MEAT & LIVESTOCK AUSTRALIA

Terms of reference

Animal Wellbeing & Biosecurity Investment Call

Exploring Bloat Control Alternatives

Summary

Bloat remains a significant and growing animal welfare and productivity issue for grassfed cattle producers in southern Australia, exacerbated by improved legume-rich pastures and the withdrawal of reliable intra-ruminal monensin capsules from the market. These Terms of Reference call for proposals to explore short-, medium- and long-term alternatives for bloat prevention, detection and management to improve animal wellbeing and reduce production losses.

Purpose and Background

These Terms of Reference have been developed in response to producer concerns, particularly raised through the Southern Australia Livestock Research Council (SALRC), regarding the increasing prevalence and impact of bloat in grassfed cattle. Producers report higher incidence of bloat associated with modern, high-productivity pasture systems containing elevated protein and saponin levels, alongside the loss of a key preventative tool—the slow-release intra-ruminal monensin capsule.

There is an ongoing need to investigate and evaluate new and existing preventative bloat management strategies that enable and optimise spring pasture production. Economic analysis indicates bloat cost producers almost **$90 million in 2025** and remains a significant animal wellbeing risk. This ToR seeks to scope MLA Donor Company (MDC) or hybrid investments to identify and assess new and existing sustainable, effective alternatives for managing bloat across southern Australian production systems

Expected outcome

Applications to these terms of reference must:

- Identify and/or develop practical, scalable alternatives to current bloat control tools which will reduce the incidence of bloat in commercial beef herds and development of optimal management options.
- Improve early detection, prevention or risk management of bloat in grassfed cattle notably on high productivity spring pastures as well as monoculture pastures.
- Deliver measurable animal welfare, productivity and/or economic benefits to producers.
- Support adoption through strong producer engagement and extension activities.

- Deliver best practice guidelines for early identification and management of bloat in commercial herds

Scope

MLA is calling for applications for levy-funded, MDC-funded or hybrid projects that address bloat control across one or more of the following timeframes:

- Short-term solutions that strengthen decision-making, risk assessment and extension.
- Medium-term solutions that improve detection, monitoring or biological control of bloat.
- Long-term solutions that reduce inherent system-level bloat risk through pasture, animal or management innovation.

Project proposals that clearly demonstrate meaningful engagement and consultation with producers, particularly in southern Australian beef regions, will be favourably assessed.

Proposed activities

Applicants should clearly define the **outputs** (e.g. tools, knowledge products, technologies, systems, recommendations) created by the project and describe the attributable **outcomes** and **impacts** for producers and the broader beef industry.

The proposed project should include, where relevant:

1 Research-focused activities

- Literature review and synthesis of current bloat assessment, prevention (novel tools) and management approaches to identify gaps and opportunities (e.g. saliva buffering).
- Quantification of bloat risk factors across pasture types, seasons and environments.
- Investigation of rumen microbiome modulation, including probiotics or other biological approaches, to reduce bloat incidence.
- Assessment of pasture composition, including legume content thresholds, alternative forage mixes and nitrogen management in non-legume systems.
- Assessment of current methods of control e.g. bloat oil, hay feeding, non-bloating legume varieties.
- Exploration of genetic or phenotypic traits associated with bloat resistance for potential breeding applications.
- Investigating tools and strategies to assist with accurate diagnosis (for example discerning between bloat, pulpy kidney & nitrite poisoning)
- Investigation of opportunities for research improvement.

2 Adoption-focused activities

- Development of integrated bloat management guidelines and decision-support tools.
- Extension and education programs to improve producer understanding of bloat risk, prevention and response.

- Evaluation of emerging technologies (e.g. smart tags or sensors) for early detection and prediction of bloat events.

Other requirements

All projects must implement monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) processes to demonstrate producer engagement, practice change and benefit to production businesses and the broader industry. A comprehensive MER plan aligned with the MLA framework is required, with guidelines available on the MLA website. The MER plan will be a requirement of Milestone 1 if the project is successful, and applicants should ensure adequate budget allocation for MER activities.

Project duration and timing

A maximum project duration of approximately 12-24 months is anticipated. Proposals should clearly outline key milestones and any critical seasonal or operational timing considerations relevant to pasture growth, grazing cycles or bloat risk periods.

Resources Required

Proposals must include details of all resources required to complete the project, including personnel, expertise, infrastructure, operating costs and total budget. Co-investment and in-kind contributions should be clearly identified.

Important information and selection criteria

Proposals will be assessed against criteria that may include:

- Alignment with producer priorities and animal wellbeing outcomes.
- Scientific and technical merit.
- Feasibility and value for money.
- Strength of producer engagement and adoption approach.
- Capability and track record of the project team.

Confidentiality and intellectual property

The successful project will be funded with either a hybrid or MLA Donor Company (MDC) funding model. Hybrid funding uses a combination of producer levies and MDC contributions. The successful applicant will be required to enter into an umbrella research agreement with MLA, as outlined in the request for tender documentation.

Deadline for submissions

Preliminary proposals must be received by MLA before 11.59pm (NSW time) **Monday, 25th May 2026. Late proposals will not be accepted.**

Use the preliminary proposal template to submit proposals electronically to MLA at: projectcall@mla.com.au and cc sdundon@mla.com.au.

Preliminary Proposals will be acknowledged and recorded on the MLA project information system.

Applicants will be advised in writing if they will be invited to submit a full proposal for consideration by (8 June 2026). Applicants which are not successful will be advised in writing by (8 June 2026).

Further Information

If you have questions about these terms of reference, contact:

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