

Introduction

- 1.1 Country of origin food labelling has been the topic of many public reviews as well as many unsuccessful legislative reform attempts in the past decade.
- 1.2 Consumers and peak advocacy groups claim that there is confusion around the various country of origin labelling claims for food products in Australia. A certain level of confusion also exists for food producers and manufacturers, leading to compliance issues.
- 1.3 The level of dissatisfaction with the existing labelling framework indicates that a system which is designed to inform and guide industry and consumers may need to be overhauled.
- 1.4 This report aims to examine options for improvement or possible changes to country of origin labelling law and policy.

Background to the inquiry

- 1.5 The Committee agreed on Thursday, 27 March 2014 to inquire into and report on country of origin food labelling. The inquiry was referred to the Committee by the Minister for Agriculture, the Hon Barnaby Joyce MP and the Minister for Industry, the Hon Ian Macfarlane MP.
- 1.6 The Terms of Reference called for the Committee to inquire into and report on country of origin food labelling, with particular regard to:
 - whether the current Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL for food) system provides enough information for Australian consumers to make informed purchasing decisions;
 - whether Australia's CoOL laws are being complied with and what, if any, are the practical limitations to compliance;

- whether improvements could be made, including to simplify the current system and/or reduce the compliance burden; and
 - whether Australia's CoOL laws are being circumvented by staging imports through third countries; and
 - the impact on Australia's international trade obligations of any proposed changes to Australia's CoOL laws.
- 1.7 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* and on social media. The Committee sought submissions from relevant Australian Government ministers and from state and territory governments. In addition, the Committee sought submissions from a wide range of industry and consumer peak and representative bodies, and food producers and manufacturers.
- 1.8 The Committee received 54 submissions and eight supplementary submissions. One submission was confidential. The submissions are listed at Appendix A.
- 1.9 The Committee held seven public hearings in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra. Public hearing details are listed at Appendix B.

Structure of the report

- 1.10 Chapter two provides an overview of the current framework that regulates country of origin food labelling in Australia.
- 1.11 Chapter three examines the rates of compliance with the existing labelling regime, and how it is enforced by regulators.
- 1.12 Chapter four explores issues and concerns raised during the inquiry that impact on consumers and industry.
- 1.13 Chapter five examines how Australia observes its international trade obligations.
- 1.14 Chapter six discusses several recent reviews of country of origin labelling for food, providing a summary of key areas of concern, recommended areas for reform and apparent difficulties with previous reform proposals.
- 1.15 Chapter seven examines proposed solutions or improvements for the country of origin food labelling system.