SAFEMEAT Submission: Adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, in particular with respect to foot-and-mouth disease

The SAFEMEAT Partnership welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee inquiry into the adequacy of Australia's biosecurity measures and response preparedness, with respect to foot-and-mouth disease (FMD).

SAFEMEAT is a consultative partnership between industry and governments that represents Australia's red meat livestock and processing industries. SAFEMEAT provides oversight and strategic advice on the red meat and livestock integrity system that protects the safety and disease-free status of Australian red meat. The system includes on-farm assurance and through-chain traceability programs and reflects Australia's commitment to biosecurity and food safety.

This submission focuses specifically on the livestock traceability aspect of biosecurity.

A robust and nationally consistent animal identification and traceability system, as part of the red meat sector's overarching integrity system, plays a significant role in Australia's national biosecurity system. Industry and government commitment to maintaining traceability systems and conducting compliance and enforcement activities form a strong foundation for both biosecurity preparedness and response. These activities provide the ability to efficiently identify and trace affected animals during a biosecurity response in a timely manner, and are crucial to safeguarding Australia's enviable biosecurity status.

Since 2018, at the request of National Biosecurity Committee (NBC), SAFEMEAT has developed recommendations to enhance the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) - Australia's system for the identification and traceability of foot and mouth disease susceptible species.

This work included the report, '*Reform recommendations for Australia's livestock traceability system*' (the report)* submitted to NBC in March 2020, outlining five interdependent traceability reform recommendations:

1. **Recommendation 1** – a national statutory body or regulatory authority be established and be made responsible for managing Australia's livestock traceability system, including;

    -   setting and monitoring standards and requirements

    -   coordinating national compliance and enforcement; and

    -   education and extension

2. **Recommendation 2** – Investment be made into a traceability and data management system that will have the capability to handle all livestock species.

3. **Recommendation 3** – National mandated digital/electronic identification of all livestock species be phased in beginning in 2021 and be complete no later than 2025.

4. **Recommendation 4** – The cost of establishing these recommendations be shared between all levels of government and industry and that a long term sustainable funding mechanism be established to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the system.

5. **Recommendation 5** – That a formal consultation Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) be undertaken to further scope the feasibility and costs associated with the preceding recommendations in order to present a comprehensive paper to AGSOC and AGMIN. All industries who provided feedback to this paper are supportive in principle of the recommendations.

The report urges immediate action to make improvements to Australia's livestock traceability system and to ensure we have the critical infrastructure in place to enhance Australia's biosecurity preparedness and meet future challenges. Most importantly, the report represents national industry consensus on a pathway forward, and an enormous amount of goodwill across the supply chain and between industry and government stakeholders.

In addition, SAFEMEAT completed two key reports* to be used as evidence to support the recommendations:

- NLIS Sheep & Goats Traceability Evaluation report: *A comparison and evaluation of traceability of electronic and visual identification in NLIS (Sheep & Goats) in a segment of the supply chain* (Evaluation Report)

- Centre for International Economics (CIE) report: *Improving traceability for sheep and goats - Update of the 2010 NLIS (sheep and goats) Business Plan* (CIE Report) and response to the report by the SAFEMEAT Sheep Traceability Working Group (STWG Response).

Both reports clearly demonstrate the need to improve the current sheep and goat traceability system operating across Australia and reinforce the rationale behind SAFEMEAT's recommendations for system wide traceability reform.

SAFEMEAT acknowledges that work is currently underway at the request of agricultural ministers to implement SAFEMEAT's recommendations, specifically focussing on nationally mandated electronic identification for sheep and goats, and the establishment of a framework for managing the Australian livestock traceability system.

SAFEMEAT's recommendations are vital to ensuring positive biosecurity, integrity and traceability outcomes for Australia. Improved traceability systems will ensure that Australia can respond quickly and effectively to biosecurity incidents and minimise the potentially devastating impacts on industry, the environment, and the Australian public. SAFEMEAT has highlighted that there is significant risk associated with inaction, particularly in the context of FMD.

If implemented, SAFEMEAT's recommendations will ensure that the integrity of Australia's livestock industries is upheld, set a foundation that will fulfil the biosecurity objectives of the Commonwealth government, and cement Australia as the global leader in livestock biosecurity and traceability systems.

Please do not hesitate to contact SAFEMEAT via the SAFEMEAT Secretariat at safemeat@awe.gov.au if you wish to discuss this submission.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this process.

Kind regards

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*Copies of SAFEMEAT's Report *Reform recommendations for Australia's livestock traceability system*, the *Evaluation Report*, the *CIE Report* and the *STWG Response* can be obtained by contacting the SAFEMEAT Secretariat on