

July 16, 2007

To: AVMA President Dr. Roger Mahr
Members, AVMA Executive Board
Dr. John Smith, Chairman AALC

Dear Drs.

It has been approximately 2 months since we sent you a letter dated May 9, 2007 stating our concerns over an AVMA News article dated May 3 "Livestock/Wildlife Interactions Policy" which was subsequently printed in JAVMA May 15. Although we appreciate the fact the AVMA staff contacted us quickly about this, they were unable, as you know, to identify a way in which AVMA could retract the statements made by Animal Agriculture Liaison Committee (AALC) in support of that policy.

We have been allowed to publish a letter to the editor in JAVMA (203(12):1196–1197) expressing some of our concerns, and Drs. John Smith and Jim Logan replied. Unfortunately, AVMA and AALC are still on record as stating that western state and federal wildlife agencies use speculation rather than science in developing wildlife/livestock health policies. We have asked AVMA and AALC to provide evidence to back up their statements, and to date have received nothing. Surely some evidence or documentation of government malfeasance must have been provided before AVMA and AALC were willing to publicly condemn our client agencies. Does this mean AALC and AVMA can't, or simply won't, provide this information?

This whole situation is particularly troubling as Drs. Smith and Logan's JAVMA reply states that, as well as the bighorn/domestic sheep pasteurellosis, the AALC was also considering brucellosis, TB and pseudorabies when they developed the policy and its anti-state and federal government statement(s). Addressing these disease issues comprises a substantial part of the core work of wildlife veterinarians who deal with brucellosis in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, with TB in Michigan and Minnesota, and with pseudorabies in the whole of the southeastern USA, Texas, California and some other Midwestern and Southwestern states. If AALC and AVMA truly believes that wildlife agencies and their veterinarians rely on speculation, not science regarding these diseases too, then we again respectfully request that you provide supporting evidence; if not, then it is only appropriate and professional to retract or further clarify.

We have challenged the AVMA and AALC assertions that state and federal wildlife agency efforts to separate bighorn from domestic sheep to prevent some of the more devastating outbreaks of pneumonia (pasteurellosis) have no scientific foundation. In our last letter to you and our JAVMA letter to the editor we provided specific literature citations supporting our views on this, some of them from AVMA's own publications, as well as a list of some 200 other published papers we use to help guide policy on this subject. We have asked AVMA and AALC whether we state and federal wildlife veterinarians were missing something, whether there were actual published scientific and/or peer reviewed articles backing that statement and that "bighorn sheep and

domestic sheep to not share the same Pasteurella”. We have been provided only the statements by Drs. Smith and Logan that “the science appears equivocal and possibly incomplete”. Does this mean AALC and AVMA can’t, or simply won’t, provide citations and peer reviewed articles to support its position?

In retrospect, the policy supporting statement characterizing bighorn sheep as a species subject to frequent dieoffs, essentially “looking for a place to die”, ironically may reflect the rather ovine world view of folks who helped write the supporting statements. It actually might be funny if it wasn’t so purposely misleading and designed to undermine bighorn sheep conservation. Anthropological and ethnological studies do not support the concept that bighorn sheep suffered periodic disease dieoffs prior to the coming of western settlement. Again, we have received no scientific evidence or peer reviewed literature citations supporting the statements made in this regard by AVMA, AALC or the American Sheep Industry Association (ASIA).

Does AVMA still believe all of what it printed is true? If so, then those assertions need to be backed up with peer reviewed citations and science, if not, they should be retracted. If this is not done, AVMA is in the awkward position of having not used good science (read speculation here) in support of a policy urging government to use good science, not speculation. The obvious contradiction could be quite embarrassing to our profession. Since we still find ourselves explaining to the public and press why we disagree with the AVMA policy supporting statements, we also have to point this out.

In the last 60 days, websites sponsored by woolgrowers have cited AVMA’s statements in support of their views and used this to urge non-cooperation with wildlife agencies, and have personally criticized wildlife veterinarians who signed our letter to AVMA by name, notably in Wyoming. Perhaps you feel we are being too insistent on these issues, but we are the injured party, not the aggressor. We didn’t start this. Our lives and practices have been made more difficult. Unless or until the offending statements are either substantively supported or clearly retracted, and until we have your assurance that this will not occur again, we cannot believe that a neutral ground from which we can go forward has been achieved, or that this issue has been dealt with openly, honestly and fairly.

AVMA staff has held out the Committee on Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST)-Animal Science Working Group white paper process as a means by which some consensus and redress might be achieved. We have acquired an early draft of, the CAST plan, and were particularly disappointed to see that it opens with the same anti-government, anti-conservation rhetoric so offensive in the subject supporting statements. It contains many of the same misstatements of fact, distortions and misleading information used to support the AVMA policy. It appears to be set to ignore results from all experimental transmission and exposure trials and has no plan to first quantify the potential impacts on grazers, a step we believe would immediately bring the issue into much better perspective. Consequently, as originally conceived we are deeply concerned that this CAST process may not be intended to openly examine the science, but rather to ratify a pre-selected outcome. We hope that AVMA will not lend prestige and staff to

this process if it proceeds as originally drafted, and would welcome the opportunity to recommend panel participants who might encourage greater objectivity in this process should it move forward.

To offer an alternative viewpoint and approach, we have attached three files that provide information on a workshop held in Davis, CA. in April of this year on Respiratory Disease in Mountain Sheep. As you will see, many of the attendees were nationally and internationally known veterinary researchers. This and two additional workshops should continue to promote information exchange, progress and development of consensus. We would be happy to provide you with a link to the full workshop proceedings should you wish, and would welcome your personal attendance at one or both of the upcoming workshops to see first-hand examples of the quality information routinely used in supporting the recommendations we make to our client agencies.

More broadly, we have suggested that any further efforts by AVMA and AALC at dealing with wildlife/livestock disease interface issues must involve wildlife veterinarians, perhaps by expanding AALC to include them, or by requiring the AALC work with the Committee on Environmental Issues (CEI) on such common problems. We would like to know how AVMA staff and Executive Board specifically plan to deal with this recommendation.

If AVMA expects to truly be the “One Voice” of the veterinary profession it claims to be, then we need to see the issues and problems above addressed finally and completely. We will be sending hard copy of this letter to you and as we have previously requested, your reply should be addressed to Drs. Jessup and Gilardi.

Sincerely,

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