

From: **Mick Alexander**

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Subject: Important Dung Beetle Research - needs fast action.. please read

Mr Sean Starling

General Manager

Research, Development and Innovation

Meat and Livestock Australia

Sydney, Australia.

Re: WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH DUNG BEETLE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT?

In May 2017, MLA was awarded a grant of \$9.2million from the Federal Government for Dung Beetle research towards which the MLA has committed to co-funding of \$4.6million. In September 2018, MLA distributed a media release announcing a 5 year project utilising this funding for research in partnership with Charles Sturt University – Graham Centre for Agricultural Innovation and 8 other organisations. Since then enquiries have been made into the scope of this project with very little result.

What are MLA levy payers getting with their \$23million project as heralded in September?

From vague information provided it appears that the current allocation of YOUR levy money lacks practical implementation strategies. It appears to favour new research without recognising the extensive research already conducted or utilising existing scientific networks.

The CSIRO Dung Beetle Project, initiated by Dr George Bornemissza in 1960, spent over 30 years researching dung beetles. They managed to import 50 species through quarantine and established 42 species with some very innovative methods developed by the CSIRO staff working on the program. 23 species are now well established. The project also identified a further 100 species that would lead to year-round coverage for the five main Australian climatic zones of cattle production. The CSIRO project was officially suspended in the 1990's, but has been recently supplemented with the introduction of two new species to fill in gaps in coverage, particularly in the early spring period.

Some of the CSIRO staff who worked on the original project, continue to advance the dung beetle program, notably John Feehan who has 50 years' experience with dung beetles beginning with the CSIRO. John is well known amongst cattle producers having given talks and media presentations the length and breadth of Australia. Since the shutdown of the CSIRO project John has collected and distributed over 5000 colonies (1000-1500 beetles in each colony) to every state in Australia. John and other ex CSIRO scientists have developed methods of rearing and distributing these beetles with a high survival rate, based on a comprehensive climatic zone grid 'Climex'.

This project needs to utilise this existing knowledge and experience – not start again at the beginning.

The efforts of the CSIRO and others in southern Australia have seen a visible reduction in bush fly numbers, making barbecues more comfortable, but the tangible impact has seen major soil and fertilizer benefits, and lessening the intestinal worm burden in pastures. The imperative need for dung beetle research and implementation now is in Queensland to tackle the Buffalo fly infestation. **There are no partners listed in the MLA announcement that represent Queensland in particular.**

Australian livestock producers have seen dung beetles working but there are just not enough species to give year-round coverage. Typically, a South African farmer says he is in an environmental wilderness if he could not find 100 species at any one time.

The MLA media release talks about further development of 2 endemic species. It is unclear whether this references native species, or now established introduced species. Australian native species are not suitable for the large cattle pads, as prior to European colonisation, nothing bigger than kangaroo dung existed in Australia. Native dung beetles have spread to the limits of their capabilities and further work on native beetle spread is unwarranted. **However, mass rearing of the successfully introduced species is where producers will see results. Dung beetles need to be further developed in Australia prioritising what is going to bring the biggest benefit to cattle producers in this carbon focussed world.**

Levy paying producers should be confident that their money is being used by practical, experienced people who are prepared to get their hands dirty in these projects.

The media release about the 'Dung Beetle Project' appeared in September and since then producers have been treated like mushrooms and consigned to the proverbial, along with the marvellous dung beetles.

Let's demand some clarity around the scope of this project and accountability for all levy payers. Together we can have our voice heard at this month's MLA Annual General Meeting.

Please forward this email to other producers. By utilising existing research and networks this project could have immediate benefits for producers.,

Mark McClintock, Cootamundra.

John & Carol Richard, Cassilis.

Mick and Noela Alexander, Rockhampton.