Delivering consumer confidence in eating quality for 20 years
A brief history

Meat Standards Australia (MSA) was released in 1998 by the Australian red meat industry to improve the eating quality consistency of beef and sheepmeat. The system is based on almost 800,000 consumer taste tests by more than 114,000 consumers from 11 countries and takes into account all factors that affect eating quality from paddock to plate.

In the early 1990s the Australian beef industry identified variable eating quality as a major contributor to declining beef consumption and committed research funding to address the problem.

The ability to predict the eating quality of cooked beef prior to consumption was identified as the key.

Consumer testing protocols were developed which led to the implementation of MSA grading standards, defined by consumer score outcomes.

Traditional carcase grading parameters have proved to be of little value in predicting consumer outcomes. Instead a broader combination of factors forms the basis of an interactive model, which accurately predicts consumer scores for almost 200 cut-by-cook method combinations for every carcase graded.
The MLA Impact Assessment for the period 2010 – 2015 reported a net industry benefit of $679 million, a benefit cost ratio (BCR) of 12.5:1 from an investment of $54 million, over the five-year period for the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) program.

26.5 million cattle have been MSA graded, supplied by over 43,000 MSA registered cattle producers.

Over the life of the program 549 people have been trained as MSA graders.

MSA has conducted consumer sensory testing with more than more than 114,000 consumers on 800,000 samples of meat in 11 countries. This research determines what attributes have an impact on eating quality. Consumer sensory testing validates all developments to the MSA Model.

MSA has asked 38,000 consumers in 8 countries about their willingness to pay for varying levels of eating quality. Results indicate that compared to a pass or ‘good every day quality’, consumers were willing to pay:

- Half or 0.5 times for a fail or ‘unsatisfactory quality’
- 1.6 times for ‘better than every day quality’
- 2.1 times for ‘premium quality’

37.2 million sheep have been processed following the MSA pathways, supplied by 27,000 MSA registered sheep producers.

In 2017 consumer testing protocols used by MSA to support eating quality research were adopted as the global standard by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

In 2013, the MSA Index for producers was released, creating a new way to benchmark carcase performance. In 2016-17, the average MSA Index was 57.59.

More than 15,000 retail, food service and wholesaler businesses have been trained in MSA programs.

*Figures as of 1 January 2018*
1998: MSA: Commercial adoption. MSA was commercially implemented in 1998 as a subsidy program with the aim of testing two Generating Process models.

1999: Initial research and development. A whole-of-industry approach, a meat grading system was established. The Australian Lot Feeders Association (ALFA) established the Australian Lot Feeders Association (ALFA) to conduct research and development in eating quality. The program was established in a national initiative to create a national grading system.

2000: MSA Model expansion. The Sheepmeat Quality Assurance (MQA) model was established in 2000. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2002: Sheepmeat Eating Quality (SMEQ) scheme launched. The SMEQ program was launched in 2002. The program was designed to evaluate sheepmeat eating quality across the country.

2006: Large processors and retailers adopt MSA. All existing MSA-licensed processors were introduced. Processor MSA graders were employed by MSA. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2010: Aspirational future industry strategy. In 2010 the Peak Industry Taskforce, mutually agreed on the plan to the year 2020. The plan was to increase the volume of cattle MSA-graded for the first time in a single financial year. The programme moved into a self-funded stage. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2015: Inaugural 2015 Eating Quality Audit report. The first survey of all Australian buyers showed that more than 90% of consumers were interested in new eating quality beef for their benefit. MSA was initially adopted by the industry in 1998, and since then, it has been expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2016: MLA celebrates 20 years of commercial operation. The Australian Beef Language was launched in 2016. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2017: MLA consumer surveys protocols endorsed as global standard. The United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) endorsed the MSA Language as a global standard for evaluating eating quality beef, and the MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2018: Inaugural Beef Excellence in Eating Quality Awards. The MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality. The MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

1996: National Eating Quality Assurance approved. The National Eating Quality Assurance (NEQA) program was approved in 1996. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2001: Industry taskforce ownership. The industry taskforce ownership was established. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2003: MSA Sheepmeat Quality Research (MSQ) program commenced. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2011: Consumer thresholds for 3, 4 and 5 star MSA were maintained. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2015: MLA consumer surveys protocols endorsed as global standard. The United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) endorsed the MSA Language as a global standard for evaluating eating quality beef, and the MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2017: MLA consumer surveys protocols endorsed as global standard. The United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) endorsed the MSA Language as a global standard for evaluating eating quality beef, and the MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2018: Inaugural Beef Excellence in Eating Quality Awards. The MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality. The MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

1998: National Eating Quality Assurance approved. The National Eating Quality Assurance (NEQA) program was approved in 1996. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2001: Industry taskforce ownership. The industry taskforce ownership was established. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2003: MSA Sheepmeat Quality Research (MSQ) program commenced. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2011: Consumer thresholds for 3, 4 and 5 star MSA were maintained. The program was expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2015: MLA consumer surveys protocols endorsed as global standard. The United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) endorsed the MSA Language as a global standard for evaluating eating quality beef, and the MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2017: MLA consumer surveys protocols endorsed as global standard. The United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) endorsed the MSA Language as a global standard for evaluating eating quality beef, and the MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

2018: Inaugural Beef Excellence in Eating Quality Awards. The MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality. The MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.

1998–2018: MSA celebrates 20 years of commercial operation. The MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality. The MLA consumer surveys protocols were expanded to include a national review of sheepmeat eating quality.