

## Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

### Definitions of Meat and other Animal-related products

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. By way of background, I spent my first 18 years helping on our family beef and dairy farm, and I know how farm animals should be treated and what is required in their raising and slaughter for human consumption. I know there are good farmers, who care about their animals, and I know there are farmers who do not – far too many put cents before sentience. I ceased eating animals when I realised the cattle, sheep, pigs and hens that I came into contact with had the same individual personalities and sentience that I and my pet dogs, cats, horse and budgies have.

#### Term of reference (a) – Product labelling, descriptors

I consider the inquiry to be a frivolous waste of taxpayer money given that two recent prior determinations by the Ministerial Forum on Food Regulation in 2018 and 2019 found that existing labelling regulations are fit-for-purpose.

There has also been a review by the Minister for Agriculture's recent working group that similarly found no appreciable evidence of consumer confusion over plant-based product labelling. And as a consumer of plant-based products myself, I agree.



As can be seen by the image above, plant-based food is invariably clearly labelled, and separated from animal products in supermarket shelves.

<https://minister.awe.gov.au/littleproud/media-releases/labelling-plant-based-products>

In 2020 a peer-reviewed study examined whether consumers were 'confused' by the use of terms such as 'milk' and 'beef'. It concluded that consumers were able to make informed choices when buying plant-based products that use such terms. Thus, the current labelling laws would be unlikely to impair investment or profitability in the meat sector, and the authorities agree. (See links below)

(**Reference:** Jareb A, Gleckel, 'Are Consumers Really Confused by Plant-Based Food Labels? An Empirical Study' (2020) Journal of Animal and Environmental Law)

<https://www.hancockagriculture.com.au/no-plans-to-change-fake-meat-label-laws/>

<https://www.farmonline.com.au/story/7263187/regulators-say-there-are-no-plans-to-change-fake-meat-labels/>

Jennifer Duke (see link below) suggested that the Senator's inquiry might help rather than hinder the burgeoning vegan industry – if the latter were her intention.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/better-labelling-of-plant-based-protein-might-help-not-hinder-the-vegan-industry-20210620-p582kj.html>

Those against plant-based food, fail to acknowledge the reason for its market presence – it is merely there in response to consumer demand for an alternative to animal products, whether for motives of people's health, the sustainability of the environment, or because they oppose intensive farming operations and the slaughter of sentient beings.

The blindingly obvious logic is that the sellers of plant-based food want their products to stand out and be clearly differentiated from animal products; not, as is claimed by some, to masquerade as animal meat, steak, hamburgers etc. Consumers are not being 'tricked' into buying what they think is animal meat, milk or whatever; they are being truthfully presented with plant, and very soon cell-based, alternatives.

When I hear attacks on those who sell alternative protein, I am reminded of George Orwells' dystopian novella, *1984*. In it 'Newspeak' was a fictional language, created to control grammar, restrict vocabulary and to limit an individual's ability to think by introducing new meanings of words to suit the agenda of Big Brother.

As an editor for 30 years, I am constantly fascinated by the way the English language changes and evolves. According to Merriam-

Webster (that esteemed dictionary established in 1828), the earliest meaning of 'meat', dating back to Old English, was simply 'food', especially 'solid food as distinguished from drink'. However, Merriam says 'meat' has been used for non-fleshy things for over a thousand years, and [meat] has numerous shades of meanings in this regard (such as referring to the edible portion of nuts), making it unlikely to be confined to the 'edible flesh of a mammal' anytime soon.

In Merriam, I found banger, hotdog, frankfurter, weenie, pepperoni - all describing a shape and style of meat. I am sure we are all aware that a 'sausage' dog is a dachshund and not destined for the plate! So 'sausage' describes shapes and style as well as food, and it is merely a descriptor.

'Minced meat' is defined as a finely chopped mixture (as of raisins, apples, and spices) sometimes with meat that is often used as pie filling. Or if referring to destruction or annihilation one can use the phrase '*make mincemeat of*'!

'Sausage' and 'burger' have been used to describe vegetarian alternatives for centuries. A Google search reveals that King George V of the UK granted the soy sausage a patent on 26 June 1918! I well recall our Christmas lunches on the farm in the 1950s when our vegetarian great uncle enjoyed slices of Sanitarium 'Nutmeat' loaf while everyone else tucked into chicken. Back in the 1950s my mother had no problems sourcing his nutmeat in the local country town grocer. I have friends who eat animal products, but who also eat Nutmeat, because they enjoy it for a change and consider it to be a healthy and sustainable alternative protein.

Merriam offers two definitions for '**burger**'—'hamburger' and 'a sandwich similar to a hamburger'. Merriam says it does so because people have, for a considerable length of time, been using the word 'burger' in a variety of ways (even though this occasionally makes people sad). Merriam goes on to explain a bit of what we are seeing with the inquiry's terms of reference:

... meat producers aren't too happy with the Beyond Burger and the Impossible Burger. The two plant-based burgers are famous for how well they can substitute for meat - they even "bleed" thanks to

ingredients such as beets, which replicate the colour of a burger's juices. The humble *nutburger* (“a patty containing ground nuts”) may sound like it is a product of modern-day dieting trends, but the word has been in use consistently since the 1930s.

‘Steak’ – According to Merriam’s definitions include:

“a ... slice of a specified meat other than beef,” “a cross-section slice of a large fish,” and “a thick slice or piece of a non-meat food especially when prepared or served in the manner of a beef steak”

Merriam explains, ‘steak’ has found itself applied to edible portions of other animals, and occasionally to non-animalian food, as well. In fine dining restaurants that offer plant-based menu choices, my family has often enjoyed what was described on the menu as ‘Cauliflower steak’. We knew exactly how that would be presented (as a large slice of the vegetable), because ‘steak’ has been a noun in the English language for many centuries - and does not apply only to animal meat. I was delighted to see that renowned chef, Neil Perry, is partnering with the plant-based company V2Food to provide vegan choices at his new restaurant, Margaret. The CSIRO backs V2, which was formed in 2019. Perry is not the only chef doing this. (See link below).

<https://www.businessnewsaustralia.com/articles/neil-perry-embraces-plant-based-meat-with-v2food-partnership.html>

A ‘patty’ is defined by Merriam as a small usually rounded mass of minced food that has been fried. Its synonyms are cake, croquette, cutlet and fritter. Once again it describes size, shape and use of food, not its composition. So, the consumer has an idea what to expect when buying it or ordering it on a menu.

Merriam describes ‘milk’ as the fluid secreted from the mammary glands of female animals (and humans) to nourish their young. But the dictionary goes on to point out that we know that almonds and soybeans don’t lactate - and that for centuries humankind has defined ‘milk’ as:

‘a food product produced from seeds or fruit that resembles and is used similarly to cow's milk’ and ‘a liquid resembling milk in appearance: such as the latex of a plant’.

‘Almond milk’ has been around since the 15th century, and milk has been used to describe the secretion of some plants well before that - ‘milk thistle’, for example. Thanks again to Merriam, I looked up ‘butter’, and the origin of peanut butter:

... first designed for invalids, but now sold with other food products, is made simply by crushing the nuts into a paste and adding water.  
— *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 Jul. 1897 [my emphasis]

Merriam includes a fascinating recipe for ‘Almond Cheese’ and advises:

We have been making **cheeses** from things other than milk for a very long time, and referring to them as *cheese* since at least the 17th century.

Reference: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/food-words-additional-meanings>

My illuminative frolic through English usage demonstrates that producers of animal protein are wrong to assert that certain words ‘belong’ to their products alone. Words belong to everyone. We cannot pick and choose to find meanings to achieve our own ends like Newspeak. Or can we?

I would be fascinated to know what the Senator and the CEO of the National Farmers Federation have to say about a new animal meat product marketed confusingly as ‘lamb-bacon’. (See links below) A farmer has just found a use for the formerly unused ‘lamb bellies’ and now markets it both here and overseas.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-16/australian-farmer-exports-lamb-bacon-to-the-middle-east/100179658>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2020-07-02/lamb-bacon-a-success-for-central-victorian-sheep-farmer/12413722>

A 19 June 2021 press release on the NFF website congratulates the Senator for her inquiry and the CEO Tony Mahar says:

The actions of some manufacturers in continuing to incorrectly label for example, faux meat products as 'bacon' featuring a pig or 'chicken' not chicken is not only potentially misleading to consumers it is an insult to farmers and the extended meat supply chain.

How does 'lamb bacon' fit with the term of reference regarding branding/economic effects, I wonder? Will pork farmers object? Will lamb farmers object?

This example shows the absurdity of trying to nail down the English language and to misappropriate words to suit a single purpose. Indeed, 'truth in labelling' works both ways. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines 'euphemism' as:

A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant.

Simulating Newspeak, NSW farmers at a recent annual meeting passed a motion that the word 'processing' should be used exclusively when referring to the livestock industry rather than the word 'slaughtering'? (See link below) 'Processing' normally refers to processed meats such as salami etc or to canning peaches or making cheese. But, as reported on *The Land* website -

In the interest of community engagement and public image, farmers passed the motion that all relevant parties in livestock industries use the term "processing" in lieu of, and to the complete exclusion of the term "slaughter".

Jack Skipper from the Southern Highland branch who put forward the motion said there was unfortunate connotations with the word slaughter in the animal food chain.

'Processed meat' is thus dead animal meat that has been subject to preservation by smoking or salting, curing or adding chemical preservatives. Sad – but the 'truth' – animals are slaughtered and butchered so people can eat their flesh. Logic dictates that a carcass cannot be 'processed' before it is slaughtered. If you think about it, 'processing' a live animal would be unthinkableably cruel!

<https://www.theland.com.au/story/6291345/farmers-ditch-slaughter-for-public-image/>

It is hypocritical to demand 'truth in labelling' when there is no truth or transparency in agriculture. In fact, the farming sector is at pains to make its operations more secretive. It was behind the 'ag-gag' laws to try to prevent animal activists from exposing cruelty. The farming sector



needs to honestly and transparently engage with the younger generation and to stop playing with words. As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words.

Therefore, I agree with the Senator that it is important that food is labelled correctly. Like Jennifer Duke (quoted on page 2 of this submission), I go to enormous pains at supermarket fridges to read labels and to check ingredients to make sure that I DON'T accidentally buy animal flesh or animal milk! I have found the plant-based products are clearly labelled in such a way that, despite the Senator's claims, I and countless others, are able to make a 'clear distinction' between animal and plant-based products.

But what does the senator think **new cell meat alternatives** should be labelled? After all, they are made from animals, not plants. (See link below)

<https://amp.news.com.au/news/worlds-first-labgrown-meat-factory-opens-in-israel/news-story/e9eb182f3a162984f5b3f2f5deb57ec4>

### **Term of reference (b) – Health implications, unnatural additives and chemicals**

The health risks associated with meat have been well documented for many years. Bacon and other processed meats are known carcinogens. Health authorities advise consumers to limit their intake of meat and eat more vegetables and plant-based food. The recent link below describes the health benefits of reducing animal protein.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/world/the-times/health-and-fitness-the-13-rules-for-a-healthy-heart/news-story/52458982fbc73177b60ed087f1bde5>.

The dietician in the link below concludes that if one's intake of red meat is above health recommendations:

... it might be worth swapping a couple of serves to a mock-meat alternative. Particularly in regards to processed meats

<https://idealn nutrition.com.au/is-mock-meat-healthier-than-real-meat/>

I agree with Ms Duke, whom I quoted on page 2 of this submission, that:

Plenty of store-bought products both vegan and non-vegan alike have undesirable health implications and clearer [labelling] information across the board is helpful.

But she continues, it would be

... economically problematic ... if labelling requirements on plant-based foods were too onerous compared to animal meat products, unfairly tilting consumer preferences in favour of one or the other.

Today greater numbers of people around the globe are choosing to buy vegan products. Clearly that cannot be attributed to consumers buying alternative proteins by accident or misleading labelling. The younger generation, in particular, are worried about the environment and/or animal welfare issues - while the flexitarians, like my nutmeat-eating friend, choose plant-based food as a healthy choice.

I find it deceitful that the terms of reference refer to 'unnatural additives' and 'chemicals' in plant-based protein, given that Australian farmers have a reputation for putting hormones and growth promotants in their cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry and preservatives in processed meats. For example, during recent trade negotiations, British farmers urged their government not to import Australian meat because of its hormone content. And some Australian supermarkets proudly advertise their meat as 'hormone-free' as a selling point.

Animal husbandry also has risks of bacterial contamination - such as salmonella and campylobacter - especially in intensive farm establishments and feedlots where animals are crowded together. Zoonotic diseases like SARS and COVID19 are rampant. Furthermore, widespread antibiotic use in farming has led to multidrug resistant pathogens. (See links below for further information)

<https://www.theguardian.com/food/2021/jun/06/nearly-half-of-australias-cattle-is-treated-with-growth-hormones-is-it-safe-to-eat>

<https://www.abc.net.au/science/slab/antibiotics/agriculture.htm>

[https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubs-jetacar-cnt.htm/\\$FILE/jetacar.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubs-jetacar-cnt.htm/$FILE/jetacar.pdf).

<https://apylr.wordpress.com/2013/07/01/negative-use-of-antibiotics-in-livestock-bioethics/>

To balance the 'truth in labelling' playing field, products containing animal meat or farmed fish should be clearly labelled if creatures have



been subject to antibiotics and or hormones. Likewise labels on sausages and small goods containing preservatives and other additives must clearly say so.

### **Term of reference (c) social and economic impacts, employment etc**

The social and economic impacts of alternative proteins do not have to be a negative for the farming community and manufacturers. The global demand for protein alternatives is growing fast, and opportunities abound. Even traditional animal protein providers like US giants Cargills and Tyson Foods and countries like Brazil are investing in plant-based alternatives. I see lucrative opportunities for Australian farmers when I see what is happening around the world. (See link below)

<https://www.proteinreport.org/plant-based?page=0%2C%2C%2C%2C%2C15%2C%2C%2C%2C%2C%2C%2C%2C%2C%2C%2C26>

I see vast opportunities for young Australian entrepreneurs when I see what Kjetil Hansen has achieved with his plant-based start-up. (See links below)

<https://www.businessnewsaustralia.com/articles/-65m-valuation-gives-melbourne-s-deliciou-a-plant-based-protein-kick-for-whole-foods-market-roll-out.html>

<https://foodmag.com.au/deliciou-plant-based-meat-launches-coles-woolworths/>

Moreover, as the link below points out, almost half of the 200 new plant-based products in Australia are made by local manufacturers who are trying to tap into the growth in global demand. Australia desperately needs more manufacturing industries to bolster its balance of payments – especially after COVID19.

More local manufacturing means more jobs in rural and regional areas. It does not make sense for farmers to grow grains to feed and fatten animals for human consumption, when instead those grains can be fed direct to humans. There is huge potential for grain-growers and other farmer to switch to growing pulses, legumes, whole grains and other ingredients to go into plant-based foods. Thousands of Australian farmers grow protein-rich crops, most of which go to the global commodity market and do not command a premium price; they could switch to value-adding into vegan alternative protein.

<https://www.farmonline.com.au/story/7166530/plant-based-foods-are-growing-on-shoppers/>

Bad farm animal welfare has become the focus of social media and no doubt has adverse social and economic impacts on agriculture. We have seen how the younger generation, in particular, is turning away from animal products. Australian farming organisations and politicians constantly claim that our farmers are the most advanced in the world yet champion a system that continually turns a blind eye to cruelty. They encourage legislators to pass ag-gag laws that foster secrecy and make criminals of those who want to shine the light. That hypocrisy is not lost on the younger generation and other Australians.

As for social impacts, aside from drought and floods, we must not forget the grim psychological outcomes for abattoir workers, who undertake dangerous work on very high-speed production lines. It is emotionally draining work that many Australians cannot face. The workers are often from low socioeconomic backgrounds and/or are temporary visa-holders. Their ability to challenge their working conditions or lobby for more ethical animal welfare in their work practices is therefore severely limited.

In Australia we have seen the misery of hens in battery cages. (The current proposal for a 2035 phase out is unbelievable when the EU, for example, outlawed battery cages in 2012.) We have seen intensive farms where broilers bred to fatten quickly can barely stand up before slaughter. We have seen indoor farms where ducks never swim; we have seen filthy overcrowded cattle and pig feedlots; intensive dairies milking 800 plus cows, sometimes more than twice daily; we have seen animals exported live on dangerous sea journeys to suffer un-stunned slaughter thousands of miles away in low-welfare countries.

How can Australian farmers be the world's most innovative and welfare conscious when they still macerate live male chicks despite new German technology, Seleggt, that provides an alternative; when hundreds of thousands of male bobby calves are slaughtered as waste product every year despite sexed semen technology that breeds only cows. (See links below) And the list goes on. Big is not beautiful; it causes animal cruelty and unsustainable environmental degradation. So long as farmer organisations and politicians continue to ignore such industrial-scale cruelty, the community will keep turning to alternative

proteins. And images of happy cows or hens or smiling pigs on their products give the lie to their 'truth in labelling' demands.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/30/chick-culling-germany-makes-tech-to-stop-slaughter-of-male-chicks.html>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2015-05-08/sexing-semen-dairy/6455252>

## **Conclusion – Don't get left behind**

Billionaire philanthropists like Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Richard Branson et al acknowledge that planet earth does not have enough land and water to sustainably keep feeding animal protein to the accelerating global population. The CNBC link below says that although US meat producers have lost only 1 per cent of their overall market to date, the declining costs of alternative meat should 'raise their eyebrows'. According to AT Kearney Consultants, plant-based and cultured foods are projected to take a 60 per cent market share of global meat sales by 2040. It is ironic to read in the link below that Nature's Fynd, a new US plant-based start-up, is building a 35,000-square-foot factory on the site of Chicago's former Union Stockyards, the epicentre of the 20th-century meat-packing industry. Thomas Jonas, the chief executive, says his product brings the evolution full circle:

Much as cows, chickens and pigs were domesticated centuries ago as protein sources, "now is the time for this second domestication," Jonas said in a recent interview. "The farming of this microbe [fungus] is an efficient way of producing protein that is just as good."

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/03/bezos-gates-back-fungus-fake-meat-as-next-big-alt-protein-.html>

The writing might appear to be on the wall for Australian meat producers; but I see this as an opportunity for them to get in quickly and research and develop similar products while the industry is still young and emerging.

Tyson Foods, the largest meat processor in the US, says it plans to launch plant-based products in Asia Pacific, including Australia. (See link below)

<https://insidemc.com.au/2021/06/02/tyson-foods-to-launch-plant-based-foods-in-australia/>

Singapore has just offered an undergraduate course directed at developing advanced meat alternatives. (See links below)

<https://www.futurefoodsystems.com.au/byte/singapore-to-offer-first-undergraduate-course-dedicated-to-developing-advanced-meat-alternatives/>

Global hospitality group Accor has partnered with plant-based pork brand Zrou developed by Chinese plant-based company YouKuai. The collaboration will see Accor's hotel brands across Greater China incorporate Zrou to serve diners a variety of plant-based meat dishes.(See link below)

<https://www.greenqueen.com.hk/accor-vegan-pork-china/>

The 21<sup>st</sup> century looks increasingly plant based and cruelty free. Rather than being spent on this backward-looking inquiry, I would much prefer my taxpayer dollars were spent on encouraging the farming community and intrepid entrepreneurs to research and develop these emerging technological advances in agriculture and animal welfare before Australia is left well and truly behind.

**Jan Kendall (July 2021)**