Agroecology & Food Sovereignty Alliance

Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

Submitted as part of the:

Online Consultation towards the Special Rapporteur's Thematic Report to the 81st Session of the UN General Assembly

03 July 2026

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AFSA welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission and highlight the voices of First Peoples, rights holders and those with lived experience within our food system. AFSA is also available to support any further opportunities to participate in the Special Rapporteurs Right to Food mandate.

About the Agroecology & Food Sovereignty Alliance

The Agroecology & Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is a farmer- and First-Peoples-led civil society organisation working for socially just and ecologically sound food and farming systems. We centre the voices of First Peoples, small-scale food producers, and local communities in decision making.

AFSA connects small-scale producers for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, advocates for fair access to local markets and infrastructure, and pushes for scale-appropriate regulation at all levels of government.

We are part of a strong global food sovereignty movement through our membership in La Vía Campesina, Urgenci, and the IPC for Food Sovereignty, and we support the Australasian delegate to the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism at the UN.

Our vision is for agroecology-oriented farms to thrive, producing nutritious food through short, fair supply chains that protect human and planetary health. This includes recognising and promoting First Peoples' knowledges and custodianship of Country, and committing to decolonial futures for food and agriculture.

Introduction

AFSA congratulates Ms Sofia Monsalve Suárez on her appointment as UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. Her long-standing record of supporting peasant, Indigenous Peoples, small-scale producer and the food sovereignty movements gives AFSA real confidence in this mandate, and we welcome the opportunity to contribute to the thematic report to be presented to the General Assembly in October 2026.

For AFSA, food sovereignty and people's rights to define their own food and agriculture systems, as a way to combat corporate concentration, captured governance and unresolved colonial legacies are the shared root of the crises named in the Special Rapporteurs concept note. Rather than restate global trends already well documented elsewhere, AFSA below provides five current examples from Australia that illustrate how these structural dynamics operate in practice, and what they mean for the right to food.

The examples are drawn from three AFSA submissions, provided in full alongside this submission and available on request for further detail, data and citations:

- AFSA (2025) Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food: Corporate Concentration and the Impact on Right to Food in Australia. 12 June 2025: See here: https://afsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/250612_AFSA_Corporate-concentration-right-to-food.docx.pdf
- AFSA (2026) Submission to the Consultation for the HLPE on 'Critical, Emerging and Enduring Issues', High Level Panel of Experts of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), UN FAO. 4 May 2026: See here: https://afsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/260504_Submission-to-HLPE-FSN-4th-Note-on-Critical-emerging-and-enduring-issues.pdf
- AFSA (2026) Submission to the Feeding Australia Strategy, Australian Federal Government. 18 June 2026. See here: https://afsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/250924_Submission-to-the-Feeding-Australia-discussion-paper.docx-1.pdf

1. Corporate capture of National Food Governance

- Australia's National Food Council (NFC), appointed in late 2025 to guide the federal governments, *Feeding Australia* food security strategy, is dominated by corporate agribusiness, retail and trading interests, including representatives of Bega Group, Grain Trade Australia and the National Retail Association, alongside only one representative with a First Nations connection, and no dedicated seat for small-scale producers or civil society[1].
- When AFSA and concerned partners[2] raised these concerns directly with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, officials maintained that members sit "as individuals" rather than as representatives of their industries; a form of "corporate capture dressed up as expertise." The Department confirmed the national strategy will be drafted internally, with public input limited to a submissions portal rather than any seat at the decision-making table.
- This is a direct, current illustration of a pattern the mandate should scrutinise globally: national food governance bodies with the formal legitimacy to shape strategy while structurally excluding the rights-holders, farmers, food workers, First Peoples, those most affected by it.

2. Corporate concentration across processing and retail

- Abattoirs: decades of consolidation and vertical integration have left small-scale livestock farmers with limited options to slaughter animals. JBS alone controls around 25% of Australian meat processing, and in 2025 Cargill acquired full ownership of Teys, the country's second-largest processor, further concentrating an already foreign-dominated sector. Six abattoirs closed their doors to independent farmers within a four-month period in 2024–25 alone, including Victoria's largest central facility.

  An AFSA national survey of 148 farmers found nearly 80% had already lost access to an abattoir or had been told they soon would; some now travel over 500km to process livestock, increasing costs, transport stress and animal welfare harm, and pushing small producers out of the market entirely. AFSA's National Abattoir Campaign delivered a concrete win in Victoria in August 2025, removing the planning-permit requirement for on-farm micro-abattoirs, evidenced that targeted reform can restore market access where consolidation has foreclosed it.[3]
- Poultry and dairy: just two companies, Baiada and Ingham's, control around 70% of the Australian poultry market under exploitative contract-growing arrangements that pay farmers as little as 60–80 cents per bird while the companies retain ownership of the birds and feed. In dairy, 80% of processing is foreign-owned, and Australia has lost 77% of its dairy farms since 1980 through consolidation and unfair pricing.
- Retail: the Coles–Woolworths supermarket duopoly controls around 70% of retail food sales and increasingly coordinates upstream production, imposing price and performance standards smallholders cannot meet. Growth in supermarket private labels and anti-competitive practices such as land-banking near store sites have squeezed out independent grocers and manufacturers, narrowing real consumer choice despite the appearance of variety on shelves.

[1] https://afsa.org.au/media-release-new-nfc-captured-by-corporate-interests-afsa/
[2] https://whodecidesfood.com/
[3] https://afsa.org.au/our-work/national-abattoir-campaign/

3. Labour exploitation in food supply chains

- The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, which supplies much of the workforce for Australian horticulture, has been documented by Pasifica Australia, the Australian Workers' Union and Human Rights Watch as involving wage theft, coercive control, passport confiscation and retaliatory treatment of workers. Human Rights Watch found Australia's farm-work visa schemes "fail to protect Pacific Islander workers," and the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery has flagged concern over Australia's dependency on precarious migrant labour in agriculture; unions and Pacific Islander representatives have drawn explicit parallels with 19th-century "blackbirding."[4]

  Workers tied to a single employer, often in isolated rural areas, remain structurally vulnerable despite a 2021 Senate inquiry recommending stronger labour-hire regulation and a Fair Work Commission ruling establishing a minimum hourly wage across the horticulture sector.

- Meat processing has recorded serious safety failures under corporate ownership: JBS was fined for a workplace accident in which a 19-year-old worker suffered severe burns after falling into a tripe vat, and separately fined for a worker's death in NSW, illustrating how concentrated ownership of processing infrastructure also concentrates responsibility for working conditions.[5]

4. Colonial legacies and First Peoples' food sovereignty and recognition

- AFSA's First Peoples First Strategy commits the organisation to prioritising the return of Indigenous sovereignty over land and food systems as foundational, not incidental, to food sovereignty in a colonised country. In 2024, AFSA amended its constitution to be explicitly co-led by First Peoples and farmers, creating a dedicated First Peoples' Focal Point. AFSA supports Pay the Rent, a Kulin Nation-based initiative funding grassroots First Nations campaigns, as a practical model of material reparations rather than symbolic acknowledgement.[6]
- A concrete regulatory barrier: Australia's food safety framework requires documented written evidence of a food's safe traditional use before it can enter commercial markets, accepting colonial explorers' journals as valid evidence while excluding oral knowledge held by Traditional Owners across tens of thousands of years of use. This has left Indigenous participation in the country's own native food industry at around 1%, and illustrates how ostensibly neutral regulatory design can entrench colonial exclusion.[7]
- AFSA is also developing an Agrarian Trust to take land permanently out of speculative markets and secure intergenerational access for young farmers and First Peoples; a direct response to land price as a barrier to land return and to new entrants.
- First Peoples' customary fishing rights are routinely criminalised: on the south-east coast, First Nations fishers take an estimated 1 tonne of abalone annually against 100 tonnes taken commercially and around 5 tonnes recreationally, yet two-thirds of people incarcerated for

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[4] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-23/palm-visa-scheme-exploitation-modern-slavery/104382194
[5] https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-03/jbs-fined-after-employee-falls-into-near-boiling-tripe-wash/12843240
[6] https://afsa.org.au/first-peoples-first/
[7] Williams, Birch, Deen, MacDonald, Matthews, Rowling, Gall (2026) Leveraging Indigenous Peoples' foods and botanicals to improve health, social wellbeing, cultural identity and economic self-determination, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, Volume 50, Issue 2. Accessed: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1326020025000937

fishing offences between 1996 and 2021 were First Peoples; a stark illustration of unequal enforcement against a customary food-gathering right.

- “Controlled participation,” consultation that is procedurally observed but substantively ignored, recurs in Australian food and water governance. In 2018, the Federal Government proceeded with a half-billion-dollar pipeline diverting Murray River water to the Menindee Lakes despite Traditional Owners' documented opposition, later citing the consultation as having occurred without disclosing that it had revealed opposition. More broadly, the 2023 referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament,[8] which followed the grassroots Uluru Statement from the Heart process, did not succeed; a significant setback for institutionalised First Peoples' voice in national decision-making, including on food and land policy.

5. The right to food as an enforceable legal guarantee

- Australia has no legislated right to food, no national bill of rights, and no government body with clear responsibility for its protection, respect or fulfilment. This leaves no legal avenue for redress when the right is not met, even as the government pursues a National Food Security Strategy.
- This is a sharp illustration of the gap the mandate's own framing already identifies: the rollback of, or failure to embed, human rights commitments, occurring not through active repeal but through the simple absence of domestic legal architecture, even in a state with no shortage of food.

[8] https://www.reconciliation.org.au/support-a-voice-to-parliament/