

14 July 2021

Committee Secretary  
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Committee Members

### **Written Submission – Definitions of meat and other animal products**

By way of introduction, my name is Andrew. I am a 31-year-old male and live in Perth, Western Australia. I am interested in this inquiry as I am vegan. I have been vegan since 2018, after watching harrowing documentaries including: What the Health, Cowspiracy, and Earthlings. I primarily went vegan for the animals, but also appreciate the health and environmental benefits of leading a vegan lifestyle. Please find, below, my comments addressing this inquiry's terms of reference.

1. *The management by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment of the legislative and regulatory framework underpinning the compulsory levy investment into meat category brands as declared through the Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry Act 1997, taking specific account of:*
  - a. *The potential impairment of Australian meat category brand investment from the appropriation of product labelling by manufactured plant-based or synthetic protein brands, including:*
    - i. *the use of manufactured plant-based or synthetic protein descriptors containing reference to animal flesh or products made predominately from animal flesh, including but not limited to "meat", "beef", "lamb", and "goat"; and*

As a vegan, I buy plant-based protein products. Through personal experience, I can advise that the terms "lamb" and "goat" are not often used to describe plant-based products. Moreover, I am not aware of any plant-based products that use the terms "lamb" and "goat" in major Australian supermarkets (e.g. Woolworths and Coles).

The terms "meat" and "beef" are used to describe plant-based products. However, I would argue that these terms can be thought of as descriptors. They help to describe the texture and flavour of products. Moreover, they encourage consumers to try sustainable alternatives to the animal products they are familiar with.

If we are looking at having more accurate descriptions for products, then I would argue it is actually the animal product names that need to change. For example, instead of "beef", would it not be more accurate to call it "cow's flesh". Instead of "pork", should we not be referring to that as "pig's flesh"?

Banning the use of terms such as “beef” and “meat” to describe plant-based products could take us down a slippery slope. If we are calling things what they are we should, for example, be saying “slaughterhouses”, not “processing plants”. Interestingly, NSW meat farmers banned the use of the term “slaughter” at their annual conference. It was replaced by the word “processing”.

*ii. the use of livestock images on manufactured plant-based or synthetic protein packaging or marketing materials.*

Using livestock images for plant-based products is useful as it encourages consumers to try something new, based on what they are familiar with.

The UN has said that, to avoid the worst effects of climate change, we need to shift to a plant-based diet. In addition, a University of Oxford study found that we could reduce the amount of land needed for agriculture by 76% by moving to a plant-based diet. That is because, for example, 85% of soy farms are used to feed livestock animals (i.e. a lot of land is needed just to feed the animals). Please find the University of Oxford study attached with my submission (for your reference).

Based on the impact animal agriculture has on the planet, I believe we should be encouraging consumers to transition to diets that are plant-based. If using livestock images assists consumers in making this transition, should we not be supportive of that (for the sake of the planet), rather than trying to put in barriers to this?

I do not believe consumers are being misled when they buy plant-based products that contain livestock images. The products clearly indicate that they are plant-based. For example, they include labels such as “plant-based” and “vegan”. It is highly unlikely that consumers take their shopping home and are shocked to later realise the plant-based products, that they purchased, do not contain any animal flesh.

*b. The health implications of consuming heavily manufactured protein products which are currently being retailed with red meat descriptors or livestock images, including:*

Regarding health implications, I would firstly like to point out that the American Dietetic Association and the British Dietetic Association – the largest bodies of nutrition professionals in both countries - have both stated that a plant-based diet is adequate and safe for all stages of life, including pregnancy.

In addition, climate change has health implications that are worth your consideration (i.e. look at the whole picture). As mentioned previously, the UN has recommended a shift towards plant-based diets to reduce the impacts of climate change. Consideration should be given to the long-term health implications of climate change (which will be worse under a scenario where we do not shift our diets away from those involving animal agriculture).

*i. consideration of unnatural additives used in the manufacturing process; and*

It is interesting to see the terms of reference talking about unnatural additives in relation to plant-based products. I would like to make the point that animal food products contain unnatural additives (such as the use of antibiotics and genetically modified animal feed). Further, the modern-day animal agriculture industry is anything but natural. We selectively breed animals, artificially inseminate them, mutilate (e.g. chopping the tails off pigs) and farm them, before driving them in trucks to the slaughterhouse where they are turned upside down to be killed.

Plant-based products contain all the vitamins and good nutrients associated with animal products, but do not come with the antibiotics, cholesterol, hormones and trans fats. Antibiotics are commonly used in the animal agricultural industry. I would argue that it is not natural to be pumping farm animals full of antibiotics.

*ii. consideration of chemicals used in the production of these manufactured protein products.*

Plant-based products provide consumers with a rich source of protein. For example, many plant-based products contain high protein ingredients such as tofu, chia seeds, tempeh, lentils, chickpeas, peanuts, quinoa and pea protein. In contrast, the consumption of animal protein products has been linked to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and many types of cancer.

*c. The immediate and long-term social and economic impacts of the appropriation of Australian meat category branding on businesses, livestock producers and individuals across regional, rural and remote Australia, including:*

*i. the reliance upon imported ingredients;*

If it is the case that plant-based products rely on imported ingredients, I would recommend that the committee consider how we could ensure more local (plant-based) ingredients are used.

A suggestion is for farmers to switch to arable farming and only produce plants. This has already been done by a number of farmers. We could also redirect tax subsidies. The majority of farming subsidies go to dairy and meat farmers. These could be redirected into plant farming. The subsidies could also be used to help financially support farmers move from animal farming to plant farming instead.

The above suggestions would help us to increase the supply of local ingredients for plant-based products.

*ii. the support of regional employment; and*

I acknowledge and agree that regional employment needs to be supported. For example, we do need to consider the livelihoods of farmers. They are often born into the farming community and have never known anything different in their lives or questioned the morality of what they do. Farming is seen as an idyllic, traditional job. We (as a society) are fed the idea of good, honest farmers struggling to make enough money to survive.

As mentioned previously, the land used for animal farming (in regional areas) could be converted to farming crops and plants. I do acknowledge, however, that the land for some farms is not suitable for plant farming. This inevitably means some farmers will lose their jobs. This is where it is important to have some perspective. A job does not provide moral justification for profiting off the death of animals. The hardships of a farmer finding a new job is nothing compared to the life of suffering and fear that animals have to endure in the animal farming industries.

It is important to note that jobs change over time. For example, check out staff have been replaced by self-service machines, and tobacco farmers have lost their jobs due to the decline of the cigarette industry. New jobs are created in other areas. I believe that attention should be given to supporting regional employment in occupations outside of the animal agriculture industries.

*iii. the state and commonwealth taxation contribution from the Australian red meat and livestock sector.*

It relation to taxation, I would like to make the following points:

- The Australian red meat and livestock sectors receive billions of dollars a year in taxpayer subsidies. That is, they are receiving significant Government handouts.
- The fossil fuel industries generate significant tax revenues for Australia. But they have a significant and negative impact on climate change. Similarly, animal agriculture is having a negative impact on the environment. As noted by Sir David Attenborough, in the Netflix documentary: A Life on Our Planet, “the planet can’t support billions of meat-eaters”. We need to consider the bigger picture, rather than just viewing industries from a tax revenue perspective.

*d. The implications for other Australian animal products impaired from the appropriation of product labelling by manufactured plant-based or synthetic proteins.*

If we are banning the use of terms such as plant-based “meat”, would it not then be a contradiction to still allow the use of terms like “hotdogs”? You could argue it is misleading to use the term “hotdogs” as they don’t actually contain any dogs. Peanut butter does not contain any butter, but we have called it peanut butter for decades. Further, we have been calling coconut milk, coconut milk since 1200AD, even though it doesn’t contain any cow’s milk. The point I am making is that these terms are part of our language. They are not brand names or trademarks. As such, we should not be looking to restrict the use of terms like “beef” and “meat”.

*e. any related matters.*

Politicians should be representing the public and the everyday citizen. They should not be representing the corporate interests of special interest lobbying groups. These lobbying groups are representing industries that are destroying the environment and killing billions of land animals every year (i.e. the animal agriculture industries).

This committee is looking at descriptors in relation to the Australian meat industry. I would like to query why this industry is pushing for these changes, when they themselves are not accurate with the language used in their industry? Moreover, the industry hides behind euphemisms to shield consumers from the harsh reality of what occurs. We psychologically distance ourselves from what is occurring. Consumers would rather pay for an animal to be “processed” than “slaughtered”. The industry uses terms such as “livestock” instead of “animals”. People will say it is acceptable to kill livestock but say no if asked: “is it acceptable to kill animals?”

If a law is passed to ban the use of terms such as “plant-based meat”, my view is it will not significantly change anything in terms of consumer demand. The sales of alternatives will not suddenly drop. People are buying plant-based alternatives because they are making conscious choices to live more ethical, sustainable and healthy lives.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Yours Sincerely  
Andrew Benskin