

Senate Standing Committee for  
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

Meat Marketing Inquiry

Interim Report  
September 2008

Response to Recommendations  
Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and  
Forestry

### **Recommendation 1**

**The committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, through the forum of the Primary Industries Ministerial Council, seek the support of state and territory primary industries ministers to harmonise national standards for all domestic meat slaughtering and processing establishments. The committee further recommends that, regardless of the model adopted, the harmonised national standard must include maintenance of dentition as the standard for classifying an animal as lamb and must require that 100 per cent of animals classified as lamb are mouthed at slaughter.**

### **Recommendation 2**

**The committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, through the forum of the Primary Industries Ministerial Council, consider the costs and benefits of applying the West Australian standard as the model for national harmonisation including examination of compliance and enforcement issues.**

### **Response to Recommendations 1 and 2**

Agreed in part.

The Australian Government supports harmonisation of national standards where possible including for all domestic meat slaughtering and processing establishments; provided these standards are voluntary and at the initiative of industry.

The Australian Government does not agree that a national standard requires 100 per cent mouthing of animals classified as lamb at slaughter as this may prove onerous on some jurisdictions.

Following the release of the Senate Standing Committee for Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport's interim report of its Inquiry into Meat Marketing, the Hon. Tony Burke MP, former Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry included the issue of meat marketing on the agenda of the November 2008 Primary Industries Ministerial Council (the council) meeting.

The council established a working group which examined whether models used for all red meat, not just sheep meat, may be suitable for national adoption. One of the models considered was the Western Australian standard, which requires 100 per cent mouthing of animals at slaughter. The examination of models was undertaken in the context of considering the costs and benefits of adopting each model including compliance and enforcement issues.

The working group provided a report to the council at its November 2009 meeting. In its report the working group found:

- that 100 per cent mouthing, a key component of the Western Australian lamb-branding model, may be onerous on some jurisdictions to introduce and enforce

- the costs of adopting a national scheme are likely to be minimal for major retailers due to the high standards of grading systems and record keeping already in place. The cost is likely to be much higher for the smaller independent retailers who may not have existing systems
- a prescriptive and mandatory labelling scheme also has the potential to discourage industry innovation and initiative in developing new labelling and branding systems such as the Meat Standards Australia grading system, as well as potentially removing flexibility in their application
- the working group and industry are of the opinion that, from a practical perspective, any adoption of a national labelling scheme should be in a uniform manner amongst the states. Extensive commercial difficulties would be created if jurisdictions chose to 'go-it-alone' in implementing labelling reform
- any additional costs associated with a national labelling system would be passed along the supply chain either to producers or to consumers.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs consider, when available, the findings of the Sheepmeat Council of Australia and the Australian Meat Industry Council's review of Lamb Brand Control and Verification. The committee recommends that, where appropriate and feasible, the relevant Commonwealth agencies assist the sheepmeat industry to implement recommendations arising from the review.**

### **Response to Recommendation 3**

Agreed.

The joint Sheepmeat Council of Australia/Australian Meat Industry Council report has not been completed. The Australian Government understands that the industry decided not to finalise the report.