Attitudes of sheep producers to use of the sheep health statement in Australia

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The Sheep Health Statement (SHS) is a nationally agreed document used by vendors in Australia to declare the health status of sheep, developed with the aim to support and protect producers from disease risks during the sales process. We conducted a cross-sectional survey in 2011 to explore current attitudes and practices of sheep producers towards its use. A questionnaire was developed to obtain information about producers’ patterns of buying/selling in the last two years, use of the SHS and perceived drivers and barriers to its use. A sampling frame was developed in consultation with industry experts to capture data from a nationally representative sample of sheep producers with 100+ sheep. A total of 870 interviews were conducted with producers using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing methodology in which the interviewer follows a script using a software application that is able to customise the interview based on the answers provided. Multivariable logistic regression analyses were conducted to investigate factors associated with uptake of the SHS. Around a quarter of producers had never heard of the SHS and 17% had heard of it but were not aware of any of its content. The SHS was regarded favourably, with 70% of producers who were familiar with it reporting that it was an effective tool for disease management. Livestock agents were regarded as influential in uptake of the SHS, with most producers reporting they were willing to supply or request a SHS if their agent told them to. Stronger enforcement and education/awareness programs were identified most frequently as ways to encourage uptake of the SHS. The main factors associated with uptake of the SHS were related to operating climate and attitudinal factors; specifically whether use of the SHS was mandatory or not, whether agents requested the SHS, and whether producers had confidence in accurate completion of the SHS.