



# Inquiry into the Definitions of meat and other animal products – Questions on Notice

## Question 1

**Senator WHISH-WILSON:** *You do say in your submission 'in consideration of the health implications of processed food products, any comparisons should be made within the category'. The point there is that a number of meat products are also processed and contain plant based additives and other emulsifiers and other products. Is there any breakdown between those products versus a steak, for example, or a chicken breast?*

**Dr Robertson:** *No, I don't think I could answer that question. Can I take that one on notice?*

## Response

To make comparisons in terms of additives then it is best to compare within the same category and format. For example, a plant-based beef flavoured mince patty with a beef patty.

In comparing products, it will typically be the case that:

1. Both products will have additives in one form or another. These additives will all comply with Food Standards Australian New Zealand (FSANZ) standards.
2. The nutritional quality will vary between the products. This means that, in some instances, plant-based products are not necessarily healthier than meat from a nutritional perspective.
3. A plant-based alternative will have a higher fibre content compared to meat. Consuming adequate fibre is important for optimal gut health, and the average intake of fibre in Australia is well below recommended levels. Consequently, replacing some meat meals with plant-based alternatives may be one approach to increasing fibre intake and improving gut health.
4. The bioavailability of iron from plant sources is lower than iron derived from animal sources, and so individuals who do not consume any animal products may benefit from supplemental iron.

There is also scientific evidence showing high consumption of red meat poses a health risk. This has led to the Australian Dietary guidelines recommending Australians to lower their red meat intake.

Irrespective of whether individuals choose to consume traditional meats, plant-based alternatives or a combination, the most critical factor is ensuring that these are included as part of a balanced diet which also contains quality carbohydrates and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

## Question 2

**Senator WHISH-WILSON:** *This is the last question from me. I have to ask this. Getting back to seaweed, I know there's a co-operative research centre down here in Tasmania that's looking at seaweed for many applications and potentially for plant based foods. Is that something you guys are involved in as well?*

**Dr Robertson:** *I might need to take that one on notice. I'm not 100 per cent sure about our involvement with that CRC. Nearly all of the R&D now being done on Asparagopsis is being contracted through the FutureFeed company, which is our commercial partner. It won't actually be CSIRO partnering with that CRC; it will be FutureFeed, if it is anyone. We can certainly find out about that, given that we are a shareholder in the company and an important R and D partner.*

### Response

CSIRO is not involved in the Seaweed Solutions CRC-P.

CSIRO was an initial partner in the Marine Bioproducts CRC. However, we have no ongoing involvement in this CRC.

## Question 3

**CHAIR:** *Right. What was the initial investment by CSIRO into the fund?*

**Ms Zielke:** *I'll take that on notice, I'm sorry. Just off the top of my head, I'll say that it was around \$50 million but I'll come back and confirm that for you.*

### Response

The initial investment by CSIRO in the CSIRO Innovation Fund (trading as Main Sequence Ventures) was \$30 million.

This investment was funded from revenue from the licensing of a technology (WLAN) and \$70 million in new government funding, provided to CSIRO over 10 years, for investment in the Fund.

## Question 4

**Ms Zielke:** *They're established as independent groups. Obviously, CSIRO, having made that investment in the fund, just like all the other investors, will receive a benefit from that in the long run. So we'll receive a return on our money, the intention being that we can take that return and reinvest it into more science. That's the benefit we get, and that return on investment is returned to the taxpayer.*

*In addition, though, we get the added benefit that the companies we're working with, particularly the small start-ups et cetera, have a pathway to commercialise their products through that particular period. It's not an area where there are many funds in the venture capital market in Australia. That was the purpose, particularly: to try to assist with that. They can only provide venture capital funding for projects that have come out of publicly funded research agencies. That's us, universities and other science agencies.*

**CHAIR:** *Yes. It's an interesting topic. We've just referred a research project to the National Audit Office because, as the committee, we weren't able to get suitable responses about where that money had gone from the peak body, or about whether it had been useful. I'm interested in this, but I don't want to get bogged down in it today—we might do it as part of estimates and get a better understanding of if you put that kind of commitment in, if there's a KPI and what sort of financial return you would expect.*

**Ms Zielke:** *We're happy to take that on notice for you and bring that back to you.*

## Response

The CSIRO Innovation Fund operates as an early-stage venture capital fund. The Fund aims to achieve an internal rate of return of 20 per cent after fees, expenses and carried interest. This target for the rate of return is consistent with other early-stage venture capital funds in the market.

Further details of the structure of the fund are available at note 3.4 of CSIRO's Financial Statements (pages 188-189 of the CSIRO Annual Report 2020-21). The Annual Report can be found at [Annual Report 2020–21 – CSIRO](#).

## Question 5

**CHAIR:** Yes, thank you. Over 23 to 25 July, a CSIRO corporate affairs employees and a CSIRO researcher liaised in an email chain with v2food CEO Nick Hazell titled 'Senate inquiry into food labelling'. In this email, the CSIRO employee, Professor Michelle Colgrave, says she will connect with Phil—presumably Phil Morle—and the fund manager of investment in v2food. Why is a CSIRO employee engaging with a private company and the fund manager who oversees this commercial interest—and I understand it is not a direct commercial interest but through the mixed fund—in that private company about the taxpayer funded agency's submission to this parliamentary inquiry?

**Ms Zielke:** I am uncertain of the answer to that. We might need to take that on notice for the specifics. Kirsten, are you able to assist with that one at all, or should we take it on notice?

**Ms Rose:** I think we should take it on notice.

**Ms Zielke:** Yes, I think we'd need to clarify. I could give you a generic answer—as in, again, we do work with so many people and try to be supportive in relation to it—but I'm happy to take the specific question on notice.

**CHAIR:** I'm trying to understand if this is acceptable behaviour from a taxpayer funded agency appearing before a parliamentary inquiry. Do you believe there could be a perception of a conflict of interest, and concern about that? That's my question on notice.

**Ms Zielke:** We'll come back with that one.

## Response

As part of our legislated functions, outlined in section 9 of the *Science and Industry Act 1949* (Cth), CSIRO works to, amongst other things:

- Assist and further the interests of Australian industry; and
- Disseminate information relating to scientific and technical matters.

These functions require CSIRO to work closely across a range of Australian industries and to inform Members and Senators of CSIRO's current work, typically through the committee process. We also provide scientific rigour to support inquiries.

As Australia's National Science Agency, CSIRO greatly values these roles. We seek to undertake all our legislated roles with impartiality and to maximise our benefit to the nation.

Having reviewed the correspondence in question, we are comfortable that there was been no improper behaviour in this instance. CSIRO can provide assurance that our representations to the committee have been unfettered. Any perception of a conflict of interest is therefore regrettable.