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# MLA program update – January to April 2012

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*This report aims to provide the Peak Industry Councils and State Farming Organisations with a brief overview of key MLA program progress as per our strategic imperatives. This is not a comprehensive report on all MLA programs, however highlights some of MLA's recent activities.*

## **Maintaining and improving market access**

### Trade

- As endorsed by REDMMAC, MLA has commissioned a research project into the impact of technical barriers to trade. The research will prioritise technical barriers to trade across issues and across markets in order to provide advice to industry and government.

### Food safety

- Over the past few months, the work undertaken to date on E. coli strains other than O157, has helped put Australia in a secure position to respond to the new market access requirements for the USA. Australian animals and meat have a very low prevalence of the 'big 6' E. coli strains, and implementation of testing systems is well under way.
- Research on antimicrobial resistance in Salmonella will be undertaken, as it may become another US technical trade issue in the future.

### Livestock export

- Meetings have been held with key importers, exporters and industry bodies to discuss ESCAS compliance issues and requirements for addressing critical future risks and potential leakages in the supply chain. A taskforce has been formed to develop a set of compliance and non-conformance guidelines to assist supply chains to manage ongoing ESCAS.
- Following the announcement from Indonesia of 60,000 head permit allocation for the first quarter, the trade is now expecting a permit allocation of approximately 120,000 head in the second quarter, with the balance of 103,000 head expected in the second half of the year.
- A simple flyer on ESCAS has been developed to further raise awareness and educate stakeholders.

## **Growing demand**

### MSA

- A project investigating the effects of long distance transport will be conducted during 2012. The project will document the effects of variable transport duration up to 36 hours (with and without rest) on carcass and meat eating quality, through consumer sensory testing. The project's results will potentially:
  - Enable MSA protocols to be revised or developed to make the MSA system accessible to more producers/cattle;
  - Provide support for the existing MSA dispatch-slaughter protocol; and
  - Provide guidelines to improve grading results for cattle currently eligible for MSA assessment.
- A 4 and 5 star compliance project is investigating the value of boning groups to determine the likely misaligned rates that occur when assigning carcasses based on boning group. An index of merit has been developed to allow an objective review of this process and to evaluate advanced sorting criteria.
- In addition to a large number of independent retailers, MSA is now utilised by major retailers - Woolworths, Aldi, Costco and IGA.
- Beef MSA grading forecast for 2011/12 year is 1.875, which is an increase of 35% on 2010/11.
- Lambs MSA grading forecast for the 2011/12 year is 2.9 million lambs.

#### Beef Marketing

- The MSA consumer awareness campaign launched on 12<sup>th</sup> Feb for three weeks, consisting of a 30 second 'What's New' TV commercial supported by print advertisements in major metro newspapers.
- MLA's new Winter 'Beefgiving' Campaign will be launched on 1<sup>st</sup> June, and run through to end of August. The campaign will include a TV commercial, social media, a new edition of ENTICE, point of sale material.
- MLA assisted in the development of a new beef retail product called the Rump Steak Sandwich. The product will provide consumers with the perfect ingredient for the classic steak sandwich.
- MLA consumer research into perceptions of veal helped a major retailer launch a new veal range.
- MLA has recently hosted chef's paddock to plate tour (NSW), Chefs Table event (WA), Butchers tour (VIC) and developed a 'Timesaver meal box' trial for butchers (QLD).

#### Lamb Marketing

- The 2012 Australia Day lamb campaign surpassed expectations, with over 600,000 views of the 'official' videos hosted by MLA on YouTube, and many more posted by members of the public. Media interest was high and sales feedback was very strong. Summary of key results:
  - 31.7% uplift compared to average weekly sales (highest since tracking started over a decade ago)
  - 86% of interviewed butchers participated in the Australia Day promotion.
  - 68% of butchers rated the sales impact as good, very good or excellent.
  - Lamb sales increased by 13% for the full month - the highest January sales on record.
- MLA's new 'Chuck a Sunday' lamb roast campaign launched on 15th April for 4 weeks. The campaign encourages Australians to recreate that Sunday feeling during the week by 'chucking' a lamb roast in the oven. The promotion includes a TV ad, online videos, new point of sale material, a radio partnership with NOVA and digital and PR activities.

#### Nutrition

- MLA has developed a brochure on weight loss for young women using a nutrient-rich, higher protein diet based on an MLA funded study which will be launched in the media during May.

### **Increasing productivity across the supply chain**

#### SmartShape: Alternative meat shaping technology

- The current SmartShape machine has generated significant interest at processor, value adding and food service, but has limitations in throughput and scalability. A project is being undertaken to develop an alternative design to better meet the industry needs for high throughput, reduced labour and better scalability, in order to accelerate realisation of the value adding benefits of shaping meat.

#### Transport

- A research project has been undertaken on the impact on the red meat and livestock industries of proposals to change road usage for heavy vehicles. These proposals are being assessed by the COAG Road Reform Project. Case studies in the research report indicate that proposals being considered could lead to small but still significant increases in road transport costs – for example, one proposal could increase cattle/beef production costs by 2.5%. The report is available <http://www.mla.com.au/policyresearch>

#### Fluoroacetate Toxicity

- A discussion paper will be produced for PICs outlining the process to develop both GM and non-GMO options for fluoroacetate toxicity. The paper will note the experiments required, timelines, budget and an indication of the likelihood of success of each step.

#### Dung beetles

- An estimated 2.5 million ha of Australian pasture is made unproductive by unburied dung. Investigations indicate 23 species of dung beetles have successfully established in Australia to address this problem and deliver significant benefits through improved water movement, increased earthworm activity, nutrient capture and flow to plant root zones.
- Researchers are importing two new species (from France and Spain) of early spring-active dung beetles to fill seasonal gaps in dung beetle activity in southern Australia. The aim is to release the new species in 2014, following quarantine, adaptation to the southern hemisphere and mass rearing.

#### Improving supply chain and market information

- Co-funded by MLA and AWI, the sheepmeat and wool survey is conducted three times a year (February, June and October) to track short term supply trends and producer intentions. Planning for the June survey is currently underway. The survey is used in the industry forecasting process, particularly in conjunction with input from the MLA Lamb Forecasting Advisory Committee, with key indicators such as ewes and lambs on hand, and recent marking rates in different regions of Australia.

#### Improving Animal Health and Biosecurity

- MLA provided support for the Invasive Animals CRC 'Pestsmart' roadshow, which aims to promote invasive animal management innovations.

### **Supporting industry integrity and sustainability**

Target 100: [www.target100.com.au](http://www.target100.com.au)

- MLA launched a new community communications initiative "Target 100" on 27 March 2012. The campaign promotes 100 different initiatives making sheep and cattle production more sustainable. It includes a dedicated website, cinema and print advertising and point of sale material in retail outlets. The focus of the website is an interactive Google earth map that showcases what producers right across the country are doing on their properties and discussion forums. The case studies aren't only about highlighting the best or most innovative producers, it's about telling city people about all of the common practices that happen on Australian cattle and sheep properties that enable great meat to be produced at the same time as protecting and enhancing our natural environment.

#### Events

- Business EDGE workshops will be held in Katherine, Goondiwindi and Charleville throughout May
- Beef Up Forums will be held in Durong, Biggenden, Texas and Nindigully in May and June.
- A Beef Up – Next Gen Forum will be held in Croydon on 22 June.
- MLA will hold a Meat Profit Day at Albany, WA on 28 August.
- MLA is hosting social media workshops to help producers learn how to strategically use social media to connect directly with an urban audience to effectively tell their stories. The workshops will equip producers with skills in using different communication platforms, such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook.
  - Workshops were held in Wellington and Tamworth, NSW in April
  - Over the next few months, workshops will be held in TAS, QLD and WA
  - Towards the end of the year workshops will be held in VIC and SA

#### Publications

- Best Practices Manual for the Top End Region has been launched; it covers all key topics including station development, land management, cattle breeding, cattle management and animal health.

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