

Issue

In October 2009, the Federal Government announced a change in Australia's Bovine Spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) food safety policy for imported beef and beef products. The new policy came into effect on 1 March 2010. In March, after considerable community concern, the Government announced that in addition to a food safety assessment by FSANZ, an Import Risk Analysis will be conducted by Biosecurity Australia.

NSW Farmers' Association position

- That a full Import Risk Analysis and In-Country inspection is undertaken for any prospective importing country, before any importation of beef and by-products can commence.
- That no beef or beef by-products be imported into Australia without the importing country having the equivalent production protocols that Australian producers are subject to (eg. Full lifetime traceability, residue testing, food safety declarations, etc).

Background

- In 1988, following the identification of BSE in the United Kingdom, Australia suspended imports of live cattle from the UK and Ireland. In 1991, these restrictions were extended to include France and Switzerland following outbreaks in these countries.
- In 2001, legislation was introduced to prohibit the feeding of all mammalian material to ruminants. In addition, a national surveillance strategy was implemented to monitor approximately 9 million cattle annually.
- Changes introduced on 1 March 2010 replaced the ban that was imposed on beef imports from countries that have previously experienced a BSE outbreak with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) risk assessment methodology to determine whether beef or beef products from a country represent a risk to the health of Australian consumers. Under this policy, countries would have to apply and be assessed by Australian Government Authorities, demonstrating that they have in place, and appropriately monitor, controls necessary to ensure that beef and beef imports imported to Australia are derived from Animals free of BSE. Based on this assessment, Government Authorities will decide whether to allow a country with prior cases of BSE to import beef to Australia.
- On the 8 March 2010, the Federal Minister for Agriculture announced that in addition to a food safety assessment, Biosecurity Australia will conduct an Import Risk Analysis for fresh beef (chilled or frozen) from countries other than New Zealand.

Reasons for Government policy change

- Overall knowledge of the disease has improved
- The disease has been controlled through measures such as bans on the use of risk materials that may contain prion and bans on feeding meat meal to ruminants.
- The change in policy brings Australia into line with other countries (including New Zealand, Korea and Japan) and internationally agreed science and rules, reducing the possible threat of retaliatory trade actions.
- Under the previous BSE food safety policy for imported beef, if there was a BSE case in Australia, domestic beef could have been removed from retail shelves across the country.

Trade implications

- The Australian beef industry exports approximately 68% of all beef production.
- Introducing the risk assessment process will bring Australia into line with other major trade partners.

If you have any queries please contact the Association at emailus@nswfarmers.org.au