MEDIA MONITORS
INCISIVE INSIGHT



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All systems go



❒ WA Meat Industry Authority saleyard relocation project manager Dave Saunders (left) explains plans for the proposed multi-species Muchea saleyard to Chittering Shire chief executive officer Kenn Donohoe, WAFarmers Meat Council president Mike Norton and Pastoralists and Graziers Association policy director Hugh Harding.

First Muchea sales set for October 2008

By PAUL HOOPER

THE first set of plans and a timeframe for the proposed Muchea multi-species saleyards have been openly scrutinised by the WA livestock industry.

Industry workshops were held last week where it was resolved to aim for livestock selling to be held at Muchea by October 2008.

More than 70 members representing producers, lobby groups, transporters, agents, animal welfare groups and government were invited by the WA Meat Industry Authority (WAMIA) to brainstorm their thoughts on the Muchea plans.

The meeting was held at the Midland saleyard complex.

It was the first opportunity for many industry members to ask in-depth questions about Muchea and resolve a solid timeframe for the project's operational start.

Questions had burned in the collective industry consciousness for more than a year and created intense debate among industry members as pressure built on a replacement for Midland as WA's central livestock facility.

The WAMIA and State Government copped most pressure amid producer calls for a clear deadline for Muchea and a cost blow-out of more than $30 million.

WAMIA Midland saleyard relocation project manager Dave Saunders said he encouraged industry to dissect

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the Muchea plans last week.

"We're not arrogant enough to think we've got it all right," Mr Saunders said.

He said the meetings were all about getting a broad perspective from industry into the plans.

The WAMIA is investigating putting water troughs in all sheep selling pens as a direct result of industry input at the meetings.

The Muchea facility could become the only saleyard in Australia where all selling pens had access to water.

All stock holding and cattle sale pens already had water troughs indicated on the plans.

WAFarmers meat council president Mike Norton said last week's meeting was crucial to the livestock industry.

"The whole thing has been in limbo for two years and this is the first briefing we've had in recent times because it appeared the situation was in a bit of a holding pattern," Mr Norton said.

Industry pressure placed on the WAMIA since January had probably helped instigate the meetings, he said.

"Otherwise the whole thing could have lost momentum and support," Mr Norton said.

"If we didn't get anything like this briefing last week, the confidence in the project would have been severely dented."

Newly appointed WAMIA chief executive officer Renata Paliskis-Bessell said last week's meeting had been scheduled by WAMIA for some time.

Ms Paliskis-Bessell said outside pressure had not instigated the meetings.

"We got the message loud and clear that industry wanted to be consulted, but it was already planned," she said.

"I understand how producers have been anxious because this has been going on for some time.

"One of the issues was the huge amount of compliance that was required.

"All those studies did take time unfortunately.

"But we've got to get it right.

"The last thing we want is to have a facility that isn't accepted."

Ms Paliskis-Bessell said the RSPCA were at the meetings last week and did not have any animal welfare concerns about the plans.

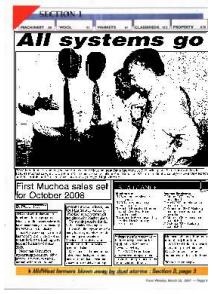
MIDLAND versus MUCHEA

Cattle	Midland (square metres)	Plan 22 - Muchea (square metres)
Holding area sale pens	5359	4528
Unloading		2351
Loading		2157
Transit	3995	4888
Total	**9354**	**13,924**
Veal		
Sale pens*	300	430
Multi-purpose		342
Total	**300**	**772**
Sheep area		
Unloading	5097	3750
Sale pens	9000	5616
Multi-purpose		342
Loading pens**		4073
Total	**14,097**	**13,781**

*sale pens do not include bull pen area.
** additional 3000 sqm to be added in stage 2.

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She said the WAMIA would remain committed to consulting all saleyard stakeholders at all stages of the project.

Mr Norton said the cost blow-out concerned industry because the extra costs had not been broken down.

He said industry tended to accept extra costs if they provided higher animal welfare standards, environmental studies and materials price increases.

"My only concern is what other costs can the government hump on this thing?" Mr Norton said.

"We've never been given an accurate explanation as to why the cost jumped from $13-14m to more than $30m.

"I would think it didn't all come from increased costs.

"I think there were other costs lumped into this from within government such as the alterations to the roads."

Mr Norton said everything would have to run extremely smoothly for the Muchea saleyard for producers to be selling there by October 2008.

Pastoralists and Graziers Association policy director Hugh Harding said he appreciated producersí apprehension and scepticism about the saleyard timeframe because the issue had already been drawn out.

"We are now concerned we get the best facility available and it proceeds as fast as possible," Mr Harding said.

For the past year Agriculture Minister Kim Chance has not divulged the actual

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❒ Atlex Stockyards managing director Ian Crafter (left) and Midland saleyards relocation committee chairman Malcolm Seymour go over Atlex's plan for the proposed multi-species Muchea saleyard.

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cost of the saleyard facility.

Late last year Mr Chance acknowledged speculative figures did include infrastructure costs for the development of the site and not just the construction of the actual saleyards.

He indicated part-proceeds from a Midland saleyard sell-off would supplement a Muchea budget.

WA Livestock Transporters and Bulk Carriers Association president Grant Robins said the meetings were a positive move after months of being in the dark.

But the planned sheep holding capacity in between off-loading and drafting was one concern raised by Mr Robins in relation to the cost of the project.

"There's not a lot of holding capacity there and the stock could get stuck on the truck for a bit," Mr Robins said.

Midland saleyard relocation committee chairman Malcolm Seymour said a common theme at the meetings was the willingness of all parties to contribute positively to the project.

"A number of constructive comments that will enhance the facility were provided as well as some suggestions on cost savings," Mr Seymour said.

"Each sector provided comments on their area of expertise, and with all sectors contri-buting, the saleyard design was thoroughly covered."

The decommissioning of the Midland complex has been earmarked to begin six months after its last sale.

Stage two of the Muchea project is earmarked to begin six to 12 months after the first sale, and will involve developing a cattle aggregation area and additional sheep-holding facilities.

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AT A GLANCE

Muchea site
- 35km north of Midland saleyards
- 300ha site, previously grazing land
- Muchea East Road borders south, Wandena Road borders east
- Surrounds 50ha retained by Midland Brick for clay extraction

Muchea timeframe
- March 2007: tenders advertised
- April 2007: pre-site works commence
- September 2007: Building and access road contracts awarded
- March 2008: Access road completed
- October 2008: Building completed



CHAPMAN Valley cattle producer Anthony Fellows appreciated being briefed on the progress of the Muchea saleyard project last week but questioned whether sufficient leadership was in place to prevent further procrastination about the project.

"I feel there has been too much time spent on deliberation and the development of the concept plan and too little effort placed on actually getting things happening," Mr Fellows said.

"While numerous consultants and committees have discussed all aspects of the development, we have seen the total value of the project skyrocket."

Like many industry members, Mr Fellows blamed rises in the cost of steel, increasing land values and escalating contractor/labour expenses for the cost blow-out.

"All livestock producers and those involved in the livestock sector have their own opinions about where and how these yards should be built," Mr Fellows said.

"When so many people are involved, all with their own opinions and ideas, true leadership necessitates someone taking the bull by the horns and making some decisions."

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