



Australian Chicken Meat
Federation (ACMF) Inc

ACMF Statement on Importation of Chicken Meat

September 2014 (revision of document dated December 2006)

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Executive Summary

Australia has strict protocols in place for the importation of chicken meat.

This is to protect Australian agriculture and consumers from diseases of poultry, including those that can also infect wild birds, and/or foreign pests of which Australia is currently free. It also protects Australians from public health risks such as bacteria and viruses detrimental to humans as well as chemical contamination of chicken meat from unmonitored residues.

Contamination is of particular interest in the area of antibiotics. Antibiotic resistance is a concern for imported meat as many overseas countries are allowed to use medications that are considered critically important for the management of human health to control disease in flocks; medications which are banned for use in poultry in Australia.

The Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF) believes that maintaining these strict controls over importations is the best approach to maintaining Australia's favourable public health, avian disease and pest status.

Situation Analysis and Background

Australia has strict protocols in place for the importation of chicken meat.

Apart from a small amount of cooked poultry meat from New Zealand, only commercially retorted or cooked in-packaging chicken meat can currently be imported. These foods - which include products such as canned chicken and some soups - account for only a miniscule amount of the chicken consumed in Australia. The heat levels used to treat these products ensure eradication of any pests, bacteria or viruses.

Importing chicken is subject to these strict requirements to protect consumers and local industry from a number of risks, including the introduction of diseases or pests to people or birds, bacterial contamination of meat and consumption of product carrying organisms resistant to medications of importance in human health care.

The strict restrictions on imports mean that:

- **Australian chickens are given maximum protection from the entry of disease.**
A number of diseases such as avian influenza and Newcastle disease can be transmitted to Australian chickens via uncooked chicken meat. These diseases, which are not considered endemic to Australia, are fatal to chickens and can be transmitted easily between birds, posing a significant threat to Australian industry.
- **Consumers have the maximum protection from any diseased bird or its meat.**
Australian consumers are not exposed to public health pathogens which more frequently occur overseas, such as avian influenza and some strains of Salmonella.
- **Consumers can be confident that animal welfare is an important consideration in the rearing and processing of the birds.**
Domestic birds are bred, raised and processed to Australia's high standards and in the context of strong regulatory oversight.
- **Chickens consumed in Australia are only treated with products registered and approved for use in Australia.**
Different practices in different countries mean that imported meat may have been treated with products not approved in Australia, may contain unacceptable level of residues, or may contain bacteria resistant to medications that are of critical importance in animal or human health in Australia. This is of particular concern in the area of antibiotics. The use of antibiotics in animals is strictly controlled, regulated and monitored in Australia to ensure no residues or bacteria resistant to critically important human health antibiotics, such as fluoroquinolones, are present in Australian poultry products.

Disease Prevention and Containment in Australia

Australia has an outstanding record in disease prevention and containment. To date, government driven industry regulations and protocols have successfully protected consumers, agriculture and the environment from significant impacts due to exotic disease.

Any decision to restrict imports of a commodity must be consistent with Australia's international obligations such those imposed by the World Trade Organization *Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures*, and the *Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade*. The Australian government has a comprehensive, science-based approach to determining whether a commodity should be imported, with a conservative approach to quarantine in order to protect Australia's favourable pest and disease status.

Chicken meat was the subject of an import risk analysis by the Federal government, which concluded in 2009. Import risk analyses identify, assess and manage risks associated with the importing of agricultural products.

This analysis resulted in the development of strict protocols for importation of raw and cooked chicken meat which, to date, poultry producers in other countries have not been able to meet. Under a separate risk management protocol, cooked chicken meat may be imported from NZ. Other than for that, the only imports currently permitted is a small volume of processed chicken meat products that have been fully retorted (ie cooked to high temperature in its container), such as sometimes found in canned chicken, soups or animal foods.

An independent economic study in 2003 estimated that unrestricted importation would result in approximately 40 percent of the chicken meat being imported to Australia, posing a significant risk to bird and human populations.

A consumer survey conducted in 2006 by the ACMF showed that 88 percent of consumers were concerned about the importation of chicken meat, for reasons such as health and hygiene standards where the birds are processed and raised the threat of avian influenza and other diseases, pesticide contamination, product freshness, and lack of animal welfare standards. The survey indicated a strong preference for Australian chicken (94 percent).

Policy Statements

Current government regulations ensure chicken meat raised and sold in Australia is of a very high production standard for quality, taste and disease status.

The ACMF supports using only domestically-grown chicken meat as the best way to protect Australian consumers, agriculture and the environment from exotic disease.

The ACMF supports any rigorous, science-based approach to the assessment of the risks involved in importing chicken, and concurs that quarantine is a vital tool to protect industry and consumers.

The ACMF strongly agrees with the government's policy of setting a conservative level of protection by requiring that the risk from import must be very low. This reflects Australia's unique status as an island nation and the consequent major impact any disease incursion would have on its population, its environment and its agricultural industries.

The ACMF actively participates in the import risk assessment process and works in cooperation with government where both parties are mindful of the fact that protecting the health and safety of birds and consumers is the primary objective.