

Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance

Illegal slaughter investigations in Greater Sydney

In 2020-2021, the Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance team successfully investigated 19 reports of the illegal slaughter and sale of meat and meat carcasses in Greater Sydney and taking enforcement action against illegal slaughter operators.

Background

In the last twelve months, the Biosecurity & Food Safety Compliance team investigated 19 reports of illegal slaughter activities occurring in the Greater Sydney area. Illegal slaughter means the slaughter, and subsequent sale, of animals from a property where the owner or occupier of the property does not hold a NSW Food Authority licence to slaughter, process and sell the meat or carcasses of the slaughtered animals.

Traditionally, offenders were pursued for food safety offences because compliance officers were only authorised under the *NSW Food Act 2003*. However, since 2015 compliance officers have also been authorised under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*. This has given us greater scope and powers to comprehensively investigate reports of illegal slaughter and enforce biosecurity and food safety requirements.

Illegal slaughter operations often involve breaches of biosecurity and food safety requirements. In addition to food safety offences relating to the operation of an unlicensed abattoir and meat processing plant, offenders often fail to comply with traceability requirements of the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) and have inadequate measures in place to prevent ruminant access to restricted animal material (RAM).

Investigation and planning

The investigation of illegal slaughter activity is often complex requiring thorough planning and coordination with multiple regulators. Compliance officers have developed strong partnerships with the NSW Police Rural Crime Investigators, Local Land Services and the RSPCA, which has seen greater co-operation in responding to reports of illegal slaughter activities.

What we did

We investigated all reports of illegal slaughter received by the Department and conducted multiple joint operations with the NSW Police and RSPCA targeting the reported properties and successfully

took actions against illegal slaughter operators.

What we found

Food safety risks

Investigations revealed that the meat and meat carcasses processed at the reported properties were considered to be unsafe and unsuitable for human consumption for the following two reasons:

- Proprietors of illegal slaughter did not implement practices in the slaughtering and processing areas to ensure that all meat and meat carcasses were safe and suitable for human consumption.
- The design and construction of the slaughtering and the processing areas were not appropriate for use as an abattoir or meat processing plant and did not comply with the Australian Standard AS 4696-2007, *Hygienic Production and Transportation of Meat and Meat Products for Human Consumption* (the Standard). Compliance with the Standard is a licence requirement for all abattoirs in NSW.

Biosecurity risks

Investigations revealed that there were usually inadequate measures in place to prevent ruminant access to RAM on the reported properties. Consumption of RAM by ruminants has the potential to cause the introduction and spread of diseases such as Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs), Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle, and scrapie in sheep or goats throughout NSW. This is a biosecurity risk

and a breach of a mandatory measure under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*.

Investigations also revealed offenders often failed to comply with traceability requirements of the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS). Failure to implement the NLIS system impacts the ability to effectively respond to or manage disease outbreaks, including serious emergency diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease. The NLIS also enables trace back of stock in the event that a chemical residue is detected. This ensures the safety of meat for human consumption, domestically and overseas, and protects NSW market access as most of our beef and sheep meat, and meat products are exported.



Photo A: Goat and sheep remains (fleece, internal organs, heads) inside a bobcat bucket



Photo B: Live maggots on the remains of slaughtered animals

Actions taken

Prohibition orders and product seizure

We issued ten seizure notices and seized approximately 815 kilograms of meat and meat carcasses. We also issued four prohibition orders to proprietors of illegal slaughter businesses under the *Food Act 2003* to prevent or mitigate a serious danger to public health.



Photo C: Meat and animal carcasses seized from an illegal slaughter operator in Greater Sydney

Individual Biosecurity Direction

We issued eight Individual Biosecurity Directions to proprietors of illegal slaughter businesses under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* to prevent and eliminate the identified biosecurity risks.

Penalty notices and prosecutions

We issued ten penalty notices with a total cost of \$9,660 and are in the process of prosecuting one company.

Industry resources

As a result of these investigations, we developed two publications to raise awareness about illegal slaughter and promote regulatory compliance:

- **Slaughter of animals sold for human consumption:** provides information about the slaughter of animals where meat is sold for human consumption in NSW and related biosecurity risks, and
- **Home slaughter and butcher services:** provides information about the slaughter of animals where the meat is cut and packaged for personal consumption.

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