

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

8 April 2013

Dear Secretary

Senate inquiry - Beef imports into Australia

RSPCA Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the Senate inquiry into beef imports into Australia. We will limit our submission to addressing the matter referenced under (e) in the terms of reference: “the adequacy of Australian food labelling laws to ensure Australian consumers can make a fully informed choice on Australian meat product”.

RSPCA Australia believes that consumers would benefit from the provision of full and accurate information about the production method used for the animal products they buy to enable them to make informed purchasing decisions. This is true for both domestic as well as imported product.

When it comes to imported animal product, at the very least, the Australian Government should ensure that the standards of animal husbandry and management - be that on-farm, during transport and at slaughter - are equivalent to Australian standards. In the case of beef imports, this would mean equivalency with the:

- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines - Cattle (currently under development);
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines - Land transport of livestock; and
- Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines - Livestock at processing establishments (currently under development).

With regard to religious slaughter standards, RSPCA Australia believes that the slaughter of fully conscious animals is inhumane and completely unnecessary. Imported meat products that are derived from animals that have not been stunned prior to slaughter must not be permitted.

In addition to meeting Australian standards, imported product must also be labelled in a manner that allows consumers to identify the housing system provided and the range of conditions under which the animals have lived. Product labels should give consumers the confidence that certain minimum standards have been met. This means that the product label and, indeed, the overseas production practices must be underpinned by a recognised certification scheme that is regularly audited to ensure standards are maintained.

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Consumers are becoming increasingly discerning towards the ethical issues surrounding food production and given that there are significant differences in the welfare of animals exposed to different production methods, we believe that accurate labelling of animal products should be given high priority. Accurate and independent product labelling will provide consumers with reliable information on the production system employed and allow them to make an informed choice.

Yours sincerely

Dr Bidda Jones
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RSPCA Australia