

ABA submission to Senate RRAT hearing on importation of beef from BSE affected countries 5.2.2010

Our submission of 14.12.2009 stands but we add further disturbing evidence to our update.

The 20th October announcement by three Ministers that beef would be imported from BSE affected countries unleashes the most serious threat to Australia's beef industry in our history. ABA vigorously opposes the decision.

We give four reasons—

- Increased risk to Australian human health.
- Increased risk to Australian animal health.
- Devastation of price to Australian producers through importation of cheaper but higher quality table beef that is subsidised through grain subsidies. Increased unemployment in regional centres as Australian owned abattoirs close.
- Loss of Australia's unique clean image for its exports as, perception wise, we are demoted to the same ranking as countries with BSE.

1. “Beef off the Shelves” myth.

Such a move would put 300,000 out of work in a week. Bankruptcies everywhere. No Government in the World did this when BSE broke out within their borders. It is claimed that FSANZ made the decision but no one has explained who would implement it. *Inquiries in New Zealand found no one who agreed that beef would be taken off the shelves there and they are part of FSANZ. Who has fabricated this blatant lie? Wasn't any BSE outbreak to be addressed by Australia's unique half billion dollar NLIS scheme?*

We AGAIN call for the tabling of the WTO “obligations” paperwork. We don't believe that it exists.

2. Increased risk to Australian human health.

Our investigations since the hearing on 14.12.2009 have been hampered by the unavailability of Nobel Prize Winner, Professor Prusiner and Professor Simon Hawke due to the Christmas recess. We have correspondence with both scientists awaiting reply. However our reading has increased our concerns at the 180 degree turn by “Science” since the USA had cases of BSE. We would like to see a review of Professor Matthews paper on which the Australian decision is based.

We are NOT scientists but we are aware that on 18th December- four days after the last RRAT hearing-the BBC's science correspondent Pailab Ghosh reported that a new wave of deaths due to variant CJD linked to eating BSE infected beef could be underway.

Professor John Collinge of the National Prion clinic reported that a 2009 death in Scotland was from a different genetic pool to that of the 166 deaths already reported in UK. They are thought to share one gene and Professor Collinge and his colleagues estimate that up to 350 people in this group could get vCJD. His group state that vCJD has moved into a new phase. The incubation period is a long one.

We tender the Australian Red Cross Donor Policy sheet which applies to those resident in UK between 1980 and 1996. The last sentence says it all "Our community demands and is entitled to, the safest possible blood supply and our actions are focused on delivering sufficient and safe blood to all who require it ". This confirms the relevance of Senator Back's question to the Chief Medical Officer at the last hearing. Blood from people in UK from 1980 to 1996 IS NOT ACCEPTABLE. Professor Collinge's discovery should see an extension to anyone who has visited UK . It should ensure that Australia revisits the SCIENCE of vCJD.

Reviews of literature are the source of Australia's "scientific "knowledge.

Lisa Waddell is a senior officer in the Department of Population Medicine Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph Ontario Canada. She is a policy Advisor to Government.

She states "In 14 reviews, conclusions exceeded evidence presented. The various review authors position on the evidence for the zoonotic public health issues lacked structured and transparent methodology, preventing the end user from assessing the review's validity"

Australia is putting trade policy above very incomplete and conflicting medical science in this decision.

To illustrate the gap between scientific papers and reality –In the US , there is still no legislation banning the feeding of chicken litter to cattle –see R-CALF USA's recent call for the practice to be banned.

We call for a full review .

3.Increased risk to Australian animal health.

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Australia, being an island continent, has succeeded in avoiding most of the serious animal health diseases. It s ban on product from FMD affected countries

has been successful in keeping our healthy record. Australia has spent huge sums on eradicating brucellosis and TB in cattle.

North America has had Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) for 30 years in deer .It is spreading fast and there are three recorded cases of its transference to cattle. It is thought by some scientists that CWD may have been derived from Scrapie by wild deer sharing pasture with sheep.

Scrapie has probably existed in North America for a century-it was identified in 1947... Control schemes have all failed. It is seen to have almost eternal survival. **Apart from a brief episode in 1952 Scrapie has never been diagnosed in Australia. It is now in New Zealand. Its introduction would be catastrophic for our failing sheep industry.**

We support Dr.Robert Steel's submission. Anyone reading it would become aware of the huge Pandora's box that TSE presents and realise the necessity to keep Australia's unique freedom from the diseases.

“Controlled risk assessment” is a fine academic phrase. We recall the chaos after the importation of some Brazilian beef after permission from an AQIS who had never visited the source. We recall the 2005 Senate Inquiry and no apparent disciplinary action taken against AQIS officers concerned. We recall the debacle of the 2007 Equine Influenza outbreak following importation of Japanese horses. We recall the reports of Eastern Creek Quarantine Station hygiene and discipline.

4. Price implications and unemployment.

This week, Burrangong Abattoir at young closed throwing 300 of a small community out of work. The importation of high quality US beef would hasten the grip on Australia's processing industry that JBS Swift and other multinationals are taking.

The USDA website's 18.11.2009 entry showed that US beef is currently selling to US consumers at around half the price that Australian consumers pay for their beef. Yesterday, US feeder steer producers were getting 31% more than Australian producers.

The US beef chain is much more efficient than Australia's due to-

1. Subsidised grain in their feedlots(their main means of growing out cattle);
2. Cheap imported labour in their abattoirs and
3. A fiercely competitive retail sector with over 60 supermarket chains.

Their table beef is graded by independent Government graders and is identified to the consumer. This gives much greater confidence in product than in Australia where there is no independent grading. Their per capita consumption is around 17% higher than Australia's.

Beef traders are already doing their sums on importing high quality US beef and those sums are looking good. It will cost around 58 aus. cents/kg to bring beef in (same as the flood of North American pork). The USDA website gives \$aus13.86/kg for Choice grade sirloin at retail. The equivalent (if you can find it) is selling in Australia from \$ 30 to \$50 kg at retail. We have seen what the opening of the floodgates did for Australia's pork industry. Should this decision be upheld we will see the closure of a lot of Australian owned abattoirs causing major unemployment in regional centres? We have seen our Orange, tomato and Onion industries destroyed by application of Canberra's Free Trade disease—now, apparently, it is beef's turn.

Question-What quota and tariff arrangements are envisaged to protect our industry –as every country but Australia and New Zealand do?

5. Loss of Australia's "clean and green" image for world trade.

Australia has made much of its freedom from FMD, BSE, Blue Tongue, Scrapie etc. **Australia is unique in many of these freedoms.** We have gone further to promote our image with a unique and very costly NLIS system. Despite these factors our producers are receiving the second lowest prices in the developed world. By allowing in beef from BSE affected countries we are relinquishing this much touted selling advantage. We will be competing with the largest cattle herd in the World-the Indian herd - on price alone.

**WE AGAIN ASK THE COMMITTEE TO ASK THE SENATE TO OVER
RULE THIS SUICIDAL DECREE.**