

Cattle Council calls for slice of levy

By BRAD COOPER

CATTLE Council is chasing a slice of beef producers' levy funds to boost the muscle of the peak beef producer representative body. Newly installed Cattle Council president Andrew Ogilvie floated the idea in a discussion paper released last week.

Changing the levy payment system would require alterations to federal legislation, as compulsory levies – currently a \$5/head transaction levy for cattle – are paid to Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) for research and marketing.

Currently, the funding for Cattle Council is derived from membership income from State farming organisations, the Red Meat Advisory Council fund, sponsorship and government funding agreements.

Cattle Council came under fire dur-

ing last year's Indonesian live export crisis when most of the industry's reputation management was left to MLA, a function well outside its charter.

MLA chief executive Scott Hansen has repeatedly stated MLA will no longer assume the role of industry mouthpiece, and will look to the national beef

ing for some time to improve its operational structure, governance, funding and membership," he said.

"There has been increasing pressure placed on our resources. We need to address this if we are to more effectively represent the sector into the future.

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– Southern NSW producer Marc Greening

producer groups to muscle up in their political lobbying and take up their share of the workload in fronting the media and public.

In a statement Mr Ogilvie indicated seeking a slice of the levy funds would assist Cattle Council in meeting this challenge.

"The Cattle Council has been work-

ed to Cattle Council's operations.

"The need for a stronger Cattle Council was brought home at the height of the live export debacle when pressure was applied to MLA to defend the industry," he said.

"The Cattle Council is the body that should be at the forefront of that work but with a budget of just \$1 million it's certainly something we need to restructure so they have the funds to do their work properly."

Victorian producer John Wylid, "Koolomurt", Coleraine, said Cattle Council could no longer rely on the State farming organisations to provide its funds, given their widely publicised problems with falling membership and financial challenges.

"They're not making any money so that's not making its way to Cattle Council," he said. "And affiliation fees haven't changed in about 25 years."

"Cattle Council has to do something because it does a lot of work on the

industry's behalf that needs to be funded. How we go about that is the tricky thing because there are so many calls on the current \$5 transaction levy.

"But something has to change, though increasing the levy wouldn't be an option."

Mr Ogilvie said the Cattle Council was not wedded to one direction, but would consider many options based on wide industry consultation.

He said access to a percentage of the cattle transaction levy as well as the direct election of a number of positions to the board were just two elements of the discussion paper.

"We are not exactly sure where the 'landing point' is in this reform process. However, what we are clear on is this is a necessary discussion for Cattle Council to have with its members as well as the wider industry."

■ Read the full paper at www.cattlecouncil.com.au/nationalrepresentation