1st September 2011

National Food Plan Unit
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
PO Box 858
Canberra City ACT 2601
Via Email: nfpsubs@daff.gov.au

The National Food Plan Unit,

Re: Australian Pork Limited’s Supplementary Submission in Response to the National Food Plan Issues Paper – Traceability – Australian Pork Industry Initiatives

Australian Pork Limited (APL) is the peak national representative body for Australian pig producers. We are pleased to provide this supplementary submission, in addition to our submission provided on Monday 25th July 2011, for consideration in development of a National Food Plan. This supplementary submission focuses primarily on traceability and integrity of food. Traceability and integrity of food is crucial to the Australian pork industry and the food industry in general in a growing global market place.

Governments and regulators are concerned with ensuring that the food supply, whether from local or imported sources, poses no risk to consumer health and safety. Traceability is an important component of the government and industry risk management strategy and to verify label claims associated with locally produced product. In many cases consumers, either through loyalty or the belief that local foods are safer and higher quality, will look to the country of origin labelling on a product in making their purchases.

Traceability is also important for maintaining market access in the event of a food safety incident associated with export product. Recently, there have been a number of incidents which have raised questions over the accuracy and effectiveness of existing traceability systems. For example; Chinese milk products, the dioxin scares in the Irish pork industry in 2008 and German animal feed in 2010, Clenbuterol residues in pig lungs in Hong Kong (1998), chloramphenicol residues in Australian pork and maws in Singapore and high levels of lead in pig meat and especially pig livers in WA in 2008. There have also been concerns over product substitution and misleading or incorrect label claims.

Australian Pork Limited, in consultation with producers, processors, regulators and key market, has investigated technologies with the potential to enhance rapid animal and product traceability in the event of an incident which threatens the food supply chain. The technology evaluated was a physiological identification technology, subsequently named ‘Physi-Trace’. Physi-Trace uses isotope ratios, trace elements and chemical markers/organic markers to discriminate between pork samples based on region of origin.
The Physi-Trace research commenced in April 2008 and has involved a number of development and demonstration projects. While still in the developmental stage, Physi-Trace has been demonstrated to a key market (Singapore Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority and Singaporean importer and processor) whereby approximately 20 ‘blind’ samples of Australian pork taken from carcases and retail packs in Singapore were traced to the farm of origin in Australia within a 36 hour period (from the time of receipt of the sample material in the Australian laboratory).

In addition, Physi-Trace has been used for a number of other pork integrity related matters including: rapidly identify the source of ‘suspect’ pork to address the issue on farm, thereby protecting Australian pork markets and consumers; verify country of origin label claims for Australian processed pork products (ham and bacon); and assess label claims relating to ‘Product of Australia’ pork in a key overseas market.

Australian Pork Limited is continuing to work with the Australian industry and regulators in development of Physi-Trace as a ‘cutting edge’ technology to mitigate risks and protect Australian pork markets.

We thank the National Food Plan Unit for accepting these additional comments for consideration in the development of a National Food Plan.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

General Manager, Policy
Australian Pork Limited