

Chapter 1

Introduction

Terms of reference

1.1 On 19 March 2008, the following matter was referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport for inquiry and report by 4 September 2008:

Concerns in relation to meat marketing, with particular reference to the need for effective supervision of national standards and controls and the national harmonisation of regulations applying to the branding and marketing of meat.

Conduct of inquiry

1.2 Following the referral of the inquiry, the committee advertised the reference in the *Australian* on 26 March 2008. The committee also wrote to a number of key stakeholders inviting submissions. The committee received 69 written submissions from state and federal government departments, key organisations and stakeholder groups and individuals. A list of written submissions is included at Appendix 1.

1.3 The submissions received raised a number of issues in relation to meat marketing, including:

- incidents of hogget and/or mutton being substituted for lamb;
- the use of dentition as the primary determinant of animal as lamb;
- the need for uniform domestic meat branding, grading, quality and labelling; and
- the need for a uniform approach to the labelling of imported meat products – specifically pork.

Scope of the inquiry

1.4 While the committee's terms of reference relate to meat marketing generally, the committee decided to focus the inquiry, in the first instance, on issues relating to lamb marketing, particularly in light of concerns that some processors are substituting hogget and young sheep for lamb. Organisations and individuals who had provided submissions were advised of the committee's decision in this regard.

1.5 The committee notes that submissions to the inquiry have raised a range of similar issues in relation to the marketing of other meat products. The committee intends to extend its inquiry to consider these issues. The committee proposes to table a final report by 30 June 2009.

1.6 The committee held public hearings in Canberra on 10 June and 9 July 2008. It heard evidence from a number of witnesses, including representatives of the Sheepmeat Council of Australia, the Australian Meat Industry Council, Meat and Livestock Australia Limited, AUS-MEAT, a number of NSW meat processors, and three state authorities – the NSW Food Authority, SafeFood Production Queensland and the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority.

1.7 Officers from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service provided evidence at the 10 June hearing and an officer from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission appeared at the 9 July hearing. A complete list of the witnesses who appeared at the hearings is included at Appendix 2.

1.8 The relevant submissions and the *Hansard* transcripts of the committee's hearing/s are available on the parliament's homepage at <http://www.aph.gov.au>.

Acknowledgements

1.9 The committee appreciates the time and work of all those who provided oral and written submissions to the inquiry. Their work has assisted the committee considerably in its inquiry.