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PRESS RELEASE

New Zealand's Meat Trade with China

Meat Industry Association of New Zealand (Inc)

"Discussions between New Zealand and the People's Republic of China on the approval of New Zealand meat processing plants for export to China are ongoing, notwithstanding the deadline of 1 November 2004, announced some time ago, for the issue of import permits to Chinese importers" Chief Executive of the Meat Industry Association, Caryll Shailer, said today. "A delegation from the New Zealand Food Safety Authority will be in Beijing next week to advance those discussions."

"Progress has been hindered by different technical understandings of New Zealand's meat hygiene system and the advanced technologies utilised in today's modern food environment. Industry will continue to work in partnership with government to ensure our valued trade with China is put on a secure footing."

"The industry does not accept that its plants are sub-standard, Dr Shailer says. It has invested heavily over the last half century to ensure that its food safety standards for exported meat meet the increasingly rigorous requirements of the world's most discerning markets and that conditions in our processing and export plants match or exceed world practice. There have been counterpart investments by livestock producers in ensuring that stock presented for slaughter is healthy, and increasing investment in meeting the traceability requirements in certain markets."

The Association is currently seeking data to enable an accurate assessment of the potential trade impact following China's re-confirmation of the implementation date for its existing rule. That rule states that from 1 November 2004 import permits will no longer be issued for product that does not come from a plant registered by China's own inspectors. "Transitional arrangements have been provided to enable product to continue to enter China where an importer has a valid import permit issued before 31 October. Importers in China actually hold the import permits so it may be some days before we are able to accurately determine any immediate impact."

We understand that the New Zealand Food Safety Authority's recommendations for plants that fulfill the requirements may now be accepted as the basis for China's own approval. "China's willingness to accept a systems approach to listing is a step in the right direction."

China is a key and growing market for lamb products, fancy meats, beef cuts, offals and other products, and in 2003 was worth approximately \$255 million. It is the diverse product mix and the significant growth potential that makes China such an important market for the New Zealand meat industry.

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