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Subject: AgForce policy on Firearms

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AgForce endorses the following policy positions relating to the management and use of Firearms for primary production purposes:

AgForce Queensland Farmers supports Queensland Primary Producers' reasonable access to and safe use of any firearm Category (A, B, C, D & H) and noise suppression devices under Category R that ensures:

- a) prompt, safe and humane euthanizing of livestock that exhibit terminal illness; injury; or serious distress due to adverse environmental conditions.
- b) culling of feral animals, both opportunistic and trapped, when a primary producer is attending to property management practices (e.g. mustering or completing a water-run) on a motorbike or in a vehicle. Feral animals are usually seen at impromptu times and having a firearm available at a moment's notice is critical to ensure optimal primary production and therefore improved enterprise viability. AgForce Queensland Farmers only condones the use of Cat H (hand guns) on a feral animal when it is trapped, therefore ensuring humane destruction at a short-range.
- c) a safe working environment for primary producers – e.g. the safer carry of a short-arm (Cat H) firearm compared to a long-arm (e.g. when mustering on two-wheel motorbike through scrub country a long-arm rifle carried by sling over the shoulders of the rider can be caught on low level branches therefore potentially causing serious injury); and, enhanced work-place health and welfare outcomes with the use of noise-suppressing devices (Cat R) to reduce the sound caused by discharging a firearm.

Background

With the exception of the QPS and Queensland-based Australian Defence Force personnel, primary producers make up the largest number of legitimate firearm users for normal "business-as-usual" needs, with the specific purposes of euthanizing of livestock to meet animal welfare needs and control of feral animals.

The vast majority of primary producers have always treated firearms with respect, and since implementation of the National Firearms Agreement (NFA) in 1996, these primary producers have complied with the QPS and State and Federal Government legislative requirements by completing mandatory firearm safety training courses; ensuring safe storage of firearms and ammunition on-property and in-transit; registration of firearms and paying applicable licence and registration fees; and educating the next generation of primary producers in safe handling and use of firearms.

However, despite the goodwill actions of legitimate primary producer and recreational firearm owners, the ability of the nation's police agencies to reduce firearm related crime and violence continues to be publicly questioned; and where the existing government strategy has focussed massive police resources into regulating the legitimate users of firearms with less attention on the criminal misuse of firearms.

AgForce Queensland Farmers policy should focus on demonstrating to governments the critical need of primary producers to own firearm types that are appropriate for any specific task at hand; whilst also working with the QPS and other firearm stakeholder groups to assist in developing and

interpreting government policy, through the *Weapons Act 1990* and associated *Regulation*, that ensures all community groups remain safe from firearm related crime.

What the industry needs

Measures to promote public safety and acceptance of producer access to firearms while streamlining regulatory requirements include:

1. Encourage greater policing resources to combat illicit use and trade of illegal firearms
 - Much of police time and effort goes into licensing low risk, legal firearm owners and administering firearms registration.
 - Government funding could be better spent putting more police officers into our communities, actively focussed on apprehending and prosecuting criminals who misuse firearms.
 - A simple and highly effective strategy to reduce the number of stolen firearms is to create the offence of “theft of a firearm” and punish it with a mandatory prison sentence of at least two (2) years - a burglar who comes across a firearm whilst ransacking a rural property, or residential dwelling, would be far more likely not to steal a firearm, knowing that unlike the more modest penalties for break and enter etc... they would then be subject to serious prison term punishment. This step would also be fully supported by all firearm owner groups, police and insurance companies, with very little, if any, cost in enforcement.
 - The firearm registration database of not only the Queensland Police Service but also those of other state police agencies are inaccurate, inflexible and incomplete, where it is anecdotally estimated that the error rate is anywhere between 60 to 80pc - such system flaws have seen both Canada and New Zealand abandon firearm registration because they contribute nothing to the safety of the community, and nothing to the efforts of law enforcement to solve crimes. Both Canada and New Zealand have re-allocated registry administration costs to greater police resources on the streets.
2. Encourage safe use and secure storage of all firearms
 - The vast majority, if not all firearm owners, are happy to have secure storage for their firearms because they don't want them stolen, nor do they want them mistreated or neglected - a gun safe represents secure storage and it keeps all firearms in the one place.
 - AgForce to promote the educational campaigns of Queensland Police Service regarding secure storage of firearms.
3. Ensure access to the appropriate firearm as a tool for primary production use
 - Queensland's Weapons Licensing Branch regularly and almost systematically refuses to authorise Category C, D, H & R licences for primary production use.
 - It has become virtually impossible to obtain a licence for a Category C, D or H firearm or Cat R noise suppressor for many primary producers despite the *Weapons Act 1990* specifically recognising and making allowance for such licensing.
 - Queensland's primary producers need access to the most appropriate firearm type that is capable of completing a specific task, whilst also ensuring the greatest safety and well-being of the firearm operator.
4. Encourage a streamlined licence application and approval process
 - Criminal misuse of firearms is not the intent of legitimate firearm owners.
 - Licence period and registration fees of no less than every 10 years.
 - A “Lifetime” licence for occupational users on the proviso that if their occupation changes then this will end their licence in that category.
 - Licence fees to be uniform between all legitimate firearm owners – e.g. a pistol club Category H licence is \$115 for 5 years compared to \$280 for a primary producer for the same firearm.
 - Renewing a firearm licence is needless because the *Weapons Act 1990* already provides police with the power to cancel or suspend a licence for any number of reasons, including

change in circumstances (address, job, health, etc.) or if domestic violence or criminal charges are placed on a firearm licence holder.

- Should a firearm registration database be considered a necessity, to maintain the general public's perception that the Queensland Police Service are at all times fully aware of the number of firearms registered within the State and the location of these firearms, then analysis could be obtained demonstrating that reduced registration and licence fees cover the costs of a streamlined registration system.