



Submission No. 5
Date received: 15/4/14

Inquiry into Food Origin Labelling

Submission by: Mrs Coral Maxwell

14/4/14

To House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture and Industry,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Inquiry into Food Origin Labelling. I have a high interest in the question of product labelling as our family business, Locate Australian, was launched in April 2010 as a result of my dissatisfaction with some of the very terms of reference you are discussing.

A brief background on my interest in this area:

I am sure I am not alone in the dilemma of being a full time working mother, (teacher by profession), wanting to buy Australian Made products when doing the quick shop after work or the weekly shop on Saturday, depending on the level of organisation achieved that week.

I am a farmer's daughter from Campbell's Forest, Victoria, and my older brothers are still working our family property trying to make a living which is now supplemented by one brother by a trucking/cartage business.

When I first became frustrated at not knowing which products were Australian on our supermarket shelves and then frustrated at not having time to read all the labels to find out where from and who made and how much was made where etc. I came up with the idea of a three tag labelling system which would tell shoppers/consumers if the product was Australian Made, was it made from Australian produce and was it made by an Australian Owned company.

That is when our website was launched and we have been going ever since. Producers and businesses list for free. We started out as a simple directory and now have over 400 listings of products and businesses and are continuing to grow.

We have also developed a phone App which allows shoppers to scan a barcode on a product and find out the expected country of origin although the bar code numbers in reality only indicate the country in which the bar code was assigned.

If a product scanned is one that is listed on our website then the three tag system comes into play as the consumer is redirected to the more comprehensive listing on our website. It is for this app development which we came in the Top 20 of the Bendigo Inventors Awards 2012.

Our next step is to have an online store which sells products using this same three tag labelling system.

This submission is not about our business but I tell you this only to put my dilemma as a shopper in perspective and to show that I do have a serious interest in this question of Australian product labelling.

Terms of Reference:

- **Does the current Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL for food) system provide enough information for Australian consumers to make informed purchasing decisions?**
 - **Are there improvements that could be made, including the simplifying of the current system and/or reduce the compliance burden?**
-

The desire to buy Australian but not knowing which products they are and if they are really Australian is an ongoing dilemma for the average Australian shopper who has the desire to support Australian companies and Australian workers and therefore Australia in general. We are a patriotic people but we need to be able to make informed decisions.

The following labelling system came into being directly because I did not have enough information to make such an informed decision. Instead of moaning and groaning I thought it would be better to take some action and do something about this inadequacy myself. Australians are after all very ingenious and work with what they have.

I believe that this system works because of its simplicity. There may be some aspects of its organisation that can be transferable to the current system (Australian Made campaign) which could be of use.

Any labelling system needs to be clear and address the three main concerns of consumers (my concerns):

1. Is the product made in Australia?
There are labelling systems now for this component of product labelling but what does the term really mean? If I see a product that has a label that says Made in Australia then I expect it is true to that label and it is totally Made in Australia. It either is or it isn't. Part overseas is not in my mind Made in Australia.
2. Is the product made from Australian Produce/Products/Ingredients?
As shoppers we want to know if the product is made from ingredients which are Australian. A simple question, I believe. Has the produce been grown in Australia? Have the ingredients been grown or manufactured in Australia? If they have, then the label Australian Produce holds true. If not, it does not. Let's not be misleading. It is better to start with a very few products that meet the criteria correctly than to be misleading and include some perhaps bigger companies who are not really deserving of the label. They can change to fit the labelling system and perhaps take a stronger stance in finding or funding Australian products so they can meet the labelling criteria.

3. Is the product made by an Australian Owned Company?

If the company is Australian Owned then it needs to be all Australian Owned. Those companies who are know they are and there is no question in their minds. There are quite a few companies who are working with various Australian product directories to promote that they are Australian Owned. Their integrity is what is on the line if they are not giving correct information. It is not in their best company/business interest to be untruthful. At the end of the day our Australian consumers are very savvy. They know what is what and will say if something is not quite right.

In keeping with these points of view of which I believe I give a fairly typical Australian consumer perspective, we have developed a unique labelling system that tells consumers exactly how Australian each product is (tags shown below and in Appendix A).



Australian Made



Australian Owned



Australian Produce

If a business is Australian owned, its products are made in Australia and they use Australian produce/ ingredients then all three tags are shown on their product listing. One other tag has been introduced as our website database has grown, by necessity; Mostly Australian Produce.



Mostly Australian Produce

The harsh reality is that not all Australian companies who desire to include all Australian produce in their products are able to do so. Some ingredients are just not available here. Hence the need for this adjusted label for some products. 'Mostly' means 'mostly' and I suppose over 50% would have to be the gauge as that is what most consumers would

say is 'mostly'. At the end of the day the tagging system is not here to judge a product or company it is just to enable us to be informed shoppers.

This labelling system works by having combinations of one, two or three labels depending on which ones hold true for that product. Labelling on the actual products of one, two or three of these symbols would be an extremely simple way for consumers to recognise a product and its origins. At this stage we have developed shelf wobblers, (see Appendix A) but this gives you an idea of how we propose the labelling system on product labels would work.

Locate Australian was created out of a passion to see Australian businesses thrive in a market flooded by overseas competition. We believe that in every business, the 'why' is more important than the 'what'. There is a growing desire from Australian's to address this issue of labelling and we believe that the use of a three tag labelling system will assist consumers to be informed shoppers. If a product only has two tags, then it only has two tags. At least we know what we are buying.

What does this mean for your Inquiry?

Well, you could adopt our simple labelling system; that would be nice, or you could look at the current Australian Made, Australian Grown system of labelling and make a few changes to let it do the same as our system proposes.

I believe consumers need all three labels on the one product. If the product is Australian Made and Australian Owned then let the labelling say so. Symbols are obviously the easier way to go and the general public can recognise these at a glance.

The labels need to be easily recognisable and trustworthy. Having an Australian Government stamp on it should certainly help in that regard. A good strong advertising campaign would ensure this information is transferred and the current Australian Made advertising campaign has been effective; I certainly know and recognise the labels. I don't have great faith in what they mean (ie. How much Australian Made does the Australian Made symbol actually represent) but I recognise them.

Are there too many compliance issues and cost etc. around the current system for Australian Made? That is not for me to judge and I don't know anywhere near the details that you do, however, we do need a system that is easy for producers and manufacturers and that encourages them to take on board the labelling system, not one that is onerous and so difficult to comply with that only the large companies can participate.

At the end of the day a business lives or dies by its reputation. If a business tells us they are three tags but are not, then we reserve the right to take them off the website. We are a small business but there was once when a product went live on the website and that business actually contacted us to say the labels were not correct. We then changed to use the Mostly Australian Produce label instead of the Australian Produce label.

Perhaps it is just an official form to complete answering a few straightforward questions about Australian Made, Australian Owned and Australian Produce and then a statement saying that any information found to be misleading will result in the product with the labelling system being recalled and the company not being able to access this labelling system again for that product OR any of their product lines.

Perhaps then the staffing for this system would just be those who authorise that the paperwork is completed and submitted and they then approve. The cost should be minimal for producers, if not Government funded; at least in the beginning.

Please forgive me if I am over simplifying or making uninformed comments. I am not an expert in this area and never have professed to be one but I am an Australian consumer who wants to buy Australian and so can just give my opinion as a farmer's daughter, turned teacher.

There must be a way to save our producers and we cannot allow any other Australian companies to go under.

What a privileged position each of you are in where you can make decisions which help shape our country and save our farmers? Thank you for putting forward this question for debate and for giving us all opportunity to have a say in the discussion.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about my comments.

Yours truly,

Mrs Coral Maxwell

Locate Australian CEO

and

College Principal

Creek Street Christian College, Bendigo, Victoria.

APPENDIX A

- **Labelling System**

- Sample of a shelf wobblers which shows how the labelling system works.
- A product may just have two of these tags or just one tag on its label
- Any one product may have these tags in different combinations. EG: Just Australian Made and Australian Owned or just Mostly Australian Produce and Australian Made.
- This could of course be much smaller if just symbols so that they can be included on any product current labelling system.



APPENDIX B

- **Locate Australian App scans barcodes which indicate probable country of origin**
-



Link to Locate Australian App- Use QR barcode scanner app to scan this image.

Website www.locateaustralian.com.au has a link directly to the app.