



# AUSTRALIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY ALLIANCE

## Briefing Note: Abattoir access impacting small-scale farmers in South Australia

Prepared for the Honourable Clare Scriven, Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development

**Date:** 17 January 2025

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### Micro-abattoirs and other rural industry

We are writing to you in your capacity as the South Australian Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development to raise with you our **serious concerns about the challenges facing small-scale farmers** across the state. This sector already contributes much to SA communities, rural economies, climate change innovation, health and food security – and under the right conditions could do much more. However, we are at a critical point – exemplified by the increasing incidence nationally of abattoirs refusing service to small-scale, local farmers. Smallholders are being squeezed from both sides simultaneously - **decreasing access to commercial abattoirs alongside a regulatory system that makes small-scale, on-farm processing difficult in most other states**. Without proactive, strategic action this sector will disappear from the SA economy, and we seek your consideration of the actions below 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 support to deliver basic commercial fairness** that also promotes environmental, social and economic health and prosperity.

It would 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 assessed by an assessment manager, these development proposals are fast tracked, and there is no notice and review period. We recommend that PIRSA issue guidance to council planners to ensure existing legislation continues to enable livestock processing in the rural zones, as we anticipate several developments will emerge in 2025 and beyond as small-scale farmers build collective micro-abattoirs.

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 provenance reputations.

The fact that small-scale farmers continue to be brought to the brink of viability despite their strong social, health, environmental and economic contributions reflects the fact that existing state and national agricultural industry representative bodies in no way understand or advocate for our interests, or those of the everyday people we feed. It is difficult for small-scale farmers to be heard and we are constantly forced to find inefficient work-arounds in a system designed to enable large-scale and/or export operations. In this context, we recommend that PIRSA seek active participation from democratically elected representatives of the small-scale farm sector such as members of the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) to ensure this vital part of the industry is built into considerations at all stages of the policy and regulatory cycle.

### **Learning from other jurisdictions**

It is worth noting the 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)*.

This growing recognition is mirrored in 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.

### **National collaboration**

Given the resonance between the challenges faced by small-scale farmers in SA and those across the country we would also welcome your leadership to raise the matters drawn to your attention in this letter with your counterparts including the federal government as part of **the multilateral Agricultural Ministers' Meeting**. There may be scope for constructive joint work, to look into abattoir ownership and regulation nationally, and/or to consider how the national standards for game meat harvesting might be practically applied to domestic livestock situations in the face of dwindling access to corporate abattoirs.

This is also relevant in the context of the anticipated finalisation of the *National Statement of Animal Welfare* and decisions around priority areas for action in 2025. Support for farmers managing livestock in pastured systems, ensuring it is still possible to care for and process animals without subjecting them to the stress of transport, feed-lots and industrial-scale abattoirs should be highlighted in these discussions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this briefing on the crisis befalling small-scale livestock farming. We hope it sparks action on these or other ideas you may have to support small small-scale farmers – both from a basic commercial fairness perspective as well as from an understanding of our value within the agricultural and food sector and rural and regional economies. We would welcome the opportunity to meet and speak further to these proposals.

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).

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