

Meat industry still without answers on Melbourne metro workforce caps

22 September 2021

The Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) is again calling on the Office of Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, Victorian Chief Health Officer Professor Brett Sutton and DHHS to consult directly with our industry on the current workforce caps in place for meat processing and manufacturing in metropolitan Melbourne.

“Whilst shocking to see the outcomes of the response to construction industry interventions by this government, The Premier has mandated vaccination for the construction industry, stating there are more cases in construction than there are people in hospital with COVID,” said AMIC CEO Patrick Hutchinson.

“If DHHS have industry stats, are they able to provide the number of meat workers that have the virus which has ensured we need these workforce caps? We have not been informed nor consulted on these statistics, nor have our vaccination rates been considered.”

“We believe that there are no sites that have had any onsite cases. This would no doubt be due to 25 percent of sites having more than 80 percent of workforce fully vaccinated and almost 50 percent having between 50-80 percent fully vaccinated, according to AMIC member data. The same data ignored by Premier Andrews, DHHS and the Health Minister.”

As at today, AMIC has still not heard from DHHS, the VIC Health Minister, nor the VIC Premier’s department. Refer to our [media release dated 3 September 2021](#). AMIC has written to the Health Minister jointly with the Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF) and Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV). As at today there has been no response.

In another “ruse” from this government on consulting with our industry, a statement released by Premier Andrews on 20 September titled [Business Consultation Helps Shape Path Out Of Pandemic](#), named AMIC as having been consulted with, and invited to, a roundtable of “industry leaders” with Minister for Small Business Jaala Pulford. In fact, AMIC was part of a group of 250 associations and individuals invited to a briefing by Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR). This is not industry consultation.

Leader of The Nationals, Peter Walsh, has also called on the Andrews Labor Government to work with industry – [Meat supply at risk after processors overlooked in Victoria’s ‘roadmap’](#)

For every day these workforce reductions are in place, there is a growing impact on the supply chain including farmers, producers, processors, manufacturers, wholesalers, cold stores, independent local butchers, and supermarkets.

AMIC’s processing and manufacturing members in metropolitan Melbourne have reported the need to spread their workforce up to a 7-day week, with tens of thousands of dollars being paid in penalty rates, loss of large contracts due to not being able to guarantee supply, with one reporting that over 100 tonnes of Christmas hams have been diverted away due to processing constraints.

“We have nervous smallgoods manufacturers in metro Melbourne right now,” said Mr Hutchinson.

“They have said it all comes down to labour, if they can’t be certain they have the labour, they can’t forecast to meet the Christmas ham demand.”

MEDIA RELEASE



Currently storage stocks are being used to meet orders, however the real impact on the sector will be felt in four to six weeks if workforce restrictions continue, which will also provide uncertainty for farmers and producers.

With Australia's major spring lamb "flush" now fully in operation, Metro Melbourne lamb processors, and Victorian and Australian lamb farmers, will be impacted severely. Meat and Livestock Australia analysis (<https://www.mla.com.au/prices-markets/market-news/2021/impacts-of-victorian-abattoir-restrictions/>) has pointed out that if this continues to Melbourne cup day there is a potential lamb surplus of 250,000 lambs. At a time when finally Victorian and other Australian farmers can finally obtain benefit from a good season, Premier Andrews will be taking this away from them. This will impact prices and there is not enough capacity to take up the surplus.

"We are also seeking clarification on what the "further obligations" mean in the roadmap with regards to meat processing, will we as the peak industry body be consulted on these obligations?"

"What is the Victorian Premier's message to farmers and meat industry supply chain workers while these workforce restrictions continue?" said Mr Hutchinson.

"What is the message to consumers as we manage a reduced food processing industry in Melbourne coming up to Christmas?"

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About

The Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC), is the sole Peak Industry body representing the post-farm gate meat industry, including processors, smallgoods manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors through to independent retail butchers and exporters.

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