

# RED MEAT ADVISORY COUNCIL LIMITED\*

## Media Alert BSE Policy Fact Sheet

### RMAC CALLS FOR CALM IN BSE POLICY DEBATE

26 October 2009

In responding to misinformation in the public arena regarding the Federal Government's recently announced BSE-related policy change, the Chairman of Red Meat Advisory Council Ltd\*, Ian McIvor AM, makes the following points:

CLAIM	RESPONSE
1. We are letting in diseased foreign beef.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ No diseased beef is being 'let in'. To access the Australian market, applications must be made by potential foreign suppliers. These will be assessed individually and on merit, taking into account <i>all</i> of Australia's requirements under existing protocols.</li><li>○ This policy change is BSE-specific, meaning there will be no change to Australia's other import protocols having to be met, including those relating to exotic diseases like Foot &amp; Mouth Disease.</li><li>○ All countries applying to export to Australia will have their animal-health and processing systems assessed. These assessments will be based on requirements that relate to a wide range of factors such as food safety, animal health, surveillance, feeding and slaughter practices. Industry will be closely monitoring this process.</li></ul>
2. We will be flooded with imported beef.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ All countries wishing to trade beef into Australia must first make an application, with this being assessed and approved before beef is shipped (see under point 1).</li><li>○ With the US for example, in the five years prior to the ban being imposed in 2004, 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. There is no reason to believe this policy change will dramatically affect these import levels.</li><li>○ The A\$ is high but even as late as 17 August 2009 US prices for Choice cuts of tenderloin, striploin, ribeye and rump were on par or slightly higher than Australian MSA prices for the equivalent cuts.</li></ul>

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\* 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>Freight to Australia would assist in offsetting any price reductions resulting from currency movements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Australia competes effectively on price with the US in major markets throughout the world.</li> </ul>
3. We are jeopardising our clean image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Major beef-trading countries around the world now recognise modern science relating to BSE and have adjusted 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.</li> <li>○ Australia's requirements will be stricter than those applied by OIE and NZ.</li> </ul>
4. We are risking our access to overseas beef markets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NZ access has been unaffected by the modernisation of its policy three years ago.</li> <li>○ 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.</li> <li>○ This policy adjustment will not affect our existing 'Negligible BSE Risk' status by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and so will remain more favourable than a number of our competitors, such as the US and Canada, which are 'controlled BSE risk' countries.</li> </ul>
5. Consultation was inadequate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ While it was a Government decision, it did involve RMAC prior to the announcement.</li> </ul>
6. Industry requested the change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For some years Government has been requested by overseas countries to review this policy.</li> <li>○ Industry's position in support of this policy being reviewed against sound scientific principles has remained unchanged for four years.</li> <li>○ 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.</li> </ul>
7. We are reacting to overseas pressures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recent indications of possible WTO action have brought the matter to a head.</li> <li>○ 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.</li> </ul>
8. The rigour of the science is questionable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 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.</li> <li>○ Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Jim Bishop, has stated publicly:</li> </ul>

	<p>“...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”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Professor Mathews’ findings are consistent with a multitude of scientific reports around the world supporting such an approach.</li> </ul>
<p>9. We are going to be worse off.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The opposite is the case. The old (existing) policy clearly states “...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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>all</i> beef could be removed from <i>all</i> domestic shelves at enormous expense, crippling the industry, and</li> <li>- foreign markets could reciprocate by locking us out without scientific justification. Around two-thirds of our beef production is exported, making this a critical issue.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>10. Industry’s position is being driven by multinationals in the processing sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Industry’s policy is consistent across all sectors, from the producers to the processors.</li> <li>○ Industry’s policy position is based on scientific evidence.</li> </ul>

Mr McIvor concluded by emphasising the extent to which BSE has diminished as an issue around the world. This is underpinned by the following excerpt from OIE data on incidents:

- at its peak in 1992, 37,280 cases in the UK alone
- in 2001, 831 cases worldwide (plus 1,202 in the UK)
- in 2008, 88 cases worldwide (plus 37 in the UK)
- so far in 2009, 11 worldwide (plus 7 in the UK).

(OIE: [http://www.oie.int/eng/info/en\\_esbmonde.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/info/en_esbmonde.htm) )

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