



For all creatures great and small.

The Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

30 April 2008

Dear Secretary

**RSPCA Australia submission to the inquiry into meat marketing**

Around the world, consumers are becoming more interested in knowing how and where their food is produced.

RSPCA Australia believes that consumers would benefit from the provision of full and accurate information about the production method used for the animal products they buy to enable them to make informed purchasing decisions.

At present, the only animal product that is regularly labelled according to its production system is carton eggs. There are three recognised definitions: caged, barn and free range, as defined in the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry. While labelling of cartons is voluntary in some states, it is mandatory in the ACT and it is also a requirement of the Australian Egg Corporation's quality assurance program.

In contrast, there is no legal or even generally agreed definition of either of the terms "free range" and "bred free range" when it comes to the production of pork in Australia. The absence of a mandatory standard for product labelling allows the often arbitrary use of such terms to continue without being considered false representation despite these terms increasingly being used in the marketing of pork products.

Generally speaking, people tend to assume that the term "free range" indicates that animals have had some access to outdoors and are not kept in close confinement. What is meant by "access to outdoors" and "close confinement" is also often undefined and poorly understood.

In the absence of any recognised definitions for such terms as "free range", "bred free range", "organic", "biodynamic", etc. to describe welfare-oriented production methods whether it is for red meat, eggs, chicken meat or pork, the public tend to assume that these terms confer some improvement in animal welfare over other production systems. This may or may not be the case and will be greatly influenced by the standards applied and the way in which the system is managed.

RSPCA  
Australia Inc  
ABN 99 668 654 249

*Patrons in Chief*

His Excellency  
Major General  
Michael Jeffery  
AC, CVO MC (Retd)  
Governor-General of the  
Commonwealth of  
Australia

Her Excellency  
Mrs Marlena Jeffery

*Patron*

The Hon Justice  
Michael Kirby  
AC, CMG,  
Hon D Litt, Hon LLD

Phone (02) 6282 8300  
Fax (02) 6282 8311  
Email [rspca@rspca.org.au](mailto:rspca@rspca.org.au)  
Web [www.rspca.org.au](http://www.rspca.org.au)

Postal Address  
PO Box 265  
Deakin West ACT 2600  
Australia



For all creatures great and small.

A useful discussion of the assumptions based around labelling terms is provided in the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council's 2006 report on welfare labelling, which can be accessed at <http://www.fawc.org.uk/reports/welfarelabel-0606.pdf>.

RSPCA Australia recognises that the development of a nationally consistent approach to the labelling of welfare-oriented animal products is part of a larger debate on the labelling and marketing of food products. Consumers are becoming increasingly discerning towards the ethical issues surrounding food production and given that there are significant differences in the welfare of animals exposed to different production methods, we believe that the labelling of welfare-oriented animal products should be given high priority. Independent labelling will provide consumers with reliable information on the production system employed.

We are hopeful that this Inquiry will make recommendations on the development of nationally recognised definitions of animal welfare-orientated production methods. As Australia's pre-eminent animal welfare organisation, RSPCA Australia would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee to help define the terms used in welfare-related labelling of animal products to ensure that they accurately reflect production systems.

Please don't hesitate to contact us should you require further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Heather Neil". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Heather Neil  
Chief Executive Officer  
RSPCA Australia