



13 June 2008

Senator Christine Milne
Senate Standing Committee on
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Milne

I write in reference to a recent Senate Estimates Committee held on Tuesday 27 May where you questioned Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) on the carbon content embedded in a leg of lamb. I took the question on notice and committed to provide you with a written response.

Life Cycle Analysis is a recognised methodology to quantify the environmental impacts of various human activities. Although internationally recognised as an approach, the assumptions about which inputs should be included or excluded from the calculation are not standardised; hence estimates of global warming impact for the same product can vary widely between different studies.

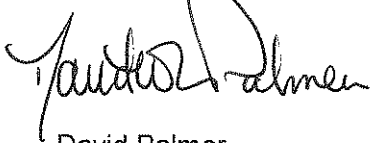
MLA is currently funding a Life Cycle Analysis of three meat supply chains to quantify the greenhouse gas contributions associated with each production system. Preliminary results for a specific commercial lamb production system involving some grain finishing suggests production and processing of a lamb carcass to the abattoir chiller is associated with release of about 10 kg CO₂ equivalents per kg carcass weight. Of this total, approx 90% is attributed to energy-dense inputs (including grain production) and methane release during the growth of the lamb on farm. Some additional emissions will be associated with refrigeration and transport to retailers, but these are expected to be minor.

Of similar interest to Senators and using the same methodology outlined above, the measurement in respect of CO₂ equivalents embedded in a kilo of beef varies between different supply chains. As an example, certain supply chains in Australia measure 15 to 20 kg of CO₂ equivalent in a kilogram of beef. In Japan, the figure is 36 kg and in tribal Africa as low as 7 kg.

The Australian meat and livestock industry treats very seriously our responsibility to reduce the emissions and carbon impact in our food production systems. The 12% reduction in beef and sheep meat emissions since 1990 is an important achievement and one that we will continue to work on in the years ahead.

Thank you for your enquiry and strong interest in this important subject.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Palmer', written in a cursive style.

David Palmer
Managing Director

cc: Senator Glenn Sterle (Chair)
Senator Rachel Siewert (Deputy Chair)
Senator the Hon. Bill Heffernan
Senator Steve Hutchins
Senator Annette Hurley
Senator Julian McGauran
Senator Fiona Nash
Senator Kerry O'Brien