

RED MEAT ADVISORY COUNCIL LIMITED *

BSE Policy Fact Sheet

2 March 2010

In responding to misinformation in the public arena regarding the Federal Government's BSE-related policy change, Red Meat Advisory Council Ltd* makes the following points:

CLAIM	FACT
1. We are letting in diseased foreign beef.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ No diseased beef is being 'let in'. To access the Australian market, applying companies must complete a questionnaire and supply exhaustive documentation. These will be assessed by Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) and Biosecurity Australia (BA) individually and on merit, taking into account <i>all</i> of Australia's requirements under existing rules and health requirements, including those relating to exotic diseases like Foot & Mouth Disease.○ All those applying to export beef to Australia will have their animal-health and processing systems assessed. These assessments will be based on Australia's requirements for food safety, animal health, surveillance, feeding and slaughter practices, cattle identification and traceability. In-country inspections may be necessary to confirm exporters' claims. Industry leaders will be closely monitoring this process on industry's behalf.○ Many Australians eat beef when they travel; many millions of foreigners eat beef regularly in their own countries. This is because of the confidence consumers have in the scientifically based systems of production in those countries.
2. We will be flooded with imported beef.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Provided overseas suppliers meet all Australia's health requirements, some new trade may occur, but it will be small.○ In the five years prior to the ban being imposed on the US, it shipped an average of 34 tonnes of beef per year to Australia. This compares with Australia's annual exports to the US of 280,000t and to the world of 968,000t (2008-09). In the years 1990 to 2004 imports by Australia from all countries reached a maximum in any one year of 4,700t, mostly from NZ.○ Regardless, Australia has lead the way internationally in demanding access to other countries for our products that we say are clean; we are being hypocrites if we lock out other countries' products from our market when they are considered clean against relevant scientific measures.○ Using unscientific ways to block trade is illegal against international

* Red Meat Advisory Council Ltd is the peak advisory body for the red-meat and livestock industry and has as its members Australian Meat Industry Council, Cattle Council of Australia, Sheepmeat Council of Australia, Australian Lot Feeders' Association and Australian Livestock Exporters' Council. The industry has a combined value of \$15.7 billion.

	<p>rules. By keeping our old policy Australia risked serious international court action and, if found guilty, would face heavy penalties. As an exporting nation, this would be damaging to our financial position and our reputation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Australia competes effectively on price and quality in all major markets throughout the world. We don't need an illegal ban to maintain our foothold.
3. Imports will begin on 1 March 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Incorrect. 1 March is the date the Government's policy will change, allowing foreign suppliers to apply for access. Assessment of these applications and associated documents will take many months. Product will only then be allowed in if Australia's strict requirements are met. We will expect any potential supplier to match what we ask of ourselves in terms of food safety, disease freedom and cattle traceability.
4. We are jeopardising our clean image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Major beef-trading countries around the world now recognise the latest science relating to BSE and have modernised their trade rules accordingly. New Zealand for example, which holds a similar clean image to Australia's, modernised its rules nearly three years ago. To quote from the NZ Food Safety Authority's announcement of February 2007: <i>The old measures, in place since 1996 and adopted internationally as well as by New Zealand, reflected a precautionary approach which was taken during a time of uncertainty. ...However, in the intervening years much has been learned about BSE and the risks to human health which has increased our understanding and virtually eliminated the risk of consumers contacting vCJD.</i> NZ is as secure in its clean image as ever. ○ Australia's requirements will be stricter than those applied by OIE and NZ in that we will be requiring equivalency for cattle traceability and will reserve the right for in-country inspections before approval is given to export to Australia.
5. We are risking our access to overseas beef markets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NZ modernised its policy three years ago yet it continues to sell its beef all around the world, including to Australia. ○ Under strict guidelines the US, Japan and Korea, being three of our major beef markets, allow beef imports from countries that have had cases of BSE provided they meet strict guidelines. ○ This policy adjustment will not affect our existing 'Negligible BSE Risk' status by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and so we will remain favourable suppliers compared with most of our competitors, such as the US and Canada, which are 'controlled BSE risk' countries.
6. Consultation was inadequate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This was a Government decision. In making it, Government did consult RMAC prior to the announcement. ○ RMAC's policy of support for change has been in place since 2005.
7. Industry requested the change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In response to Government requesting industry's policy on this matter, RMAC wrote to Ministers Burke, Crean and Roxon on behalf of its member organisations and outlined the inadequacy of the current Government policy. The Government agreed with industry and responded accordingly.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The existing Government policy was internationally illegal in that the ban on beef from BSE-related countries no longer had scientific backing. Australia’s beef trade was therefore in jeopardy of retaliation. ○ For some years Government has been requested by overseas countries to review this policy. ○ Industry’s position in support of this policy being reviewed against sound scientific principles has remained unchanged for four years.
<p>8. We are reacting to overseas pressures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recent indications of possible WTO action have brought the matter to a head. ○ Given the scientific knowledge of the disease and the negligible risks of infection, overseas countries rightly believe we have been holding onto an unfair trade barrier, something Australia rejects from other countries when our exports are being blocked. ○ Australia is a signatory to international agreements requiring trade barriers to be backed by science. We therefore have an obligation to keep up with the rest of the world in modernising our trading rules. ○ The Australian beef industry has benefited for decades from international trade rules that have led to the removal of most non-scientific trade barriers around the world. We are being hypocritical and illegal if we’d continued to apply the blanket ban on trade from BSE-related countries.
<p>9. The rigour of the science is questionable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The scientist, Prof John Mathews, had his report, on which the Government decision was based, peer reviewed by a scientific group under the National Health and Medical Research Council. ○ Australia’s Chief Medical Officer, Jim Bishop, has stated publicly: “...better testing would allow beef to be traded safely ... [This policy change] now brings Australia into line with countries such as the US, Canada and New Zealand to assess each country on a case-by-case basis”. ○ Professor Mathews’ findings are consistent with a multitude of scientific reports around the world supporting such an approach. ○ Because the world is awash with scientific papers on the subject, Professor Matthews only needed a short time to gather the evidence and draw a robust conclusion supporting modernisation of the policy.
<p>10. We are going to be worse off.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The opposite is the case. The old policy clearly stated, “...all beef and beef products in Australia are to be derived from cattle that are BSE free”. Under this rule, if Australia were to be affected by an unlikely single case of BSE the results would be devastating for the sector and the economy because <i>all</i> beef could be removed from <i>all</i> domestic shelves at enormous expense, crippling the industry. ○ Also under the old policy foreign governments could demand compensation through the World Trade Organisation courts. Around two-thirds of our beef production is exported, making this a critical issue.β

<p>11. Overseas beef is rife with BSE infection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ BSE cases have dramatically declined since the height of the disease in the early 1990s <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – at its peak in 1992, there were 37,280 cases in the UK alone – in 2001, there were 831 cases worldwide (plus 1,202 in the UK) – in 2008, there were 88 cases worldwide (plus 37 in the UK) – in 2009, there were 58 cases worldwide (plus 12 in the UK to 30/9/09). (OIE: http://www.oie.int/eng/info/en_esbmonde.htm) ○ Since 2003 when the US found BSE in a cow originating in Canada, over 800,000 ‘at risk’ cattle have been tested after slaughter. Only two ‘a-typical’ cases have been found in native-born cattle.
<p>12. There is no country-of-origin labelling law for beef being sold in Australia.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This is correct. At present country-of-origin labelling (CoOL) of beef in Australia is voluntary. ○ Government has commissioned a study into labelling laws; the report is due around mid 2010. ○ Consumers should have the power to choose. If mandatory CoOL is supported by Government it will take some time to implement. In the meantime sellers of Australian meat are at liberty to label the product as coming from Australia.
<p>13. The so-called human form of BSE, known as new Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, is hereditary.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) is a rare human brain disease that is caused by abnormal brain proteins called prions. There are two types of CJD: <i>Classical</i> CJD (cCJD) and <i>Variant</i> CJD (vCJD) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Classical CJD occurs in Australia at the rate of around 1 per million people and about 10% of these cases are inherited – vCJD is thought to come from eating beef from cattle with BSE. It is not heritable and has not occurred in Australia. ○ Predictions at the height of the BSE epidemic of a vCJD pandemic have failed to materialise. Over 150,000 deaths from vCJD were predicted; there have been between 192 and 208 reported cases worldwide.
<p>14. Australia’s electronic cattle identification system, NLIS, is useless in tracing back from cuts of meat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Diagnosis of BSE in cattle occurs before or at the point of slaughter, not from cuts of meat. NLIS is outstanding in tracing back to farm of origin for the individual animal and its cohorts (other cattle with which it has come into contact in its lifetime). ○ Provided the correct systems for converting livestock into cuts of meat are used, cuts of meat are ‘clean’ and therefore irrelevant to the detection and tracing procedures. ○ In a recent exercise in Victoria, 57 cattle were randomly selected for testing the traceback system. These cattle, and their nearly 500,000 cohorts, were successfully traced within the 48-hour time period stipulated. This is a world-leading result. ○ Australia will be using its own tracking standards as the minimum requirement for foreign suppliers before their application to export to Australia is considered.

<p>15. We need an Import Risk Analysis (IRA) done on all applications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Biosecurity Australia (BA) conducts Import Risk Analyses where a potential import could risk the health status of Australian agriculture.○ BA does not consider there is any likelihood of BSE posing a risk to the Australian cattle herd should beef imports occur. BA has therefore ruled out conducting an IRA on new applications in respect of BSE.○ All beef products will continue to be assessed for risks of any other diseases entering Australia.○ Industry requires from Government maximum protection of our industry. If Government deems an IRA necessary in respect of BSE, industry would support it.○ A full risk assessment is being conducted by FSANZ against each application. This is because any risk of BSE is considered a risk to human health, and that is the responsibility of Food Standards Australia New Zealand.
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