



Dear Establishment Management

Re: Workplace Culture in the Export Meat Sector

On behalf of the government-industry Meat Modernisation Working Group (MMWG), we would like to update you on the ongoing work that is being undertaken to modernise the Australian export meat regulatory system, following the \$328 million '*Busting Congestion for Agricultural Exporters*' measure announced by the Australian Government as part of the 2020/21 Budget.

We are pleased to release today material aimed at providing a basis for supporting and strengthening the professional and productive working relationship between export meat establishments and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (the department).

In late 2020, the Meat Modernisation Working Group (MMWG), comprising industry leaders and the department, explored culture, as it related to the existing regulatory relationship between the department and the export meat sector. The workshops were an opportunity for participants to examine the behaviours, attitudes and processes that create concern between the regulator and industry.

Collectively known as the *Workplace Culture in the Export Meat Sector Project*, two key documents have been produced:

The Joint Statement of Intent (JSOI)

The JSOI is intended to define the benchmark for professional and productive behaviours throughout the export meat supply chain, including on plant, between the department and export meat establishments.

Intended efficiencies to be gained include:

- Effective and efficient regulation and stakeholder operations through improved communication and defined communication channels;
- Reduction in disagreement and complaints therefore more efficient use of resources and time; and
- Reduction in risks to the mental health and well-being of all people involved.

The JSOI aims to foster an agreed understanding of the expected standards of behaviour and allows identification of sub-standard behaviour which can be addressed and will serve as a mechanism to build trust between the department and export meat participants.

Feedback and Complaints Handling Process

Aligning with the existing departmental client service charter (<https://www.awe.gov.au/about/commitment/client-service-charter>), a dedicated export meat sector *Feedback and Complaints Handling Process* has been developed to establish clear channels to escalate matters where there is a disagreement with the regulator on plant. The

mechanism is intended to provide a clear process for managing feedback and complaints that are unable to be resolved on-plant. This is a supplementary process to the department's broader feedback and complaints handling process, to provide a single contact point for industry.

It is important to emphasise:

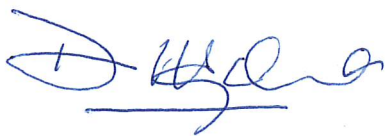
- This process will provide consistency across all establishments in how feedback and complaints are handled;
- The process will uphold best practice complaints management where issues are dealt with at the appropriate level and authority on plant; and
- Issues are to be escalated only when all options for resolving the matter on plant have been exhausted.

The department and leaders of the Australian export meat processing industry are committed to working together to advance opportunities for export meat sectoral success. By embedding a constructive and productive relationship between the department and the export meat processing sector participants it regulates, and by fostering a culture of continuous and forward leaning improvement, the sector and the department will jointly encourage success.

We acknowledge that acceptance and commitment to these new practices will require, in some cases, a shift in culture and that positive change takes considerable time and effort. As such, we will be undertaking engagement sessions with meat export participants to garner feedback on the documents and their effectiveness in embedding a professional and productive working relationship between the Department and export meat participants. You may be invited to participate in activities that will seek to embed positive cultural change within the sector.

We would welcome any feedback or comments regarding this work which can be directed to the department via email to meatmodernisation@awe.gov.au or by telephone to Dr Amy Little on (02) 6272 3707. Alternatively, feedback can be provided to Dr Mary Wu at the Australian Meat Industry Council via email mwu@amic.org.au or by telephone 0458 882 770.

Yours sincerely



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Co-lead, MMWG



Terry Nolan
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Co-lead, MMWG

Australian Government and Meat Industry

Joint Statement on Workplace Culture in the meat sector

Vision – a professional and productive working relationship between the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (the department) and export meat establishments, resulting in the production of meat and meat products that consistently meets trading partner requirements, supports growth in the meat export processing sector and improves international competitiveness and the sustainability of the industry.

Background - The export meat industries are a key sector of the Australian economy. The export meat processing sector will play a key role in realising the aim for the Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector in achieving \$100 billion in farm gate output by 2030.

The department supports industry to meet their commercial goals, by maintaining and expanding market access, by providing a robust regulatory and certification system, and by promoting and facilitating access for Australian products overseas.

The department and leaders of the Australian export meat processing industry are committed to working together to advance opportunities for export meat sectoral success. By embedding a constructive and productive relationship between the department and the export meat processing sector participants it regulates, and by fostering a culture of continuous and forward leaning improvement, the sector and the department will jointly encourage success.

Through a joint industry-department working group, a set of key principles have been agreed, representing how the department and the export meat processing sector will work together:

- ***Ensuring workplace health and safety arrangements*** support staff in performing their workplace duties in a safe environment. This includes a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment, in addition to the proactive management of unprofessional behaviours.
- ***Supporting and encouraging innovation***. Export meat processing establishments are encouraged and incentivised to embed regulatory compliance at the heart of their operations as they seek innovation within their business. In return, the department will actively support and encourage this innovation when regulatory compliance requirements can be maintained and enhanced.
- Both the department and the export meat processing sector will ***act in a transparent manner***, proactively sharing data and information, where appropriate, to support the Australian export meat industry.
- The department will focus on ***embedding regulatory approaches, that support industry competitiveness and sustainability*** to meet trading partner requirements, maximise production, minimise wastage and serve the Australian community through the effective and efficient administration of regulation.

- ***Clear and understandable regulations and rulings*** will provide export meat industry participants with the knowledge needed to comply with regulations.

Examples of two-way positive behaviours can be seen at Appendix 1

To support and embed the above principles across the export meat supply chain, the department has committed to the introduction of a sector-specific complaints management process, the feedback from which will be used to improve its delivery of regulatory activities.

Industry, through peak bodies, will proactively work with its members to ensure identified channels are utilised to provide constructive and balanced feedback supporting a professional and mature workplace culture.

Trends and systemic issues identified through these processes will be reported on an annual basis to the Export Meat Industry Advisory Committee (EMIAC) and will also be communicated across the department's meat program to drive continuous learning and improvement across the network.

ATTACHMENT A

Appendix 1 – the following table provides a non-exhaustive list of two-way positive behaviors. It is intended to illustrate positive workplace culture, applicable to both establishment and government stakeholders.

Cultural theme	Example of positive behaviors (Industry and Department)
<p><i>Ensuring workplace health and safety arrangements</i> support staff in performing their workplace duties in a safe environment. This includes a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment, in addition to the proactive management of unprofessional behaviours.</p>	<p>All staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are appropriately trained in their WH&S obligations and receive appropriate site inductions. • are made aware of and encouraged to use company and departmental complaint escalation processes and contacts when appropriate. • Conduct their interactions in a constructive and respectful way – A zero tolerance approach to intimidation, harassment, or bullying. • call out unacceptable practices when they occur, seek a constructive resolution and take appropriate action if required. <p>WHS requirements and developments are actively discussed at the EMIAC consultative committee, enabling proactive to engage on WH&S requirements and developments</p>
<p><i>Supporting and encouraging innovation.</i> Export meat processing establishments are encouraged and incentivised to embed regulatory compliance at the heart of their operations as they seek innovation within their business. In return, the department will actively support and encourage this innovation when regulatory compliance requirements can be maintained and enhanced.</p>	<p>The market access prioritisation framework is utilised to seek trading partner acceptance of technological innovation as required.</p> <p>Departmental processes are reviewed/updated as technological innovations are accepted and implemented.</p> <p>A transparent alternative technologies approval process is available, to enable consideration of alternate technologies</p>

ATTACHMENT A

<p>Both the department and the export meat processing sector will <i>act in a transparent manner</i>, proactively sharing data and information, where appropriate, to support the Australian export meat industry.</p>	<p>Openly communicates, and empathises with the other party to understand their views/drivers.</p> <p>Staff will actively work to ensure clear, two-way communication (written and verbal) using direct and simple language.</p> <p>Export establishments and the department are encouraged to acknowledge another party for displaying behaviors which affirm positive alignment with broader vision.</p>
<p>The department will focus on <i>embedding regulatory approaches, that partner with industry</i> to meet trading partner requirements and serve the Australian community through the effective and efficient administration of regulation.</p>	<p>Industry and department staff prioritise OPV weekly meetings. Both groups undertake prior preparation to ensure meetings are productive, with minutes and action items promptly recorded, agreed to and actioned.</p> <p>Timely communication of changes in policy/procedures during weekly meetings</p> <p>Export establishments and the department are encouraged to acknowledge another party for displaying behaviors which affirm positive alignment with broader vision.</p>
<p><i>Clear and understandable regulations and rulings</i> will provide export meat industry participants with the knowledge needed to comply with regulations.</p>	<p>Regulatory decisions are made fairly, objectively and consistent with legislation and communicated to establishments (including in writing) with support of appropriate evidence, with review pathways clearly outlined.</p> <p>Policies requirements for regulation are accessible and clear.</p>

Complaints Escalation Mechanism

The export meat program is committed to ensuring that decisions made by its officers are fair, transparent and lawful.

We recognise the need for export meat industry participants to:

- Have a clear process for escalating and reviewing real or perceived regulatory process failings.
- Provide feedback where obligations under the department's client service charter are not met.

To support effective two-way communication, investigation and resolution of complaints, and avoid where possible potential market disadvantage occurring, the program has developed an escalation process specific to export meat sector regulated entities, which is consistent with the department's obligations under the client service charter, service standards and complaints handling process.

This escalation process enables establishments to directly communicate with the export meat program management team to raise evidence-based concerns with issues and decisions, which are viewed as inconsistent with export legislation, or where the department has not met its obligations under the department's client service charter.

Process

1. Export meat industry participants are asked to make every effort to resolve concerns at the plant level with the department's operations team, prior to escalating issues. It is noted that the On-plant vet is the senior departmental officer in attendance at Tier 2 export meat establishments.
2. A separate process has been developed for the resolution of carcase disposition related complaints (the ***carcase disposition dispute resolution policy***). This policy will be released shortly.
3. Where a resolution has not been able to be achieved with the department's operations team, regulated entities should write to meatexportsfeedback@awe.gov.au outlining:
 - a. The nature of the complaint (including the urgency if it relates to product being shipped)
 - b. The positioning of the export meat industry participant and the reasoning for that positioning. Evidence should be provided to facilitate a timely investigation and resolution of the complaint.
4. The department will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within one business day. The acknowledgement will include an assigned priority based on the urgency of the complaint and the contact details of the departmental officer assigned, and best placed to consider the complaint.
5. The department will investigate the complaint, with a view to resolving factual issues and consider options for resolution and provide a response within 10 working days. If the matter is complex, it may take longer in which case an interim response will be provided.
6. In accordance with Part 2, Division 2 of the *Export Control Act 2020* (the Act), certain decisions made under the Act and subordinated legislation are reviewable decisions. The notification of

decisions will include details of how an export meat industry participant can seek a review of such a decision, should they disagree with an outcome.

By nurturing good relations between the department and export meat industry participants, the abovementioned complaints escalation mechanism will support the effective resolution of issues.

In addition to the process outlined above, the department will also maintain an aggregated record of concerns (non-regulatory) raised with export registered meat establishments. The department and industry, through the Export Meat Industry Advisory Council (EMIAC), will together undertake regular reviews of complaint trends and their resolution to support continually improving regulatory delivery in line with the department's Client Service Charter.