Halal certification in Australia: a quick guide

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This quick guide provides an overview of Halal food certification in Australia.1

Halal
Halal is an Arabic word that means permitted or lawful in Islam. It is both an umbrella term used in relation to all food products, and a term that refers to a method of livestock slaughtering consistent with Islamic rites.

What is permitted?
All foods are Halal unless they are Haram (which means prohibited or unlawful). For example, all fruit and vegetables are Halal unless they are contaminated with Haram substances or the production plant contains Haram substances.

What is doubtful?
Mashbooh is an Arabic word that means doubtful or questionable. In relation to Halal guidelines, Mashbooh products cannot be clearly classified as either Halal or Haram without more information. For example, food products that contain ingredients such as enzymes, gelatine, emulsifiers and flavours are Mashbooh because the origin of these ingredients is not known. Generally, Muslims will avoid eating Mashbooh foods.

What is prohibited?
Food products that are considered Haram include pork and its by-products, animals with fangs, Halal animals improperly slaughtered, lard, alcoholic drinks and foods contaminated with the aforementioned. More information about Halal and Haram foods can be found at:

- the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources—Australian Government Authorised Halal Program (meat notice 2009/08: guidelines for the preparation, identification, storage and certification for export of Halal red meat and red meat products)
- Meat and Livestock Australia—has produced an Australian Halal meat products guide and an Australian Halal fact sheet (focused on meat products) and
- Halal Australia (a certifying body)—provides general information about Halal and Haram foods, as well as Halal certification, as does the Islamic Co-ordinating Council of Victoria and the Islamic Council of Queensland.

1. The Quick Guide was produced with research assistance by Jolanta Olender and Abraham Williamson, interns from the Australian National University College of Law. The author thanks Paula Pyburne, Senior Researcher, Law and Bills Digest, for her input.
Why is food certified as Halal?

Food certification organisations ensure that strict standards are met by producers or manufacturers before they are entitled to label their food with the relevant certification trade mark. Non-religious examples of certification standards include those for organic food, free range eggs, and perhaps the best known, the Australian Made and Produced certification. Producers and manufacturers obtain certification to more effectively market their products to consumers.

As with other food certification systems, to be considered Halal food must meet the rules laid down by the organisation from which the food producer or manufacturer is seeking certification. Once the relevant standards are met, the food can then be packaged and marketed as having been certified as Halal by that organisation.

The global Halal market has been estimated at 1.6 billion consumers and may be worth up to US$1.6 trillion per annum by 2018. Food certified as Halal by an Australian certifying organisation is able to compete in the overseas market and so create export opportunities. For example, the Senate Economics References Committee noted, in a 2015 report on third party certification of food, that:

Halal certification is required for [red meat] exports to Indonesia, Malaysia, Iran, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Brunei, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. These are significant markets for the meat industry and third party certification is instrumental in providing exporters access to these markets.2

In Australia, certification schemes reflect a growing number of consumers to whom it is important that the food they eat complies with their religious beliefs. More broadly, though, certification gives confidence to a growing number of consumers who are concerned about the foods they eat and want more information about the ingredients contained in that food on the relevant packaging.

Who can certify food as Halal?

As with other food certification systems, a range of different certifying organisations exist.

Halal certification

In relation to Halal certification, the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources website sets out a list of Australian organisations that are able to certify red meat and red meat products as Halal for export to certain overseas markets. In addition, a number of Halal certification organisations also operate within Australia (listed in Appendix A), offering Halal certification services to Australian domestic food producers and manufacturers.

What is the certification process?

As with other certification process, Halal certification follows a series of broad steps:

1. The relevant food producer or manufacturer applies to the relevant certifying organisation (for example, Halal Australia). This usually involves providing detailed information about the raw materials, ingredients and additives, and the manufacturing process.

2. An inspection of the manufacturing site is then conducted by an appropriately qualified person on behalf of the certifying organisation to determine whether all the relevant requirements are consistently being met, and a report prepared. The applicant may be required to alter their manufacturing processes or ingredients, or to provide further information about their supply chain.

3. A certification agreement is then concluded between the applicant and the certifying body, and Halal accreditation or certification is awarded for a period of time.

A flow chart outlining an example of a domestic Halal certification process chart is available here, whilst an example of the Halal certification process for exports is available here.

Does Halal certification increase costs to consumers?

The cost of obtaining Halal certification varies depending on the product involved, the organisation from which certification is sought and whether the goods are for export or domestic consumption. However, the fees are often modest.

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For large-scale manufacturing the cost of certification in the context of overall manufacturing, advertising and distribution costs has little, if any, impact on a product’s price. For example, in relation to Halal certification, the Senate Economics References Committee (the Committee) noted, in a 2015 report on third party certification of food that ‘evidence received by the committee overwhelmingly suggests that Halal certification does not result in increased food prices’.3

**What are certification funds used for?**

The funds raised from certification applications can be used for a variety of purposes beyond the payment of usual business expenses such as salaries, taxes and superannuation. This can include providing funds for a variety of charitable and community causes. The Committee noted, in a 2015 report on third party certification of food, that ‘evidence indicates that there is no direct link between Halal certification in Australia and terrorism funding’.4

**Recent inquires**

In 2015 the Committee conducted an inquiry into, and reported on, third party food certification. As part of that process, issues around Halal certification were examined. In relation to Halal certification, the Committee made the following recommendations:

- the government, through the Department of Agriculture, consider the monitoring and compliance of Halal certification of meat for export; and becoming the sole signatory on the government Halal certificate
- the government, through bilateral and multilateral forums, promote greater acceptance of a ‘whole-of-country’, government-led Halal certification system
- the government consider requiring that Halal certification of goods in the domestic market comply with the standard agreed for export
- the Halal certification industry consider establishing a single Halal certification authority and a single national registered certified trademark and
- meat processors clearly label products sourced from animals subject to religious slaughter.

At the time of writing, it does not appear that any of the above recommendations have been implemented.

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3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Ibid., p. 27.
Appendix A: Australian Halal certification bodies

The selection of Halal certification bodies below is derived from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources’ list of Islamic organisations that have an Approved Arrangement with the Department for the certification of red Halal meat and red meat products for export:

- Adelaide Mosque Islamic Society of South Australia
- Al-Iman Islamic Society
- Australian Federation of Islamic Councils Inc.
- Australian Halal Development and Accreditation
- Australian Halal Food Services
- Global Halal Trade Centre Pty Ltd
- Halal Australia Pty Ltd
- Halal Certification Authority Australia
- Islamic Coordinating Council of Victoria Pty Ltd
- Islamic Council of Western Australia
- Muslim Association of Riverina Wagga Wagga Inc.
- Supreme Islamic Council of Halal Meat in Australia Inc.
- Western Australia Halal Authority

In addition to the above, other entities certify Halal products for the domestic market, such as the Islamic Council of Queensland Inc.