

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 was 27 November 2009. The Senate has agreed to extend the final reporting date for this inquiry to 30 June 2010.

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 153 submissions. A list of individuals and organisations that made public submissions to the inquiry is at Appendix 1. To date, the committee has held fifteen public hearings on 4, 5, 24 and 25 March, 1 April, 19 May, 1 July, 31 August, 18 September, 6, 7, 12 and 23 October and 18 and 24 November 2009.

1.5 The committee tabled its first interim report on 18 June 2009. The report focused on allegations made by Cuthbertson Brothers Pty Ltd, a major purchaser of sheep and lamb skins in Tasmania in respect of its commercial dealings with Swift Australia Pty Ltd, the largest meat processor in Australia.

The committee's second interim report

1.6 The committee's second interim report discusses a number of concerns raised in relation to proposed coal and gas exploration and mining/drilling on the Liverpool Plains area of NSW, in particular by BHP Billiton Ltd, Shenhua Watermark Coal Pty Ltd and Santos Ltd. Particular concerns were raised at the potential for these developments to adversely impact on agricultural activities in the area.

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

1.7 The committee received evidence related to these issues at public hearings in Sydney on 5 March, Gunnedah on 19 May, and Canberra on 18 September and 24 November 2009, details of which are at Appendix 2. The committee also made a site visit to the Liverpool Plains on 19 May 2009.

1.8 Other evidence on food production presented at the committee's other public hearings will be discussed in further reports by the committee.

Acknowledgements

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

1.10 The committee would particularly like to thank Mr Tim Duddy, Spokesman for the Caroon Coal Action Group for facilitating the committee's visit to the Gunnedah area on 19 May 2009. It would also like to thank other member of the Action Group and the many members of the community it was able to meet during informal discussions and at the public hearing held in Gunnedah on that day.