



AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE

Briefing Note: Abattoir access impacting small-scale farmers in WA

Prepared for the Honourable Jackie Jarvis, Minister for Agriculture and Food; Forestry; Small Business

Date: 17 January 2025

Micro-abattoirs and other rural industry

We are writing to you in your capacity as the Western Australian Minister for Agriculture and Food and Minister for Small Business to raise with you **serious concerns about the crisis of abattoir access small-scale farmers are facing** across the state. Farmers are being squeezed from both sides simultaneously - **decreasing access to commercial abattoirs alongside a regulatory system that makes small-scale, on-farm processing extremely difficult. There are low-cost, common sense options to address these issues and support farmers seeking to grow and sell healthy, local food in a sustainable way.** Smallholders contribute disproportionately to agritourism, agri-education and providence reputations, and they are important for industry diversification and resilience. However, without proactive, strategic action this sector will disappear from the WA economy and we seek your support to prevent this outcome.

The recent federal Parliamentary inquiry into the supermarkets confirmed the negative impact of the current duopoly, not just on farmers selling into that system – but on consumers whose choices about what they eat, how it is produced and the prices they pay are increasingly dictated by these companies. The actions proposed in this briefing are aimed at kick starting action to foster a thriving local food industry that contributes to broader wellbeing. None of the options are geared towards subsidies, tax breaks or hand-outs, but on **common-sense regulatory change to deliver basic commercial fairness** that also promotes environmental, social and economic health and prosperity.

Learning from other jurisdictions

It is also important to note increasing recognition across other jurisdictions of the challenges faced by small-scale livestock farmers. There is scope for shared learning on action being taken. For example, the Victorian Government has recently produced an 'e-guide' to help farmers navigate the complex planning environment associated with the development of micro-abattoirs. They have also developed a definition of vehicle-based abattoirs (mobile), and our Victorian colleagues have provided recommendations to expand this to include a definition of micro-abattoirs in the *Meat Industry Act (1993)*.

It would also appear that South Australia currently has the most enabling legislation for micro-abattoirs in the country. In SA, a 'stock slaughter works' is a 'deemed-to-satisfy' development in the Rural Zone, and Rural Industry is encouraged in the Rural Zone and the Productive Rural Landscape Zone, so while it would be assessed by an assessment manager, they fast track these development proposals, and there is no notice and review period.

The reforms we propose are aligned with changes overseas such as those implemented in [Canada](#) in 2021, where small-scale facilities are granted exemptions from scale-inappropriate planning controls and food safety regulations designed for more complex, long supply chains. Our counterparts in New Zealand are well supported by a [Risk Management Template for Micro-Abattoirs](#) that process fewer than 20 large animals or 50 small animals per day. And both the [UK](#) and the [US](#) have introduced funding support for small-scale meat processing facilities.

The WA Government has a responsibility to protect all scales of livestock farmers from consolidation of abattoirs and other meat processing infrastructure.

AFSA has spoken to its WA members to gain a better understanding of what planning reforms the State Government could enact to enable small-scale producers to build micro and mobile abattoirs on farms to:

- a) support ethical and environmentally, socially and financially sustainable local food production;
- b) reduce the burden on smallholders travelling long distances to access abattoirs, with attendant negative impacts on animal welfare; and
- c) ensure smallholders have control of infrastructure that is critical to the welfare of animals and the livelihoods of farmers.

If urgent action is not taken, knowing where your meat comes from will be a thing of the past, as there will be no local meat in butcher's shops or on restaurant menus, let alone direct from farmers. Independent butchers will struggle to survive if abattoirs refuse to sell whole carcasses in preference for making more profit by selling them boxed meat. As has already happened in the US and elsewhere, we are on the cusp of losing the craft of whole-carcass butchery and knowledgeable and skilled butchers to service high streets across Australia. Local abattoir and cold chain transport jobs will also disappear as multinationals import labour and export most of the meat.

Those who will benefit from micro-abattoirs include local butchers and restaurants in addition to rural communities more broadly. Further, smallholders contribute disproportionately to agritourism, agri-education and providence reputations.

Lack of clarity in State and Local Government legislation

In WA, the Planning and Development Local Planning Scheme Regulations provide the framework for rural industry in the Rural Zone, which is then interpreted by local government planning schemes. Under current WA state and local government planning schemes, **rural industry** is undefined, however, one of the objectives of the Rural Zone is:

To protect broad acre agricultural activities such as cropping and grazing and intensive uses such as horticulture as primary uses, ***with other rural pursuits and rural industries as secondary uses in circumstances where they demonstrate compatibility with the primary use.***

Micro-abattoirs clearly serve the objectives of the Rural Zone to protect agriculture. They will be critical to assuring the ongoing viability and continued existence of smallholders whose access to vertically-integrated and export-focused abattoirs has been steadily foreclosed. The 2007 [Water Quality Protection Note: Rural Abattoirs](#) offers an insight into the Government's position on the lower risk posed by small-scale abattoirs. The note states that the Environmental Protection (Abattoirs) Regulations 2001 apply to abattoirs processing between 100 and 1000 tonnes (live weight) in animals per annum, in which case the abattoirs must apply and pay a one-off fee for registration, which has no expiry date. They must adhere to the regulations therein to maintain their registration. Abattoirs processing more than 1000 tonnes per annum must apply for a licence, renewable every one to five years. The note is silent on abattoirs that process less than 100 tonnes per annum, implying they are sufficiently below environmental risk thresholds as to not require registration.

These distinctions rightly reflect the critical difference between standard abattoirs and micro-abattoirs. The latter, as rural industry - ancillary use to primary production - processing and selling meat from livestock raised on or near the farm do not require a permit.

Although AFSA has made the case for micro and mobile abattoirs clear to all State Governments, no definition of, or specific provision for, micro abattoirs exists in current Australian legislation, with the exception of game meat. There has been some progress in Victoria, where vehicle-based (mobile) abattoirs can be licensed as a meat-processing facility (Meat Industry Act 1993 (Vic)) AFSA has recommended to the Victorian Government that this be expanded to include a micro-abattoirs.

AFSA calls on the WA Government to amend the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority Act 1976 to allow micro and mobile abattoirs to be classified as rural industry by local government planning schemes, and therefore exempt from permits. This would recognise on-farm micro-abattoirs as an appropriate and accepted land use in the rural zone.

We respectfully ask the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Food to advocate for this reform to the Honourable Minister for Planning. The future of small-scale livestock farming depends on a rapid flourishing of micro-abattoirs, before access to critical meat-industry infrastructure is totally closed to small-scale producers.

Recommendations

1. Include a definition of 'micro-abattoir' in the Meat Industry Authority 1976, defined as a meat processing facility processing less than 1000 tonnes (live weight) in animals per annum.
2. Classify 'micro-abattoir' as rural industry in the Planning and Development Local Planning Scheme Regulations, making it exempt from the requirement for a permit.
3. Fund appropriate training and accreditation for producers and workers throughout the supply chain, including meat inspection.

Sincerely,

Dr Tammi Jonas, AFSA Focal Point for Farmers

About the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is a farmer- and First Peoples-led civil society organisation of people working towards socially-just and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems. The democratic participation of First Peoples, small-scale food producers and local communities in decision-making processes is integral to these efforts.

AFSA provides a balanced voice to represent small-scale food producers and local communities' interests at all levels of government. We connect small-scale food producers for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, assist local, state and federal governments in instituting scale-appropriate and consistent regulations and standards that enable agroecology and socially-just localised food systems, as well as advocate for equitable access for small-scale food producers to local value chain infrastructure and markets.

We are part of a robust global network of civil society organisations involved in food sovereignty and food security policy development and advocacy. We are members of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), La Vía Campesina (the global movement of small-scale food producers, and the largest social movement in the world), and Urgenci: the International Network for Community-Supported Agriculture. We also support the Australasian representative on the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM), which relates to the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS).