

# Alpaca Manifesto

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## Preamble

This document assumes that members of the alpaca industry want and/or need an industry association, as evidenced by the fact of an existing association. Hence, it makes no attempt to convince industry members of the need for an association per se. Instead, it focusses on what the association should be.

It strikes a workable balance between the control of the members over the association, and the ability of the association to run itself without undue reference to members. It includes a mechanism whereby if control proves too constrictive, members may explicitly relax their control somewhat without fear of giving up more control than was intended.

Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. By placing explicit limits on the power of the few and giving the final say to the many, the serving few will be protected from the temptation of power while the weak will be less attracted. On the rare occasion when the many wish to have their say, the few will need to produce compelling arguments if they are to have their way.

## 1. Principles

### The association must be for the members

If the association does not exist to serve the members, what reason does it have to exist at all? The explicit agreement between the association and its members is that the association will serve the interests of its members, and that the members will in return fund the operation of the association.

### The members must control the association

Since the association exists to serve the members, and the members fund the operation of the association, the members both own and control the association. On no account can the association do anything that does not have the ultimate approval of the members. The members can rescind an action of the association.

### Commonsense must prevail

In this day and age there is too much dissembling, misrepresentation, wordplay, hair-splitting, spin, legalese and political correctness. Ordinary people know the difference between right and wrong, without resorting to legalistic definitions of terms or actions. In the event of disagreement between any two parties, and in the running of the association, commonsense must prevail.

### The committee must not hijack the association

The association is for the members. The committee cannot decrease the members' control of the association; only the members can do that. Members may wish to decrease their control if they find the existing level to be counter-productive to their interests.

Any decision or action which can be reasonably be interpreted as decreasing members' control is automatically null and void unless it contains an explicit acknowledgement (for example, "this motion explicitly acknowledges the reduction in control of the Members over the Association") that such control is being decreased, and a sunset clause (for example, two years). After the sunset period, a renewal can optionally omit a sunset clause but cannot omit an explicit acknowledgement of reduction of member control.

### **The committee must be allowed to run the association**

If the safeguards are sufficient, the committee must be allowed to run the association without undue interference - the primary purpose of the safeguards is to establish a regime in which the committee can be trusted and permitted to do this.

### **The committee must not be its own judge**

By and large, the committee should be trusted to run the association. However, should a grievance against the committee (or one or more committee members) be lodged, the committee must not adjudicate the matter. This task must be performed by an independent review committee.

### **The review committee adjudicates on the committee**

The committee makes decisions according to the rules. The review committee ensures the decisions comply with the rules - it does not make or change rules. Decisions of the review committee are binding on the committee but can be rescinded by members.

### **The review committee must be independent**

A member of the review committee can neither be nor share an interest with a member of the committee within a period of two years of any term on the review committee, and similarly in reverse for a member of the committee. A person must choose their path. A member of the review committee does not have to be a member of the association. This allows for experience in corporate governance (say) on the review committee.

### **The committee must be accountable**

The committee must explain a decision or action if/when called upon to do so. If the explanation is not provided within the required timeframe or if the members believe the explanation is unsatisfactory, the review committee will automatically have the task of adjudicating the matter. The review committee has the power to remove a member of the committee.

### **The committee must be disinterested**

Any interest which may reasonably give rise to a perception of conflict of interest must be declared. A committee member may consult privately with the review committee in this decision. A committee member must not vote on any matter in which they could reasonably be perceived as having a conflict of interest.

### **Being a volunteer is not an excuse for doing a job poorly**

If a volunteer (including elected ones) is for any reason unable to perform their duties to a satisfactory standard, they must step down and allow another member the opportunity to contribute to the association. If no-one volunteers, the association should feel free to "volunteer" someone.

### **Being a conscientious volunteer is sufficient out for the odd honest mistake**

No-one can rightly expect a volunteer (including elected ones) to get right every thing, every time. The explicit agreement between the association and the volunteer is that if a volunteer makes a mistake, but has made every reasonable effort beforehand to prevent such, and has made every reasonable effort afterwards to acknowledge and rectify it, there must be no recrimination whatsoever.

### **The association must be transparent**

The association must not hide from members what it is doing. Unless there is a good reason to the contrary, members have the right to know. The association must keep reasonably comprehensive and demonstrably

accurate minutes. Minutes must be published soon after they are approved. The committee may choose to make available unofficial minutes, having regard to the possible consequences of inaccuracies therein.

### **The level of transparency must be within reason**

There are reasonable limits to transparency. For example, a member does not have an automatic right to the knowledge of the salary of an employee of the association.

### **Professionals cost money**

No-one would argue that things should be done correctly but competent executives command large salaries, so a large salary would have to be offered to attract one. In an industry of this size, networking should be tried first: surely someone knows someone who can do the job well enough.

### **The animal register must be adequate**

It is self-evident that today an animal register must be electronic, that is, a database. What may be less apparent to the ordinary person is that different databases can vary dramatically in terms of quality and fitness-for-purpose. In addition to satisfying such technical requirements as data security (can there be any unauthorised access) and data integrity (are there any internal inconsistencies), the register must be demonstrably correct and scientifically useful – a lineage containing an uncertain sire is thrown into doubt completely. Just how many instances are there where the actual sire of a cria is not the intended one but one which “jumped the fence”?

Breeders must be able to *rely* on the database’s content when designing, and later evaluating, their breeding programmes. DNA testing will verify the parentage of every living alpaca as well as all deceased alpaca for which suitable genetic material is available. Verification Rating (VR) will indicate numerically the confidence one can have in the *recorded* parentage of an alpaca.

### **It is ok to use good ideas**

There is nothing wrong with borrowing practices etc. from other organisations if they serve the purpose of the members.

### **Rules**

The rules of the association should reflect and enshrine its principles, with each rule identifying the principle(s) to which it relates, where possible.

## **The Fine Print of the Principles**

### ***The association must be for the members***

There is no fine print for this principle, fullstop.

### ***The members must control the association***

The members do not make all decisions directly. In fact, they make very few directly - most decisions are made on their behalf, by the committee. However, the most important decisions must be left to the members. The most important decision of all is, where is drawn the line between the decisions made directly by the members and the decisions made on behalf of the members.

Members’ rescission power should only be used in extraordinary circumstances. The fact that the members have this power makes it unlikely it will ever be needed. Generally, the committee and the review committee should be allowed to perform their duties without intervention from members.

The rescission power must be exercised with caution and with the clear support of the membership. Rescinding an action is a grave step in and of itself. Moreover, a rescission can have implications; all implications must be considered carefully before members decide to rescind an action of the association. A rescinded motion, or an equivalent one, cannot be put again by committee until after an election.

### ***The committee must be accountable***

The explanation may ordinarily be dealt with as a committee agenda item and during the committee process.

The review committee could conceivably find the reasons for exceeding the time frame to be acceptable. At the other extreme, it could remove one or more committee members. The review committee could conceivably find the members' objection to the explanation to be inadequate.

***Being a volunteer is not an excuse for doing a job poorly***

The association should keep in its "back pocket" a list of members who could if necessary be called upon to perform certain functions.

***Being a conscientious volunteer is sufficient out for the odd honest mistake***

Being open about a mistake doesn't mean a volunteer has to advertise it, it means they mustn't hide it from a member who asks. The asking member must remember they must bear no malice to a volunteer who has acted reasonably and in good faith. The association should be discreet.

## **2. Practices**

### **Market Research**

The association should take the trouble to ask its members relevant questions and so gain a better understanding of where members are coming from and where they are trying to go, in order to help members get there. Possibilities include survey forms (possibly repeated periodically, say three years) and writing down feedback obtained in conversation and correspondence with members. Similarly, the association should take the trouble to ask prospective partners and customers relevant questions.

### **Husbandry**

The association must help educate members how to care for their alpacas. It should provide to all new members a husbandry starter kit ("Alpaca Care Kit"). To the extent possible, the kit should include veterinary information.

### **Breeding**

The association must help educate breeders how to design and implement a sound breeding programme. It should provide to all new members a breeding starter kit ("Alpaca Breeding Kit"). The association must help all breeders to improve their breedstock, whether their herd numbers none or a thousand. The association should make available literature which outlines the various theories which can underpin a breeding programme, providing the novice breeder with a starting point in constructing their own breeding programme.

### **Fleece**

The association must help educate members how to deal with their fleece. It should provide to all new members a fleece starter kit ("Alpaca Fleece Kit"). The association must help all breeders to dispose of their fleece, whether their herd numbers one or a thousand. Smaller breeders may prefer to liaise directly with local spinners. The association can help in this respect, especially for new breeders, by putting breeders and spinners in contact with each other. The association should establish a register or directory of spinners and also of processors.

While market price for fleece is depressed, the association should help and encourage members to find cost-effective ways to transport fleece to endpoints.

### ***Shearing***

The association should encourage the training and development of new and existing shearers.

### ***Classing***

The association should encourage the training and development of new and existing classers. Training must achieve consistency amongst classers. Adherence to standards is a self-evident requirement. These standards must be disseminated throughout the industry to all breeders. Breeders must be allowed to be educated in how classers class and how that relates to the fleece the breeders are producing. This education will feed into their own breeding programmes, and help foster realistic expectations of returns on fleece.

### *Processing*

This is arguably the most important step. Processors must be encouraged into the alpaca fleece market. The surest way to achieve this is to convince them they can make a profit from processing alpaca fleece. In part, this requires convincing processors that they can indeed take delivery of sufficient quantities of the type(s) of fleece that the processors prefer. Obviously, any member wishing to sell fleece to processors should be producing this/these type/s of fleece. The association must work with processors and identify the fleece characteristics that are important to them, and communicate these ideals to the members.

The association should help educate members in the techniques of skirting, scouring, carding, spinning and knitting.

### **Land management**

The association must help educate breeders how to manage their land for the benefit of animal health, fleece quality, and environment.

### **Shows**

The association must offer breeders methods of benchmarking so they can measure their own progress by standards of their choosing. This is traditionally taken to mean alpaca shows but should be extended to other methods. The fundamental requirement of any benchmark is some manner of ranking or scoring with which to compare against other breeders or animals. Judging at alpaca shows should focus on the qualities that reflect what processors want.

### **Marketing**

The association should assist members, especially processors, identify marketing opportunities and customers, and realising those opportunities. Marketing is an important part of alpaca business management.

### **End product**

If there is no end product there is not a genuinely viable industry per se, although some members will be content with trading, hobby, cottage or academic pursuits, and fair enough. The association must help educate, and assist where appropriate, willing members in the production and distribution of end product.

### **Research & Development**

The association must encourage and perhaps sponsor research into areas of interest to members. The association must where possible publish industry white papers or make available independent papers on topics of interest to members. An educated breeder is a superior breeder.

The association should endeavour to have running at all times a one-month project, a one-year project and a three-year project. These short-, medium- and long-term development projects can be of any description as long as they focus on the development of the industry in some way. The short-term project can be longer than a month but care should be exercised – the intention is for a small project which can be set up quickly and achieve its objective quickly.

There is tremendous scope for research and it doesn't have to be strictly academic. Any member can participate in an experiment that appeals to them, on their own or as part of a group. The association can provide co-ordinators for these projects. Lessons learned can be contributed to the association's knowledge store. Writings that are submitted do not have to be of academic standard; the emphasis is to get people involved. The association could perhaps provide an editor to assist with written submissions. Submissions can be recorded observations as opposed to writeups of conclusions – someone else could later use those observations in further work.

### **Mr Fixer**

#### *Member Liaison*

The association should have a "Mr Fixer", one or more member liaison officers whose job it is to field problems from members and ensure they get solved. By definition, the scope of possible problems is great but should obviously be restricted to those which are alpaca-related. Apart from kits supplied by the association, members should generally expect to pay for materials. From the common questions, an

information pack should be built. The association must supply these liaison officers with the resources they need. Depending on the number of Fixers, there may need to be a co-ordinator to ensure some consistency.

#### *Partner Liaison*

The association should have a partner liaison officer whose job it is to, among other things, field problems from partners and ensure they get solved. From the common questions, an information pack should be built.

#### *New Member Liaison*

The association should have a new-member liaison officer whose job it is to, among other things, field enquiries and problems from prospective and new members and ensure they get answered and solved. From the common questions, an information pack should be built.

### **Recruiting**

The association must encourage new entrants into the industry, to increase the number of members and to replace some members lost through natural attrition. Increased membership means an increased national clip for the industry, and the association's fixed costs are shared amongst a greater number of members.

### **Expos/events**

The association should stage industry events which showcase end product to the public and corporate buyers, and raise awareness of the sorts of things that consumers and retailers can buy. Events can incorporate fashion shows, garments, arts, craft, spinning etc.

The association should stage industry events for recognising achievement. For example, an awards night ("Alpaca Industry Awards") with categories embracing the breadth of the industry including land management, animal care, breeding, shearing, spinning, knitting, processing, product, marketing, R&D and service to the industry.

### **Sister Organisations**

The association should embrace and engage with related organisations eg. alpaca associations in other countries and llama etc. associations in this country.

### **Tree planting**

While not directly related to any particular alpaca activity, there is no reason why the association should not lead other organisations by example in assisting members to plant trees on their properties. For every tree that is cut down by one organisation, another organisation must stand up and replace that tree.

## **Conclusion**

An association cannot be all things to all people but it must attempt to serve members as best it can. Where choices must be made, the members must decide the direction of the association.

The members must have the power of the final say in any decision, should they choose to exercise it. With that guarantee in place, the association must be allowed to get on with its job, freeing members to concentrate on their own affairs.