

# A Review of Halal Practices in Australia

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## Abstract

The use of Halal is on the rise across the world and in Australia. Halal practices in Australia is an area which requires greater academic investigation as the demand for Halal rises throughout the world including Australia. The Halal practices in Australia have not been very well researched in academia. Research publications were searched in Google Scholar search engine using appropriate search terms. Since there is not much literature available about Halal practices in Australia, non-academic general publications were searched as well. General publications (e.g., news articles) were simply searched in the Google search engine. The search terms used were 'Halal Practices' and 'Australia'. Australia is one of the major exporters of Halal meat in the world and hence, the issues faced by it over Halal certification need to be understood. One of the primary issues with Halal certification in Australia is the lack of regulation in Halal certification. Another issue is the multiplicity of certification bodies that have come up creating confusion amongst the certification seekers. A need for greater traceability and accountability in Halal related matters has been identified.

**Keywords:** Halal Practices, Australia, Meat, Regulation, Accountability

## Introduction

The use of Halal is on the rise across the world and in Australia. 'Halal' describes what is permitted for Muslims to eat under the precincts of Islam and are a set of laws codified in the Quran. These pertain to the range of food and drinks that are acceptable for the Muslims to eat. However, Halal is based on the interpretations of the Quran and these differ from one country to the next, procedures for Halal animal 'slaughter may vary from country to country' (RSPCA, n.d.). There are many definitions of Halal. Shafie and Othman (2006) quoted the definition of Halal from the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development which is the country's central Islamic authority. Shafie and Othman (2006) quoted "Under JAKIM's guidelines, Halal is defined as food not made of, or containing parts of animal origin which Islamic law forbids to be consumed. Food is Halal if it does not contain or come into contact with anything regarded as filth e.g. carrion, alcohol, pork, blood, faeces, urine. It must also be prepared, processed or manufactured using equipment untainted by anything unclean. The slaughter of animals must be performed by a Muslim of sound mind and maturity, who fully understands the fundamentals and conditions related to this activity. The animal must be alive at the time of the slaughter and must be among those which Muslims are allowed to eat. The slaughter must be done with a sharp device –but not something made out of bones, nails or teeth – and the animals's respiratory tract, oesophagus and jugular vein must be severed. Processed food is Halal if it is not made up of or does not contain parts or by-products of animals which Muslims are forbidden to consume. It should not made up of or does not contain parts or by-products of animals which Muslims are forbidden to consume. It should not contain what the law terms as filth, and should be prepared, processed and manufactured using untainted equipment. In preparation, processing and storage, halal food should not come into contact with or be in close proximity to that which is not halal. Hygiene

and sanitation: The premises for manufacturing, preparing and selling food and drinks must be clean and free of elements which may cause infestation or flies, rats, cockroaches, lizards and other such pests. Factory workers must be healthy, and wear clean, protective clothing to avoid contamination. Equipment used must be washed frequently to ensure cleanliness. Washroom facilities must also be clean.” If a product is Halal certified, it means that is safe for consumption of Muslims, and it does not contain any of the items banned for Muslims by the Quran such as pork or alcohol. It also means that the product has been produced on machines which have been sanitized as per Islamic regulation (Benns, 2015), and the workers are Muslims. Halal certification for animals requires that they must be killed by a “practicing Muslim with cut to the throat by a single blade” (Benns, 2015).

## Methodology

The Halal practices in Australia have not been very well researched in academia. For this reason, both research publications and non-academic sources were reviewed. Research publications were searched in Google Scholar search engine using appropriate search terms. General publications (e.g., news articles) were simply searched in the Google search engine. The search terms used were ‘Halal Practices’ and ‘Australia’. In the first stage, the papers available in the first five web pages were selected and classified based on their contents irrespective of the year (any time) of publication. In the second stage, more recent papers were searched specifying the time range as 2010 to 2017. A total of 37 papers were obtained by this method. The idea of this paper is a qualitative discussion rather than a quantitative meta-analysis based on international reviewing standards. The review from this paper is given below.

## Review

In this paper, we will examine the current Halal practices prevalent in Australia and the most common issues faced in implementing these practices.

There are more than a 1,000 Halal restaurants in Australia (Zabihah, 2016). In Australia, the key issue surrounding Halal is the slaughter practices followed – Halal slaughter in other countries does not include pre-slaughter stunning, but in Australia, animals in Halal abattoirs are stunned unconscious before slaughter (RSPCA, n.d.). According to the RSPCA website, majority of Australia’s Halal slaughter ‘complies with standard slaughter practice where all animals are stunned prior to slaughter’. But with Halal slaughter, a reversible stunning method is used, as opposed to an irreversible used in conventional humane slaughter (RSPCA, n.d.).

According to the RSPCA website, a few Australian abattoirs have been given permission from either state or territory food authority to carry out slaughter without prior stunning of the animal (only cattle and sheep) – for Halal and Kosher practices. These could be considered exemptions to the Australian standard slaughter practice. Chicken is slaughtered only after stunning throughout Australia (RSPCA, n.d.).

According to RSPCA, the following 8 Australian abattoirs have permission to carry out slaughter without prior stunning: New South Wales – 2 abattoirs; South Australia – 3 abattoirs; and Victoria – 3 abattoirs.

Australia has a nationally adopted guideline, *Ritual Slaughter for Ovine (Sheep) and Bovine (Cattle)*; these are requirements for religious slaughter without prior stunning. According to RSPCA, stunning is required for cattle but is carried out immediately after the throat is cut. As

per the guidelines, 2 slaughter men need to be present – one for the stunning and one to perform the cut. According to Halal practices, ‘the animal must be restrained (including head restraint) in a manner that ensures it remains standing in an upright position and is still during the slaughter process’ (RSPCA, n.d.). For sheep, stunning is not required unless either except where the animal is distressed or does not rapidly lose consciousness.

Australia exports frozen ‘Halal accredited’ meat to the Middle East and other markets and this export trade is increasing every year. In 2014, exports of frozen and chilled mutton and lamb grew by 29% and 7% respectively. According to the article, most of this meat supply comes from animals stunned before slaughter (Animals Australia, n.d.). However, according to some researchers, Australia is lagging behind countries like India and Brazil when it comes to exporting Halal meat. According to Kabir (2015), “With growing number of Muslim population and improved purchasing power of Muslim community in Asia-pacific zone, Halal food market appears as a potential opportunity for meat producers. The strict requirement of Halal standard, however, makes the entry to this potential market often challenging. This study analyses trade potential in Halal Bovine meat industry; and finds that India and Brazil have successfully entered the market and grabbed a substantial segment of the market. Australia, being a leader in global Bovine meat supply, stays far behind in the race. Collaboration with Muslim countries (that have advanced in developing acceptable Halal standard) would help Australia to take a lead in the Global Halal Bovine meat market.” This means that there is a huge opportunity for Australia to capitalize on Halal meat exports to Middle Eastern countries.

Halal practices in Australia have also come under the scanner for a variety of issues, with the lack of regulation in Halal certification being one of the prominent ones. This lack of regulation in the Halal sector has led to numerous certifying bodies, each with a profit motive in mind. According to Bennis (2015), Halal certification mark sits on almost every food article in Australia and for this, manufacturers, wholesalers and food processors pay millions to a variety of unregulated certifiers. This works well as these food manufacturers want access to markets, both at home and abroad, and these certifiers want the money. According to Bennis (2015), the cost of Halal certification differs from case to case and certain abattoirs are charged above of AUD \$ 12,000 annually for accreditation, whereas some of them are charged almost AUD \$ 25,000 annually. In some cases, these products were being certified at multiple stages of the supply chain, which basically ended up profiting the certifiers (Bennis, 2015).

Some researchers (e.g., Poniman, Purchase, & Sneddon, 2015) have also pointed out the benefits of having a traceability system for Halal foods. The main finding of Poniman, Purchase and Sneddon (2015) was that “... individual’s perception of Halal idea logic is aligned to the roles they perform. These perceptions were impacted by the specific objectives or business interests of each organization. Facilitating organizations also perceive that traceability systems are a strategic tool in the Halal food processing industry.” Additionally, they stated the practical implications to be “The research provides insights into how to improve existing understanding of the Halal idea logic within Halal food business networks and the benefits of implementing traceability systems in Halal food production. Joint activity between firms creates a network effect, where the value created is greater than that which the firms alone can create.” This indicates that there is a need to have a traceability system for the benefit and accountability of all the stakeholders in the Halal supply chain (Ababio et al., 2013; Samsi et al., 2013; Mustafa‘Afifi et al., 2013). Wan, Saidi and Razak (2014) studied the Halal related disclosures of Malaysian companies as a part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR). Reporting on a company’s Halal practices is a way of

being more accountable in Halal related matters. Wan, Saidi and Razak (2014) found that “There are Malaysian public listed companies specifically in the food industries that disclosed halal related information in their annual reports. However, the involvement by overall companies in food industries is very few. The level of disclosure by companies that provided halal related information is relatively low as compared to other CSR disclosure such as community, environment or employees. Nonetheless, disclosure areas devoted the halal related information indicate that halal issues are seriously considered by the companies and had been integrated as part of the business operations. On the other hand, the content of disclosure focused on obtaining confidence for consumers where the companies stress on the accreditation and approval achieved from others. Even though halal is not an issue that is taken lightly by companies, providing halal related information should be consider as equally important to enable consumers to be abreast with halal issues apprehended by the companies. Outcome of this study provided information for shareholders as well as the stakeholders to play active role to ensure the companies disclose halal related information, so they can be held accountable for their actions and decisions. Further researches on this matter are necessary to encourage disclosure of halal related information by companies as part of their CSR disclosure as well as further analysis by numerous researchers.” These findings are applicable to other countries including Australia. Reporting of Halal practices by companies will make them more accountable in their Halal practices and also help them gain more trust from their Muslim customers. The accountability can also be enforced by the stakeholders of companies and people with interest in sound Halal practices. In another Malaysian study by Wan, Bakar and Razak (2014), it was found that stakeholders of companies can influence the companies to be more Halal-accountable. Wan, Bakar and Razak (2014) quoted “Muslim consumers need to heighten their power as stakeholders to ensure their needs and demands will be considered by companies. In doing so, halal related matters should always be considered as top priority in choosing food products. Wide range of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp and others should be utilised to the benefits of Muslims by informing others of any unethical activities by any company. Any confusion with regards to the ingredients should be clarified firmly with the companies. Changing the purchasing behaviour by taking more conscious act upon halal issues would demonstrate the seriousness of Muslim consumers in making sure the food products that are served to them are halal and according to the Islamic principle. As the stakeholders, make them as one who holds greater power and control over companies’ resources. It leaves them with no other choice but to fulfil the needs of Muslims consumer.” These findings can also be applied in Australia as they are related to human and business behavior which has lot of similarities across the world.

## Conclusions

Halal practices in Australia is an area which requires greater academic investigation as the demand for Halal rises throughout the world including Australia. Australia is one of the major exporters of Halal meat in the world and hence, the issues faced by it over Halal certification need to be dealt with. One of the primary issues with Halal certification in Australia is the lack of regulation in Halal certification. Another issue is the multiplicity of certification bodies that have come up to make the most of the demand for Halal in the Australian market. These issues have made Halal both costly and, in some cases, even unscrupulous. There is clearly a need for greater traceability and accountability in Halal related matters in Australia. The traceability and accountability can be brought upon by consumers, companies and other stakeholders.

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