

Chapter 1

The reference

1.1 On 27 February 2013, the following matters were referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report by 17 June 2013:

- (a) the possible imminent importation of beef products from countries whose cattle herds have bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and/or foot-and-mouth disease (FMD);
- (b) the processes undertaken by Australian government agencies in determining risk to consumers and industry and the adequacy of such processes;
- (c) the lessons to be learnt from the recent contamination of the beef supply chain with horse meat throughout Europe and its implications for Australian consumers and industry;
- (d) the likely implications of allowing imports of beef from BSE and FMD countries on Australia's international reputation and standing as the world's safest exporter of beef;
- (e) the adequacy of Australian food labelling laws to ensure Australian consumers can make a fully informed choice on Australian meat products; and
- (f) any related matters.¹

1.2 On 17 June 2013, the Senate extended the committee's reporting date to 5 July 2013.²

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* on 6 March 2013 and on the committee's webpage. The committee also invited the State and Territory governments and interested organisations and individuals to make submissions to the inquiry.

1.4 The committee received fourteen submissions, several answers to questions taken on notice by witnesses and some additional correspondence and information. A list of submissions, correspondence and additional information may be found at Appendix 1.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, 27 February 2013, p. 3675.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, 17 June 2013, p. 3992.

1.5 A public hearing was held in Canberra on 17 May 2013. A list of witnesses who gave evidence at the inquiry is attached as Appendix 2. A proof copy of the *Hansard* transcript of the hearing was posted to the committee's website. The references to the pages of the *Hansard* transcript in this report are to the proof *Hansard*, which may be different from those of the official transcript.

Structure of the report

1.6 In the following chapters the committee:

- provides some background to the matters that are the subject of the reference (Chapter 2); and
- discusses key issues raised during the inquiry (Chapter 3).

Acknowledgments

1.7 The committee thanks those individuals and organisations who made submissions and those who gave oral evidence. Their input greatly assisted the work of the committee.