

# Opinion

The WEEKLY TIMES

## Spray ban sets bad precedent

All rural landholders should be concerned at the harsh stance the NSW water regulator has taken on banning the state's farmers from using their stock and domestic water rights to fill spray tanks.

The NSW Natural Resource Regulator has decided to follow the letter of the law when it comes to restricting basic landholder rights to "domestic consumption and stock watering, but not for any other purpose".

This Common Law riparian water right has existed in every state of Australia since federation.

But back in 1901 there were no herbicides, pesticides, synthetic fertilisers or biosecurity protocols that required farmers to wash down machinery, let alone spray tanks and private firefighting vehicles.

What NRAR has failed to consider is that all these activities involve infrequent and low water use.

This water is vital to maintaining human, animal and the environmental health of our nation's vast rural estate.

NSW Farmers Association has been trying to get this water incorporated as part of the basic landholder right since August 2023.

But it appears the NSW Labor government's Water Minister Rose Jackson is more interested in cranking up NRAR's powers.

Instead of having to prove beyond reasonable doubt that water was taken unlawfully, the minister has drafted a bill that gives NRAR the power to take civil action. It means the standard of proof is lowered to the point where on the "balance of probabilities that water was taken unlawfully".

Water users in other parts of the nation should not think they are immune from similar actions to those of NRAR in NSW.

# Sticking points of plan



When it comes to Livestock Production Assurance accreditation, not all will go to plan, writes **FIONA MYERS**

The devil could be in the detail when producers knuckle down to complete their animal-welfare plans to be able to sell stock.

As part of their accreditation under the Livestock Production Assurance program, they must have an animal-welfare plan for any audits completed after September 1.

Part of the process is reading the Australian Animal Welfare Standard, a broad-ranging document with standards and guidelines for running stock.

That document includes what is proving to be a push-button response from the industry — that sheepdog use should be limited to the minimum needed to complete the task.

It's rightly raised the ire of those who know the value of a working dog, and how difficult day-to-day management tasks would be without the assistance of a good canine workmate. Anyone trying to load a race for

drenching or fill up pens at shearing knows that all too well.

But it's one of a host of guidelines in the standard which is not only meant to improve animal welfare but to ensure access to markets remains open.

The broader industry should have concerns about these plans though.

When producers complete the plan, they are acknowledging that not only the person filling it in, but every person who works with stock on their property is aware of the details of the plan. It's difficult to imagine every livestock producer across the nation sitting down with staff and briefing them on the details in their property-specific animal welfare plan.

Then there are issues with the plan itself, a document where there are suggested responses, or, if you choose, a box to tick that says none of these are completed or it's not applicable.

Take euthanasia of stock. There's



Livestock producers know the value of a good working dog. Picture: Sam Rutty

industry standards on who can and how to do it, but the animal welfare plan provided by the regulator allows the producer to tick a box saying that none of the recommended methods of euthanising stock are applicable.

Then when it comes to audit time, how do those auditors know what's been detailed in the plan has actually been completed, especially if there is a desktop audit and not one on property.

Good livestock producers will still be good livestock producers, caring about their sheep and cattle with or without an animal welfare plan.

And a plan which isn't audited properly anyway is probably unlikely to hold much weight if our red meat buyers want proof on the welfare of stock management.

**Fiona Myers is a reporter with The Weekly Times**

## Cannabis 'economic lever waiting to be pulled'

The next economic boon for Victorian farmers and rural communities looks set to come from an unlikely source: cannabis production.

Momentum is building for Australian states and territories to introduce a government-regulated system for the production and sale of non-medical cannabis. That is, to treat cannabis more like alcohol but with even stricter conditions.

The key drivers of this reform are boosting community health and safety by wresting control of the cannabis market away from crime gangs and establishing tight rules around cannabis production, sales and consumption.

But there will also be a significant economic dividend for the state which embraces this reform first, and most of the benefit will go direct to country communities.

New economic modelling commissioned by Penington Institute — which has developed a detailed policy



Moves to regulate cannabis open a series of opportunities for farmers and rural communities, writes **JOHN RYAN**

blueprint for how governments could establish a regulated adult-use cannabis market — highlights the scale of the economic opportunity facing Victorian farmers and country communities.

Over the first decade of operation, a regulated cannabis market would create more than 8000 ongoing full-time jobs in country areas and pump roughly \$9bn into local economies.

Beyond the farm gate, a legal cannabis industry would create jobs across the entire production cycle, from greenhouse technicians to processing, transportation and retail roles in nearby towns. Dedicated storage, logistics and distribution facilities would also need to be established and staffed.

Under the Penington plan, state

governments would also charge retail sellers a series of fees and charges as part of strict licencing arrangements. This money would go straight back into general government revenue and be available for things like local roads, mental health, housing and community infrastructure.

Legal cannabis has the potential to be a dynamic agricultural industry, attracting new investment, stimulating research and development, and sparking innovation.

This would deliver a welcome boost to our regions struggling with uncertain economic conditions, climate change and the current drought.

Canada and more than 20 US states have already legalised and regulated cannabis, providing us with hard data and important lessons on

how to embrace this reform while also avoiding unintended consequences.

In Canada, it is estimated that between 2018 and 2021, legal cannabis businesses invested \$32bn in real estate, infrastructure and technology. The creation of a new legal industry helped add \$48.7bn to Canada's GDP. And this new industry then sustained an average of 98,000 full-time equivalent jobs per year.

Victoria is in the box seat to reap a similar economic dividend from embracing commonsense cannabis reform. This is to say nothing of the immense social benefits that will come from depriving criminal gangs of power and control over the cannabis market.

Cannabis regulation is an economic lever waiting to be pulled.

There is a real prize here — but only if we're ready to seize this opportunity.

**John Ryan is chief executive of the Penington Institute**

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