



19 April 2021

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: jsct@aph.gov.au

Inquiry into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

I am writing on behalf of the Australian red meat and livestock industry in response to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties inquiry into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP).

Our industry is supportive of RCEP and particularly its enhanced trade facilitation outcomes. RCEP is set to provide a single set of rules and procedures for accessing preferential tariffs across the region - rather than utilisation of the slightly different rules / procedures existing via the 10 different FTAs applicable to the 15 RCEP members.

RCEP will also help promote more modern customs procedures - which according to DFAT will “encourage predictability, consistency, and transparency in the application of customs laws and regulations, and promote efficient administration of customs procedures and expeditious clearance of goods”. This is a welcome initiative.

The ability of RCEP to provide additional avenues for tackling non-tariff barriers is also encouraging - with NTB’s amongst RCEP members impacting the Australian red meat industry to the tune of \$1.6 billion per annum. The promotion of compliance with WTO rules and further improvement in cooperation and transparency are useful inclusions.

However, given Australia has existing free trade agreements (FTA) with all 15 current signatories, RCEP did not deliver any additional market access gains (one of industry’s key trade reform priorities) – with the previously agreed tariff commitments for Australian red meat, including tariff reduction / elimination schedules, remaining as previously negotiated with each party.

Disappointingly, India, an original RCEP negotiation member, was not in a position to sign the RCEP Agreement in 2020. As India is currently not amongst Australia’s suite of bilateral FTA partners, the opportunity for Australia to deepen and strengthen trade ties with India, via RCEP, was missed.

As India offers strategic benefits, not only to the broader Australian economy but also for Australian red meat, our industry is strongly supportive of, and requests that, the Australian Government re-engage on comprehensive trade talks with India at the earliest opportunity - either bilaterally or via India’s potential future accession to RCEP.

Overall, the Australian red meat and livestock industry recommends that the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties endorse the RCEP agreement – and that binding treaty action be taken without delay.

Yours sincerely

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