

Measuring public perception of the Western Australian beef industry and production systems

Purpose of the study

This study aimed to provide a better understanding of public perceptions of environmental and animal welfare aspects of beef production.

The study was targeted at the rangelands beef industry.

What methodology was used?

Online survey responses were collected from a representative sample of about 900 members of the Western Australian (WA) public in September and October 2023.

The primary focus of the survey was to understand which aspects of beef production relating to animal welfare and environmental impacts were most important to the public. We measured the importance of 21 different practices or aspects of beef production using a method called best-worst scaling. We also measured social license to operate, which is a measure of public approval for the WA beef industry.

Other attributes (e.g., demographics, meat consumption, knowledge, awareness) were also collected and used to explain public preferences.



Key Messages

Of the 900 people surveyed:

- Most believe animal welfare outcomes are more important than environmental outcomes.
- Live export is not an important issue for most people, but is a top priority for 1-in-4 people.
- The results in this study help inform public perception about on-farm management and marketing decisions.

What did we find?

The survey respondents are generally more concerned with aspects relating to animal welfare than environmental outcomes. The most important aspects were: having access to food and water; minimising stress before slaughter; and promptly treating sick cattle.

Different groups of people prioritised different aspects of beef production. Over half of respondents do not think live export is an important issue. However, about 1-in-4 people think live export is a top-priority issue. About 1-in-7 people think environmental outcomes are top-priority issues.

Most of the people surveyed support the WA beef industry. For example, two-thirds of respondents believe WA cattle farmers are ethical and trustworthy, while 7-in-10 believe the beef industry contributes to the long-term wellbeing of WA.

While most beef consumers surveyed are concerned with environmental and welfare aspects of beef production, they still place more importance on other attributes of beef. They rated taste, health impacts, and price as the most important attributes, followed by animal welfare and environmental impacts.

1-in-8 respondents said they do not eat beef. Of these people, only 1-in-4 people said it was due to animal welfare concerns, and 1-in-5 people said it was because of environmental concerns.

What are the outcomes?

Our results confirm the importance for both the beef industry and policymakers to enhance welfare considerations in animal production systems, especially feed systems, as it aligns with public expectations and priorities.

The results also raise the question of how attitudes towards cattle farming might change if public perceptions and awareness change over time.

To maintain and improve the social license status of the beef industry it is recommended that animal welfare considerations continue to be included in producer decision making.

This information can also help to inform marketing decision making.



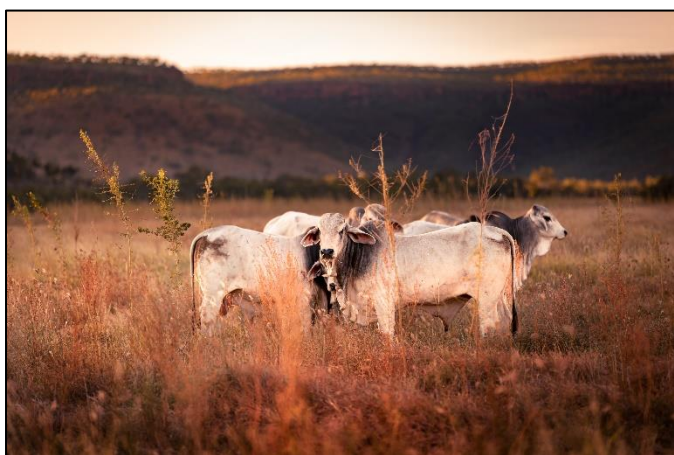
References

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The Final Report was submitted to Meat & Livestock Australia. All project outputs are available from our website: <https://www.uwacaed.org/research>

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