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AUSTRALIAN LOT FEEDERS' ASSOCIATION

By email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

29 November 2005

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Australian Lot Feeders' Association Submission to the Inquiry by the
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee into the National
Animal Welfare Bill 2005**

The Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) has prepared the attached submission to the Senate Inquiry.

ALFA appreciates the opportunity to expand on this submission through a face to face meeting with the Senate Committee members at a hearing in 2006.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Malcolm Foster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Malcolm Foster
President ALFA

Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) Submission to the Inquiry by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee into the National Animal Welfare Bill 2005

ALFA submits the following viewpoints that both impact specifically on the feedlot industry as well as impacting on other livestock production industries.

1. Executive Summary

ALFA opposes the National Animal Welfare Bill 2005, which would set up a new National Animal Welfare Authority with direct Australian Government regulatory powers and employment of inspectors.

The Australian and all State and Territory governments, key livestock industry organisations and other stakeholders, have agreed to a National Animal Welfare Strategy, which was endorsed by the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC) in 2004. This strategy acknowledges the role of State governments in regulating animal welfare, the role of industry organisations in developing and implementing codes of practice and export control.

More broadly, it also acknowledges the co-ordination role of the Australian government. In our view, such role delineation is sensible, as it reflects the roles of States in the constitution, the existing State based regulatory and advisory infrastructure and the inherent problems in placing a new national agency over the top of this existing body of legislation and expertise.

In the case of the feedlot industry, such stepped up national intervention is, in any event, not justified by the robustness of industry compliance systems, or by industry animal welfare performance using outcomes based management.

ALFA pioneered on farm QA in the livestock industries, including strict compliance with government endorsed animal welfare standards. The National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) has been operating for nearly 12 years. The scheme incorporates a feedlot animal welfare code of practice and also requires compliance with this code through active maintenance of an animal care statement. Independent third party auditing ensures the integrity of NFAS. NFAS is co-regulated by linkages to State government feedlot approval and licensing legislation and AQIS administered export regulations.

Shade structures are now commonly used throughout the industry to mitigate against extreme or prolonged hot/ humid weather events.

ALFA and our Service Provider, Meat & Livestock Australia have invested a total of \$1.5m in R&D and technical support into heat load research. Further money will be invested in this area in the future. In a feedlot shade survey conducted in June/July 2005, the capacity under shade represented 59.5 per cent of the total surveyed AUS-MEAT feedlot capacity. This figure is up 124 per cent on capacity under shade in February 2000.

The incidence of cattle deaths in feedlots is now well below grazing industry levels.

2. Feedlot Industry Animal Welfare Systems

ALFA fully accepts that the feedlot industry has the responsibility to ensure cattle inducted into, fed in, and despatched from feedlots are humanely managed. The Code of Practice for Welfare of Cattle in Feedlots states, "Owners and managers have a legal and moral responsibility to care for the welfare of animals under their care."

Feedlots play an every increasing very important role in reducing the incidence of animal stress in Australia. Prior to the feedlot industry reaching the significant size it is today the beef industry experience through recurrent droughts would typically result in many cattle either losing condition in drought devastated paddocks, or being transported, often in poor condition for slaughter. With feedlots now producing in excess of one third of total annual Australian beef production, Australian agriculture is much better equipped to maintain good animal welfare standards across varying seasons.

The feedlot industry has worked closely with and been strongly supported by the RSPCA and all State and National regulatory agencies, in developing its animal welfare initiatives through the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS).

The feedlot industry delivers high level animal welfare performance through the following five interlocking systems and management innovations:

1. NFAS which was introduced in 1994. Under the NFAS, accredited feedlots must commit to officially recognised animal welfare, environmental, chemical and medicinal usage standards. These standards are updated through ongoing research and dialogue with government and animal welfare bodies or audits indicate a need for change. As an example of this dialogue, before NFAS was introduced it was intensively workshopped with all stakeholders in 1992. Accredited feedlots must also maintain an animal welfare data base through an actively managed Animal Care Statement.

Site visits by independent auditors ensure that NFAS accredited feedlots have, and are seen to have, recognised standards, compliance procedures, and trained personnel, in place.

Since the "architecture" of NFAS is a product of ongoing consultation with various stakeholders, its standards and compliance assurance processes are widely accepted as credible and effective. This credibility is enhanced by the field audits referred to above.

2. State governments, and local councils, have feedlot development approval

and licensing powers which interlock with NFAS accreditation. While the extent of this interlocking varies, the National Feedlot Guidelines which are agreed between ALFA and State regulatory authorities are the common reference document for all authorities involved in feedlot regulation. In Queensland, for example, all feedlots are licensed, and license conditions are consistent with those guidelines and include animal welfare related standards in areas such as pen density, pen drainage, and effluent management.

3. AQIS administered export regulations also help to "pull through" the NFAS by linking grainfed beef export certification to NFAS accreditation.
4. Since 2002, NFAS has included a provision for notification to ALFA of significant incidents of morbidity or mortality of cattle. This provides a central reference and reporting point in cases, for example, where extreme climatic events may have increased the risk of stress on cattle. The mandatory reporting by feedlots is triggered if feedlots up to 5,000 head have greater than 3 deaths or from feedlots over 5,000 head lose more than 0.04 per cent of the cattle on feed.
5. NFAS animal welfare guidelines have been amended recently to address climatic events in which either prolonged periods of very high temperatures, or the interaction of high humidity, still air and high temperatures raise the risk of animal stress. The experience of the industry over the past 5 years in managing heat load events and the massive amount of on-site weather data has assisted researchers developing a risk management model for use by all Australian feedlots. This model when used in conjunction with a long range predictability service, can advise of many management practices and tools to minimise the impacts of these rare but predictable conditions.

3. The Philosophy of Self Regulation

The bill has as its premise that national regulation is the key to ensuring good animal welfare performance and is more rigorous, as centralised regulation.

We disagree with that premise. It is our strong conviction that it is essential for managers and owners to embrace their duty of care to animals as an integral part of operating a well run enterprise. Effective management comes from the desire to be good citizens by meeting community standards, and by understanding that treating stock humanely is also the only way to run a productive viable and efficient operation. A personal empathy with sound animal welfare practices is an integral part of good management.

An animal welfare culture cannot be imposed but it can be fostered by training, education and by encouragement. Feedlot personnel take pride in looking after cattle well and ALFA and its sponsors foster this ethos through regular management competitions.

Our customers also typically like to see evidence of compliance with recognised animal welfare and environmental standards as NFAS is able to provide through third part audits. We do accept however, that there is an important role for regulation as a safety net underpinning self regulation.

4. Adequacy of Current Regulation

In our experience, State agencies perform their animal welfare regulatory roles with reasonable competence and diligence. Besides government staff, the RSPCA is commonly empowered to enter premises and initiate prosecution.

It is likely that the proposed National authority would add complexity and costs, rather than value, for the following reasons:

- States already have administrative infrastructures in place. Substantial costs would be incurred by setting up another agency.
- Who will pay for that agency? Would industry be expected to pay for the new policeman?
- There would be great potential for legal contention over National agency powers, which presumably would rest on the difficult platform of National corporations powers, or on export control powers. What happens when a feedlot is judged by State officials to be animal welfare compliant, but is separately prosecuted by the National agency?
- Or is the assumption that States will transfer their powers to this agency? How likely is that to happen in practice?

5. Conclusion

ALFA does not support the draft bill, and the premises underlying it.

Developing a duplicate Federal and State Animal Welfare compliance system will inevitably lead to situations where feedlots under a State jurisdiction could be considered to be compliant whilst not being compliant under the Federal system. The introduction of prescriptive based requirements instead of outcomes based management will be a retrospective step for Primary Industry.

The significant cost of setting up a new bureaucracy and a team of inspectors, when the State government/RSPCA system of ensuring compliance is working adequately is not justifiable.

The way forward is an ongoing co-operative approach between governments, industry and animal welfare groups that recognises that good animal welfare rests on outcome based practices, with credible and science based self regulation.

ALFA appreciates the opportunity to expand on this paper at the Senate Committee hearing into this matter.