was to be repealed. It is disappointing the government did not seek producers' feedback.

One solution would be to incorporate the brands system, which is still in a card form, into the existing PIC renewal/registration application form. These are renewed biennially, based on when they were first issued.

This would avoid the once-off hit of \$300,000 to upgrade to an electronic system as it can happen gradually as PIC numbers are renewed, and the running cost could become part of the PIC renewal.

If there are at least 15,000 registered PICs in SA then simple maths would suggest that if half of these PICs were to register a brand or earmark, it would only cost a few dollars per PIC renewal to cover the \$22,000 operating cost, quoted by PIRSA. This would upgrade the system, automatically dropping off old unused brand symbols and earmarks, of which there are more than 15,000.

This would update and streamline the database as well as strengthening the security of our industry.

If you agree with this proposal, you must make contact with Livestock SA, your local Member of Parliament and Minister Bignell to advocate to have your brands and earmarks recognised by state legislation.

- **Details:** Livestock SA, 08 8297 2299