AMPC
AUSTRALIAN MEAT PROCESSOR CORPORATION

Literature Review: Attraction, Retention, and Inclusion in the Australian Meat Processing Industry

Report for the Australian Meat Processor Corporation (AMPC)

Project code	Milestone no.	Prepared by	Date submitted
2025-1008	4	Paula Brough, Ashlea Troth, Vicki Anderson, Jafar Akbari	24/10/2024
		Centre for Work, Organisation & Wellbeing Griffith Business School Griffith University	

Contents

1.0 Milestone description

The Achievement Criteria for this Milestone 4, in the signed Agreement, is:

Draft and finalise report for Reviews #1 and #2.

Complete GU ethics submission.

Milestone report submitted to, and approved by, AMPC.

The due date for this Milestone is 24th October, 2024.

2.0 Introduction and Overview

2.1 Introduction

The Australian meat processing industry plays a crucial role in the country's economy (Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Shah, 2017). The IBISWorld 'Meat Processing in Australia – Market Research Report (2014-2029) reports that, as of June 2024, the industry employs 36,971 employees across 668 businesses and has a revenue of $31.8bn to date for 2024-2025. The market size including from exports is projected to grow over the next five years. However, the IBISWorld Report (2024) states that labour shortages in the meat processing industry have, at times, limited processing activities. McKenna (2022), for the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC), relatedly notes that the constrained labour availability in meat processing means that supply chains do not have flexibility to respond to changing supply and demand (p. 4), and bottlenecks in processing may negatively affect farmer returns (p. 4). There are impacts on the Australian community more broadly, with a shortage of meat processing workers leading to higher costs of retail meat (McKenna, 2022, p. 4).

The meat processing industry is challenged by such persistent challenges in workforce management, particularly in attracting, retaining, and engaging a diverse workforce, and has faced continuing high turnover rates and skills shortages (e.g. Kanan et al., 2023; Shah, 2017). Turnover impacts on the ability of plants to operate, and is accompanied by high costs – an estimated $650,000 to $1.3 million per annum for a medium sized plant (Cordery, 2006). Calculated across the industry, this is an annual cost of over $30 million (Glass et al., 2022).

Characteristics of the meat processing sector in Australia impact on this scenario and how the industry manages its labour force. These characteristics include that the work is labour-intensive (Jerrard et al., 2008; Norton & Rafferty, 2010), and difficulty to automate, requiring humans to flexibly handle animals (Glass et al., 2022). Being labour intensive, labour force management has a predominant effect on productivity and profitability (Glass et al., 2022; Productivity Commission, 1998). Employers are often located in regional areas (e.g. Jie & Parton, 2009).

To date, the industry has relied on a diverse, multi-cultural workforce including local workers, migrants, and, increasingly, workers from Pacific Island countries (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Cooney et al., 2010; Shah, 2017). This means there is now a heavy reliance on non-Australian, non-local employees (estimates of 50% to 70% of abattoir workers; Kanan et al., 2023), and on temporary visa holders (Shah, 2017, p. 20).

The work is physically demanding and can be exhausting and potentially dangerous, impacting on worker satisfaction (e.g. Kanan et al., 2023; Shah, 2017). High rates of workplace injuries and claims is a factor affecting attraction to the work, and when workers are employed, their wellbeing and engagement; and "The industry's reputation for unappealing 'dirty work' puts it at a disadvantage relative to other industries in attracting and retaining workers." (Shah, 2017, p. 19).

2.2 Overview

In sum, this literature review examines the developing employment landscape in the industry from 1998 to 2024. It synthesises the contributions from 24 academic studies, industry reports, and government documents, to present an over-arching view of the challenges and opportunities for the meat processing industry in creating more inclusive and engaging workplaces. What emerges from the review is that there has been an evolution over the 26 years in the understanding of the workforce challenges and issues, and a growing emphasis on managing diverse employees, employee wellbeing and cultural safety. This information, about the development and characteristics of Australia's meat processing industry workforce management, is a valuable lens through which to consider how to promote workforce diversity and inclusion, employee engagement, and wellbeing, towards achieving greater attraction, retention and engagement of diverse employees.

3.0 Project objectives

Objectives (from page 22 of the Research Agreement)

- To identify evidence-based research literature, theory, and workplace best practices about increasing the attraction and inclusion and reducing turnover of a diverse workforce.

- To identify inclusive workplace practices and issues in Australia focussed on the meat processing sector.

- To examine the current state of diversity, inclusion, psychosocial safety, and cultural safety, in the Australian meat processing industry, including existing metrics, policies, practices, and strategies, and through the lived experiences of employees and leaders/managers regarding their felt inclusion and what this means for their turnover intentions and their wellbeing.

- To identify, in the Australian meat processing industry, current good practice (such as effective management/leadership practices) to point to areas for intervention, and areas for improvement / development.

- To produce AMPC case studies, describing pertinent instances of this good practice.

- To produce a Report providing the information identified and set of evidence-based recommendations to AMPC. This report will specifically include a outcomes-focused road map identifying recommended measures the industry should consider to facilitate the broader inclusion of diverse workers.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Research Question and Design

The key research objective is:

how can Australian meat processing workplaces improve attraction, retention and engagement, reduce turnover, and promote psychosocial safety and wellbeing and cultural safety, through developing and implementing inclusive employment practices for their diverse workforces comprising a range of cultures and social groups, including First Nations employees?

This aim of this review is to take a specific focus on the literature specific to the Australian meat processing industry (now referred to as 'the industry'), to assess the knowledge and initiatives relating to this research objective.

A systematic review method was used to identify the research and reports relevant to this objective, to then consolidate this, identify themes, and provide suggestions to improve future directions for practice.

4.2 Search Strategy and Literature Selection

Two searches were conducted. To be included, papers and reports had to be published from approximately 2000 through to 2024, in English, and could include all literature types. The paper must have been written about the Australian context, and be about or significantly include meat processing.

4.2.1 Academic literature review

A systematic search was first conducted of the published literature in five scientific and academic databases: Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, EBSCOHost, and Google Scholar. To capture a wide range of literature, a list of keywords was compiled, and Boolean operators and stemming were applied. **Table 1** sets out the search terms used. The same groupings of search terms were applied in all five databases. Elicit.ai was also used to conduct a search to supplement the database searches. Citation tracking was also employed, including backward and forward citation analysis, to check for other earlier or more recent literature.

Table 1

Search terms used for search focus of Australia plus Meat Processing

Australia* AND
(work* OR organisation* OR organization* OR job* OR labor* OR labour* OR occupation* OR employ* OR industry) AND
("meat process*" OR "food process*" OR "food manufactur*" OR manufactur* OR farm* OR meat OR "meat industr*" OR abattoir* OR livestock OR butcher* OR slaughter*) AND
((attract* OR recruit* OR select* OR engag* OR retention OR retain* OR turnover OR attrition) OR (diverse OR diversity OR equity OR "equal opportunity" OR inclusion OR inclusive) OR ("psycho* safety" OR wellbeing OR well-being) OR (cultur* OR "cultur* safe*" OR "cultur* engage*"))

The results from the database searches, 4739 papers, were uploaded into Covidence ®, a web platform for systematic reviews. **Figure 1** shows that 1408 duplicates were identified and removed, and the titles and abstracts of 3331 papers were screened to determine their relevance. 3085 papers were excluded at this stage. The full text of the remaining 232 papers was screened, and a further 217 were excluded, leaving 15 to be extracted.

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart is in **Figure 1**.
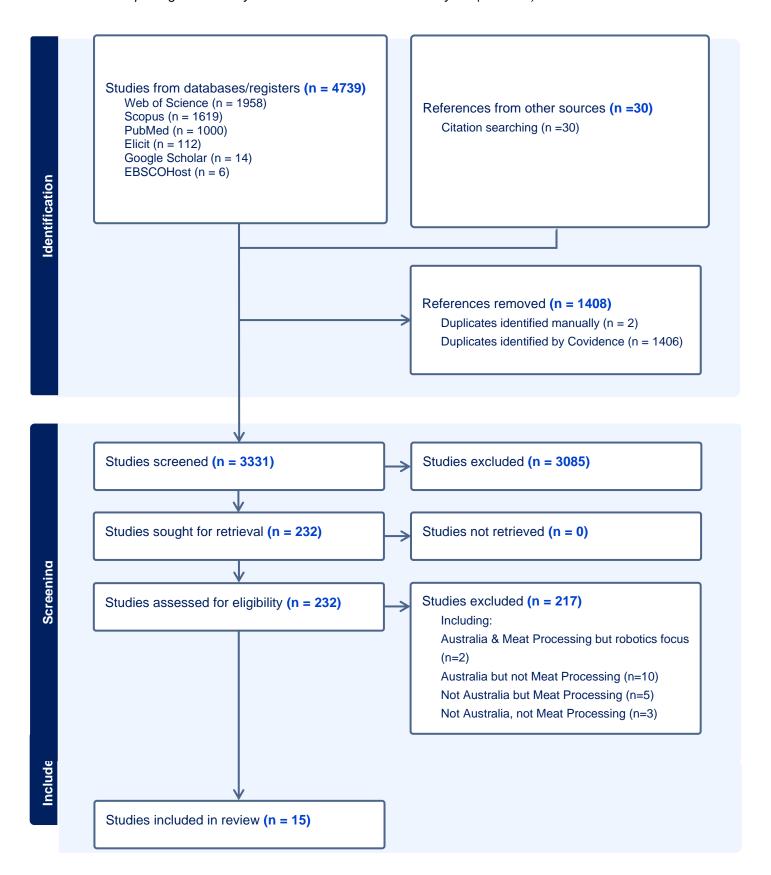
4.2.2 Grey literature review

A similar systematic review process as above was adopted for the grey literature review. The process involved a systematic identification of grey literature, which consisted of materials not formally published through traditional academic or commercial channels, such as Government or organisational reports, and working papers. To source these references, searches were conducted of Australian government websites and the sites for professional associations and organisations relating to the meat industry. The search plan is set out in **Table 2.**

Table 2

Grey literature search plan

Search for information relating specifically to the Australian meat industry, by reviewing the websites of the AMPC, the MLA, the AMIC, and the AMIEU.	Reports and studies (including 'state of the industry', annual reports, and relevant submissions to Government such as pre-Budget submissions)	Examining citations in each of these for relevant additional references.
	Online information in these websites, and links to other sites.	
Search in Google for relevant Australian Government sites, using the following search strings that do not specify industries or sectors (as no useful results were found when the relevant sector was specified).	site:gov.au AND (attract* OR recruit* OR select* OR engag* OR retention OR retain* OR turnover OR attrition) AND (diverse OR diversity OR equity OR "equal opportunity" OR inclusion OR inclusive) AND Australia* AND (("psycho* safety" OR wellbeing OR well-being) OR (cultur* OR "cultur* safe*" OR "cultur* engage*"))	
Search in Google more broadly for sites and information about the Australian meat processing, and Australian meat, industries; and about indigenous employment.		
Engineer prompts in Perplexity.ai about the meat industry and employment in Australia, for the sources it identifies.		

Following full text screening of the results from the grey literature search, 10 documents were finally determined to be added for extraction for this review.

Figure 1

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart

Identification

Studies from databases/registers **(n = 4739)**
 Web of Science (n = 1958)
 Scopus (n = 1619)
 PubMed (n = 1000)
 Elicit (n = 112)
 Google Scholar (n = 14)
 EBSCOHost (n = 6)

References from other sources **(n =30)**
 Citation searching (n =30)

References removed **(n = 1408)**
 Duplicates identified manually (n = 2)
 Duplicates identified by Covidence (n = 1406)

Screening

Studies screened **(n = 3331)** → Studies excluded **(n = 3085)**

Studies sought for retrieval **(n = 232)** → Studies not retrieved **(n = 0)**

Studies assessed for eligibility **(n = 232)** → Studies excluded **(n = 217)**
 Including:
 Australia & Meat Processing but robotics focus (n=2)
 Australia but not Meat Processing (n=10)
 Not Australia but Meat Processing (n=5)
 Not Australia, not Meat Processing (n=3)

Include

Studies included in review **(n = 15)**

4.3 Data extraction

The final 24 articles and reports were reviewed to identify and extract more detailed information. Their characteristics are set out in **Table 3**. A summary of the findings and recommendations from these articles are then presented in the following Project Outcomes section (section 5.0).

Table 3

Details of the literature included in this review in chronological order

Reference	Description	Design / Methodology
Productivity Commission. (1998). *Work Arrangements in the Australian Meat Processing Industry*. Research Report, AusInfo, Canberra.	Provided in-depth information about the then current work arrangements in the Australian meat processing industry, how they had changed in recent times, and what impediments existed to further change that could enhance industry performance.	Discussions with industry representatives and meat processors. Reviewed previous studies. Examined industry awards and certified agreements to understand regulatory and operational context. Consultation with interested parties and participants. Data from government and other sources.
Perkins, K. (2005). *No Bull – growing people does grow business: Final Evaluation of the Midfield Personal Directions Pilot Program*. Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.	The Personal Directions Program aimed to reduce absenteeism and improve retention in the meat processing industry by enhancing communication skills among supervisors and employees, showing initial success in reducing absenteeism but requiring ongoing support and adaptation for sustained impact.	Workshops tailored based on participant input and company context. Use of an expert facilitator with change management experience. Direct involvement of senior managers in workshops. Regular interviews and feedback sessions for reinforcement. Formal monitoring over 12 months with pre-workshop meetings, interviews, observations, feedback collection, and follow-up interviews.
Cordery, J. (2006). *Strategies for improving employee retention: Final report.* Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.	Documented the nature and extent of employee turnover within several meat processing plants, and collected data relating to underlying causes of employee retention and turnover. The aim was to assist the plants in the development of a focused employee retention strategy.	Collected four types of data: interviews, employee surveys, focus groups, turnover records, from six sheep and beef processing plants. Used the Job Embeddedness Framework as the guiding model for improving employee retention (improving fit, building links, intensifying sacrifices related to leaving the job).
Colic-Peisker, V., & Tilbury, F. (2006). Employment Niches for Recent Refugees: Segmented Labour Market in Twenty-first Century Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 19*(2), 203-229.	About the employment niches and labour market segmentation experienced by recent refugee groups in Australia. Recent humanitarian refugee groups from ex-Yugoslavia, Africa, and the Middle East are concentrated	A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a survey of 150 refugees in Perth, Western Australia, and data from two sociological research projects on resettlement of refugees in Australia.

	in certain low-status, low-paid jobs including meat processing.	
Jerrard, M., Donohue, R., Kimberley, N., & Cooney, R. (2008). Reinventing meatworkers: Old skills but new careers for the twenty-first century?. *Employment Relations Record*, *8*(1), 51-67.	Examined the challenges the Australian meat processing industry faces in attracting and retaining workers, and strategies for "reinventing" the industry to make it more appealing as a career rather than just a "dirty job".	Literature review and conceptual analysis to examine workforce issues and strategies in the meat processing industry. Case study analysis of a specific industry initiative in South Australia Analysis of industry data on employee turnover rates
Jie, F., & Parton, K. (2009). The need for improved skills in the Australian meat industry. *International Review of Business Research Papers*, *5*(4), 257-269.	With a particular focus on the issue of unskilled and inexperienced personnel, this focused on identifying the major constraints to the implementation of effective supply chain management in the Australian beef industry, with	Mail survey of beef producers, processors, and retailers/wholesalers. Analysis of published literature on the Australian beef industry. Interviews with key personnel in the beef sector and training organisations.
Cooney, R., Jerrard, M., Donohue, R., & Kimberley, N. (2010). Exploring skill ecosystems in the Australian meat processing industry: Unions, employers and institutional change. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, *21*(2), 121-138.	Explored the concept of 'skill ecosystems' in the context of the Australian meat processing industry, particularly the abattoir sector. Aimed to identify the critical features of skill ecosystems and apply them to the analysis of the meat processing industry. Discussed how major institutional changes through the deregulation of industrial relations disrupted the existing skill ecosystem in the industry.	Multi-method approach combining analysis of secondary sources and case study research. Semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU), supplemented by analysis of relevant policy documents and industry reports.
Norton, K., & Rafferty, M. (2010). *Work, Skills and Training in the Australian Red Meat Processing Sector. A National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program Report*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. PO Box 8288, Stational Arcade, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia.	Investigated the changes in work, skills development, and training in the Australian red meat processing sector over the past three decades, and how these changes have been influenced by factors such as supply chain dynamics, ownership structures, and industrial conditions, and have impacted training and workforce development in the industry.	4 case study sites (2 beef processing, 2 lamb processing) including based on firms that have adapted and survived, as indicated by growth in employees/plants. Conducted semi-structured interviews with a vertical cross-section of workplace members at each site to obtain a balanced view and validate the data.

Bretherton, T. (2011). *The Role of VET in Workforce Development: A Story of Conflicting Expectations. Research Report*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. PO Box 8288, Stational Arcade, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia.	Examined the role of vocational education and training (VET) in workforce development, enhancing productivity, and increasing workforce participation, in the meat processing and childcare sectors as case studies. Used a four-domain model to analyse workforce development challenges.	A 3-year research program investigating the role of VET in workforce development. A national roundtable of VET experts held in October 2010 to test the validity of the findings.
Hemphill, E., & Kulik, C. T. (2011). Myth busting rural labour shortages. A market segmentation approach reveals new recruitment opportunities. *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies, The*, *17*(2), 174-203.	Examined the recruitment challenges faced by two regional meat processing plants in Australia and how they can improve their recruitment outcomes by applying market segmentation analysis to better target and attract workers from the regional labour pool, rather than relying solely on international recruitment. Identified new recruitment opportunities by understanding the differentiated needs and interests of potential job applicants.	Focus group discussions with meat processing workers to identify relevant attributes.

Consultation with industry stakeholders to review a survey. Best-worst choice survey methodology to identify most and least important job attributes.

Random sampling of a regional workforce and meat processing workers. |
MINTRAC (2011). *Workforce retention and training in meat processing plants: Final report.* Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.	About the Workforce retention project 2004 to 2006 which aimed to research causes of high turnover in the meat processing industry, and develop tools to improve retention and reduce absenteeism, culminating in the distribution of training materials and resources.	Literature review to identify causes of turnover. Analysis of high- and low-turnover companies. Development of training tools and resources (e.g., supervisor training unit, induction program). Research on traineeships with focus on trainee feedback. Collection of evaluation data from companies and supervisors.
Bryant, L., & Jaworski, K. (2012). Minding the gaps: Examining skill shortages in Australian rural non-agricultural workplaces. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *18*(4), 499-515.	Examined skill shortages in rural Australian mining and food and beverage processing industries, arguing that these shortages are often confused with skill gaps. Highlighted the need to address gender and racial assumptions to better utilise the available workforce.	In-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews with HR personnel from mining and food processing sites. Use of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) quantitative data.
Piller, I., & Lising, L. (2014). Language, employment, and settlement: Temporary meat workers in Australia. *Multilingua*, *33*(1-2), 35-59.	Explored the role of language in the employment and migration trajectories of a group of Filipino meat processing workers on temporary visas in a small town in rural Australia. Examined how language proficiency requirements serve to secure a flexible labour supply for	Case study approach combining macro-data from language and migration policy documents and media reports, with micro-data from ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation and formal interviews with 6 temporary work visa holders.

	the meat industry despite the workers' limited opportunities to practice English at work or in the community.	
Shah, C. (2017). Employers' Perspectives on Training: Three Industries. NCVER Research Report. *National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).*	Examined the workforce training practices and perspectives of employers across three industries in Australia - red meat processing, road freight transport, and freight forwarding. Aimed to understand the factors that affect employers' investment decisions on training, and the types of learning approaches they adopt to deliver that training.	Semi-structured interviews with key personnel from 10 firms (ranging in size from small to large) across 3 industries (red meat processing, road freight transport, and freight forwarding).
Samad, A., Teicher, J., Akbar, D., & Kinnear, S. (2018). Achieving secure and stable migrant employment: A study of agriculture, manufacturing and food processing in Regional Queensland. *CQUniversity, Centre for Tourism and Regional Opportunities, Australia.*	Identified obstacles to the employment of skilled and unskilled migrants in the agricultural, manufacturing, and food processing industries in regional Queensland. Examined the potential socio-economic and other benefits of employing migrants in these industries. Made observations on the policy implications of the research findings.	Qualitative research including data collection from secondary sources, face-to-face and telephone interviews with employers, industry peak bodies, and other stakeholders, and thematic content analysis of the interview data.
Barrie, H., McDougall, K., & Wasserman, R. (2018). Murray Bridge: A blueprint for good migrant settlement. *Hugo Centre for Migration and Population Research, University of Adelaide.*	Aimed to achieve a better understanding of the factors leading to long-term successful settlement outcomes for new migrants in the rural city of Murray Bridge, where the meat processing industry is a major employer, with migrants often recruited for jobs at local meat processing plants. A focus on active citizenship and social participation in community life. Applied findings to develop blueprint for migrant settlement that can be used by other regional communities.	Literature review. Analysis of secondary census data. 20 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (e.g. employers, local government, community groups, schools, migrant support services). 23 interviews and focus groups with migrants living in Murray Bridge.
Donovan, M., Khan, A., & Johnston, V. (2020). Exploring associations of employee reports on safety climate, disability management and labour management with work characteristics	Explored the associations between employee reports of three organisational domains (safety climate, disability management, and labour management) and	Survey of employees on organisational domains, individual/work characteristics, and work injury history.

and injury at an Australian poultry meat processing plant. *Safety Science*, *126*, 104659.	individual/work characteristics and work injury history in a poultry meat processing plant in Australia.	
Mackenzie, H. & Work Healthy Australia. (2021). *Employee Retention in the Red Meat Industry: A Best Practice Model.* Australian Meat Processor Corporation.	Examined what are the factors influencing employee retention in the Australian meat processing industry, and how can these be synthesised into a model for best practices to improve retention. Developed a theoretical model for best practices in employee retention in the Australian meat processing industry.	Narrative literature review of relevant databases. Stakeholder interviews at three plants. Collection and analysis of turnover data from five plants over 28 plant-years. Semi-structured interviews with plant staff. Analysis of stakeholder views and turnover data.
Glass, R., Moore, A., Whitton, A., Leahy, T., & Trumper, E. (2022). *Development of a research-based employee Retention Framework of Excellence for the meat processing industry.* Australian Meat Processor Corporation.	Developed a retention framework to address high turnover rates in the meat processing industry by identifying the potential causes - key practices affecting employee satisfaction - and providing targeted solutions for industry-wide implementation.	Three phases: research, development, and adoption. - Research phase: qualitative interviews with 740+ employees and quantitative data collection from HR divisions. Development phase used a non-linear approach to engage plants and develop a Retention Framework. Adoption phase aimed to implement the framework industry-wide.
Phillips, C. (2022). *Development of a research-based employee wellbeing program for the meat processing industry.* Australian Meat Processor Corporation.	Addressed what are the current practices and needs for a wellbeing program in the red meat processing industry, focusing on both physical and mental wellbeing. Developed a tailored wellbeing model by assessing employee needs and health metrics, identifying key areas for improvement, and providing insights for future wellbeing resources.	Two phases. Phase 1 (Assessment) included four stages: Exploration, Build, Delivery, and Review. Exploration involved site visits and virtual strategy sessions. Build involved developing industry-specific assessment tools. Delivery tested these tools in five pilot plants with digital and paper formats. Data collected focused on physical health, mental health, overall health, and workplace wellbeing.
(2022). *Training and Competency Framework – Stage 1 (Support Roles).* Australian Meat Processor Corporation.	Discussed improving retention of operational employees in the Red Meat Industry by developing competency frameworks that provide clear career pathways and integrate with HR processes to address capability gaps and adapt to changing work environments.	Identify and commit to support roles at entry, mid-level, and senior levels. Standardise role descriptions including technical and behavioural competencies. Map roles and competencies to potential career paths. Link competencies and roles to training pathways. Overlay training opportunities with mixed-mode deliveries. Conduct internal marketing campaign to promote career pathways

McKenna, S. (2022). *A Migration System for Australia's Future.* Australia Meat Industry Council.	Addressed what are the impacts of reduced migration on the workforce shortage in Australia's meat processing sector, and how can visa reform address this issue. Discussed the critical need for visa reform to address workforce shortages in Australia's meat processing industry, exacerbated at that time by reduced immigration due to COVID-19, to ensure its sustainability and economic contribution.	Survey of AMIC processor members to assess workforce vacancies. Consultation with members regarding SAF funding and training programs. Collaboration with the government to design and implement a pre-employment program. Engagement with Jobactive providers through email, phone contact, and project briefings.
Kanan, L., & Putt, J. (2023). Safety and wellbeing in Australia's Pacific labour mobility scheme. ANU and the Dept of Pacific Affairs	Overview of the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. Findings of a research study (one of the industries in the study is meat processing) that investigated the safety and wellbeing experiences of men and women participating in the scheme, including factors impacting safety and wellbeing, help-seeking behaviours, barriers to seeking support, and the arrangements in place to support worker welfare.	Combination of qualitative and quantitative methods including observations, surveys, interviews, and analysis of incident data from the PLF.
Petrou, K., & Connell, J. (2023). Our 'Pacific family'. Heroes, guests, workers or a precariat?. *Australian Geographer*, *54*(2), 125-135.	Critical analysis of Pacific Australia Labour schemes (meat processing is a major employer of Pacific workers under PAL Mobility scheme). Highlighted how schemes designed primarily to benefit Australian employers and economy. Discussed issues of exploitation of migrant workers from Pacific Island Countries.	Does not present a detailed methodology section outlining the specific methods used in this study.

5.0 Stage summary – Project Outcomes

This section synthesises the information from 24 academic papers, industry reports, and government documents (presented in **Table 3**), to present an over-arching picture of the challenges and opportunities for the meat processing industry with respect to the research objective. The literature is presented chronologically from 1998 to 2024 to highlight the evolution over 26 years in workforce management in Australian meat processing - in employment practices, the diverse workforce, a growing emphasis on employee wellbeing, and the development of more holistic approaches to address the attraction, retention and engagement imperatives for the industry.

There are 4 sections:

- 5.1 Early 2000s: Recognising Workforce Challenges
- 5.2 Late 2000s to Early 2010s: Deepening Understanding and Evolving Strategies
- 5.3 Mid-2010s to Early 2020s: Increasing Focus on Diverse Workforce
- 5.4 2020 to 2024: Holistic Approaches, Comprehensive Frameworks, and Wellbeing

5.1 Early 2000s: Recognising Workforce Challenges

> Productivity Commission. (1998). Work Arrangements in the Australian Meat Processing Industry

The early 2000s marked a period of recognition of the significant workforce challenges facing the Australian meat processing industry. The Productivity Commission's 1998 report on work arrangements in the industry had highlighted several key issues that are evident in the discussions and initiatives in the following years. The Productivity Commission noted that processing meat is labour intensive (p. 29), and labour costs represented a large proportion of production expenses – labour was thus an integral aspect of productivity of the industry (p. XVII, 30). The workforce was predominately male (83%) (p. 34).

5.1.1 Labour Decline, Turnover, Attraction and Retention Challenges

There was a 30% decline in employment between 1979-80 and 1995-96 (Productivity Commission, 1998, p. 30), indicating a long-term trend of workforce contraction. The industry was struggling with attracting and retaining workers. High labour turnover was identified as a persistent issue, with the Productivity Commission (1998) reporting some workplaces advised of annual workforce turnover of 10-20% (p. 42). Cordery (2006) cited annual turnover rates ranging from 37% to 90%, with an average of 58% across the six plants surveyed in that study (p. 3). Cordery (2006) also found that costs of turnover appeared to be within a range of $2500 to $5000 per employee (p. 3).

The Productivity Commission (1998) identified the industry's negative reputation as one significant barrier to recruitment (p. 17-18), with a factor being the industry's poor occupational health and safety record. In 1993-94, there were over 180 claims per thousand employees, compared to 28 per thousand for all industries (p. 41). Cordery (2006) described other issues negatively impacting on employee wellbeing and health, such as the excessive physical demands, monotony, and 'unsociable hours' of the work, (pp. 16-17); and mentioned a "culture of harassment" as an issue impacting employee retention (p. 16). Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) state that meat processing work is described as unpleasant, hazardous, and requiring low levels of education or skill (p. 207). Cordery (2006) noted that, at that time, the meat processing industry faced major challenges of having "…an image as an 'employer of last resort' in many labour markets." (p. 20).

5.1.2 Emerging Focus on Understanding and Addressing Issues

In response to these challenges, studies and reports began to analyse issues relating to employment in the industry. A first approach was a greater emphasis on understanding and addressing employee turnover and retention.

> Perkins, K. (2005). No Bull – growing people does grow business: Final Evaluation of the Midfield Personal Directions Pilot Program. Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.

Perkins (2005), in a report initiated by Meat & Livestock Australia Limited (MLA), described and evaluated the 'Personal Directions Program', an initiative aimed at reducing absenteeism and improving retention by enhancing communication skills among supervisors and employees (p. 2). This program, involving a number of workshops, showed initial success in reducing absenteeism. However, the effects on retention were mixed and not sustained, highlighting the need for ongoing support and follow-through with such initiatives, to meet raised expectations about, for example, career pathways and longer-term change, to have sustained impact (pp. 4-5).

> Cordery, J. (2006). Strategies for improving employee retention: Final report. Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.

An early theory-informed research project, undertaken by Professor Cordery for Meat & Livestock Australia Limited, aimed to develop focused employee retention strategies for six plants and collected data on the underlying causes of employee retention and turnover. Cordery used Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) as the guiding model through which to consider improving employee retention – improving 'fit', building 'links', and intensifying 'sacrifices' (pp. 7-10). Generic strategies for organisations and communities to strengthen these three elements of job embeddedness are set out on pages 9 to 10 of his paper.

Cordery provided 12 recommendations for improving employee retention (p.19-22):

1. Improve collection and analysis of employee turnover data to calculate voluntary turnover rates (p. 19)
2. Modify use of exit interviews – by someone independent of the organisation or anonymously. (p. 19)
3. Set targets and establish managerial accountabilities for reporting on and improving retention. (p. 19)
4. Develop and communicate an 'employee value proposition' (EVP) focussing on on- and off-job opportunities, and positive and realistic job-related aspects that would be valued by prospective employees. (pp. 19-20)

5. Step up community-based activities in relevant labour markets such as sponsoring events and activities (e.g. sporting), offering educational scholarships. Also to build and maintain community linkages for existing employees to reduce turnover. (p. 20)

6. Select employees more rigorously based on organisational fit, including using the EVP, and involving employees in referrals etc. (p. 20)

7. Offer employment security guarantees (p. 21)

8. Train extensively, intensively and visibly (p. 21)

9. Increase organisational communication (about the organisation's plans, progress and performance), to develop identification and trust (p. 21)

10. Emphasise teamwork and employee engagement – to develop commitment and links (p. 21)

11. Reward based on organisational performance (pp. 21-22)

12. Improve job design and working environments, including the inclusion of employees in technological innovations (p. 22).

These innovative and thoughtful recommendations reflected an early advanced appreciation of the need for a multifaceted approach to workforce management in the industry.

> MINTRAC (2011). Workforce retention and training in meat processing plants: Final report. Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.

While released in 2011, this MINTRAC Report was a final milestone report on work from 2004 to 2006 on a project in meat processing plants focussed on seeking to improve retention of new employees.

Various strategies included:

- development of induction programs (p.3-4)
- creation of supervisory training for supervising new recruits (p.2); and
- development of traineeships and induction materials (p.4-5).

This report specifically mentioned that data on traineeship rates showed increases in women both commencing and completing meat processing industry Certificates; and briefly mentioned non-English speaking background and Indigenous trainees.

5.1.3 Emerging Workforce Diversity

By the mid-2000s, the literature started to reflect the significant changes being experienced by the industry in its workforce composition.

> Colic-Peisker, V., & Tilbury, F. (2006). Employment Niches for Recent Refugees: Segmented Labour Market in Twenty-first Century Australia.

Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) noted that recent humanitarian arrivals, particularly from ex-Yugoslavia, Africa, and the Middle East, were increasingly concentrated in 'labour market niches', including meat processing (also cleaning services, aged care, taxi driving, security and building) (p. 203, 205). This trend towards a more diverse workforce brought both opportunities and challenges for the industry.

On the one hand, this represented a source of employees for the meat processing industry, with refugees working in low-status, low-paid jobs that locals avoid (p. 203). On the other hand, as the authors highlighted, many refugees

experienced a significant loss of occupational status, often finding themselves in jobs that did not match their qualifications or previous experience. High turnover rates are mentioned as a characteristic of refugee employment in the industries considered by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) (p. 211), in part due to this mismatch between skills and job roles.

5.1.4 Summary of Early 2000s

The literature from the early 2000s identifies fundamental workforce challenges that would persist and evolve over the following two decades: the recognition of high turnover rates, poor reputation of the work in this industry, safety and wellbeing concerns, and the increasing diversity of the workforce. Early initiatives such as the Personal Directions Program and the broad range of recommendations in Cordery (2006), highlighted the complexity of the issues facing the industry, and the need for sustained, multifaceted approaches to workforce management. To this point, the literature does not specifically address issues relating to diversity and inclusion workplace best practices (and impacts of such practices for organisations' performance), cultural safety of employees, or employment of Australian First Nations employees.

5.2 Late 2000s to Early 2010s: Deepening Understanding and Evolving Strategies

As the Australian meat processing industry moved into the latter part of the 2000s and early 2010s, at that time, there were approximately 300 abattoirs with a workforce of 25,000, predominantly young workers (Jerrard et al., 2008, p. 56; Jie & Parton, 2009, p. 261). Further to the Productivity Commission (1998) report of a 30% decline in employment between 1979-80 and 1995-96, Norton & Rafferty (2010) reported a continuation in trend of workforce contraction, with ABS data showing the number of employees in the industry having fallen by around 40% between 1977-78, and 2007.

Issues continued for the industry with high turnover rates, persistent labour shortages, and difficulties recruiting and retaining appropriately skilled staff (Bryant & Jaworski, 2012, Hemphill & Kulik, 2011; Norton & Rafferty, 2010). The work remained labour-intensive, physically demanding and sometimes dangerous (Hemphill & Kulik, 2011; Norton & Rafferty, 2010). The industry faced a reputation as low-status, low paid work, in an environment with industries and occupations with higher relative attractiveness across a suite of employment features (pay, status and conditions), vying for much the same labour pool (Bretherton, 2011, Norton & Rafferty, 2010). For example, labour was being lost to mining because, "…although the work is no less demanding or physical, it is less confronting and offers better pay." (Norton & Rafferty, 2010, p. 17).

The literature in this period reflects a deepening understanding of these workforce challenges in attracting, retaining, and engaging workers in the Australian meat processing industry, and development in strategies to address them. This period saw more nuanced research into the nature of work in the industry, the skills required, and the potential for new approaches to workforce development.

5.2.1 Reframing the Industry's Image

> Jerrard, M., Donohue, R., Kimberley, N., & Cooney, R. (2008). Reinventing meatworkers: Old skills but new careers for the twenty-first century?

Further to the types of observations referred to earlier about the image of the industry, Jerrard et al. (2008) examined the challenges the Australian meat processing industry faced in attracting and retaining workers, focusing on how to "reinvent" the industry to make it more appealing as a career rather than just a "dirty job". Their paper described the work as brutal, dirty, noisy, malodorous, boring, and repetitive (p. 56). Their research highlighted the persistent issues of poor working conditions and low wages contributing to high turnover rates (pp. 57-58), with some abattoirs reporting turnover rates between 35 and 90 percent (p. 59).

The authors suggested several strategies to improve the industry's image and make meat-working more attractive as a career, including:

- increasing wages
- restructuring roles
- addressing the stigma associated with "dirty work" (pp. 60-62); and
- developing deeper relationships between industry, vocational education and training, and higher education sectors (p. 65).

The paper describes the 'South Australian Meat Industry Attraction and Retention Project' as an example of the need for transformational change in the industry (pp. 62-63). This study marked a shift towards considering how the industry could transform itself to become more attractive to potential workers, rather than trying to fill vacancies within an existing model – that is, to "…lead to the structural, systemic, and cultural change that is necessary to enable a reinventing of work in the industry to be more attractive to a greater section of the labour market." (p. 63).

5.2.2 Skills – Importance, Industry Needs, Training and Development

A focus started to emerge at this stage on the importance of appropriate employee skills for the industry, as an issue related to staff attraction and retention, but with some distinct elements.

> Jie, F., & Parton, K. (2009). The need for improved skills in the Australian meat industry.

Jie and Parton (2009) identified the importance of unskilled and inexperienced personnel as a constraint to the implementation of effective supply chain management in the Australian beef industry. Their study highlighted the ongoing difficulties in attracting and retaining all categories of appropriately skilled workers, particularly in regional areas (p. 257, 261). The authors recommended several strategies to address these challenges:

- enhancing payment incentives
- integrating training methods; and
- implementing better targeted recruitment strategies (pp. 262-266).

This research emphasised the need for a more strategic approach to skills development in the industry, recognising that workforce issues were closely tied to industry sustainability issues such as supply chain management challenges.

Cooney, R., Jerrard, M., Donohue, R., & Kimberley, N. (2010). Exploring skill ecosystems in the Australian meat processing industry: Unions, employers and institutional change.

In 2010, Cooney et al. introduced the concept of 'skill ecosystems' to the analysis of the Australian meat processing industry, particularly the abattoir sector. This identifies that skills and learning are developed in an industry in the context of its institutional frameworks and networks that enable or may impede such development (pp. 122-124). They identified factors impacting on employee skills in meat processing included:

- the work was seasonal and cyclical in nature
- the high turnover rates
- many workers had low levels of formal qualifications
- and the increasing diversity of the workforce, including many migrant workers.

In particular for their premise, they found that the networks and pathways facilitating entry for employees into the industry had been impeded by institutional changes, focussing in particular on how the major union, the Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU), which had previously played a facilitating role, was no longer able to play this role as effectively.

5.2.3 Evolving approaches for a changing, more diverse workforce

Norton, K., & Rafferty, M. (2010). Work, Skills and Training in the Australian Red Meat Processing Sector. A National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program Report.

Norton and Rafferty (2010) further investigated issues relating to skills development and training in the Australian red meat processing sector over the past three decades. In doing so, they provide a valuable snapshot of the changing nature of work in the industry, and in the workforce.

They identified that "(w)ork practices in the meat-processing industry have changed in recent years. The industry has moved away from workers dressing a whole carcass towards a chain-based system, with each worker performing a single task along a moving production line." (p. 3). These changes in work practices towards task specialisation and deskilling of the work – "from a trade-based occupation (industrial butcher) to a more generic process worker model" (p. 16) - have had impacts on training (p. 16), and the elements of job autonomy and complexity relating to work attractiveness, leading to higher turnover. (p. 9).

They describe a workforce that is now:

- Comprised of either

  o longer-term or career meat processors, interested in good income for the skills they have, working close to where they live, low stress, family and friendship connections at work; or

- o significant pools of temporary / transitional meat workers (overseas workers and travellers (e.g. 417 and 457 visa holders, backpackers and grey nomads), contributing to high levels of staff turnover – that is, these workers are by their nature transitory (pp. 3, 19).

- Often characterised by workers with low levels of post-secondary education and English literacy

- Increasingly diverse across many dimensions, including many workers from non-English speaking backgrounds (p. 16-17), creating a need for multilingual approaches to supervision and training (p. 8); and Indigenous people in rural towns living close to the processing site (p. 21).

Their case studies of four processing sites:

> …provided strong support to back the sector's work on improving the social development of workplaces, especially in terms of the quality of supervision and the building of a safe and supportive culture in the workplace….These are also workplaces that can accommodate the wider and more diverse pools of labour now available for running large processing plants in conditions of labour shortage. (p. 8).

The case studies highlighted some emerging practices to address the challenges of attracting and retaining workers, and opportunities for workplace changes, including programs to increase participation by Indigenous people and women (p. 17).

- In the first clear diversity and inclusion initiatives seen in the literature so far

    - o some plants used customised and flexible shifts and part-time work for different worker groups (e.g., 'mums' shift' from 9am to 3pm; 'kids' shift' of Friday night 4pm to midnight) to attract participation from Indigenous people, females and young people (pp. 25-26)

    - o some employers used adaptations such as interpreters or multilingual approaches in training for the increasingly diverse workforce (p. 30)

    - o Engagement with Indigenous people supported by an intermediary (p. 31).

- Job rotation was used by some employers - to increase job variety and satisfaction and reduce physical strain and fatigue for employees (pp. 24-25), with an additional organisational benefit of allowing for greater flexibility in filling gaps in production

- Some plants fostered team environments and used self-directed work teams (p. 25)

- Internal promotion pathways were offered in some plants (p. 24)

- Improved training for supervisors (including in leadership, communication, cultural diversity) aimed to create safer, more supportive, less stressful and more attractive workplaces (p. 8, 29, 32-33), with a recognition of

the key role supervisors play in shaping workplace culture, to soften a tough and adversarial culture "from brawn to brains" (pp. 28, 32)

- Leading edge induction and skill development to provide a supportive and respectful environment for new workers including Indigenous and non-English speaking language people, and women returning to the workforce (p. 30-31).

Norton and Rafferty noted significant variability between the sites they studied, commenting: "…genuinely innovative approaches to workforce development require a rare bland of factors. This includes dynamic workplace management, creative intermediaries and government support that build on local initiatives – as opposed to imposing predetermined institutional forms." (p. 28).

This valuable research provided a more developed understanding of the complex interplay between work design, skills development, and workforce diversity in the industry.

Bretherton, T. (2011). The Role of VET in Workforce Development: A Story of Conflicting Expectations. Research Report.

In examining the role of vocational education and training (VET) in workforce development, enhancing productivity, and increasing workforce participation, Bretherton (2011) observed that people in the meat industry would not accept a contention that meat processing work is low-skilled work (p. 18). The author notes that "…the perceptions of skill can play a critical role in changing perceptions of work itself." (p. 8), and considers this in the context of difficulties in sourcing 'external labour' (potential workers), and retaining 'internal labour' (existing workers).

The paper explored that the emphasis in meat processing on task-based competencies "obscures the reality that good job performance…requires a mix of higher-order and lower-order skills". The alternative notion of a building a sense of vocation for meat processing, as a craft, with a continuum of skill, was contemplated (p. 8, 21-24).

Hemphill, E., & Kulik, C. T. (2011). Myth busting rural labour shortages. A market segmentation approach reveals new recruitment opportunities.

This study investigated innovative approaches to recruitment and retention, based on meeting the diverse preferences and needs of applicants, to also achieve employee fit. The authors considered how regional meat processing employers could increase their attractiveness to, and better target and attract, workers from their own regional labour pool rather than relying solely on international recruitment.

This was by understanding the 'attributes of preference' – the needs and interests that prospective job applicants have for certain attributes, and targeting people to offer them what they value. The authors considered Job, Family, and Organisation attributes. They found benefits of aligning an employer's 'brand' with worker preferences for certain attributes - for example, in this case, messaging a family-friendly image in attracting workers with a preference for family support attributes, such as spouse/partner employment opportunities at the location of the workplace.

This research highlighted the potential for more targeted and flexible approaches to recruitment and job design to attract a diversity of workers to the industry.

Bryant, L., & Jaworski, K. (2012). Minding the gaps: Examining skill shortages in Australian rural non-agricultural workplaces.

Meat processing sites represented 40% of the food and beverage employers examined in this study, which uses interview data from 2004 along with current ABS statistics. Notably for this review, this paper suggests that organisations need to address underlying assumptions about gender and race to more fully utilise the available workforce. It highlights issues of gender and racial inequality in the workplaces it examined, and critiques current approaches to diversity management, suggesting they can be used to evade choices about recruitment and retention (p. 501). It suggests that workplace culture 'polices' a narrow set of masculine norms and is intolerant of diversity (p. 502). However, it reported that some meat processing plants have employed women in traditionally male-dominated roles and saw improvements in productivity and work quality (p. 507).

5.2.4 Summary of late 2000s and early 2010s

The late 2000s and early 2010s saw a deepening understanding of the complex workforce challenges facing the Australian meat processing industry. Research during this period highlighted the need for multifaceted approaches to workforce development, including:

- Reframing the industry's image to make it more attractive as a career

- Developing more integrated approaches to skills development

- Recognising and adapting to the increasing diversity of the workforce

- Implementing more flexible work arrangements to accommodate different worker groups

- Enhancing career pathways and promotion opportunities

- Improving training and development programs, including multilingual approaches.

These studies also began to highlight the potential benefits of a more diverse workforce and the need for more inclusive workplace practices, in the context though of changing long-standing industry practices and perceptions.

5.3 Mid-2010s to 2020: Increasing Focus on Diverse Workforce

As the Australian meat processing industry moved into the mid-2010s and to 2020, in 2015-16 the industry employed 38,000 workers in over 700 enterprises (Shah, 2017, p. 19). The labour supply was largely people with limited employment experience and low educational attainment (Shah, 2017, p. 8). Labour costs accounted for about 50% of total processing costs (Piller & Lising, 2014, p.37). The industry in Australia was still labour-intensive, and difficult to automate (Piller & Lising, 2014; Shah, 2017, p. 19). It faced labour shortages and high turnover rates, struggling to attract and retain workers due to undesirable working conditions (Piller & Lising, 2014, p. 35; Shah, 2017, pp. 19-20), and a reputation for unappealing 'dirty work', making it challenging to attract and retain workers, and putting it at a relative disadvantage to other industries (Shah, p. 19). Some firms used temporary workers (417 and 457 visa holders) to fill labour gaps (Shah, p. 20).

In this period there was an increasing particular focus on issues of diversity and inclusion, with more attention given to the role of migrant workers in the industry, and the challenges associated with their employment and integration.

5.3.1 Migrant Workforce Considerations

Piller, I., & Lising, L. (2014). Language, employment, and settlement: Temporary meat workers in Australia

This study, focussed on temporary migrant workers in meat processing, highlights the increasing reliance of employers on sponsoring these workers on long-stay visas to fill labour shortages, and fill jobs which were considered undesirable by many local Australians (p. 35).

Piller and Lising (2014) found that language barriers existed for the Filipino meat processing workers with limited English proficiency in their study. Some employers addressed this by using interpreters or multilingual approaches in training. However, workers had limited opportunities to practice English at work (as talk during work is discouraged) or in the community, impeding their visa extension or conversion to permanent residency.

This research highlighted the complex interplay between language, employment, and settlement for migrant workers in the meat processing industry, highlighting the need for more comprehensive support systems for these workers who were helping address staff shortages.

Shah, C. (2017). Employers' Perspectives on Training: Three Industries.

In examining the workforce training practices and perspectives of employers in the red meat processing industry (along with two other industries), this study by Shah (2017) provided insights into the challenges faced in training a diverse workforce; and further highlighted the industry's efforts to accommodate the linguistic diversity it was facing, with many workers in the industry being migrants, with limited English language skills (p. 19). To address this, translators were provided for workers who struggle with English, and training materials were provided in various languages to accommodate diverse workers (p. 21). Training and skills development was seen by employers as critical for both safety and employee retention; and as "doing a social good" for people who otherwise had few such opportunities (p. 20).

Barrie, H., McDougall, K., & Wasserman, R. (2018). Murray Bridge: A blueprint for good migrant settlement.

This study by Barrie et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of community support and cultural considerations in the successful settlement of migrant workers in the meat processing industry. It is focussed mainly on community-level engagement with new migrants in the rural city of Murray Bridge where the meat processing industry is a major employer, with migrants often recruited for jobs at local meat processing plants (p.14).

Factors were examined that led to long-term successful settlement outcomes. There were positives and negatives found in migrant engagement within the broader community (p. 2). Some migrants reported difficulty finding work that fitted with childcare and family commitments (p. 20). Some mentioned difficulty accessing culturally appropriate food (p. 28); but positively, most participants said the Murray Bridge community supported their cultural practices (p. 28).

Recommendations include providing information for new arrivals, supporting community groups and organisations, and facilitating a connected approach to settlement (pp. 33-37). This study provided insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with migrant employment in the meat processing industry in some locations.

> Samad, A., Teicher, J., Akbar, D., & Kinnear, S. (2018). Achieving secure and stable migrant employment: A study of agriculture, manufacturing and food processing in Regional Queensland.

Samad et al. (2018) considered the persistent challenges in attracting and retaining workers, despite government efforts to encourage migrants to settle and work in rural and regional Australia (p. 1). In doing so, they identified some obstacles to the employment of skilled and unskilled migrants in regional industries including meat processing. These included that some migrants experienced unwelcoming attitudes from local communities, difficulty accessing culturally appropriate food, and lack of cultural associations (p. 21).

Recommendations include promoting regional communities, enhancing stakeholder communication, and providing government incentives for employers and migrants in regional areas (pp. 29-33). This research highlighted the ongoing challenges in integrating migrant workers into the industry and regional communities.

5.3.2 Work Health, Safety and Employee Wellbeing

> Donovan, M., Khan, A., & Johnston, V. (2020). Exploring associations of employee reports on safety climate, disability management and labour management with work characteristics and injury at an Australian poultry meat processing plant.

While this study by Donovan et al. (2020) is about poultry processing, it has been included as it contains interesting information about the association of certain 'organisational policies and practices' (OPPs) in a processing context, with employee injury and wellbeing. The study found that there was an inverse relationship between the OPPs of safety climate, disability management, and labour management, as perceived by employees, and employee wellbeing and injury rates (pp. 3-4, 7-8).

Other specific findings included that different work zones within the plant, and different shifts, had varying levels of safety climate and injury rates (pp. 7-8), providing evidence of organisational microclimates within the one workplace (p. 7).

This research emphasises the importance of organisational practices and workplace culture in promoting worker safety and wellbeing in processing employment.

5.3.3 Summary of mid-2010s to 2020

The mid-2010s to 2020 saw an increased focus on the challenges and opportunities associated with workforce diversity in the Australian meat processing industry. These studies showed challenges were still ongoing in attracting and retaining workers, particularly in regional areas, and highlighted the growing reliance on migrant workers. The literature flagged the need for comprehensive strategies to support migrant worker settlement, such as their cultural integration, through to practical approaches to accommodating linguistic diversity.

Moving into the final and current period, there is a continuation of these themes, with an increasing emphasis on the development of more comprehensive frameworks, and an increasing visibility of worker wellbeing, in workforce management in the industry.

5.4 2020 to 2024: Holistic Approaches, Comprehensive Frameworks, and Wellbeing

As the Australian meat processing industry moved into the 2020s, McKenna (2022), for the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC), presented information that there was a significant shortage of people to work in Australia's meat processing sector, largely due to the impacts of reduced migration. The report cited figures from a 2022 survey of AMIC meat processor members indicating that:

> (c)ritically, only 35% of respondents were operating at or above 80% operating capacity. While 80% cited a lack of international worker availability as the key reason for the workforce shortages they are experiencing. Several of our members have indicated that without migrant workers they would be forced to close their operations. (McKenna, 2022, p. 3).

This was also in the context of strong competition for labour from other parts of the economy (McKenna, 2022, p. 2).

An example of the continuing workforce management issues in employee retention are set out in Glass et al. (2022). Their project was conducted in the context of 25 participating plants with an average turnover rate of 62.2% in 2019 (a range of 21% to 108%) (p. 13). More than half of new employees exited before 6 months, and over two-thirds before a year (p. 14). These turnover rates were considerably higher than those of the wider manufacturing industry (the ABS reported turnover rate for the comparable period was 6.4% in manufacturing) (Glass et al., 2022, p. 4).

This period from 2020 to 2024 saw more development of holistic approaches to workforce management in the Australian meat processing industry. This period was marked by large projects endeavouring to create impactful, actionable, practical frameworks to address retention (Glass et al., 2022; Mackenzie, 2021), wellbeing (Phillips, 2022), and competency development (AMPC, 2022).

Consistent with the issues raised by McKenna (2022) about the reliance on migrant workers to maintain operations for a number of meat industry employers, the literature continues to show a focus on migrant workforce considerations, including examining international labour mobility schemes (Kanan & Putt, 2023; Petrou & Connell, 2023).

While mental health, wellbeing and psychosocial safety were a particular focus in Phillips (2022), such issues are also evident in the other literature during this period, and as associated with retention and engagement of employees in the industry.

5.4.1 Frameworks for Employee Retention

Mackenzie, H. & Work Healthy Australia. (2021). Employee Retention in the Red Meat Industry: A Best Practice Model.

Mackenzie and Work Healthy Australia (2021) proposed that, to date, there was a lack of an "actionable framework" on which to base strategy for improving retention in the industry (p. 5). This report was focused on the factors influencing employee retention, and how can these be synthesised into a testable model for best practices to improve retention of employees in the Australian meat processing industry (p. 5).

Mackenzie and Work Healthy Australia (2021) worked with five plants, with an average annual turnover of 35% (ranging from 16% to 54%) (p. 3); and where on average one-third of employees terminated within their first three months of employment. Half of these left within 30 days; and another 39% (on average) terminated after 12 months service (p. 3). The authors stated:

These data suggest a potential shock of entry causing new workers to leave their jobs shortly after commencing employment within the industry, and a worthwhile focal point for addressing this sharp turnover rate by length of service. Future research should focus on more deeply understanding employee attitudes related to the meat industry and their reasons for staying in the industry… (pp. 3-4).

An initial literature review described some papers particular to Australian meat processing (pp. 12-14), then provided a narrative review of broader literature on certain factors the authors considered to be influential for employee retention in the Australian meat processing industry (p. 3):

- Workplace Factors
    - Opportunities for training and development (p. 14)
    - Non-pecuniary benefits (p. 14)
    - Communication, management, and human resources (p. 15).
- Individual Factors
    - The person to job fit (p. 15)
    - Negative affectivity and job stigma (p. 15)
    - Perceptions of alternative employment options (p. 15)
    - Job satisfaction (p. 15).

Key findings from interviews with a variety of staff at three sites included that supervisor attitudes, communication, and leadership were important factors in the job experience of workers and their likelihood to remain in the industry.

In making recommendations for improving retention, the authors acknowledged that some plants will not be able to apply them all, due to factors such as their location in regional areas limiting how selective they can be about candidates. They also noted:

…several of these recommendations may appear at first to be difficult or require significant changes in longstanding internal processes. It may help plants to view these recommendations as being options to consider in the context of their unique circumstances, and to select the low-hanging fruit or potentially higher-impact strategies in their context. (p. 18).

The recommendations are detailed at pp. 19-21, and relate to

- Onboarding

- Training (particularly relevantly for this review, including mental health first aid training for supervisors)

- Internal communication

- Non-pecuniary benefits, rewards, and recognition

- Understand competing employers

- Addressing job factors such as task rotation

- HR practices, in particular exit surveys.

The report concludes with lists of factors associated with employee retention / turnover; and the interview questions used. This research represents a significant step towards a more systematic approach to addressing retention issues in the industry, and offering practical recommendations for improvement that were directly informed by the data from the research.

Glass, R., Moore, A., Whitton, A., Leahy, T., & Trumper, E. (2022). Development of a research-based employee Retention Framework of Excellence for the meat processing industry

Glass et al. (2022) noted that previous reports on retention in meatworks (e.g. Cordery, 2006; Perkins, 2005) identified reasons employees leave, but – Glass et al. assert - with little proof of industry adoption (p. 5). This project aimed to develop a practical research-based employee Retention Framework of Excellence for the meat processing industry, designed to create behavioural and cultural change through a set of broad-based retention practices.

In developing the Framework, findings and observations included:

- Turnover rates in meat processing plants were considerably higher than in the wider manufacturing industry (pp. 12-13)

- Turnover rates varied considerably between plants (pp. 13-14)

- More than half of new employees exit before 6 months and over two-thirds before a year – so to improve retention, measurement and reporting tools should focus on the number leaving in the 30-180 day period (p. 14-16)

- Retention is strongly correlated with company size - larger plants, and parent companies, reported lower turnover (pp. 16-17)

- Whether the location was remote, rural or metropolitan had no effect on retention (pp. 16-17)

- "The overuse of short-term employees, and some labour hire practices, have been disastrous for retention rates in the industry. They have created animosity due to different pay rates, laziness in the development of new employees, and negative perceptions of treatment by possible longer-term employees." (p. 72).

The Retention Framework of Excellence elements (pp. 20 – 22), developed from the research data from the 25 plants, are:

- An effective workforce structure and strategy

- Integrated systems in the framework

- Goals are measured and reported

- Leadership behaviours to influence the systems, symbols and behaviours affecting employee retention

- Company culture of strong leadership, and that promotes the establishment of workplace connections, and valuing of staff

- Various stages of employee lifecycle management: attraction, preparation, selection, induction, integration, development, and advancement of employees.

Further to the research findings that positive experiences of floor staff decline over time (p. 18), the Framework includes a focus on key points within the employee lifecycle, providing practical information for employers and employees to better navigate each stage (p. 4), designing systems and behaviours that treat people with respect, dignity and humanely (p. 72).

The Report includes copies of leaflet-style communiques, with worksheets and videos, developed to communicate to employees and managers the different elements of the Framework:

- Workforce Strategy (pp. 21-26)

- Accountability and Authority (pp. 27-29)

- Integration of Systems (pp. 30-33)

- Attraction Processes (pp. 34-38)

- Prepare (i.e. new employees for work in the meat industry) (pp. 39-43)

- Selection (pp. 44-45)

- Induction (pp. 46-50)

- Employee Integration (pp. 51-55)

- Training and Development (pp. 56-59)

- Advancing Employees (pp. 60-62)

- Leadership Behaviour and Development (pp. 63-66)

- Measurement and Reporting (pp. 67-71).

This research provided a holistic, practical, data-driven approach to retention customised for Australian meat processing, recognising the interconnected nature of various factors affecting employee satisfaction and engagement.

(2022). Training and Competency Framework – Stage 1 (Support Roles). Australian Meat Processor Corporation.

A Training and Competency Framework was developed for the AMPC with the explicit purpose of improving retention of certain roles in the meat processing industry - in HR, QA, safety, training, and return to work / rehabilitation (pp. 3, 6). As well as developing career pathways, aims included to identify development and capability requirements.

Notably for this review, the framework included that these various roles required skills and expertise in diversity and inclusion and cultural awareness, and some required mental health awareness (pp. 23-28).

5.4.2 Employee Wellbeing Focus

Phillips, C. (2022). Development of a research-based employee wellbeing program for the meat processing industry

Phillips (2022) undertook the first research on employee wellbeing for the Australian meat processing industry, focusing on both physical and mental wellbeing (p. 3). Important specific aims included to improve attraction and retention of particularly high-quality candidates (p. 3), and to identify the needs of and risks to employee and the business. This project furthered the strategic plan aspiration of the AMPC, where safety and physical and mental wellbeing are priorities for people and culture in the industry (p. 3).

The report proposed that wellbeing programs provide a healthy value on investment (VOI) and return on investment (ROI) that may be measured in medium to long-term reduced absenteeism rates and higher retention rates, (and) show as improved morale, positivity and motivation (p. 3). The report also noted the legal imperative to provide a physically and mentally safe workplace to employees, identifying and managing psychosocial risk factors (p. 3).

The research assessed employee needs and health metrics via five diverse plants. It identified that psychological safety at a significantly lower standard than physical safety practices (p. 15). Main health issues seen were fatigue, followed by mental health issues (p. 11). Dealing with people (peers, managers and team members) was listed as the highest cause of struggles (p. 11). Risks identified included feeling isolated, a lack of support, and being unwilling to disclose struggles (pp. 11-12). Another key finding was the "severe lack of mental health support, particularly in rural and regional Australia." (p. 11); and that mental health first aid training is sporadic and limited across the industry (p. 12).

A tailored wellbeing model was developed identifying key areas for improvement and recommending the development of future wellbeing resources (pp. 15-16). Specific recommendations (p. 16) based on the needs of the industry included - to enhance and protect mental wellbeing.

This research flagged a growing recognition of the link between employee wellbeing and organisational performance – including attracting and retaining quality employees - in the meat processing industry.

5.4.3 Migration System and Labour Shortages

McKenna, S. (2022). A Migration System for Australia's Future. Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC).

McKenna (2022), for the AMIC, highlighted the ongoing importance of migrant workers to the industry and the need for supportive policies and practices to facilitate their employment and integration. In arguing for visa reform to address the workforce shortages issues – to enable migrant workers to transition to permanent residency (p. 5) - the industry's commitment to protecting the welfare of migrant workers was emphasised, including:

- supporting workers with English as a second language with mechanisms such as the use of translators, translated or simplified communications including pictorials, and providing English tuition for migrant workers (p. 8)

- Development of a voluntary code of conduct to protect the interests and promote the welfare of migrant workers (pp. 8-9).

5.4.4 Pacific Labour Mobility Schemes

The most recent studies in this literature review focus on the experiences of Pacific workers in Australia's labour mobility schemes, which have become increasingly important for the meat processing industry. Kanan and Putt (2023) noted that there had been a rapid rise since 2020 in the number and proportion of long-term (in particular) Pacific workers in the meat processing industry (p. 48). As of January 2023, 24.3% of Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme workers (8,627 individuals) – combined long and short-term workers, were employed in meat processing (p. 9).

The Petrou and Connell (2023) paper primarily focuses on the guestworker schemes (SWP, PLS, and PALM) that bring workers from Pacific Island countries to Australia, including for employment in the meat processing industry which is a significant employer of Pacific Island workers under these schemes. Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) were designed to attract workers from Pacific Island Countries to fill labour shortages in Australia (Petrou and Connell, pp. 125-126). Petrou and Connell (2023) stated that by 2021, meatworks employment accounted for one of the greatest numbers of workers in the PLS (p. 126). Many workers returned season after season to the same employer, indicating some level of retention (Petrou and Connell, p. 127). In 2022 the schemes were expanded and revamped as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme to improve processes and potentially increase engagement (Petrou and Connell, p. 131).

Kanan, L., & Putt, J. (2023). Safety and wellbeing in Australia's Pacific labour mobility scheme

Kanan and Putt (2023) provided insights into the challenges faced by Pacific workers participating in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, and the support systems in place.

Key findings included:

- The industry is a male-dominated workforce (pp. 17, 50), and 89% of the PALM scheme workers in the meat processing industry are male (p. 10). Women in the sector were more likely to be employed in packing and cleaning (p. 54)

- Adjustments workers had to make to the type of work in meat processing included: the cold workplace (pp. 17, 53), concerns about safety and injury risks (p. 20), concerns about lack of parity remuneration and hours issues (pp. 20-22, 53-54), the assembly line model of production (p. 53), the "pressure of the volume and unrelenting nature of the work" (p. 53)

- Mental health support was identified as a crucial need for Pacific workers (pp. 24-26), with stress and fatigue as significant problems (p. 23)

- The study discussed challenges related to family separation and social isolation (pp. 4, 28)

- Culturally appropriate services and support are important (pp. 4, 25).

A thought-provoking quote from one stakeholder from the Pacific diaspora was: "If you understood that we are collective beings and that's our world view, not the individualistic one, then you would create policy and structures and systems that are culturally responsive to the people you are bringing over." (p. 17).

> Petrou, K., & Connell, J. (2023). Our 'Pacific family'. Heroes, guests, workers or a precariat?

Petrou and Connell (2023) provided a critical historical analysis of Pacific Labour schemes (PLS), highlighting issues and challenges that have at times been faced by these workers, including related to their psychosocial safety, wellbeing, and cultural safety. The authors raised concerns about worker welfare, and how cultural and language barriers could impact workers' experiences and training effectiveness, with the need for better support systems for migrant workers.

5.4.5 Summary of 2020 to 2024

The period from 2020 to 2024 saw the development of more comprehensive and holistic approaches to workforce management in the Australian meat processing industry. Key themes emerging from this recent research include:

- The need for systematic approaches to retention, encompassing all aspects of the employee lifecycle

- Growing recognition of the importance of employee wellbeing, including mental health, in retention and performance

- The development of clearer career pathways and competency frameworks to support employee development and retention

- Ongoing reliance on migrant workers, particularly through Pacific labour mobility schemes, and the associated challenges in ensuring their wellbeing and integration

- The importance of culturally appropriate support systems and practices for an increasingly diverse workforce

- The need for continued focus on workplace safety and the role of organisational culture in promoting safe practices

- The potential for wellbeing programs and inclusive practices to contribute to both employee satisfaction and organisational performance.

These studies highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of workforce challenges in the meat processing industry and the need for holistic, culturally sensitive approaches to address them. They also underscore the ongoing importance of adapting industry practices to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce and to address persistent issues of retention and worker wellbeing.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Summary of Current Knowledge:

Impediments and Enablers to Attraction, Retention, and Inclusion of Diverse Workforces in the Australian Meat Processing Industry

The AMPC observed in 2022 that:

> The…sector has traditionally faced employee attraction and retention challenges due to the physical and sometimes unglamorous nature of daily task requirements, often exacerbated by unusual hours associated with shift work. The current environment wherein more employees are leaving the workforce than joining it is further increasing these challenges. With research showing that retaining quality workers is by far more cost effective than hiring and training new starters, employee retention has become a critical issue for the meat industry. (AMPC, 2022, p. 6).

This literature review reveals that there is a complex interplay of factors that both impede and enable the attraction, retention, and / or inclusion of diverse workers in the Australian meat processing industry. This summary synthesises the current state of knowledge on these factors relevant to the research objective, with overviews in Figures 2 and 3.

6.1.1 Factors Impeding Attraction, Retention and Inclusion

Figure 2

Factors Impeding Attraction, Retention, and Inclusion

1.   Industry Image and Perception

The meat processing industry has a poor reputation, perceived as offering low-status, undesirable work (Piller & Lising, 2014; Productivity Commission, 1998). It has a consistent characterisation as "dirty work", putting it at a disadvantage relative to other industries (Jerrard et al., 2008; Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Shah, 2017) as an 'employer of last resort' in relevant labour markets (Cordery, 2006). Pay is also an issue – Norton & Rafferty (2010) noted that the industry faces competition from industries offering more attractive conditions, such as mining, where "although the work is no less demanding or physical, it is less confronting and offers better pay" (p. 17). This negative image significantly hampers efforts to attract new employees. When the factors causing this image are actually encountered by employees at work, the factors contribute to high turnover rates, as noted next.

2.   Challenging Working Conditions

The physically demanding and sometimes hazardous nature of meat processing work has been consistently identified as a barrier to attraction and retention (Cordery, 2006; Jerrard et al., 2008; Kanan et al., 2023; Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Piller & Lising, 2014; Productivity Commission, 1998; Shah, 2017). Long hours, shift work, and the often repetitive nature of tasks, can lead to physical strain and fatigue, impacting job satisfaction and retention. The work has been variously described as:

- brutal, dirty, and noisy (Jerrard et al., 2008)

- monotonous with 'unsociable hours' (Cordery, 2006)

- exhausting (Kanan et al., 2023) and unpleasant (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006).

The nature of meat processing work often allows for limited flexibility in work arrangements, which can be a barrier to attracting and retaining diverse workers, particularly those with caring responsibilities (Barrie et al., 2018).

Health and safety has been a concern with the work involved - the work has been noted to be potentially dangerous (Kanan et al., 2023), and hazardous (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). Workplace injuries can affect attraction to the work, and employee wellbeing and engagement (Norton & Rafferty, 2010).

All of these issues can particularly impact the attraction of potential employees such as females and young people.

3.   Career Development and Skills

Early studies highlighted the lack of clear career pathways within the industry (Productivity Commission, 2002). While some progress has been made, the perception of limited career progression opportunities continues to impact retention, particularly among skilled workers (Jie & Parton, 2009; Shah, 2017). Evolving challenges include:

- A shift from a trade-based occupation to more generic process work, impacting job autonomy and complexity, with task specialisation and deskilling of work leading to reduced job satisfaction (Norton & Rafferty, 2010)

- A persistent mismatch between worker qualifications and job roles, particularly affecting migrant workers (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Samad et al., 2018), leading to dissatisfaction and turnover of this vital group of employees for the industry.

4. Cultural Diversity and Language

An increasingly culturally diverse workforce, with growing numbers of workers from non-English speaking backgrounds, is creating new integration challenges (Norton & Rafferty, 2010). Examples of social integration challenges, which impact in turn on the wellbeing and satisfaction of employees, include unwelcoming attitudes reported from local communities towards migrant workers (Samad et al., 2018); difficulties accessing culturally appropriate food, and lack of cultural associations (Barrie et al., 2018; Samad et al., 2018).

Language barriers have emerged as significant workplace challenges, such as with training delivery in English for diverse workforces (Petrou & Connell, 2023; Piller & Lising, 2014; Shah, 2017). These barriers can impede effective communication, integration, and career progression, particularly for migrant workers.

5. Geographic Location

The regional location of many meat processing facilities presents challenges in attracting and retaining workers, particularly skilled professionals (Jie & Parton, 2009; Samad et al., 2018). Limited access to services and cultural amenities in regional areas can be difficult for all workers, with challenges in finding work that fit with childcare and family commitments in regional areas (Barrie et al., 2018). These, and social isolation issues, particularly affect Pacific and other workers (Kanan & Putt, 2023).

6. Workplace Culture

Some studies have suggested that the workplace culture in meat processing can be unwelcoming to diversity (Bretherton, 2011). Bryant & Jaworski (2012) propose there can be a workplace culture with masculine norms that shows intolerance of diversity. Cordery (2006, p.16) documented a "culture of harassment" impacting employee retention. Such environments can create an exclusionary environment that impacts the retention and inclusion of diverse workers.

7. Mental Health Challenges

Inadequate mental health support can negatively impact retention and overall wellbeing. Recent research has highlighted the mental health challenges faced by workers in the industry, particularly:

- migrant workers who may experience additional stressors related to cultural adjustment and family separation (Kanan & Putt, 2023; Petrou & Connell, 2023); and

- workers in rural and regional areas where there is limited access to mental health support (Mackenzie & Work Healthy Australia, 2021).

6.1.2 Enablers to Increase Attraction, Reduce Turnover, and Support Inclusion

Figure 3

Enablers to Increase Attraction, Reduce Turnover, and Support Inclusion

There has been an evolution of strategies and initiatives to enhance attraction and inclusion and reduce turnover. Early recommendations focused on systematic organisational changes to improve retention (Cordery, 2006, pp. 19-22; MINTRAC, 2011, pp. 2-5). Cordery's innovative and thoughtful recommendations reflected an early advanced appreciation of the need for a multifaceted approach to workforce management in the industry. His recommendations included to: improve collection and analysis of employee turnover data, modify exit interview processes to be conducted independently or anonymously, set targets and establish managerial accountabilities for retention, develop and communicate an 'employee value proposition' focusing on valued job aspects, emphasise teamwork and employee engagement, and increase organisational communication to employees about plans and performance, to increase engagement (Cordery, 2006). Later comprehensive approaches are set out in points 1 and 2 below.

While the Australian meat processing industry still faces significant challenges in attracting, retaining, and including a diverse workforce, the literature reveals a growing body of knowledge about effective strategies to address these challenges. The shift towards more holistic, culturally competent, and wellbeing-focused approaches shows promise in improving outcomes.

1. Comprehensive Integrated Retention Frameworks

The development and implementation of integrated approaches combining multiple strategies, evolving from earlier individual initiatives (Cordery, 2006; Norton & Rafferty, 2010), have promise in addressing turnover. These recent comprehensive frameworks take a systematic approach to retention, addressing various aspects of the employee lifecycle:

- Employee Retention Framework incorporating leadership behaviours, mental health support, onboarding processes, training practices, and HR practices (Mackenzie & Work Healthy Australia, 2021)

- Retention Framework of Excellence addressing workforce strategy, integrated systems, leadership behaviours, and employee lifecycle management (Glass et al., 2022).

The Training and Competency Framework (AMPC, 2022), while limited at this time to certain roles only, provides a direction in integrating considerations of career pathways, HR processes, capability development, cultural awareness, and mental health awareness. The development of clear career progression opportunities and competency frameworks has been identified as a key factor in improving retention (Australian Meat Processor Corporation, 2022; Norton & Rafferty, 2010). Such pathways can provide motivation for skill development and long-term commitment to the industry.

2. Wellbeing Programs

Investment in comprehensive wellbeing programs that address both physical and mental health has been identified as a key enabler of retention and inclusion for the industry, with positive return on investment (Phillips, 2022). These programs can contribute to improved job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Wellbeing initiatives have expanded from an early focus on physical safety (Cordery, 2006; Productivity Commission, 1998) to a holistic approach. The progression in approaches includes:

- Enhanced safety climate considerations (Donovan et al., 2020; Norton & Rafferty, 2010)

- Recognition of work-life balance needs (Barrie et al., 2018; Norton & Rafferty, 2010), and

- Mental health support initiatives (Mackenzie & Work Healthy Australia, 2021; Phillips, 2022).

3. Cultural Competence and Language Support Initiatives

A further wellbeing issue is cultural safety, which the literature has identified in particular as important for migrant workers (Kanan & Putt, 2023) but is important for other important potential and existing employees such as Indigenous workers. Cultural competency – with the integration of cultural awareness into competency frameworks and leadership development programs - has been recognised as important for creating inclusive work environments (Australian Meat Processor Corporation, 2022).

Providing language support and multilingual resources has also been identified as not only beneficial for inclusion (Shah, 2017), but is of practical importance. From the early recognition of language barriers (Norton & Rafferty, 2010;

Piller & Lising, 2014), language support strategies have progressively developed, with the development of multilingual approaches in:

- Training delivery and materials (Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Shah, 2017)

- Supervision and workplace communication (Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Piller & Lising, 2014; Shah, 2017)

- Use of interpreters and translators (McKenna, 2022; Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Shah, 2017).

Recent enhancements have included the provision of English language tuition (McKenna, 2022), and the integration of language support into broader retention strategies (Glass et al., 2022).

4. Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

The evolution of diversity approaches spans from an early recognition acknowledgment of a diverse workforce composition in the industry (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Productivity Commission, 1998). Early programs provided some consideration of Indigenous participation and women's involvement (MINTRAC, 2011; Norton & Rafferty, 2010). The implementation of flexible work arrangements, such as customised shifts for different worker groups, was positive for improving attraction and retention, and in accommodating different groups (Hemphill & Kulik, 2011; Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Shah, 2017). Productivity improvements from gender diversity initiatives were flagged (Bryant & Jaworski, 2012).

There has been an evolution towards more structured approaches to diversity and inclusion, such as:

- Induction programs specifically supporting diverse groups (MINTRAC, 2011; Norton & Rafferty, 2010)

- Integration of diversity and inclusion considerations into training systems and as core competencies in organisational frameworks (AMPC, 2022; Glass et al., 2022; Shah, 2017).

5. Innovative Work Design

Cordery (2006) flagged the need for improved job design and working environments, and for employee involvement in technological innovations. Approaches evolved with certain employers in the industry including:

- The implementation of job rotation to increase job variety and satisfaction, and reduce physical strain and fatigue (Mackenzie & Work Healthy Australia, 2021; Norton & Rafferty, 2010)

- Development of team environments and self-directed work teams (Hemphill & Kulik, 2011; Norton & Rafferty, 2010)

- Introduction of customised and flexible shifts to accommodate different worker groups such as 'Mums' shift' from 9am to 3pm, and 'Kids' shift' of Friday night 4pm to midnight (Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Shah, 2017).

These practices can increase job satisfaction and reduce physical strain, contributing to improved retention.

6. Leadership and Supervision

Leadership development has been a consistent focus of importance for retaining and engaging employees in the meat processing industry. There was an early emphasis on supervisor training for supervising new recruits (MINTRAC, 2011; Perkins, 2005). Further relevant supervisor training developed included:

- Leadership and communication skills (Norton & Rafferty, 2010)

- Cultural diversity awareness (Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Shah, 2017)

- Creating safer, more supportive environments (Norton & Rafferty, 2010).

The frameworks described earlier include leadership behaviours in creating social cohesion (Mackenzie & Work Healthy Australia, 2021); cultural and mental health awareness in leadership competencies (AMPC, 2022); and the leadership role in maintaining calm, controlled work environments (Glass et al., 2022).

7. Targeted Support for Migrant Workers

Providing comprehensive support systems for migrant workers, including assistance with settlement and community integration, has been identified as crucial for retention and inclusion (Barrie et al., 2018; Kanan & Putt, 2023).

Community engagement strategies have evolved from early recommendations for community engagement (Cordery, 2006; Norton & Rafferty, 2010), to initiatives such as:

- Development of intermediary support for Indigenous engagement (Norton & Rafferty, 2010)

- Evolution of settlement support as detailed in Barrie et al. (2018) and Samad et al. (2018) including: providing information for new arrivals, support for community groups, and enhanced stakeholder communication.

Kanan & Putt (2023) and Petrou & Connell (2023) describe the recent focus on Pacific worker support systems, aimed at providing integration and inclusion from a community to a workplace level to retain, engage and support migrant and visitor workers.

6.2 Summary of Current Knowledge:

Factors Impeding and Enabling Psychosocial Safety, Wellbeing, and Cultural Safety in the Australian Meat Processing Industry

The literature review information indicates a still-evolving understanding of psychosocial safety, wellbeing, and cultural safety in the Australian meat processing industry. While the industry has made some progress in recognising their importance to workforce management, significant challenges remain. The literature reveals a growing awareness of these issues, and the development of some strategies to address them. However, this is somewhat scattered, and effectiveness of these strategies varies; there is a need for continued research and innovation in this area.

This summary provides a snapshot of the current state of knowledge on factors that impede and enable psychosocial safety, wellbeing, and cultural safety. Their interconnected nature is evident, with many factors set out below impacting all three areas. This suggests that holistic, integrated approaches are likely to be most effective. Future research could focus on evaluating the long-term impacts of current initiatives, and developing industry-specific best practices for promoting psychosocial safety, wellbeing, and cultural safety in the unique context of meat processing work.

6.2.1 Psychosocial Safety

Figure 4:

Factors Impeding and Enabling Psychosocial Safety

6.2.1.1 Factors Impeding Psychosocial Safety

1. *High-Pressure Work Environment*: The meat processing industry is characterised by high-pressure work environments with demanding production targets (e.g. Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Productivity Commission, 2002). This pressure can contribute to stress and negatively impact psychosocial safety.

2. *Job Insecurity*: High turnover rates and the prevalence of casual employment in the industry contribute to job insecurity (e.g. Cooney et al., 2010; Productivity Commission, 2002). This insecurity can be a significant source of psychological stress for workers.

3. *Inadequate Supervisory Practices*: Poor supervisory practices have been identified as a factor that can negatively impact psychosocial safety (e.g. Donovan et al., 2020). Inadequate support from supervisors can lead to increased stress and reduced job satisfaction.

4. *Limited Control Over Work*: The often repetitive and standardised nature of meat processing work can lead to workers feeling they have limited control over their work, which can negatively impact psychosocial safety (e.g. Norton & Rafferty, 2010).

6.2.1.2 Factors Enabling Psychosocial Safety

1. *Strong Safety Climate*: Research has highlighted the importance of a strong overall safety climate in promoting psychosocial safety (e.g. Donovan et al., 2020). Organisations that prioritise safety across all dimensions tend to have better psychosocial outcomes.

2. *Effective Leadership*: Leadership behaviours that promote a calm and controlled work environment have been identified as crucial for psychosocial safety (Mackenzie & Work Healthy Australia, 2021).

3. *Job Design Interventions*: Initiatives such as job rotation and self-directed work teams have shown potential in improving psychosocial safety by increasing job variety and worker autonomy (e.g. Hemphill & Kulik, 2011; Norton & Rafferty, 2010).

4. *Clear Communication*: Improved organisational communication has been identified as a factor that can enhance psychosocial safety by reducing uncertainty and improving understanding of job roles and expectations (e.g. Perkins, 2005).

6.2.2 Wellbeing

Figure 5

Factors Impeding and Enabling Psychosocial Safety

6.2.2.1 Factors Impeding Wellbeing

1. *Physical Demands of Work*: The physically demanding nature of meat processing work, including repetitive motions and heavy lifting, can lead to fatigue and musculoskeletal issues, negatively impacting overall wellbeing (e.g. Hemphill & Kulik, 2011; Norton & Rafferty, 2010).

2. *Shift Work and Long Hours*: Irregular work hours and long shifts, common in the industry, can disrupt work-life balance and impact physical and mental wellbeing (e.g. Norton & Rafferty, 2010).

3. *Social Isolation*: Particularly for migrant workers in regional areas, social isolation has been identified as a significant factor impacting wellbeing (Kanan & Putt, 2023; Petrou & Connell, 2023).

4. *Limited Access to Health Support*: In regional areas where many processing plants are located, limited access to health services, particularly mental health support, can negatively impact worker wellbeing (e.g. Kanan & Putt, 2023).

6.2.2.2 Factors Enabling Wellbeing

1. *Comprehensive Wellbeing Programs*: The development and implementation of holistic wellbeing programs addressing both physical and mental health have shown promise in improving overall worker wellbeing (e.g. Phillips, 2022).

2. *Mental Health Support*: Increasing recognition of the importance of mental health support, particularly for diverse workers, has led to the implementation of targeted mental health initiatives in some organisations (Phillips, 2022; Shah, 2017).

3. *Social Support Networks*: Fostering social support networks among workers has been identified as important for wellbeing; this is illustrated in the literature for helping migrant workers adjust to new environments (e.g. Barrie et al., 2018).

4. *Work-Life Balance Initiatives*: Where possible, the implementation of flexible work arrangements and customised shifts has shown potential for improving work-life balance and overall wellbeing (Norton & Rafferty, 2010; Hemphill & Kulik, 2011).

6.2.3 Cultural Safety

Figure 6

Factors Impeding and Enabling Cultural Safety

Factors impeding Cultural Safety
- Language Barriers
- Lack of Cultural Awareness
- Limited Cultural Support
- Discrimination, Racism

Factors Enabling Cultural Safety
- Cultural Competence Training
- Multilingual Resources
- Diverse Leadership
- Community Integration Programs

6.2.3.1 Factors Impeding Cultural Safety

1. *Language Barriers*: Limited English proficiency among some workers with low levels of English literacy can lead to communication difficulties, misunderstandings, and feelings of exclusion, impacting cultural safety (Piller & Lising, 2014; Shah, 2017).

2. *Lack of Cultural Awareness*: Limited understanding of cultural differences among supervisors and co-workers can lead to unintentional discrimination or exclusion, negatively impacting cultural safety (e.g. Bretherton, 2011).

3. *Limited Cultural Support*: Particularly in regional areas, limited access to culturally specific resources, food, and community support can impact the cultural safety of migrant workers (e.g. Barrie et al., 2018).

4. *Discrimination and Racism*: Some studies have reported instances of discrimination and racism, which significantly impact cultural safety (e.g. Petrou & Connell, 2023).

6.2.3.2 Factors Enabling Cultural Safety

1. *Cultural Competence Training*: The integration of cultural awareness into competency frameworks and leadership development programs has been recognised as important for creating culturally safe work environments (e.g. Australian Meat Processor Corporation, 2022; Norton & Rafferty, 2010).

2. *Multilingual Resources*: Providing information, training materials, and support in multiple languages has been identified as beneficial for creating a culturally safe environment (e.g. Shah, 2017).

3. *Diverse Leadership*: Increasing diversity in leadership positions can contribute to a more inclusive and culturally safe work environment by ensuring diverse perspectives are represented in decision-making processes.

4. *Community Integration Support*: Programs that support migrant workers in integrating into local communities, including assistance with housing, education, and social connections, can contribute to cultural safety both within and outside the workplace (e.g. Barrie et al., 2018).

7.0 Conclusions / recommendations

This literature review, focussed on the attraction, retention and inclusion research specific to Australian meat processing, reveals a complex and evolving landscape of workforce management in the industry. Many challenges have persisted over the past two decades. High turnover rates, labour and/or skills shortages, and difficulties in attraction, have proven to be continuing features of the employment landscape for meat processing, impacting on the operation of the industry. However, there has been an evolution in the industry's approach to these issues.

Early research focused on identifying and quantifying these challenges, while later papers and reports have developed more comprehensive and nuanced strategies for addressing them. The increasing diversity of the workforce, particularly the growing reliance on migrant workers, has brought both opportunities and challenges. For example, while migrant workers have helped to address labour shortages, ensuring their wellbeing and integration remains a significant challenge, particularly in regional areas. With respect to employers focussing more attention on longer-term employment options through, for example, the Pacific Labour Scheme, Glass et al. (2022) relevantly stated: "Whilst Australian employers continue to look for labour solutions from outside of our shores, they should be very mindful to employ locals from their area as well. Not all school leavers will go onto further study or complete a trade." (p. 72).

The development in recent years of more comprehensive frameworks addressing retention, wellbeing, and competency development, are approaches that recognise the interconnected nature of various factors affecting employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention, and the need for professional workforce management in the industry with clear and attractive career pathways for its workers. However, persistent challenges remain. The industry continues to struggle with its image and the perception of meat processing work as undesirable. Continued high turnover rates and ongoing challenges, particularly among new employees, suggest that more work is needed in areas such as onboarding, early engagement, and job design.

A relevant interesting observation was made by Mackenzie and Work Healthy Australia (2021), arising from their consultation with the sector for their particular literature review. They stated they had found useful industry documents about employee retention in meat processing, but that few industry managerial personnel seemed to be aware of the documents' existence "…despite the ubiquitous problem presented by employee retention in the industry. There is a risk that these documents become lost to the passage of time relatively soon after their production…the industry would benefit from considering ways of routinely disseminating thoughts and discussion related to this topic." (Mackenzie and Work Healthy Australia, 2021, p. 18).

This current review can inform the important continued work in research, innovation, and implementation of best practices needed to fully address the workforce management challenges in the industry. This review provides an up to date, research-informed perspective for the Australian meat processing industry of its past, its present, and its future directions, in adapting to a changing workplace environment such as in workforce demographics, societal expectations around work, and evolving best practices in employee wellbeing and engagement. The directions in which leading organisations in the industry appear to be moving include: developing culturally appropriate, inclusive work environments that offer clear career progression, prioritising both physical and mental wellbeing, balancing the need

for productivity with employee wellbeing, and navigating the complex landscape of migrant and other diversity in the workforce.

Applying the information in the reviews completed for this project, and continuing research on what are the best, viable and sustainable workforce management practices for the meat processing industry, will work towards improved strategies for employers to improve attraction, retention and engagement, reduce turnover, and promote psychosocial safety, well-being and cultural safety, through developing and implementing inclusive employment practices for their diverse workforces comprising a range of cultures and social groups, including First Nations employees.

8.0 Bibliography

AMPC (2022). *Training and Competency Framework – Stage 1 (Support Roles).* Australian Meat Processor Corporation.

Barrie, H., McDougall, K., & Wasserman, R. (2018). Murray Bridge: A blueprint for good migrant settlement. *Hugo Centre for Migration and Population Research, University of Adelaide.*

Bretherton, T. (2011). *The Role of VET in Workforce Development: A Story of Conflicting Expectations. Research Report*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. PO Box 8288, Stational Arcade, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia.

Bryant, L., & Jaworski, K. (2012). Minding the gaps: Examining skill shortages in Australian rural non-agricultural workplaces. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *18*(4), 499-515.

Colic-Peisker, V., & Tilbury, F. (2006). Employment niches for recent refugees: Segmented labour market in twenty-first century Australia. *Journal of refugee studies*, *19*(2), 203-229.

Cooney, R., Jerrard, M., Donohue, R., & Kimberley, N. (2010). Exploring skill ecosystems in the Australian meat processing industry: Unions, employers and institutional change. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, *21*(2), 121-138.

Cordery, J. (2006). *Strategies for improving employee retention: Final report.* Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.

Donovan, M., Khan, A., & Johnston, V. (2020). Exploring associations of employee reports on safety climate, disability management and labour management with work characteristics and injury at an Australian poultry meat processing plant. *Safety science*, *126*, 104659.

Glass, R., Moore, A., Whitton, A., Leahy, T., & Trumper, E. (2022). *Development of a research-based employee Retention Framework of Excellence for the meat processing industry.* Australian Meat Processor Corporation.

Hemphill, E., & Kulik, C. T. (2011). Myth busting rural labour shortages. A market segmentation approach reveals new recruitment opportunities. *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies, The*, *17*(2), 174-203.

IBISWorld (2024). *Meat Processing in Australia - Market Research Report (2014-2029)*. Meat Processing in Australia - Market Research Report (2014-2029) (ibisworld.com)

Jerrard, M., Donohue, R., Kimberley, N., & Cooney, R. (2008). Reinventing meatworkers: Old skills but new careers for the twenty-first century?. *Employment Relations Record*, *8*(1), 51-67.

Jie, F., & Parton, K. (2009). The need for improved skills in the Australian meat industry. *International Review of Business Research Papers*, *5*(4), 257-269.

Kanan, L., & Putt, J. (2023). *Safety and wellbeing in Australia's Pacific labour mobility scheme.* ANU and the Dept of Pacific Affairs

Mackenzie, H. & Work Healthy Australia. (2021). *Employee Retention in the Red Meat Industry: A Best Practice Model.* Australian Meat Processor Corporation.

McKenna, S. (2022). *A Migration System for Australia's Future.* Australia Meat Industry Council.

MINTRAC (2011). *Workforce retention and training in meat processing plants: Final report.* Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.

Norton, K., & Rafferty, M. (2010). *Work, Skills and Training in the Australian Red Meat Processing Sector. A National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program Report*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. PO Box 8288, Stational Arcade, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia.

Perkins, K. (2005). *No Bull – growing people does grow business: Final Evaluation of the Midfield Personal Directions Pilot Program*. Meat & Livestock Australia Limited.

Petrou, K., & Connell, J. (2023). Our 'Pacific family'. Heroes, guests, workers or a precariat?. *Australian Geographer*, *54*(2), 125-135.

Phillips, C. (2022). *Development of a research-based employee wellbeing program for the meat processing industry.* Australian Meat Processor Corporation.

Piller, I., & Lising, L. (2014). Language, employment, and settlement: Temporary meat workers in Australia. *Multilingua*, *33*(1-2), 35-59.

Productivity Commission. (1998). *Work Arrangements in the Australian Meat Processing Industry*. Research Report, AusInfo, Canberra.

Samad, A., Teicher, J., Akbar, D., & Kinnear, S. (2018). Achieving secure and stable migrant employment: A study of agriculture, manufacturing and food processing in Regional Queensland.

Shah, C. (2017). Employers' Perspectives on Training: Three Industries. NCVER Research Report. *National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)*.