



# FERTILIZER INDUSTRY FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA

Incorporated in Victoria  
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## Phosphate Rock Imports from the Western Sahara

### The Role of the Fertilizer Industry Federation of Australia (FIFA)

FIFA is an industry association primarily involved in public policy development and implementation on behalf of its member companies. FIFA works with all levels of Government in Australia on issues such as food safety, environment, quarantine and security where fertilizers can have an impact. As such FIFA does not have any direct involvement in commercial issues to do with sourcing of fertilizer products.

Our member companies are responsible for more than 95% of the fertilizer manufactured, imported and sold in Australia.

### Background

Single super phosphate has been an important part of productive pasture production in Australia for many years. It contains a balance of phosphorus and sulphur that is well suited to the nutritional requirements of legume based pastures that are the core of our essential livestock industries. Super phosphate is an important contributor to sustainable productive agriculture and is a major contributing factor to productivity and profitability of grazing systems.

Other fertilizers are available for the pasture market that provide a range of phosphorous and sulphur contents and forms. This provides farmers with useful options for managing production and environmental outcomes.

In the last five years Australian super phosphate sales have averaged 1.2 million tonnes per annum with 95% of those tonnes manufactured in Australia from imported rock phosphate. Across the globe, the quality of rock phosphate is variable and the number of suitable deposits is limited. The rising demand for food, fibre, and now bio-fuels has increased global demand for all types of fertilizers putting further pressure on available supplies of suitable quality rock phosphate.

Recently, there have been some concerns raised about imports of phosphate rock through Moroccan based suppliers from Western Saharan deposits. The concerns can largely be categorised as being in relation to:

- the sovereignty of Western Sahara, which is currently defined as a non self governing territory by the United Nations and Morocco has de-facto control of the region; and
- the quality of the phosphate rock sourced from the Western Sahara, and particularly the levels of cadmium in the phosphate rock.

## Legal and Ethical Questions

Each of the Australian companies involved in importing Western Saharan phosphate rock from their Moroccan suppliers has satisfied itself that this does not breach international law. It is also relevant to note that the Australian Government has not prohibited the importing of resources from the region.

The resolution of the long-running dispute between Morocco and the Polisario in relation to the sovereignty of the area known as Western Sahara is, and should be, in the hands of the international community, not individuals or companies.

Whilst FIFA is not in a position to judge the relative merits of either case, the member companies involved have noted the following in reaching their decision to continue to source this important raw material from the Western Sahara.

- That the sovereignty of the territory of Western Sahara is under dispute.
- That whatever the eventual outcome, Morocco is the current administrative power.
- That the U.N. has principles under which an administrative power of a non self governing territory should act to ensure that the local population benefits from any economic and development activity.
- That there has been significant development of civic infrastructure in the Western Sahara as a direct result of the economic activity of Morocco.
- The Moroccan Government has put forward a proposal for autonomy of the Western Sahara within the Kingdom of Morocco.
- This is noted in UN Security Council Resolution S2007/238 ...“Taking note of the Moroccan proposal presented on 11 April 2007 to the Secretary-General and welcoming serious and credible Moroccan efforts to move the process forward towards resolution; also taking note of the Polisario Front proposal presented on 10 April 2007 to the Secretary-General,...”
- The European Union signed a fisheries partnership agreement with Morocco that includes access to Western Saharan waters in February 2007.
- In a statement on the EU Fisheries Agreement with Morocco UK fisheries Minister, Ben Bradshaw said: "We are content with this agreement on fisheries and conservation grounds but we were concerned not to affect the difficult talks taking place on the status of the Western Sahara. Our legal advice is that nothing in this Agreement does that, but we expect the Committee set up to monitor the Agreement to ensure that Morocco's obligations under international law, are observed and that the benefits of it accrue to all the people of the region, including the people of the Western Sahara."

Removing access to Western Saharan rock phosphate would have a significant impact on supplies of single super phosphate to Australian farmers and subsequent effects on sustainable productivity. The effect on local manufacturing would be significant and could lead to plant closures and subsequent economic effects including job losses.

## Western Saharan Phosphate Rock Quality

The maximum permissible concentration (MPC) of cadmium has been set at 300mg of cadmium per Kg of elemental P as the result of extensive scientific evaluation by the CSIRO and Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). In addition to meeting the MPC for cadmium in fertilizer sold in Australia, the fertilizer industry, through FIFA, has been an active participant in a national program to minimize the impact of cadmium on the food chain. Details of the Australian Cadmium Minimisation Strategy can be found at [www.cadmium-management.org.au](http://www.cadmium-management.org.au).

In all cases, the fertilizer product manufactured from Western Saharan rock meets Australia's strict standard for MPC. Indeed, there are three Australian manufacturers of super phosphate: Incitec Pivot Ltd; Impact Fertilisers; and CSBP. All of these companies use Western Saharan phosphate rock, in addition to other sources, because of its good manufacturing quality and relatively low cadmium levels.

### About FIFA

The Fertilizer Industry Federation of Australia is a not for profit organisation. Its members represent more than 95% of the fertilizer sold in Australia and represents importers, manufacturers, suppliers and distributors. A full list of members is available from our web site.

The FIFA mission statement is:

To maintain public consent for the responsible contribution of our industry to the growth of Australian agriculture for the benefit of the Australian fertilizer industry and its customers.

The main activities are in development and implementation of public policy in the areas of environment and food safety, quarantine, product security and regulation.

FIFA runs a national product stewardship training and accreditation program, Fertcare, and is active in a number of Federal and State programs to manage environment and food safety issues relating to fertilizers.

Further information on FIFA and its activities is available from the FIFA web site, [www.fifa.asn.au](http://www.fifa.asn.au).