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Your voice.
Your future.**

Lamb Definition Consultation Paper



Purpose:

The Sheepmeat Council of Australia (SCA) is consulting with producers and supply chain stakeholders to determine whether the current definition of lamb requires changing.

The lamb definition is currently:

Meat derived from a female, castrated male, or entire male ovine animal that shows no evidence of eruption of permanent incisor teeth.

The proposed change of the lamb definition will:

Allow the eruption of permanent incisors, but without either incisor being in wear.

Why the lamb definition?

The Australian lamb industry has consistently embraced change to capitalise on opportunities, such as the adoption and incorporation of objective criteria into breeding programs.

This adaptability, is the cornerstone of a professional, standalone industry that places great importance on the quality, safety and integrity of its products. Demonstrative of the hard work and effort Australian sheep producers have invested in the industry, Australia's lamb and sheepmeat sector is a case study of best practice agricultural development. Valued at approximately \$4.83 billion to the Australian economy, the lamb and sheepmeat sector has grown a resounding 250% since 1994 (\$1.96 billion).

Reflective of industry's significant investment in promoting the category, lamb is now an established brand that is highly valued by both Australian and international consumers in over 100 countries. As industry's most valuable brand, it is important that it continues to evolve and reflect developments in the science to continue to meet the needs of both consumers and producers. This ethos of information-based decision making, is embodied in the continued successful evolution of lamb marketing campaigns which adapt to the ever-changing consumer environment.



Fit for purpose language:

The introduction of meat and livestock specification language that is 'fit for purpose', allows for supply chain alignment that generates price signals from consumers back to producers.

Alignment will facilitate producers being paid for the attributes that consumers most value at the dinner table – effectively bridging the divide that currently exists between livestock and meat markets. By bridging this divide and producing what consumers value, industry will grow the price premium Australian sheep producers receive for the quality, safety and integrity of their products.

Key priorities being progressed under the fit for purpose language program include:



- **Delivering value from the yearling category:** Meat science research has validated what many producers already know – certain cuts from a yearling animal provide eating quality value equal to lamb. The introduction of a yearling sheepmeat category underpinned by investment in brand development and marketing provides an opportunity to broaden the market opportunities for lamb. A marketing strategy can be developed to drive the price discovery point of certain cuts from yearling animals to appropriately reflect their cuts based eating quality attributes.



- **Identifying opportunities in the young lamb category:** At SCA request, industry service providers have commenced meat science research into identifying the different product attributes that exist between new season and carryover lambs. SCA plan for this research to provide a basis for further developing category specific branding opportunities and the development of marketing strategies to manage the new season and carryover product in retail displays.



- **Fit for purpose language review:** Upon the completion of the lamb meat descriptor review and subsequent affirmation of the basic sheepmeat categories, SCA will initiate a review of sheep meat language across all categories of livestock, production systems, trade and consumer language that will provide recommendations for industry to achieve best practice.

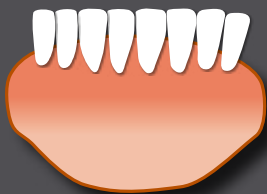
Avoiding the price cliff face:

Lamb is currently defined as a *female, castrated male, or entire male ovine that shows no evidence of eruption of permanent incisor teeth*. Under this definition, as soon as an animal has lost a milk tooth it is reclassified to the mutton category. Consequently, the re-categorisation encounters a substantial price discount commonly known as the 'price cliff face'.

At the request of lamb producer groups, SCA commissioned agricultural consultancy organisation, Holmes Sackett, to assess the implications of enhancing the definition of lamb so that producers could better manage the 'price cliff face'.

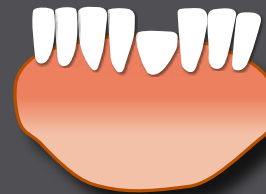
The Holmes Sackett report identified that the New Zealand definition of lamb as a *sheep less than 12 months of age or which does not have any permanent incisors in wear*, could provide an indicator of the maximum time producers have available before they will incur the 'price cliff face'. The New Zealand definition effectively allows the eruption of either or both of the first pair of permanent incisors so long as neither incisor is 'in wear', or in other words, when the mouth is closed, the permanent incisor cannot touch the pad of the upper jaw.

Current definition of lamb



Meat derived from a female, castrated male, or entire male ovine animal that shows no evidence of eruption of permanent incisor teeth.

Proposed definition of lamb



Allow the eruption of permanent incisors, but without either incisor being in wear.

What are the potential impacts ?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



What's in this for producers?

The proposed definition could provide an indicator of the time producers have available before they will incur the 'price cliff face' of lamb being downgraded to hogget or mutton.



What effect would a change in definition have on eating quality of the lamb category?

Meat science research has identified that small changes in the dentition of lamb when tested against those that are about to erupt their teeth [i.e. what is proposed] has little effect on eating quality of the animal (Pethick, 2008).



Would changing the definition improve or decrease our international market access?

The proposed definition, which is already in use in New Zealand, is expected to have no impact on market access. New Zealand currently has access to all international markets that Australia does.



How will compliance with the definition be met?

AUS-MEAT is the national organisation that ensures Accredited Enterprise compliance against the National Accreditation Standards and audits identification and traceability through the Quality Management System. AUS-MEAT slaughter floor monitoring includes dentition assessment and lamb processing procedures that require the dentition of each and every carcass to be examined for the presence of permanent incisor teeth. AUS-MEAT also provides audit services of the New Zealand Quota Compliance Verification Standard under which lamb has the same definition as the proposed change incorporates. SCA envisage, that a similar compliance scheme operated by the New Zealand Meat Board could be introduced into Australia to effectively enforce the proposed definition.



How does this fit with objective carcass measurement and industry proposed investment in DEXA technology?

The lamb definition provides a measurement for producers on-farm and in saleyards when making decisions. Whilst the industry looks to move towards more objective measurements, through the use of OCM technologies, there will, for the near future, still be a requirement for decision making on farm and a definition of lamb related to dentition provides this.



The process



In conjunction with the forward consultation program, SCA will be engaging with regulators to determine a pathway forward for the issuing and control of sheepmeat marks and brands not related to food safety in non-AUS-MEAT Accredited Enterprises. Approximately 15% of the national lamb slaughter is processed through non-AUS-MEAT Accredited Enterprises. These establishments are required to meet a range of different

regulatory and compliance systems across state jurisdictions that, to varying degrees, underpin the practice of lamb branding.

The consultation process has provided SCA with a unique opportunity to capitalise on engaging with the respective federal and state regulators to put forward options for the adoption of one set of rules, across all jurisdictions. If achieved, the harmonisation of all federal and state

compliance schemes underpinning the description of lamb, into one effective compliance scheme to be consistently applied across Australia, would only serve to further enhance the quality and integrity of the lamb category.

Options for harmonisation will be presented alongside the Holmes Sackett final report for consideration by the new SPA Board in February 2018.

“ Have your say ”

It isn't by coincidence the Australian lamb and sheepmeat industry has grown from strength to strength to be the professional and standalone industry it is today.

It has taken commitment and passion from all producers to ensure industry's continued growth, but first and foremost, it has been industry's united approach that has delivered our greatest successes. It is for this reason SCA welcomes all supply chain stakeholders to have their say on whether industry should move to adopt a definition that allows the eruption of permanent incisors, but without either incisor being in wear or maintain the current definition of lamb.

Input can be provided through the following [online survey](#), or alternatively detailed submissions can be made via email to Holmes Sackett at sandy@holmessackett.com.au.

Your feedback will be incorporated by Holmes Sackett into the final report that will be considered by the new Sheep Producer Australia Board in February 2018.

Further information:

For further consideration, the following information papers can be located on the Sheepmeat Council of Australia website:

- McEachern S. 2017. Interim Report – Review of the implications of changing definition of lamb to allow eruption of permanent incisors, but without either incisor being in wear.
- Pethick D. P. 2008. Lamb definition project. Key area 2: Assess the impact of extending the lamb definition on eating quality. Meat and Livestock Australia.
- Sheepmeat Council of Australia 2017. Lamb Brand National Compliance Harmonisation Working Paper.

Sheepmeat Council of Australia:

The Sheepmeat Council of Australia is the representative body for sheep producers in Australia. SCA operates as a prescribed peak industry body under the regulations of the *Australian Meat and Livestock Act 1997*. The core business of SCA is to be the national voice for sheep producers to the Australian Government as well as to provide oversight of levy investment and industry policy development.

Contact SCA 02 6269 5610 or visit www.sheepmeatcouncil.com.au