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HUNT BLOG NEWSLETTER

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FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

RED MEAT INDUSTRY ORGANISATIONS ADOPT RUSSIA'S '*IMITATION DEMOCRACY*'

Less than 3% of Meat and Livestock Australia's (MLA) eligible members bothered to exercise their 'rubber stamp' vote for *pre-selected* directors at MLA's AGM in late November 2017.

November 2017 also saw the launch of the brave new world of Sheep Producers Australia Ltd (SPA) being formed to replace the State Farm Organization (SFO) based the Sheepmeat Council of Australia Peak Council that was established in 1978. The SPA endorsed the appointment of 5 *pre-selected* directors to Australian sheep producer's new representative advocacy body at its first AGM on 14 November 2017.

On Wednesday 17 January 2018, the SFO's instructed the Cattle Council of Australia (CCA) to walk away from the Cattle Australia Implementation Committee (IC) set up in 2015 at former Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce's behest to establish a new truly democratic representative cattle producer Peak Council with a board directly elected by grass fed cattle transaction levy payers to replace CCA.

CCA advised the IC last Wednesday that they proposed to continue to represent Australian grass fed cattle producers through a board comprising 8 SFO *appointed* directors and two directly elected board members with a proposal for two more directly elected board members if CCA can drum up 500 direct members.

A 2012 published Innovact Consulting report commissioned by CCA acknowledged that as a consequence of falling SFO membership and the convoluted SFO/CCA organizational structure, CCA no longer truly represented Australia's grass fed cattle producers. Despite this acknowledgement the SFO's directed the CCA members of the IC to resign because the SFO's were not prepared to give up their place in the sun as controllers of Australia's grass fed cattle Peak Council.

Huntblog was at the historic multi-organization cattle producer meeting in Brisbane in February 2015 when CCA agreed to establish a truly democratic representative advocacy body to represent Australia's

grass fed cattle producers. Huntblog was also at the historic meeting in Brisbane on the 17th of January 2018 when CCA resiled from that 2015 agreement.

Consequently, an article on Russia's *Imitated Democracy* in the 20-21 January 2018 weekend Australian Financial Review caught Huntblog's eye.¹

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia's economy has undergone a radical transformation moving from an introspective, centrally planned, communist economy to a globally integrated market economy. Russia's 1993 post-Soviet Union and post-communist constitution declares Russia to be a democratic, law-based, republican federation,² with a semi-presidential structure where the president and prime minister share governing power.

Last weekend's Financial Review article suggests that in reality Russia has a sham or '*Imitated Democracy*' rather than a real one and describes Russia's *Imitated Democracy* as "*a complex political entity [that] comes without free and fair elections, an independent parliament and an independent judiciary.*" A fake or simulated democracy that relies on deception rather than violence or confrontation to control its population.

The Financial Review article suggests Vladimir Putin has hung on to effective power for 18 years in the Russian Duma on the back of a system that effectively allows him to *handpick selected* parliamentary candidates for both the government and opposition. A system that is backed by laws that prohibit challenges to the incumbent from candidates with criminal convictions and the lack of separation of powers in Russia, which allows Putin to obtain convictions against popular opponents such as Alexie Navalny for fabricated offences from a compliant judiciary.

Howard Smith, the current Chair of the CCA, and other CCA directors have publically expressed their support for the "*...move to a directly elected grass fed cattle producer representative Peak Council*" and Howard Smith has left the door open for CCA to re-join the process to incorporate Cattle Australia if the funding issues can be sorted out.

Despite this constructive assurance Howard Smith and his fellow directors of the CCA are attempting to blur the fundamental fact that the SFO's decision to pull the CCA members out of the Implementation Committee is based on the SFO's Vladimir Putin like determination to retain control of the grass fed cattle producer Peak Council. To this end they are publically pushing the line that CCA and the SFO's had no alternative but to resile from their 2015 agreement to set up Cattle Australia because the government had failed to provide an ongoing funding stream for its continued operations.

This lack of ongoing funding rationale does not however bear scrutiny. The Commonwealth Government has provided a \$500k grant to help set up the proposed new directly elected grass fed cattle producer representative Peak Council. So the funds are available to establish the new truly democratic representative body and the issue about obtaining adequate ongoing operational funding for the grass fed cattle producer Peak Council is by definition a common issue irrespective if the structure of that Peak Council is the current CCA /SFO model or the proposed *directly elected grass fed cattle producer representative model*.

In any event, Huntblog presumes to surmise that a new cleanskin Cattle Australia with a board directly elected by grass fed cattle transaction levy payers form 15 regional electorates across Australia will have more chance of raising the necessary additional operational funding from Australian cattle producers and/or from grass fed cattle transaction levies than the outmoded, unrepresentative, undemocratic CCA model will have.

¹ This article may be accessed electronically at: <<http://www.afr.com/news/politics/world/russias-imitation-democracy-and-its-illusory-opposition-and-representation-20180115-h0ie8m>>

² See Chapter 1, Article 1, Section 1 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation 2013.

CCA are also somewhat bizarrely trying to repaint their outdated CCA majority SFO appointed board structure as the model of democracy because they hope to attract 500 hundred 'direct members' so that they can appoint two more *directly* elected board members to constitute a CCA board with a majority of 8 SFO appointed directors and a minority of 4 directly elected directors.

Australia is governed by a system of representative democracy. A system whereby people in particular electorates elect representatives from a number of competing candidates with differing policies to represent their interests in the parliaments and organizational structures of our land.

At a Federal and State government level Australia has a system of compulsory voting which results in Australian citizens having the highest election voter turn outs in the world. We know from the fact that less than 3% of operational service provider MLA's members bother to exercise their rubber stamp right of endorsement of pre-selected directors, and that *Imitated Democracy* structures discourage rather than encourage grass roots engagement by members with their organizational bodies.

Australian cattle and sheep producer's representative advocacy bodies need and deserve truly democratic bodies, whose boards are elected from a number of candidates, who truly represent the interests of their constituents, rather than by bodies with directors selected or appointed by particular interest groups. Truly democratic, representative bodies that truly engage with their constituents.

A representative body with a *selected* or *appointed* board is a contradiction in terms. A fake or simulated *From Russia with Love* democracy. An *Imitated Democracy* based on deception and spurious arguments designed to serve and preserve the interests of particular factions.

Sadly, at the moment, the boards of Australia's sheep and cattle producer industry representative advocacy bodies are not democratically elected from constituent candidates with competing policies. Rather the boards of those Peak Councils are *selected* or *appointed* by particular interest groups either directly or through a faux or fake democratic right of *endorsement* process that is very similar to Russia's system of *Imitated Democracy*.

The good news for Australia's grass fed cattle producers is that the remaining members of the Implementation Committee and the Federal Government have both confirmed their commitment to *Real Representative Democracy* for Australia's grass fed cattle producers despite the SFOs pulling CCA out of the Cattle Australia Implementation Committee.

For related topic Huntblog Newsletters on Sheep Producers Australia Imitation Democracy and Cattle Producer Representative Democracy visit www.Huntblog.com.au.