

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Higgins to the Minister for Primary Industry and Resources:

Agribusiness Development

- 1. Cattle duffing has been a major issue in my electorate in the last year. Is the Department aware of this, and what action are you taking to address what is being described by some as a 'crisis'?**

The Department of Primary Industry and Resources (DPIR) collaborates with Northern Territory Police for investigations into stock theft and ownership disputes in accordance with public service and legislative requirements. Theft of property, which includes theft of cattle is a criminal offence under the Northern Territory *Criminal Code Act* and as such is managed by NT Police.

The Northern Territory *Livestock Act* and Livestock Regulations administered by my department underpins the livestock identification and movement requirements for livestock in the Territory. This includes:

- Brands
- Waybills
- NT Health Certificates (including waybills)
- Declared Area Movement Permits
- National Livestock Identification System (NLIS).

The department is aware of allegations of stock theft in the Territory and has consulted with industry through Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) and NT Police on several occasions regarding the formation of a NT Stock Squad. NT Police advised that the resources available within the Major Investigations Unit are sufficient to manage the current investigations into alleged stock theft.

My department's Livestock Biosecurity Branch provide assistance to NT Police with alleged offences of cattle theft or ownership disputes. Regional and remotely based police officers liaise with Regional Livestock Biosecurity Officers (formerly Stock Inspectors) when investigating reports of stock theft within the region. To ensure that reports of stock theft are formally reported and due investigation process is followed, Livestock Biosecurity Officers advise livestock owners to contact the NT Police to report any alleged instances of

theft. This is in accordance with a standard operating procedure for Livestock Biosecurity Officers to provide guidance to industry.
An information sheet with these guidelines for industry is available and has been distributed to the NTCA for members.

There is one provision under the *Livestock Act* which refers to livestock ownership. Section 132 (3) of the *Livestock Act* states:

A registered brand or earmark on livestock or hides that are proved not to be owned by the owner of the registered brand or earmark (the brand owner) is evidence that the brand owner branded or marked the livestock or hides knowing he or she did not own the livestock at the time they were branded or marked.

A registered brand on cattle is prima facie evidence of livestock ownership. Livestock Biosecurity Officers provide information which supports the determination of livestock ownership in investigations into stock theft and ownership disputes.

My department will continue to provide assistance to NT Police for investigations relating to stock theft in the Territory.