

AAA. Alternative Alpaca Associations ...

by Dr IAN DAVISON
President, Australian
Alpaca Association

*T*HIS year, the Australian Alpaca Association (AAA) celebrates its 15th birthday. For most of those 15 years, it has been the only organisation representing the interests and aspirations of Australian alpaca breeders but, as in many other alpaca-breeding nations, breeders now have a choice between the long-established AAA, and a fledgling organisation calling itself the 'Australasian Alpaca Breeders Association'.

To understand the alternatives, new breeders need first to understand a little of the history behind the AAA.

Fifteen years ago, in 1992, when Australia boasted only marginally more alpacas than it had breeders, the Australian Alpaca Association was formed to service and coordinate the activities of Australia's few alpaca owners. One of its first, and most insightful, decisions was to establish the International Alpaca Register (IAR), owned by, and managed on behalf of, the AAA. It is a much changed organisation today, with over 2000 financial Australian members, 50 international members, and 2000 currently registered studs. The IAR records the heritage and genetic linkages of over 80,000 alpacas, with reference to almost 4000 herds that have been registered on the IAR, making it the biggest registry of alpacas in the world. Most of New Zealand's alpacas are registered on

their own subset of the IAR, and registrations are also taken from individual breeders in the UK, Europe and USA. The annual income of the AAA now runs to \$1.7 million, and it employs six staff, including a newly appointed General Manager, to manage its affairs and activities.

The concept of the AAA as a simple breed society, based purely on the registration of animals and the organisation of shows, was long ago eclipsed by the demands and expectations of a progressive, educated, and highly motivated membership, whose visions for the alpaca industry extend well beyond shows and hobby farms.

It is understandable, and entirely acceptable, that this role does not represent the needs of all Australian alpaca breeders, some of whom prefer to limit their involvement and expenses to that more befitting a breed society. Thus it was that, in May of 2006, an alternative organisation was established for alpaca breeders from 'Australasia', which has attracted about 114 members at the time of writing, a number of whom remain financial members of the AAA at this time. That organisation has elected its own committees, formed its own register, formulated its own rules and, despite the dual membership of some, remains entirely independent of the AAA.

We wish them well in their endeavours.

That said, the AAA is very much more than a simple breed society, as has been demanded by the vast majority of its members. It is expected to provide leadership in a wide range of activities, including (but not limited to) the formulation of breed standards; the implementation of programs for genetic improvement; national and international market development for both animals and alpaca products; raised community awareness of the alpaca industry; negotiation with governments and their various

instrumentalities regarding such things as health and animal welfare issues, import/export protocols, and the taxation treatment of alpaca breeders; financial assistance for research and development; the organisation and sponsorship of regional and national shows; the conduct of national educational programs, and a biennial national conference; the conduct of an annual national auction of elite animals; design and maintenance of a website; development of on-line services such as alpaca registrations and payment of fees; and ongoing development of the industry, its markets, and its place in the national agribusiness economy.

This activity requires more than a little commitment in terms of manpower, expertise, time and financial resources. It explains the need for a fee structure that is inescapably higher than that of a simple breed society, to deliver a service that is so much more than that which can be delivered by a less ambitious, more modest operation. Our large membership, fortunately, provides us with a wealth of technical and professional advice and support, mostly given without charge, which remains critical to our operation. Whilst it is true that *all* alpaca breeders will benefit indirectly from the initiatives undertaken by the AAA (and paid for by its members) on behalf of the industry, it is equally true that the direct benefits will be restricted, wherever appropriate, to the members of the AAA whose subscriptions have underwritten those services. The principal of 'user pays' extends equally to 'buyer benefits'.

Consequently, enrolment of alpacas on the Across-herd Genetic Evaluation program will be restricted to those alpacas that are registered on the IAR and owned by registered AAA members; participation in AAA-sponsored shows will be similarly restricted; attendance at AAA seminars will be limited to AAA members, as will promotion in AAA journals and magazines.

It is important for new entrants to the Australian alpaca industry to understand the differences between the two organisations, and the services and opportunities they offer. For example, the opportunity to show animals at AAA shows or participate in the AGE is contingent upon the alpacas in question being registered on the IAR, and their owner being a financial member of the AAA. Whilst any person may join the AAA at any time, subject to payment of a joining fee and annual membership, the question of the retrospective registration of lapsed or unregistered alpacas on the IAR will depend upon those alpacas meeting the requirements of the regulations, and the payment of the appropriate fees; alpacas sired by males which have not been certified by the AAA remain forever unregistrable, as do all their cria.

To some who have left the AAA, these matters are of no consequence, and neither they nor the AAA are likely to have any problem with that. For others, who have no interest in the AAA, its show circuit, the AGE, or selling animals to AAA members, they too are unlikely to be disadvantaged by not becoming an AAA member. For some, however, particularly new entrants to the alpaca industry, there can be unintended and unforeseen consequences in taking the decision to leave, or not to join, the peak body of the Australian alpaca industry. New entrants, particularly, are advised to seek broad-based advice before joining one or other organisations, and especially before purchasing their first alpacas, as those decisions may have far-reaching consequences.

It is my expectation that both organisations would prefer that prospective members be fully and appropriately advised before taking out membership in either organisation, lest their new members be disillusioned with the cost or range of services offered by one or other organisation. Critical to that process is a clear understanding of what role they wish to play in the industry, and how each organisation can best serve that objective.

For now, the AAA remains committed to its members, and committed to the longterm success of the Australian alpaca industry. We have a vision for our industry which sees Australia, and the AAA, taking a leading role internationally in the development of the alpaca, and the marketing of its products.

For those who wish to share in that vision, we welcome your company on our journey.

Achievements of the AAA

- 2118 members; 2003 registered studs
- Ownership of AAA offices and building
- International Alpaca Registry (IAR); 78,000 registrations
- Across-herd Genetic Evaluation program (AGE)
- *Alpacas Australia* magazine - over 50 editions
- AAA Newsletter
- AAA website
- Online registration of alpacas
- Australian Alpaca Fibre Limited (21.1% holding)
- Australian Alpaca Research Pty Limited (100%)
- Uniquely Alpaca Pty Limited (100%)
- Strategic industry partnerships
- Strategic cooperation with NZAA
- Established relationships with international alpaca associations
- Annual National Show and Sale
- Biennial National Alpaca Conference
- ACIL Alpaca Industry Viability Report (2001)
- Strategic Development Task Force (SDTF); Vision 2020 report (2003)
- Industry Growth Task Force (IGTF) (2005)
- Shearing Code of Practice
- Formulation of Breed Standards
- Annual Fleece Sampling Survey
- Appointment of National Marketing consultants
- Appointment of General Manager
- Draft certificate course in Agriculture (Alpaca Management)
- National guidelines for showing and judging of alpacas
- MAP program for Johnes Disease
- Q-alpaca program
- Membership of Animal Health Australia

Executive expertise to augment Australian Alpaca Association Inc

FRESH from his role as the CEO of Keep Australia Beautiful and with years of experience in marketing and management for Ericsson, Andrew McLorinan plans to use every skill under his belt to keep the Australian Alpaca Association Inc. (AAA) at the forefront of the industry both locally and abroad.

McLorinan's appointment as the General Manager of the AAA Inc ushers in a new era of marketing and profile building initiatives for the Association, which has enjoyed a highly successful year both on and off the field.

Holding undergraduate degrees in Arts and Marketing and postgraduate qualifications in public policy and business administration, McLorinan is the ideal person to head the charge for the Australia alpaca industry internationally and position it more aggressively in the local agribusiness sector, according to Dr Ian Davison, President of the Australian Alpaca Association Inc.

"We are delighted to welcome Andrew to the Australian Alpaca Association and we are confident that his experience and passion will be a great asset in meeting the challenge of growth both in Australian and overseas," said Dr Ian Davison.

"His understanding of the market and its challenges will play an integral role in driving the industry forward in line with the Vision 2020 report."

Currently serving as a Councillor with the City of Bayside, it was the vision of the AAA Inc that drew McLorinan to the role of GM. During his tenure he intends to remain firmly focused on the value of Australian alpaca as an economically sustainable and environmentally sound agribusiness.

"The Australian Alpaca Association has a strong, national, growing membership base and a unique environmentally friendly value proposition. I am very impressed by the Association's vision and responsiveness in tackling market challenges. I look forward to working with our members in developing this dynamic organisation and positioning Australian alpaca as the best in the world for future generations," said McLorinan.