



20 December 2023

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COVID-19 Response Inquiry Panel
Australian Government
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

Dear Panel

Re: COVID-19 Response Inquiry (the Inquiry)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this Inquiry, which aims to identify lessons learned to improve Australia's preparedness for future pandemics.

Our submission highlights the experiences of our organisation and the Australian pork industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, giving regard to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

Australian Pork Limited (APL) and the Australian pork industry

APL is the peak national representative body for Australian pork producers. It is a producer-owned company combining marketing, export development, research and innovation and strategic policy development to assist in securing a profitable and sustainable future for the Australian pork industry.

The domestic pork industry is a vital part of Australia's food supply chain, with pork the second most consumed meat in Australia and all fresh pork consumed in Australia domestically sourced.

The Australian pork industry contributes around \$6 billion in gross domestic product to the economy and supports 34,634 jobs. The industry is domestically focused with around 90% of our production providing high quality protein for Australians. The value of the 10% exported in 2022/23 was \$182 million. In 2022/23, the industry produced 453,426 metric tonnes of pork.

Our industry is national, with producers raising pigs at 6,314 sites across Australia (at 1 July 2023). The commercial sow herd is predominantly located in regional areas of Queensland, Victoria, SA, WA and NSW.

APL holds a number of roles on behalf of the industry:

- The pork Research, Development and Extension organisation leading research in partnership with the Australian government and research community
- The marketing arm of the pork industry managing national campaigns to raise awareness of high quality Australian pork and smallgoods
- The peak body for the Australian pork industry, representing pork within the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and other representative frameworks
- Leading the pork industry's Sustainability Framework and part of the sector-wide collaborative effort to develop an Australian Agricultural Sustainability Framework, coordinated by the NFF on behalf of the Federal Department of Agriculture, and
- The industry signatory to the Emergency Animal Disease Response Deed (EADRA).

COVID-19 pandemic and impacts on the Australian pork industry

The Australian pork industry is a national industry, part of the domestic (and overseas) food supply chain and supported by essential workers.

Workforce and supply chain constraints, animal management and maintaining business continuity through the supply chain were key challenges and priorities for the industry through the pandemic.

It was vital that APL was able to work with Government to safely maintain business continuity as much as possible, across jurisdictional borders. This ensured safe protein supply to consumers could be maintained, and the wellbeing of animals in our care upheld.

Regular communication with Government was important to ensure the industry and supply chain were understood and responses therefore informed. In particular, throughout the COVID response APL highlighted key considerations such as:

- Australian producers and associated supply chain businesses are extremely well placed to maintain a safe, affordable and orderly supply of pork;
- Any disruption to the workforce, processing capacity or transport represented significant risks to animal welfare and supply capacity extending to impacts on farm gate price stability;
- The entire pork supply chain has particularly robust hygiene and biosecurity practices, in line with ongoing vigilance against animal disease and food safety risks;
- Our workforce is highly specialised and alternative employment would be difficult to obtain should supply chains be suspended;
- Suspension of pork exports, for example due to freight disruptions, presented food security impacts in key markets like Singapore and local impacts on producers and supply chain businesses, especially in WA.

The industry and supply chain demonstrated resilience through significant challenges and uncertainty. The published article¹ "Impact of COVID-19 on the Australian pork industry" details experiences of the early pandemic (2020).

Some of the lingering impacts of the pandemic include skills and labour shortages, with longstanding challenges exacerbated during COVID-19. This has impacted industry research and innovation capability with a shortage of research students still being experienced.

Key priorities and Government responses

Key priorities and support APL advocated for, to minimise impacts, included:

- Clear, simple and timely communications from Government around changing rules and restrictions.
- Consistency of rules and guidelines between jurisdictions to support business continuity (movement of pigs and pork product often requires border coordination).
- Facilitation of cross-border movement of essential workers and goods. In particular:
 - The 'Agricultural Workers Code'² to facilitate a nationally consistent approach to the efficient movement of people, animals and goods.
 - Prioritisation of essential workers to enter Australia from overseas.
- Adequate access to testing and provision of subsidised Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) for agriculture and regional areas, and guidance on responsible RAT use.
- Nationally consistent (science-based) exemptions for essential and critical workers.
- Air freight support via the International Freight Assistance Mechanism.

APL supported the effort made by all levels of government to align against a nationally consistent response via the development and implementation of 'COVID-19 Recovery Plans', aligned to the COVID-19 National Plan³.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this Inquiry. APL valued the work undertaken by Governments throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in order to keep people safe and minimise impacts on businesses. Please contact Policy Manager, Angela Bradburn if required on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,



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Chief Executive Officer

¹ D'Souza DN, Dunshea FR. Impact of COVID-19 on the Australian pork industry. Anim Front. 2021 Feb 5;11(1):19-22 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7863340/>

² <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/agriculture-workers-code.pdf>

³ <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/national-plan-to-transition-australias-national-covid-19-response-july2021.pdf>