



National Retail Council Report

By Kerry Melrose

The National Retail Council has a range of important matters on which it is representing members at this time.

Meat and Livestock Australia has the responsibility to promote the domestic meat industry. Figures released for the Domestic Task Force showed that there has been no increase in beef sales on the domestic market since 2006. During this time The National Retail Council has made repeated representations to MLA on the lack of targeted promotional activity and has made many recommendations on how this should be addressed. The concern on the Council is now vindicated with the lacklustre performance on beef sales.

The Domestic Marketing Plan for the year 2009 – 2010 has been released by MLA at the Domestic Task Force in Sydney which I attended along with Brendon Watts and Ron Stapleton. This Plan addresses many of the concerns which have been expressed to MLA by the National Retail Council. With an increase in the available funding from \$23m in 2008 – 2009 to \$25.5m in 2009 – 2010 MLA has increased the Beef Marketing expenditure to allow for three promotions instead of two in the current year. Council supported the increased expenditure and the contracting of Laurie Lawrence as the “face of beef” for the MLA promotional activity. Council considers it a major failure that the MLA has set a goal of no increase in beef sales in this budget period. If this outcome is realised the beef sales will be flat in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009. Hardly a successful promotional program when chicken and pork sales continue to increase. Council firmly believes that, with the right MLA promotional program, the sales of beef will increase and resolved that this be further addressed with MLA.

Listeria testing continues to be a major issue for the Retail and Smallgoods sector. AMIC attended a forum in February which discussed developments in the science behind listeria and the possible effects on mandatory testing. The issue particularly discussed is products in which listeria will not grow. The forum particularly addressed formulation changes to products with the possible outcome that listeria growth rates can be reduced or stopped in a wider range of products. This has an important long term outcome for listeria testing and product recalls. While much work is required, Council supported the developments and will continue to work with the wider industry on this matter.

The AMIC Retail Strategic Plan was approved by Council and this will be a part of the Meat Industry Strategic Plan (MISP) for the 2010 – 2015 years. AMIC has attended several meetings which are developing the MISP and ensuring that the Retail position is well represented. This is a complex process but, when completed, provides the platform for the major issues and promotional activity to be delivered through MLA for the next five years.

The Award Modernisation process continues. AMIC was successful in the latter part of 2008 in having independent butchers excluded from the general Retail Award. This required a strong case to be presented by AMIC to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) to argue that independent butchers do much more than simply sell meat. Supermarket butchers could not provide such an argument and these are now covered by the general Retail Award.

AMIC has now submitted to the AIRC a modern Meat Award which preserves the hours and conditions of the current Retail Award. The National Retail Council has approved this modern Award. The Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union has provided a submission which opposes the spread of ordinary hours (particularly Sunday) and AMIC will address this with its presentation to the AIRC in late March. This is an important matter for the Council because if AMIC is unsuccessful in having a separate modern Meat Award the AIRC will decide an applicable award.

The New South Wales Government has taken Meat Labelling into the national arena by having it referred to the Primary Industries Ministerial Council. The National Retail Council anticipated this move and resolved to oppose this strategy.

Council has made representations to Government on this proposed introduction of the use of the AUS-MEAT language at the point of sale. AMIC supports the language at the back of shop as it is an industry purchasing language not a retail language. To move to a customer language will confuse customers, play into the hands of the supermarkets where there is not the butcher support that the independent butchers offer and add cost to independent butchers for audit and accreditation to AUS-MEAT. AMIC has argued that MSA is the guarantee for eating quality and should be recognised by Government.

Q Fever Vaccine Program

The Federal Government recently approved funding to the Federal Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), which has purchased over 60,000 doses of the Q Fever vaccine (Q Vax) for the 2009/2010 financial year and further doses to continue in the future. The vaccine will be free and will be available to all people working in the Agricultural/Meat and Livestock industry.

All other costs, such as the delivery from CSL Ltd supply depots, doctor's fees to administer the vaccine and the preliminary screening tests will still have to be paid by the vaccine recipient.

This program is open to abattoir workers, livestock workers, farmers and their families, shearers, livestock transport workers, veterinarians, doctors, wool classers and saleyard workers including buyers and auctioneers.

AMIC welcomes this response to its many requests to the current and previous Ministers to assist the meat industry in both the availability and the cost of Q Vax.

AMIC has continually advised members not only of the importance of Q fever testing, and, if required, vaccination, for employee safety from the disease. In response the meat processing industry has been recognised by DoHA as one of the “best vaccinated groups compare to the other sectors in the Agricultural/Meat and Livestock industry.”

In order to expand the awareness and importance of vaccinating against the disease the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) will be responsible for the formulation of a communication strategy to the named industry sectors through organizations such as AMIC as well as supplying information and training packages to doctors.

Members will be provided with further information on this program over the next few months. If you have any questions on this matter please contact your nearest AMIC office.

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