LWCC **Nov 2014**

Draft Statement regarding the Willis dropped ovary technique for sterilisation of cattle.

The Willis dropped ovary technique has been described for spaying cattle. Under extensive conditions where managing bulls is difficult, an unwanted pregnancy in a young animal can result in an out of season calf which can increase mortalities and reduce condition in both the dam and calf and reduce profitability. In older animals that do not meet breeding requirements or where there is a surplus of breeding stock, these animals can maintain body condition better if they remain non-pregnant. Farmers may also defer selling them until they reach optimal market weights or when prices reach a level that they deem to be optimal. Thus there are very good economic reasons why producers want to spay cattle in northern Australia.Currently there is no quicker and more affordable method available to prevent mismating under such circumstances where cattle may be seen very seldom.

The main welfare concern with performing this procedure is that mortality rates range between 1 and 2.5%. These mortality rates are unacceptably high if the main aim is to attempt to achieve better growth rates. After spayinganimals often show an initial decrease in weight gain most likely due to decreased feed intake post-operatively.

In South Africa, surplus heifers are sent to feedlots where they receive implants such as trenbolone acetate to stop cyclic activity. There is no evidence at this time that suggests that spayed animals would have faster growth rates, in feedlot conditions. In fact, the only possible change in carcass quality may be quicker fat deposition.

There is therefore no justification for using the Willis dropped ovary method in South Africa.

(Drafted by Rhoda Leask)