

# Maudsley: Torbay damaging

By MARK PHELPS

STRAIGHT-TALKING AgForce Cattle president Grant Maudsley has described as "laughable nonsense" claims that NSW's controversial new Torbay beef grading/labelling scheme is only a voluntary scheme aimed at improving beef quality.

"No matter which way the Torbay Bill is presented, as it stands any person who sells meat at the retail level in NSW under Aus-meat descriptions will be forced to follow the rules set down under the Torbay Bill," Mr Maudsley said.

"Given how comprehensive the Aus-meat language and descriptions are, there is no way of retailers circumventing what the Torbay Bill proposes.

"The Torbay Bill is, for all intents and purposes, absolutely and categorically a mandatory system that will damage producers by directly reducing the value of older animals at meatworks."

Under the Food Amendment (Beef Labelling) Bill which was last week introduced into the NSW Parliament all table beef (excluding mince and premium tenderloin cuts) from eight tooth and older animals will be labelled as "low grade" or "low quality".

The Torbay Bill also excludes Meat Standards Australia (MSA) graded beef from eight tooth and older animals from being sold with the derogatory labelling terms. However, at present eight tooth animals are currently excluded by processors from the (MSA) system on the basis of dentition.

The Torbay Bill is a carcass grading based labelling system. MSA is a cuts based eating quality system which has been embraced by industry and is being further developed to define the eating quality of lower value product.

The bill was introduced by the independent member for the Northern Tablelands, Richard Torbay, who has

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championed the NSW scheme with the support of Inverell, NSW, based processor Bindaree Beef, and the maverick Australian Beef Association.

Mr Torbay and his supporters now want the grading/labelling scheme, which threatens the ongoing roll-out of MSA, to go national.

Mr Torbay strongly defended the bill, saying consumers would buy more beef if they found consistent quality through a reliable labelling system.

"It (the bill) is a victory for people power over vested interests and should help the beef industry to climb out of its slump," Mr Torbay said.

"When consumers find consistent quality through a reliable labelling system they are expected to put beef more often on their shopping lists."

Sydney-based lobbyist, Norman Hunt, who is engaged by Bindaree Beef, also strongly defended the Torbay Bill (see Letters p18).

However, the derogatory descriptions have sent shock waves through the industry, which says the negative labelling will drive consumers to competing proteins, including pork and chicken.

"If this is not a con, I do not know what is," Mr Maudsley said.

"Torbay is forcing the ultimate home goal on the beef industry. Is he seriously suggesting that any consumer will buy any product that is identified as low

grade or low quality? We have the world's best beef grading system in MSA, which is being developed on the best available meat science. That is where we need to be heading, not off on some misguided crusade driven by vested interests that has real likelihood of damaging the industry.

Mr Maudsley said an impact of the bill would be to reduce processor competition for eight-tooth and older cattle.

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Potentially damaging comments following the Torbay Bill informing consumers that poor quality beef would be widespread at the retail level are already beginning to surface.

An article in Brisbane's *Courier-Mail* on Monday suggested Queensland faced being "inundated with poor quality meat unless it adopts legislation aimed at reducing the sale of beef from old cattle as quality cooking cuts".

## Drought cruelly cattle market

QUEENSLAND beef producers' number one gift this Christmas will be heavy rainfall, as vendors scrambled to offload drought affected cattle, with values plummeting across the State.

The outlook was grim on Tuesday when Roma Store Index fell to its lowest ever mark of 86 points, with the Queensland Cattle

Savage, Barker and Backhouse stock agent Brad Mulvihill said the confidence has gone from the market.

"It's the combined factors of the weather and the dollar that are making things hard," Mr Mulvihill said.

"If you turn one of those factors around, things could change dramatically."

The Gracemere sale saw some of its lowest

