



## Queensland Country Life column

10 March 2010

The Cattle Council of Australia supports modernising the BSE import policy setting from a blanket ban to a risk-assessment approach because we believe it is in the best interests of Australia's beef cattle producers.

Under the previous policy of a blanket ban and in the event of even a single case of BSE being detected in this country, domestic beef could have been removed from the shelves and major trading partners could have locked us out of their markets. This would have a disastrous and long-term impact on the entire beef production chain and severely hamper our biggest single market, our domestic market. All sales, deliveries, processing, wholesaling and retailing would grind to an immediate halt with the loss of tens of thousands of jobs.

We expect our trading partners to underpin their assessment of Australia's capacity to trade by scientific principles. If Australia wishes to access markets based on scientific principles (of which we rely on for selling 67% of our total beef production), then other countries understandably expect to access our market under those same principles.

If Australia ever suffered a BSE detection (or something else!), it is these very same rules that would be our 'passport' to renegotiate our re-entry into markets, sooner rather than later. I assume every beef producer does not want to see Australia locked out of export markets for an extended period of time.

Also, the previous blanket ban was counter to internationally agreed science and Australia's beef trade was therefore in jeopardy of retaliation.

Given the scientific knowledge of the disease and the negligible risks of infection, why would we risk losing our markets for the sake of arguing for an unscientific BSE policy that is now outdated? When I get the chance to talk to producers, one-on-one, and explain the reasons behind the decision and the differences between the old and new policy, the facts usually resonate and they wonder what all the fuss it about.

Any overseas country wishing to export beef to Australia must first make an application to the Australian Government's BSE Food Safety Assessment Committee for individual country risk assessment to address human health and food safety issues. Biosecurity Australia will also conduct country specific quarantine determinations based on animal health.

Cattle Council is demanding that traceability in the import protocol delivers the same outcomes in other countries as it does in our own. That is, traceback and traceforward, including cohorts. We expect no more or no less to what we currently deliver to our domestic and international consumers.

You've hopefully heard this all before and understand the importance of the policy change to our industry. However, for those that may be influenced by the 'scare tactics' some are playing, it always pays to reiterate. AgForce is doing a great job of reinforcing these facts. If you know anyone who is unsure about this issue, I recommend they visit the cattle council website [www.cattlecouncil.com.au/importpolicy](http://www.cattlecouncil.com.au/importpolicy) to learn further about why this policy change is protecting the interests of the nation's beef cattle producers.