Current situation and outlook

Favourable weather in the late summer and autumn has been followed by a relatively good winter over virtually the whole country.

Both beef and dairy cattle have come through the winter in good condition.

Slaughterings of most classes of stock for the 1978/79 season up to the end of August 1979 were slightly below those for the same period last season.

Adult cattle slaughterings were down by about 11 per cent, with the cow kill down 26 per cent and the heifer kill down 0.6 per cent.

The comparatively small drop in the heifer kill reflects the slaughter of excess female dairy calves retained for beef production under the Government's dairy beef market guarantee scheme rather than a continuing rundown in breeding cow numbers.

The female cattle kill comprised about 52 per cent of the total adult cattle kill to the end of August 1979, compared with about 56 per cent for the 1977/1978 season.

The drop in adult cattle slaughterings indicates an end to the rundown in cattle numbers which has occurred since 1976.

Beef and veal production in the season ended September 1979 is expected to total 502,000 tonnes, 10.6 per cent down on the previous season, with heavier carcass weights offsetting a slightly lower kill.

Beef and veal production in the 1979/1980 season is forecast to decline by a further 6 per cent to 472,000 tonnes carcass weight, due to a further drop in cattle slaughterings.
This reflects both the decreased numbers of cattle on farms and the increased retention of female stock necessary to stabilize cattle numbers.

Domestic consumption of beef is expected to decline and exports are likely to drop to about 210,000 tonnes shipping weight, assuming some withdrawal from stocks.

Stocks of beef and veal held in New Zealand at 11 August 1979 were about 5,000 tonnes less than that at the same time last year.

Cattle numbers are expected to stabilize by June 1980 at only slightly below the estimated June 1979 total of 8.1 million head.

Conclusion

New Zealand's confidence in the future prospects for meat, despite continuing restrictions on trade, are shown by these facts.

We are about to transfer to a new International Arrangement on Meat; that we are prepared to do so is a mark of the usefulness we have seen in the existing group.