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Red Meat MoU Review Taskforce  
Red Meat Advisory Council  
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Via email: [redmeatmou@rmac.com.au](mailto:redmeatmou@rmac.com.au)

Dear Taskforce members

**Green Paper for the Red Meat Memorandum of Understanding**

RSPCA Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the review of the Red Meat Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Rather than comment on a particular model that might be suitable for the red meat industry to ensure appropriate representation, governance and accountability, RSPCA Australia has limited our submission to brief comments on key animal welfare aims and outputs that we expect the industry to achieve within the framework and arrangements that may eventuate from this process.

The review of the MOU is an opportunity to consider a structure for the red meat industry that is based on a whole-of-chain approach which ensures farm animals are raised, transported and slaughtered in an ethical manner.

Yours sincerely,



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## **RSPCA Australia submission**

### **Red Meat MoU Review**

Rather than comment on a particular model that might be suitable for the red meat industry to ensure appropriate representation, governance and accountability, RSPCA Australia has limited our submission to brief comments on key animal welfare aims and outputs that we expect the industry to achieve within the framework and arrangements that may eventuate from this process. In no particular order:

#### **A focus on animal welfare research, development, extension and adoption**

It is widely acknowledged that livestock industry research, development and extension is important to the long-term viability of the sector. Improving animal welfare must be a priority in industry research programs. An essential aspect of industry and government-funded research is peer-review and publication of research results. This will ensure transparency and accountability, particularly where the research has involved expenditure of public money. We would also recommend that rural R&D corporations consider the introduction of external community and animal welfare representatives to advisory committees involved in overseeing the expenditure of public money on public good research projects including those involving animal welfare. Of particular importance, is the need to address barriers to adoption of new technologies or improved practices coming from this research. Assuming that research results are readily adopted, ongoing investment in research will ensure that livestock producers have access to best practice technologies that will improve productivity, their long-term viability and, importantly, animal welfare. In that context, the livestock sectors need to ensure their R&D programs reflect an awareness of emerging issues and a responsiveness to growing consumer expectations that may impact their industry.

#### **Collection of data to demonstrate continuous improvement**

There is an urgent need to provide accurate information regarding the type of husbandry practices carried out across industry and the class and number of animals affected. This information should be made publicly available and be kept up-to-date through regular and on-going surveys carried out on a representative sample of producers every few years. This lack of information is particularly evident when Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals are reviewed and converted into Standards and the impact of proposed changes to existing practice is difficult to quantify due simply to a lack of data. An example of how surveys could be conducted and presented is the MLA producer [surveys](#) of sheep and cattle husbandry practices which, although it took a long time to finally be published, present a picture of current practice. Without data, industry is unable to demonstrate its commitment to improving practice and is unable to gain or retain the trust of consumers and the general public who are concerned about animal welfare across the supply chain.

#### **Consumer confidence and public trust**

Recent research commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (Futureye 2018 'Australia's shifting mindset on farm animal welfare'), looked at the public's expectations of farm animal welfare and found that 95% of the public, whether from the city, a regional town, or rural area, is concerned about the treatment of farm animals. 29% of people did not trust the information available to them on animal welfare, while 31% felt that the agricultural industry is not transparent about its practices. 65% of respondents were willing to pay more to ensure better conditions and welfare for farmed animals. With regard to particular practices relevant to the red meat industry, the public were moderately to extremely concerned in relation to:

- Withholding food and water from animals for long periods during transportation - 89%
- Performing painful procedures on animals without pain relief - 88%
- The use of hormones for growth promotion - 86%

- The use of antibiotics for growth promotion - 86%
- Live export of farm animals - 84%
- Mulesing - 82%
- Feedlot conditions - 74%
- Dehorning - 71%
- Land transportation of animals - 70%
- Use of bolt guns to make animals unconscious before slaughter - 68%
- Branding - 62%

For livestock production to be sustainable in the long term, consideration needs to be given to these societal concerns about animal welfare. To achieve this, what is needed is a supply chain that believes good animal welfare is an inherent part of livestock production and provides animals with a life worth living: a life that encompasses good nutrition, a suitable living environment, good health, the ability to express innate behaviours, and the opportunity to experience positive affective states.

### **Defending the indefensible**

The Green Paper mentions the need for industry to have a unified response to issues. RSPCA Australia is of the view that a unified response is helpful where there is honest acknowledgement of the various (animal welfare) issues that industry needs to address, that industry is intent on addressing those issues and that the public is kept informed about progress towards achieving these goals. A unified response is not helpful where practices that are clearly unacceptable from an animal welfare perspective continue to be defended. Key examples include the live export of farm animals, the use of battery cages for egg-laying hens, mulesing and other painful procedures, and unstunned slaughter. Industry should accept that maintaining the status quo is not an option when animal welfare is compromised.

### **Supply chain - monitoring and feedback loop**

Prompt feedback from the processor back to the producer is one way in which animal welfare (and health) can be monitored and improved on farm and throughout the supply chain. Whether issues are identified that relate to animal handling or management at the abattoir, at a saleyard, during transport, or on farm, mechanisms to identify issues and enable them to be addressed by the responsible party not only affect product quality but provide a means of demonstrating to the public that, across the supply chain, animal welfare matters. In the interest of transparency, public reporting of the outcomes of this feedback loop should be considered with the aim of communicating improvement over time.

### **Supply chain - stakeholder engagement**

As demonstrated through the Futureye research mentioned earlier, the general public care about the welfare of farm animals. Concern about farm animals increases as the public's knowledge about specific issues increases. The RSPCA is a key source of information for members of the public wanting to know more about farm animal welfare. If the red meat industry is to gain or maintain public confidence, it will, in addition to public attitudes research, need to facilitate ongoing engagement with a range of stakeholders representing various interests, e.g. as has been done for the Beef Sustainability Framework. This engagement needs to be meaningful and industry action should demonstrate that stakeholder views have been heard.

### **Drought, flood, fire preparedness**

The frequency of drought, flood and fire events has been increasing in recent decades and this trend is expected to continue across Australia in the years to come. These are not isolated events; they occur over vast areas across the country and have significant and lasting effects on the land, the people whose livelihoods depend on the land and the farm animals in their care. The red meat industry should continue to

promote drought, flood and fire preparedness strategies which include plans for managing animals on farm, building and maintaining feed reserves, ensuring adequate water supply (in the case of drought or fire), managing the environment, and building up financial reserves. Climate change and the associated increase in drought, fire and flood events, may put in question the viability of livestock production in affected areas.

### **Role of government**

The Futureye research into the public's view on farm animal welfare, showed that the public believe that the Federal Government have a regulatory role to play with 91% of people wanting to see reform to address the regulatory gap - i.e. the public believe the Federal Government rather than state/territory governments should be the key regulator when it comes to farm animal welfare. The red meat industry governance and accountability framework should take into account this public need for a higher regulatory authority to ensure the welfare of farm animals. This highlights the importance of industry being proactive in the development and review of national animal welfare standards that make a meaningful, positive difference to the lives of farm animals from birth through to slaughter and should be seen as a key opportunity to drive change rather than defend lowest common denominator practices.

### **Sustainable livestock production**

The Red Meat MoU Review is an opportunity to consider a framework for a red meat supply chain that truly encompasses the concept of sustainability:

- A supply chain that is supported by a government that takes a leadership role in animal welfare and dedicates resources to progressing national animal welfare standards and animal welfare research.
- A supply chain that is supported by a government that recognises the importance of productive land, access to water and renewable resources to the production of food and therefore places a strong emphasis on climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation.
- A supply chain that acknowledges that food production and consumption should avoid negative environmental, health or social impacts.
- A supply chain that is research-driven and innovative in its use of technology.
- A supply chain that recognises that food loss and food waste is an unacceptable consequence of food production and seeks opportunities to reduce or eliminate wastage at each stage of the chain.
- A supply chain that pays farmers a fair price for the food they produce, that allows farmers to invest in improving infrastructure, to take measures to mitigate the impacts of climate change, to manage their land for future generations, to ensure staff are trained and competent, to provide a high level of animal welfare, as well as earn a decent living.
- A supply chain that recognises that food is valuable because the cost of production needs to take into account all the resources required to produce it and the impact its production has on those resources.
- A supply chain that believes good animal welfare is an inherent part of livestock production and provides animals with a life worth living. A life that encompasses good nutrition, a suitable environment, good health, the ability to express innate behaviours, and the opportunity to experience positive affective states.

**SUBMISSION ENDS**