

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 25 June 2008, the Senate referred the following matter to the Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries:

Food production in Australia and the question of how to produce food that is:

- (a) affordable to consumers;
- (b) viable for production by farmers; and
- (c) of sustainable impact on the environment.¹

1.2 The reporting date for the inquiry is 27 November 2009.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The inquiry was advertised in the *Australian*, major regional newspapers, and through the Internet. The committee invited submissions from a wide range of organisations and individuals. The committee resolved to accept submissions throughout the course of the inquiry.

1.4 The committee received 98 submissions. A list of individuals and organisations that made public submissions to the inquiry is at Appendix 1. To date, the committee has held six public hearings in Brisbane on 4 March 2009, Sydney on 5 March 2009, Perth on 24 March 2009, Melbourne on 25 March 2009, Launceston on 1 April 2009 and Gunnedah on 19 May 2009.

The committee's interim report

1.5 The committee decided to present an interim report in relation to one aspect of its inquiry. This report focuses on allegations made by Cuthbertson Brothers Pty Ltd (Cuthbertsons), a major purchaser of sheep and lamb skins in Tasmania in respect of its commercial dealings with Swift Australia Pty Ltd (Swift), the largest meat processor in Australia.

1.6 Cuthbertsons presented evidence to the committee at a public hearing in Launceston on 1 April 2009, details of which are at Appendix 2. Swift was also invited by the committee to give evidence on that day but declined to appear.

1.7 The committee in tabling this report notes the difficult financial situation that Cuthbertsons finds itself in as a result of its dispute with Swift.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, 25 June 2008, p. 7.

1.8 The committee also notes that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is currently investigating certain allegations concerning actions by Swift that relate to its commercial dealings with Cuthbertsons.

1.9 This report deals with evidence received at the public hearing in Launceston on 1 April 2009 in relation to the Cuthbertsons-Swift issue. Other evidence on food production presented at the committee's other public hearings will be discussed in the committee's final report.

Acknowledgement

1.10 The committee thanks those individuals and organisations who made submissions and gave evidence at the public hearings held to date.