



5 September 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Australia's Food Processing Sector
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Although Animal Health Australia (AHA) is not directly involved with the food processing sector we do have an interest in its future needs and its sustainability.

Animal Health Australia is an innovative partnership involving the Australian Government, state and territory governments, major livestock industries and other stakeholders. We work with our members and stakeholders to strengthen Australia's national animal health system and maximise confidence in the safety and quality of Australia's livestock and livestock products in both domestic and overseas markets.

Recent years have seen a significant change in AHA's business environment, with the impact of the global financial crisis and consequential pressure on budgets affecting government and industry members alike. Within government agencies in particular, there has been increased competition for public funds and a further rationalisation in the delivery of government services. Increasingly private enterprise needs to deliver services previously provided by governments e.g. quality assurance, product certification, maximising productivity and profitability and capital investment.

Australia's livestock industries rely heavily on both export and domestic markets and are placed at significant risk by the increasing volumes of international passengers and goods. Meanwhile, the expectations of international and Australian customers with respect to the health and welfare of our livestock continue to become more demanding. Effective biosecurity measures are therefore needed across the production continuum, from producer to consumer.

AHA has identified eight strategic priorities for the next five years. Five of these directly affect supply of livestock and product to the processing sector. These are to:

- Improve the national coordination and management of animal health.
- Secure adequate sustainable resources for national animal health.
- Strengthen emergency animal disease preparedness and response.
- Maintain and increase market access through effective partnerships for livestock welfare and production, and disease policy development and implementation.

- Improve disease surveillance nationally, to meet current and future needs.

The abattoir processing sector is a key component of the national animal health system in relation to the detection and reporting of animal disease. Historically, abattoir activities were a major plank in the eradication campaign of bovine tuberculosis from cattle and buffalo in Australia and our global recognition of 'free country' status on 31 December 1997. The capability to detect diseases at abattoirs continues to play a strong part in our overall biosecurity effectiveness and specifically our national ability to be prepared for and respond to both endemic and exotic animal diseases. AHA has several projects that rely upon the ability of the abattoir sector to participate willingly; any initiative that supports the viability of the meat processing sector is desirable.

It is noted that 'labelling' is also referenced, and our general suggestion is that governments should facilitate the application of relevant, additional labelling, as required by the markets – both domestic and international. A voluntary, market-driven labelling scheme for certain attributes such as the nature of production, underpinned as necessary by legislation, will allow the consumer to select for those attributes that are important to them. This will help drive industry application of new initiatives at minimal cost to government.

AHA would be pleased to provide further input to the Inquiry, if requested, particularly if matters of animal biosecurity arise in the Committee's deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mike Bond
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER