

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 19 March 2008, the following matter was referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport for inquiry and report:

Concerns in relation to meat marketing, with particular reference to the need for effective supervision of national standards and controls and the national harmonisation of regulations applying to the branding of meat.

Conduct of inquiry

1.2 On 4 September 2008 the committee tabled an interim report addressing issues relating to lamb marketing, particularly concerns that some processors are substituting hogget and young sheep for lamb. The committee recommended that the Commonwealth Government seek state and territory support for the harmonisation of national standards for domestic meat slaughtering and processing establishments. It also recommended that this standard include the requirement that all animals classified as lamb be mouthed at slaughter and that the West Australian standard be considered as the model.

1.3 The committee intends to keep a watching brief on this issue as it has not yet been resolved to the committee's satisfaction.

1.4 As indicated in the interim report, the committee's inquiry was extended to include other meat marketing issues not addressed in that report. The committee wrote to a number of organisations indicating that it would consider the following in the second phase of its inquiry:

- The labelling of beef products, particularly improvements that could be made to ensure consumers have better and more accurate information about the product they are purchasing; and
- The use of labels 'organic' and 'free range' across all meat products.

1.5 The committee received a number of new and supplementary submissions addressing these issues. The list of submitters is included at Appendix 1.

1.6 The committee held public hearings in Canberra on 17 March and Melbourne on 26 March 2009, taking evidence from the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, various beef industry organisations, pork industry representatives and the Australian Food and Grocery Council. A complete list of witnesses at these hearings is included at Appendix 2 and responses to questions taken on notice at the hearings are included at Appendix 3.

1.7 Submissions to the inquiry and transcripts of the committee's hearings are available through the committee's website at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/rrat_ctte/meat_marketing/index.htm.

Report structure

1.8 Chapter Two discusses issues relating to the labelling of beef products. In particular the committee examines the lack of beef grading for quality in Australia and the options for providing better information to consumers; concerns about the 'budget' beef labelling agreement misleading consumers as to the nature of what they are purchasing; and perceived problems with the use of breed claims in marketing.

1.9 Chapter Three covers issues that cut across specific types of meat, including concerns about the misuse of terms such as 'organic' and 'free range', made possible by legal ambiguity as to their correct use. This chapter also addresses concerns about potentially misleading place of origination claims.

Acknowledgements

1.10 The committee reiterates its appreciation to all those who contributed to this inquiry through written or oral submissions.