

MEDIA RELEASE – 24th JANUARY 2013

OJD – GOING THE WRONG WAY

James Harker-Mortlock, independent candidate for the federal seat of Hume, made the following comments today in regard to the issue of OJD :

“I call upon the Standing Council on Primary Industries to intervene immediately to halt the proposed National Ovine Johne’s Disease Management Plan 2012-2017 proposed by Animal Health Australia which has been set down to commence on 1st July, 2013. The new plan was due to commence on January 1st, but was delayed following concerns expressed by producers.

I have been travelling around the electorate of Hume talking to farmers from many different backgrounds. Some with large holdings. Some with small holdings. Some who own their land. Some who lease land. Some who share farm. Some who run studs. Some who run commercial level operations. Some who trade. Whatever their background and size of agricultural business, all those farmers agree on one thing – OJD as an issue is dead and buried. It should not be resurrected. There are methodologies in place to deal with the problem, including vaccination and grazing strategies. There is the Assurance Based Credit Scheme to enable the managed trading of sheep from OJD prevalent areas to areas of lower prevalence which has operated successfully since 2004. There is SheepMAP. Leave it alone.

Farmers are concerned that the procedures which were applied in the past to control the disease set farmer against farmer, district against district. The attitude of authorities appeared to be to ‘get’ a farmer. There was not an attitude of OJD being a common problem to be solved in a collaborative fashion. Many farmers were victimised. This caused severe economic distress for many of the farmers identified as having OJD amongst their sheep and in some cases led to family tragedies. Nobody wants that to happen again.

Why Animal Health Australia wishes to raise the issue again is hard to fathom. No adequate explanation appears to have been provided as to why the current arrangements need to be changed.

It seems that the main motivation behind the changes is that Animal Health Australia wants to present the appearance that it is doing something about biosecurity in order to justify its own existence. If Animal Health Australia want to do something useful, would it not be better to focus resources on funding further research into OJD in all areas of the country and on improving the vaccine in order to stop or to reduce the shedding of OJD bacteria and into making the vaccine safer to use for the operators. Would this not be more useful than fiddling with bureaucratic arrangements, which appear to be guaranteeing only more unpaid paperwork for farmers and include the expense of producing, and annually auditing, Regional Biosecurity Plans, which not all farmers will be able to afford to do in any event? It is hard to see many real benefits to farmers in the proposed new arrangements.

The actions of Animal Health Australia are already re-activating the often acrimonious debate surrounding the OJD issue. Stop now. This debate was over years ago. Just get on with business.

I call upon the Standing Council on Primary Industries to act swiftly to curtail the current plans of Animal Health Australia in regard to OJD.”

For more information :

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