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MEDIA STATEMENT

"OPPORTUNITY LOST TO REFORM FOOD ADMINISTRATION"

The Government's announcement that the ministries of Agriculture and Health would retain their existing responsibilities for food regulations was criticised today by the Meat Industry Association.

MIA Executive Director, Brian Lynch, said "The decision is against overseas trends where governments are responding to BSE and foot and mouth scares by insisting their food laws are better coordinated and unnecessary structural obstacles are removed. It's a major disappointment that Government has sidestepped the chance to overhaul New Zealand's outdated framework of food safety regulation. For more than three years food processors and exporters have been calling for reform. This decision means they will have to continue to cope with legislation that is poorly focussed and fragmented. The confusing and costly split of responsibilities between the ministries of Agriculture and Health will remain ".

Mr Lynch said meat companies had advocated a single regime of food administration and an authority based in MAF with sole responsibility for giving food safety advice and administering food-related regulations.

"Ministers seem to have convinced themselves that giving MAF the task of overseeing all food regulations would have risked having an export focus overshadow the concerns of domestic consumers in New Zealand. We have never seen the interests of processors and consumers being in conflict. Both stand to gain from an arrangement that would eliminate the existing confusion in consumers minds over which department is responsible for which regulations, and at the same time offer credible assurances to our overseas markets that New Zealand had a consistent regulatory system in place".

Mr Lynch said that experience would show that Government had not yet addressed the underlying problems. The MIA would continue to work with other food processing groups to bring about a better regulatory system.

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