

I would like to submit a response to the inquiry into Bio-security and Quarantine arrangements.

The terms of reference being.

A). The adequacy of current Bio-security and Quarantine arrangements, including Resourcing;

Will there be adequate AQIS meat inspection staff, after the reforms that are taking place at the present time, to ensure that proper implementation and of relevant legislation and oversight is taking place. Should the Abattoir operators be given the option of employing their own meat Inspectors. This will mean a reduction in AQIS Meat Inspection Staff. The independence of a Permanent Meat Inspection system is needed to maintain consumer confidence in the red meat products.

It would need to be ensured that the conflict of interest did not lead to Meat Inspection responsibilities being neglected if they were not available and other functions within the Abattoir needed Attention confusion over roles and responsibilities is not what an AQIS Meat Inspector needs in a regulatory duty.

AQIS has advocated increased self-inspection as a means of increasing the efficiency and reducing the cost by transferring the responsibility away from AQIS Inspectors to Inspectors employed by the Abattoir operator.

The current staffing level enables AQIS Meat Inspectors to carry out our on line inspection with confidence and insist on being presented with a clean carcass and carcass parts at the point of inspection. They have had their staffing levels reduced with past reforms and any further reduction will make enforcement action against those people that they work with on a daily basis when necessary more difficult.

AQIS Meat Inspectors are the public health back stop to protect the public should disease animals enter the food chain.

The resourcing of a permanent Meat Inspection system is currently done from Dubbo Stores. This is being closed down and is a necessary support service of clothing and equipment for staff. There is security provided for seals and other related items that are kept there ready for quick dispatch.

In summary; AQIS Meat Inspection staffing numbers are just adequate to perform effectively regulatory roles such as meat hygiene and disease control. When this reform is fully implemented we will have inadequate staff to carry out these roles with confidence. Resourcing having any time delay on needed equipment will impact on efficiency and safety.

B) Projected demand and Resourcing requirements.

No response

C) Progress toward achievement of reform of Australian Quarantine and Inspection service export fees and charges.

The question of who should pay for the regulatory services provided by AQIS. As AQIS moves towards full cost recovery and brings an end to the subsidy it currently provides by June 30<sup>th</sup> 2011. AQIS as the regulator currently subsidises the red meat export sector, you may think that it not appropriate for a regulator to do so. Protection of the consumer and public health, which may arise from food should not in my view be a cost to the Abattoir operator and should be funded centrally. While there is a requirement under EU Legislation to charge operators for the delivery of official controls, the official veterinarian and the independent auditing process should be the only cost imposed on an export abattoir.

The progress of reform to date in the red meat sector is of a news letter number 6 the AQIS Meat Inspectors received this on the July 12<sup>th</sup>.

Minimise cost to the Industry

- \*An assessment of what, if any preparation functions can be undertaken by authorised competent persons or company employed inspectors.
- \*Changes to the current retain rail approach.
- \*Changes to EU load out requirements.
- \*A review of all slaughter floor practices.
- \*Other related reform activities.

In summary, as full cost recovery is implemented with reform then progress will not have been made just less people on the ground doing more.

D) Progress in implementation of the Beale review and their recommendation and their place in meeting projected Bio-security demand and resourcing.

The review Panel headed by Roger Beale recommended that the additional \$260 million a year be provided to properly resource the system. It borders on criminal negligence in ignoring the concerns raised by the Roger Beale review panel; this decision will cost our nation dearly.

We have had outbreaks of Diseases in Australia Newcastle Disease, September 1998, April 1999 1.9 million birds from 32 flocks, non commercial and the general public's poultry and aviary birds, August 1999, January/February 2000, May 2002, October 2002. Equine Influenza, this happened under our previous government.

Foot and Mouth, a single outbreak of this disease will cost, social and economic break down due to the stress and cost of having to destroy infected stock. Industry and taxpayers will be up for Billions as export sanctions are put in place. The never to replace our once invaluable clean green, Disease-free, safe food reputation will be gone.

AQIS Meat Inspectors have seen nothing implemented by the Beale report but sadly the opposite instead of investment at our level, our Department is focused on spending part of \$125 million by reducing Meat Inspection numbers, so that the cost to industry is minimised when full cost recovery is implemented. 30th June 2011.

The Sheep Meat Council of Australia and the Cattle Council of Australia urged the state and Federal Governments to keep up their Quarantine investments.

Yet some industry leaders are in line with AQIS management as they reduce costs by means of self-inspection. This should be an indicator that AQIS at the upper level cannot

properly manage an independent system and are influenced by industry.

In summary Governments and industry don't stop disease, people on the ground doing their routine work properly resourced and staffed do, this is what the public pays for, wants and expects and should receive.

Any related matters.

Consequence of reforms

These reforms retain a skeleton AQIS staff only at abattoirs and provide for the provision of company inspectors. Given the current policy in AQIS, where implementation of any corrective action requires a long and drawn out paper trail, it places the company in a position where they can dictate daily operations and circumvent standing requirements. Residual AQIS staff will operate in an environment where they are incapable of effectively ensuring any effective compliance with Australian and importing country requirements.

Although the meat industry is keen to drive these changes under the guise of cost savings, Australia's animal industries should be concerned about the long term implications for our trade in meat and co-products. We already have examples where AQIS ``stepping back ``has jeopardised established markets, eg Kangaroo meat to Russia and Dairy products to the EU.

It would be appropriate for an independent Risk Analysis of these reforms to be conducted before any implementation.