

Prosecution Summary of Conviction

Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-Operative Limited

| LEGISLATION: | | <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2020</i> | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|--|------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Charge | Charge Number | Sentenced Date | Regulation | Section | Penalty | Offence Date |
| 1 | KT859/2024 | 27/08/2025 | | 19(1) 31(1) | \$785,000 | 10/12/2022 |

BREACH

Being a person conducting a business or undertaking, did not ensure, so far as was reasonably practicable the health and safety of workers while the workers were at work in the business or undertaking, and by that contravention caused the death of a worker contrary to sections 19(1) and 31(1) of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2020*.

DETAILS

On 10 December 2022, a worker was killed as a result of becoming entangled in an item of plant known as a 'cake press' while working at the Katanning Abattoir operated by the Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-operative Ltd (**WAMMCO**).

Incident

The incident occurred in an area of the abattoir that was designated as the 'Rendering Shed', where products not intended for human consumption were processed. The Rendering Shed contained various items of plant including cookers used to create animal-grade meat products from offal. The cake-press formed part of a cooker. It had an open hopper that housed rotating paddles that separated grease and fat from the meat product which then could be used as animal feed.

The incident occurred while the worker was carrying out the shutdown procedure for the cooker.

The shutdown procedure was a procedure that was carried out daily and the steps to be followed when carrying out the procedure were set out in a WAMMCO work instruction titled 'Cooker Shutdown'. All workers who were authorised by WAMMCO to perform the shutdown procedure were trained in that work instruction. However, the worker had not been formally trained in the work instruction because he was not authorised by WAMMCO to carry out the shutdown procedure.

The process for shutting down the cooker involved a worker on the nightshift emptying hessian bags of meat meal weighing up to 25kg – 30kg into the open hopper of the cake-press in order to clean it out. The bags of meat meal had to be carried up two sets of metal steps onto a platform to access the hopper. These steps were slippery due to grease and fat that accumulated on them.

The opening for the hopper was approximately 1.4 metres above the platform, which was slightly lower than chest height for the worker. The opening of the hopper was approximately 600mm by 640mm making it big enough for a person to fit through.

When the meat meal was poured into the cake press, the paddles needed to be rotating. On a number of occasions, the rotating paddles had grabbed the hessian bags and pulled them into the hopper as workers were pouring in the meat meal. When this happened, the usual practice was to let go of the bag then turn the press off using a touch screen control then cut the bag out using a knife.

There were emergency stop buttons installed on the cake press. However, these were approximately 2.6 metres from the open hatch of the cake press. Consequently, the emergency stop buttons could not have been reached by a worker while pouring meat meal into the open hopper.

Due to the potential for paddles to grab the hessian bags and pull them in, Workers would hold the bags up high performing a “full shoulder press” to keep the bag from being grabbed by the paddles.

The procedure for the cooker shutdown was routinely carried out by a single operator working alone. WAMMCO’s procedure required the task to be carried out by a trained ‘cooker-operator’, who was supposed to have been signed off as having been trained on the relevant work instruction.

Another worker, (**worker 2**) who was trained in the cooker shutdown process, taught the worker how to do this process. He taught him how to do the process as he had been taught, to stop the machine immediately if the bag was grabbed by the press and had observed the worker performing this process to make sure he did it properly.

The worker routinely assisted with the task of shutting down the cooker while working with worker 2. The Area Supervisor who was responsible for workers in the Rendering Shed was unaware that this was occurring as he had usually left the site by the time that the cooker shutdown being was completed.

The WAMMCO supervisors responsible for the Rendering Shed were not aware that worker 2 had taught the worker how to do the shutdown process or that the worker was performing the shutdown process.

On 10 December 2022, the worker was at work in the Rendering Shed with worker 2, who was trained on the cooker shut down work instruction.

The worker completed his usual duties and continued his normal work routine assisting the cooker operator in cleaning the cake-press and the surrounding area. At approximately 2:40pm, only worker 2 and the worker were working in the Rendering Shed. Other workers had either finished their shifts or were in the process of signing off.

Worker 2 had already completed the process for cleaning another identical cake-press in the Rendering Shed. The worker told worker 2 that he would pour the meat meal into the cake-press while worker 2 used a forklift to empty a nearby waste bin.

Worker 2 was away for approximately a minute. When he returned, he saw the worker’s foot in the open hopper of the cake-press. He pressed an emergency stop button and attempted to remove the worker.

He went and sought help from fellow workers. Emergency services attended the scene shortly afterwards and declared the worker deceased. The Coroner concluded that the worker was killed by traumatic asphyxia and skeletal injuries.

WAMMCO had policies in place acknowledging the requirement for guarding and isolation and tagout procedures. At the time of the incident, WAMMCO had in place a Machinery Guarding Policy, which had a stated objective to ensure all machinery on the WAMMCO International site in Katanning complied with State laws and Australian Standards. However, despite these requirements, the entanglement hazard created by the rotating paddles was left unguarded.

Measures taken following the incident

Following the incident, WAMMCO installed a post box style guard over the open hatch of the cake press. The post box hatch can be opened to receive meat meal product while the worker remains isolated from the energised rotating paddles. To allow meat meal to be poured into the hopper, the

operator first opens the hinged door and pours the meat meal into the hopper. While the drawer is in the open position, the door functions as a distance guard, while the sides on either side of the door are guarded to prevent any person being able to access the rotating paddles.

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| OUTCOME | Pleaded guilty – convicted and fined |
| FINE | \$785,000 |
| COSTS | \$5752.00 |
| COURT | Magistrates Court of Western Australia – Katanning |