

Exciting new era for Oakey

AT A GLANCE

- Oakey abattoir was bought by Nippon Meat Packers Australia in 1987.
- Oakey is one of three plants operated in Australia by NMPA.
- Others are Borthwicks, Mackay and Wingham, NSW.
- Major plant redevelopment undertaken over the past seven years, lifting single-shift capacity to 1150 head.



NIPPON Meat Packers Australia is nearing completion of a major upgrade of its flagship Oakey abattoir west of Toowoomba, designed to take the business into the 21st century as one of the most modern meat processing facilities in the world.

The ongoing seven-year project, which will represent a very substantial investment by Nippon at completion, represents a major vote of confidence in the long-term future of the Australian export and domestic beef industry.

Oakey can now rightfully lay claim to being one of the most sophisticated, hygienic and customer-focused large-scale beef processing plants anywhere. The plant is held up as one of parent company, Nippon Ham's showcase beef facilities, worldwide.

The first major component of the redevelopment was the completion of a new high-tech boning room in late 2006, with capacity to bone more than 1000 carcasses daily using a single shift, while delivering unparalleled levels of product traceability down to individual primals in a carton.

The completion of the new four-line boning room provided its own challenges for the business, however, as the existing kill floor had to operate two shifts daily to keep pace with the expanded boning demand.

That 'bottleneck' was solved with the completion of a new

state-of-the-art kill floor last year, which provides the ability to process 1150 head daily, using a single daily shift in both boning and slaughtering.

On a single-shift capacity basis, industry statistics suggest Oakey now rates as the third largest abattoir in Australia, behind Swift Dinmore

style killfloors. While kill-floors generally are, by nature, less technology-dense than the boning room operations, there has been a wide array of design and equipment innovations incorporated into the new Oakey floor to optimise efficiency, food safety and product performance.

Just some of these include dual hide pullers, changes to knocking procedures, the use of brisket restrainers and other labour and process innovations.

In addition, there has been a major change to the approach to offal packing. Because of hygiene issues associated with transporting offals to a remote packing room by slide-chutes, all offals are now packed and sorted in trays on the Oakey kill floor itself, for later cartoning.

The overall Oakey site redevelopment will be completed in coming years with the planned redevelopment of the rendering section and additional chiller capacity, currently in planning stage.

Oakey general manager Pat Gleeson said the plant's unparalleled capacity to preserve

individual animal identity through to primals in a carton was delivered through a Marel traceability system, developed originally for the salmon industry in Iceland.

While traceability itself was important to many customers, the Marel system also provided a

second critical function in terms of delivering greater accountability in boning and other practices that affect product performance.

"For example, if a customer in Japan encounters a cutting specification problem with a single primal in a carton, that

The system allows every boner and slicer to take personal 'ownership' of the product.

item can be traced back to a single employee workstation, and remedial education taken to improve the process," he said.

"The system allows every boner and slicer to take personal 'ownership' of the product they handle, and the standard of workmanship has continued to trend upwards, as a direct result," Mr Gleeson said.

One of the enduring benefits at Oakey has been the quality standard disciplines fostered at the plant through a long association with the Japanese export market.

In earlier times, much of the turnover out of Oakey has been grainfed cattle directed into the Japanese market, but as articles in the following three pages will illustrate, the business has undergone some major recent transitions in its market focus.



(1650/shift) and Teys Lakes Creek.

Further killing capacity could easily be added at Oakey if circumstances require by adding additional shifts each week.

By any standard the new Oakey kill floor presents as a remarkably clean, hygienic and safe work environment, in comparison with many older



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