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Swan Hill Regional Livestock Exchange Strategic Review

The Swan Hill Regional Livestock Exchange (SHRLE) has been a key part of our agricultural community since 1938, supporting local farmers, agents, and businesses. As the livestock industry evolves, so too must our approach to ensuring a sustainable and viable future for the exchange.

A strategic review of the SHRLE has been conducted to assess its long-term feasibility, explore potential management and ownership models, and consider alternative marketing options for local livestock producers. The review highlights industry trends, financial challenges, and potential opportunities for the site, including leasing, repurposing, or alternative operational models. No decision has been made regarding the future of SHRLE.



Introduction

Swan Hill Rural City Council has undertaken a strategic review of the Swan Hill Regional Livestock Exchange (SHRLE) to better understand its current performance, challenges, and future opportunities.

The review was conducted by an independent specialist in the Australian saleyard sector. It involved detailed site inspections, financial analysis, industry research, and consultation with livestock agents, buyers, transporters, and the wider community.

Background

The SHRLE has been a part of Swan Hill's agricultural landscape since 1938, providing an important service for livestock producers, buyers, and agents across northern Victoria and southern New South Wales. Saleyards like SHRLE have long played a vital role in Australia's livestock industry, helping to connect farmers to domestic and export markets.

However, industry trends are changing. Across Australia, smaller saleyards are closing or consolidating into fewer, larger, more efficient facilities. Advances in transport, online livestock sales, and direct-to-buyer transactions are reshaping how cattle and sheep are marketed.

While the Swan Hill facility is modern and well-maintained, its livestock throughput has been falling, and it currently operates at a financial loss.

Compliance with current and future animal management standards are also a financial concern as investment into a reduce service is commercially unviable.

This review looked closely at:

Current operations and infrastructure - including sale methods, compliance, and technology.

Industry and regional trends - such as livestock numbers, buyer behaviour, and competition from nearby saleyards.

Financial performance - assessing the long-term viability of the site.

Options for the future - including continued operation, leasing to private agents, repurposing, or potential closure.

Frequently asked questions

Is the Swan Hill Regional Livestock Exchange going to close?

No decision has been made regarding the future of SHRLE. The Council is seeking community feedback before considering any further actions.

What is the purpose of the Strategic Review of the Swan Hill Regional Livestock Exchange (SHRLE)?

The review was conducted to assess the viability of the SHRLE, considering industry trends, financial performance, infrastructure needs, and potential future management and ownership options.

Why was the review undertaken?

SHRCC commissioned the review to determine the best course of action for the livestock exchange due to declining throughput, financial losses, and broader industry changes.

What were the key findings of the review?

- SHRLE has been operating at a financial loss for several years.
- The number of cattle and sheep has been declining through the yards.
- Industry trends show increasing consolidation of saleyards and the rise of alternative marketing options such as direct sales and online auctions.
- The infrastructure, while relatively modern, has some inefficiencies that create operational challenges and animal welfare concerns.

What are the possible options for the future of SHRLE?

The review identified several options, some of which have also been suggested by the community, including:

- Continuing Council ownership and subsidised management.
- Change operational practices to improve yard efficiency
- Change revenue collection
- Leasing the facility to a private operator (e.g. livestock agents).
- Selling the facility to a private entity.
- Closing the facility and repurposing the site.
- Developing a new regional facility at an alternative location.
- Council is also listening to the community around any other ideas or suggestions as to how to best manage the SHRLE and its financial sustainability.

How does the SHRLE compare to other saleyards in the region?

The SHRLE has several other significant sale-yards in proximity with larger sale-yards in Shepparton, Echuca, and Finley. Many of these facilities benefit from higher throughput, strategic central locations, and superior infrastructure, giving them a clear competitive advantage.

What are alternative selling options

Producers can sell livestock through:

- Nearby saleyards (e.g. Shepparton, Echuca, Ouyen, Bendigo, Deniliquin, Finley).
- Online platforms such as AuctionsPlus and Herd Online.
- Direct sales to feedlots or abattoirs.

What concerns have stakeholders raised about the review?

Stakeholders, including agents, buyers, and community members, have expressed concerns about:

- The potential closure of the facility and its impact on the local agricultural community.
- Operational inefficiencies, including outdated sales processes.
- Health and safety issues such as dust exposure and inadequate infrastructure.
- The financial burden on ratepayers.

Next Steps

Council will consider all feedback received from the community and stakeholders before making a decision on the future of the SHRLE.

