



**ADDRESS TO THE 105TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF THE PASTORALISTS & GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION
BY ROB GILLAM, PRESIDENT**

There are few here today that would argue against calling 2011 as one of the most trying and challenging years faced by producers in Western Australia.

From the Federal Government suspending live cattle exports to Indonesia, to the implementation of a Carbon Tax; from an organic grain grower threatening to sue his GM Canola growing neighbour, to the imprisonment of farmers for clearing native vegetation; from the State Government's refusal to negotiate on pastoral rents, to the introduction of rangeland reform - these are just a few of the issues which dominated not just the agricultural landscape, but for the first time the public arena in 2011.

Agriculture in Western Australia is on the dawn of a new era, one that has not been seen since the Green Revolution of 50 years ago and as in the past, producers will need to choose whether to embrace this change and prosper, or refuse to accept it and allow their industry to decline.

It is no longer possible for producers to continue to believe that they do not have to change and that the accepted practices and attitudes of the past can continue. Our society continues to evolve at tremendous pace and has brought with it new challenges such as social media, which has opened up all governments and industries to scrutiny by the general public.

For 105 years now the PGA has been seen as the leader in agriculture in Western Australia, fighting against previously accepted practices, supporting competition and embracing change. We must continue to remain open to seizing the opportunities of the future and not be fearful of letting go of the past.

We have dealt with many issues throughout the past year and I would like to take the opportunity to address a few of the key challenges which we will continue to face in the year ahead. These include the continuation of the live export trade, changes to animal welfare, the role of the RSPCA, the National footrot and OJD programs, wild dog control, the wool industry, national representation in the grains industry, CBH, GMO's, the Carbon Tax, Private Property Rights, National Heritage Listing of the Kimberley and finally Pastoral rents, tenure and rangeland monitoring.

LIVE EXPORTS

The Gillard Government's decision to temporarily suspend live cattle exports to Indonesia last June continues to impact not only on the livelihoods of Northern Cattle producers, but all livestock producers in Western Australia. From cattle, to sheep, to goats, all live exports are now under intense public scrutiny and the entire livestock industry needs to be aware that any cruel or inhumane practices will be seen as an indictment on all livestock production and will no longer be tolerated by the public and the Government.

The suspension and the subsequent cutting of quotas by the Indonesian Government have shown the need for producers to be aware of the pitfalls of relying on a single market. The emergence of “self-sufficiency” programs is not only limited to Indonesia, as many of our traditional trading partners, including those in the Middle East, are considering similar policies. As well, increased competition from other exporting countries due to the high Australian Dollar will continue.

The live export industry has been forced to undergo significant changes in how it does business and producers need to be aware that, as eventually happens with all commodities the live export bubble may burst.

ANIMAL WELFARE

The continuing impact of animal welfare organisations on livestock producers cannot be overestimated.

Whist we were pleased, after many years of lobbying, to see responsibility for commercial animal welfare finally transferred from Local Government to the Department of Agriculture, we were less than impressed when we realised it came with some unexpected baggage – the RSPCA.

The RSPCA, like all organisations is fighting for relevance and has unfortunately gone from being an animal welfare to an animal liberationist organisation dominated by members of Animals Australia and PETA.

Following the success of Animals Australia and the RSPCA in pressuring the Gillard Government to temporarily suspend live exports to Indonesia, the attention of these animal liberation groups has extended beyond live exports and land transport to all forms of livestock production, including a national accreditation program for ethically produced food.

We will continue to ensure that the extreme views of animal liberationists do not dominate the issue over acceptable animal welfare standards in all areas of livestock production and transport.

NATIONAL FOOTROT PROGRAM

The PGA continues to support a nominal program of surveillance for footrot to prevent the import of more virulent footrot strains from the eastern states. The PGA will maintain its watch on this program, particularly now that it is primarily funded by a producer levy.

NATIONAL OJD PROGRAM

The PGA continues to support a national OJD program which is not about drawing lines on a map, but will assist producers in assessing and responding to a risk management program.

WILD DOGS

Wild dogs have now reached plague proportions throughout the pastoral regions. The PGA is calling for continued action from both the State and Federal Governments, including the implementation of a National bounty program to drastically cull numbers. We applaud the work of the local Regional Bio-security Groups (RBG), however the size of the task is overwhelming.

WOOL

2011 has seen at long last, some consolidation in the wool industry in both price and politics. Disconcertingly we note that better returns are being sized upon as the results of promotion, when history has taught us that supply and demand is the true driver.

GRAIN NATIONAL REPRESENTATION

This year has seen the largest harvest ever recorded in Western Australia and the fourth under a deregulated market. While growers in WA continue to lead the rest of the nation in grain production, national representation in the grains industry continues to be perceived as the right of Eastern States growers, most notably Grain Growers Limited which is fighting to be the peak industry organisation. The PGA continues to support the concept of a voluntary model, which has fair and equitable representation for West Australian growers.

CBH

Deregulation of the grains industry has clearly shown the need for further development in storage and handling infrastructure, which can only occur through the introduction of competition to CBH.

We will continue to pursue a policy of demutualisation of CBH, which will facilitate not only the introduction of competition, but allow growers to access their equity.

GMO

PGA Western Graingrowers members were the first and only organisation in WA to publicly defend GM grower Mike Baxter's right to grow what is a legal and safe crop. The PGA will continue to support the right of West Australian growers to use GMO's in their cropping programs.

THE CARBON TAX, NATIVE VEGETATION LAWS AND PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS

We continue to fight against the Government's introduction of a Carbon Tax and remain sceptical of the ability of any Government to regulate an ever-changing climate through taxation.

The PGA strongly supports the view that the current clearing ban regulations in Western Australia have changed the definition and security of rural land ownership. This removal of key rights of ownership of private property has been exacerbated by requirements set down under Kyoto and other climate change related protocols.

The PGA will continue to push for an independent appeals process and for fair and just compensation to be provided to those land owners who are not able to clear remnant vegetation from their land.

WORLD HERITAGE / NATIONAL HERITAGE LISTING OF THE KIMBERLEY

We were disappointed that Minister Bourke recommended the National Heritage listing of the Kimberley after very limited or meaningful consultation with pastoralists. We attempted to engage with the National Heritage listing processes but continually found it difficult to have our views considered seriously at the drafting table.

We will continue to meet with Government representatives to redress the change of policy. This will not be an easy battle to win and I must pass on my appreciation to those individual pastoralists who continue to do an enormous amount of work on this issue.

PASTORAL

Three issues; rents, rangeland conditioning monitoring and tenure continue to dominate the pastoral industry and unfortunately we have allowed all three issues to get tangled up which has led to us now being perceived as a totally negative organisation that is unresponsive to any and all change.

Rents

We have now seen the implementation of the third tranche of rent increase which is, to say the least very disappointing. I was one who felt that after the live export suspension the Government would not proceed with the final increase - sadly this was not to be.

We will continue to press for reform and the establishment of five different zones for rating purposes, which would allow for a fairer and more equitable assessment, rather than a one size fits all approach.

Rangeland monitoring

Self-monitoring will be implemented and the costs and responsibilities will be borne by the lease holder. Unfortunately for many years PGA members complained about the rangeland condition assessments and the Minister listened, deciding that pastoralists might as well do it themselves. It is highly unlikely that there will be any financial assistance offered to pastoralists and if we seek any assistance on monitoring, we will probably be charged for it.

Land Tenure

In my opinion, by pursuing a path of negativity in relation to proposed land tenure reform we are doing a disservice to those pastoralists with short-term leases, as well as to future generations of pastoralists.

The current proposal for the Minister to not have the right of refusal to roll over a lease, conditional on environmental and financial caveats, is a very strong benefit to pastoralists. The proposed legislation sees the transfer of the right of renewal from the Minister to the pastoralist. Should July 1, 2015 come about without tenure reform, the urgency for change will diminish and leases may be rolled over with no further guaranteed rights.

Should the PGA continue down the path they are on currently and be responsible for land tenure not being addressed in this term of Government, then we may well be criticised very strongly by those whose leases that expire in the next 20-30years.

We live in a changing and progressive State. As pastoralists we need to realise that the conditions and opportunities that have been available to us, on basically uninhabited land for most of the last 150years, are not going to continue in the 21st Century.

Pastoral pursuits as a primary generator of wealth in the rangelands are diminishing as we see an increase in demand for alternative land use by other industries. We need to welcome the future of the rangelands of Western Australia which still have opportunities

for traditional grazing practices, but which also have enormous potential for more intensive uses which the ever expanding economy of the State wishes to embrace.

I believe that the pastoral areas of Western Australia still have a bright future for those that wish to adapt their business to accommodate the rapidly changing environment in which we operate.

CLOSING & THANKS

Our representation and involvement in all these issues is not possible without the help of every member that participates at Executive, on a Sub-Committee or District Committee.

The input and feedback I get from each and every person that contacts me is invaluable and I thank everyone for their continued contribution - even those who I strongly disagree with. It is only through robust debate that proper policy is created.

I thank my Vice Presidents, Tony Seabrook and Ruth Webb-Smith for their support and also our Treasurer Bevan Henderson for his untiring efforts.

I would also like to thank a number of other key people in the organisation - Alan Cleland, Digby Stretch, Gary Peacock, John Snooke, David Lovelock, Leon Bradley, Sue Walker, Gary McGill, Barry Court, David Boyle, Barry Large, David Steadman, Will Scott and Jim Motter for their hard work and dedication to the PGA.

In conclusion all is made possible by Sandy Hayter and the staff at Pastoral House. Thank you for your untiring support.

I look forward to another year meeting the challenges on behalf of the PGA's members.
