



### **To whom it may concern**

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment acknowledges that the impacts of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) are unprecedented and to some extent, yet to be fully known. Australia remains committed to ensuring that food and agricultural products intended for export are safe for human consumption and that export supply chains are maintained.

COVID-19 is caused by a coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2. Coronaviruses can cause respiratory illness, such as the common cold and more serious illnesses such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). Human-to-human transmission of SARS-Co-2 is via droplets and fomites from an infected person to a close contact.

The department understands that there is no evidence of transmission of COVID-19 through food and agricultural products. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the Australian Government statutory authority with responsibility for issuing science-based domestic food safety standards, and other international regulators (including the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)) have issued statements supporting this position.

Additionally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has issued precautionary recommendations, including advice on good hygiene practices during food handling and preparation.

Under the *Export Control Act 1982* (the Act), Australia has strict controls over the production of meat, dairy, seafood, plant and egg products intended for export. This includes requirements to ensure these food products are free from harmful levels of contaminants and are suitable for human consumption. Exported goods that are not directly regulated under the Act (such as processed foods), must meet Australian domestic food safety legislation and requirements in the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code. Only products that meet Australian and importing country requirement will be eligible for export. As such, food exported from Australia is safe and not a source of risk from the virus.

The department has developed plans to maintain business continuity and work health and safety standards for staff on establishments. Furthermore, the department will continue to engage with export businesses to provide appropriate regulatory oversight, which includes the ongoing provision of regulatory services to ensure that necessary verification and mandatory certification activities are maintained. This will enable the department to continue to deliver its regulatory activities in a consistent manner.

The implementation of measured, transparent and effective regulation by all countries during this crisis will ensure that agricultural supply chains are maintained to the greatest extent possible, supporting the availability of safe, wholesome food to all markets. Through this active management, the department is confident that any potential food safety issues can be effectively managed.

The department is proactively monitoring the situation and assessing the potential impacts as they arise. Should you have any questions, please contact the department through [exportstandards@awe.gov.au](mailto:exportstandards@awe.gov.au).

**Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment**

**24 March 2020**