



For all creatures great and small.

18 July 2005

The Secretariat  
The Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group  
GPO Box 858  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

**Ensuring a profitable and sustainable agriculture and food sector in Australia: Submission from RSPCA Australia Inc.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the discussion paper *Ensuring a profitable and sustainable agriculture and food sector in Australia*. The comments provided below relate directly to the issues raised in the discussion paper so they largely concern how animal welfare relates to the economics of the agriculture and food sector. However, it should be noted that RSPCA Australia believes animal welfare is justifiable on its intrinsic merit – animal welfare does not need to be justified in economic terms.

**Markets for agriculture and food**

*Animal welfare as a key 'selling point'*

RSPCA Australia believes that the development and enforcement of high welfare standards for animals in food and fibre production industries is a key factor in ensuring profitability in those industries.

On the domestic front as well as in international markets there is an increasing consumer awareness of animal welfare issues in farming industries, and a corresponding demand for products which are 'animal welfare friendly'. Such a demand is predicted to continue to grow.

Australia has the opportunity to take advantage of the demand in this area by establishing itself as a world leader in the supply of products produced under high animal welfare standards. Such a standing would be complemented by Australia's excellent reputation as being free of major disease concerns.

*Mandatory labelling*

For producers to properly benefit from an increased focus on animal welfare standards in food production, the standards of production must be communicated to consumers through labelling. Consumers should be able to identify which producers meet a required standard of animal welfare, and which exceed required standards. Labelling should clearly define the production method and should be government enforceable.

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## **Competitiveness of Australian agriculture and food businesses**

### *Value adding*

Australia is currently missing key opportunities to value add in livestock industries. In 2004 Australia exported nearly 4 million sheep, cattle and goats to Middle Eastern and Asian markets for slaughter, whilst all these markets are also shown to accept chilled or frozen meat from Australia. The slaughter and processing of these animals in Australia would increase the profitability and stimulate employment.

### *The role of retailers*

It is noted in the issues paper that large retail chains are moving away from wholesale based purchasing to direct contracts with farm suppliers and they are therefore likely to have a direct influence on farm level production processes. As, generally, the demands from retailers are likely to reflect the demands of their customers this is a positive step. A consumer demand for improved animal welfare standards should be communicated to the producer.

However, there may conceivably be examples where retailer pressure results in a producer adopting lower animal welfare standards. It is therefore essential that Model Codes of Practice, which define standards in animal welfare for animals in food and fibre industries, be mandatory as the minimum acceptable standard.

### *Research and development*

Unless the financial benefits of adopting higher animal welfare standards are made clear, there is no incentive for industries to invest in research and development in the area of animal welfare. Government needs to establish priorities for research into improved welfare for production animals. Such research should be government driven, with input from industries and could be partly or wholly funded by industry levies.

### *Biosecurity and environmental concerns*

The outbreak of FMD in the UK in 2001 and the recent drought conditions here in Australia highlight the need for clear strategies on dealing with animal disease outbreaks or extreme environmental conditions affecting the welfare of animals. A key feature of such strategies should be humane slaughter procedures, where conditions necessitate slaughter.

### *Transport*

The RSPCA believes that animals should be slaughtered as close to farmgate as possible, as transport over long distances is inherently stressful to animals. The Victorian Government's Animal Welfare Science Centre has recently convened the Transport Sector Reference Group, which aims to develop animal welfare standards for the livestock transport industry. It is currently intended that the outcomes of the project be incorporated into a quality assurance program for the transport industry however, the RSPCA believes that it is imperative that such standards be translated into an enforceable code.

## **Using and managing natural resources**

### *Control of animals regarded as agricultural pests*

RSPCA Australia acknowledges that in some circumstances it may be necessary to reduce wild populations of some native and introduced animals. However programs to control such animals must be conducted humanely and under the direct supervision of the appropriate government authorities.

We look forward the outcome of the Reference Group's review of the sector.

Please contact Jenny Hodges, Executive Officer, RSPCA Australia should you have any queries regarding this submission.

Yours faithfully

Dr Hugh Wirth  
President  
RSPCA Australia