

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Biosecurity misconduct revealed by cooperative investigation**

The Corruption and Crime Commission has tabled a report in State Parliament detailing the serious misconduct of a Livestock Manager at Murdoch University.

The report details how cattle were exhibited at the Perth Royal Show under private stud names without permission and bulls owned by the University were loaned to teaching facilities and private studs – all with false identification documentation and disregard for required biosecurity measures.

Despite the unusual circumstances of the misconduct, the report reveals familiar themes and lessons for all agencies:

- a senior manager with considerable autonomy and control over assets of significant value;
- abuse of power and control;
- self-interested and/or misguided motivations;
- inadequate oversight;
- poor systems and processes; and
- lack of recordkeeping and appropriate management.

In short, Murdoch University's lack of proper governance and oversight of the farms created a breeding ground for misconduct.

Murdoch University operates four farms which hold livestock, including cattle, for teaching and research purposes. The farms' 2020 budget shows they cost almost \$1.2m to run and brought in revenue of just over \$260,000.

The Livestock Manager is responsible for the operational and financial management of the farms and associated livestock. That includes compliance with stringent legislative and other requirements such as the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS); the mandatory use of registered identifiers (up until 1 January 2022); and registration to a breed society for all purebred cattle, who then receive identifiers such as a tattoo and stud name, and certificates which record legal ownership.

In 2003, Mr Kim Thomas appeared a well-qualified appointment to the position of Livestock Manager. He'd previously been a farm manager at Muresk Agricultural College and described farming as his life's passion.

However, in 2019 and 2020, audits and other investigations by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), revealed ongoing biosecurity breaches including

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false information entered on the NLIS database, failure to comply with required recordkeeping and missing and incomplete documentation. Other issues included cattle without an NLIS device, unearmarked or branded cattle, and lack of paperwork required to transport cattle.

Given the seriousness of the alleged conduct and estimated value of the cattle herds, the Corruption and Crime Commission decided to investigate the matter, in cooperation with DPIRD, to leverage their industry-specific knowledge.

The investigation was challenging and protracted because of the difficulty in identifying and tracing Murdoch University cattle due to Mr Thomas' administrative failings. Investigators persevered and what they uncovered indicated Mr Thomas was using Murdoch University-owned cattle without authority to benefit himself and others.

He was exhibiting university cattle as if they were his own to win accolades and recognition in the cattle industry. This included the receipt of prize money to which he was not entitled.

Mr Thomas also took advantage of his position to benefit private cattle studs by loaning them university bulls to improve the genetics of their herds. This included temporarily transferring ownership of the bulls so the private studs could register progeny as their own.

Mr Thomas' non-compliance with the systems for the identification and traceability of cattle made it extraordinarily difficult for Murdoch University to know what they owned and how the cattle were being used.

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### **Read the report**

[A report on Murdoch University's governance and oversight of farm management](#)

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