



Food relief sector – issues brief

Foodbank, OzHarvest and SecondBite¹ are key organisations in the National Food Relief and Food Rescue Sector (the Sector). Collectively we delivered over 160 million meals across Australia in 2024.

This election we're calling for a commitment to policy change, better food governance, and meaningful sector support to address food insecurity and food waste.

Food insecurity has reached a crisis point

Australia is facing a food insecurity crisis that cannot be ignored. Right now, **1 in 6 Australian adults and 1.2 million children** are living in food-insecure households, struggling to access enough nutritious food. This is not an outlying problem—these are our neighbours, our friends, and our communities.

The escalating cost of living, stagnant wages, and rising housing and energy costs have driven more Australians to seek food relief than ever before. Foodbank's latest Hunger Report revealed that demand for food relief has surged by **50% in the last three years**, with food relief organisations stretched beyond capacity. In regional and remote areas, the crisis is even more acute, with many families forced to choose between keeping the lights on in their homes or feeding their children.

Food waste is causing climate change

This crisis is happening in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and it is a shameful paradox that millions go hungry while **7.6 million tonnes of food are wasted annually**. In landfill, this food waste releases methane, contributing to global warming, which will further exacerbate challenges for vulnerable households, as well increase pressure on our agricultural system and supply. Australia has a 2030 food waste reduction target which is supported across the Parliament, but more action is needed if the country is to reach it.

The food relief sector is working hard to fill the gap

These issues coalesce at a time when collaboration between the key sector players, Foodbank, OzHarvest and SecondBite, has never been stronger. As a sector, we provide food with a retail value close to half a billion dollars to the Australian community. In 2024 we provided 160 million meals across every state and territory and in every one of the 151

¹ SecondBite merged with FareShare on July 1 2024

federal electorates. We provide a vital service that is built on infrastructure and logistic networks established over the past decades. From working together operationally to ensure the broadest footprint of food relief is provided, to collating critical data to demonstrate the state of food insecurity in Australia, our partnership has strengthened our capacity, but we cannot do it alone. We estimate that 200 million more meals annually would be required across the country to meet the need.

More food insecure households than ever are reaching out for help, particularly those in the severe category (30% in 2024 vs 26% in 2023) who are running out of food and skipping meals or an entire day of eating. This is at a time when family and friends are less able to help because of their own struggles.

Our current systems and policies are failing to protect the most vulnerable, leaving the Sector to respond to the historically high demand without adequate resources or government support

People are being left behind

As it stands, successive governments of all persuasions have not invested the required amount to address the core of the issue, let alone ensure the National Food Relief Sector can safeguard struggling Aussies from going hungry. Whilst the Sector has worked closely with the Commonwealth, the level of priority given to investing in food relief is simply not on par with what the community expects or requires during challenging economic times.

Put simply, this is above politics, and the Sector asks for more holistic food systems governance, as well as critical financial support, to ensure the settings allow for the most vulnerable of Australians to have secure access to nutritious food – always.

Decisive action is needed, now

As the federal election approaches, we call on all political parties and candidates to commit to urgent and decisive action. We're asking for two critical interventions:

1. Create a **National Food Plan** and appoint a **Minister for Food** to address food insecurity and food waste holistically.
2. Help to provide more meals to Australians in need
 - a. Provide growing **sustainable funding for food rescue and relief** organisations, enabling them to meet skyrocketing demand.
 - b. Implement a **tax incentive for food donations** to increase supply for food relief.

We also acknowledge food insecurity is a symptom of complex drivers, so it is essential to also **tackle the root causes of food insecurity**, including systemic poverty and inadequate social safety nets.

The time for action is now. The choices made by the next government will determine whether we take meaningful steps toward ending food insecurity—or whether millions of Australians will continue to go to bed hungry. **Let's ensure that no one in our nation is left without a meal on their table.**

Key Asks

National Food Plan

A National Food Plan would provide a comprehensive strategy to address food security challenges, integrating policy across agriculture, health, environment, and social services to ensure no Australian experiences food insecurity. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture's inquiry and subsequent report into food security in Australia provides a solid foundation for a National Food Plan to be based upon.

Action: Commit to developing and implementing a National Food Plan that prioritises reducing food insecurity, supporting sustainable agriculture, ensuring fair access to nutritious food for all Australians and achieving the national 2030 food waste reduction target.

Minister for Food

The establishment of a dedicated Minister for Food would provide a central point of leadership and accountability for addressing food security.

Action: Support the appointment of a Minister for Food to drive coordinated national efforts, streamline policy development, and ensure food security remains a national priority.

National Food Council

A National Food Council, comprising stakeholders from government, industry, and the Food Relief and Food Rescue Sector, would provide expert advice and oversight to address food system challenges.

Action: Establish a National Food Council to foster collaboration, develop innovative solutions, and guide the implementation of food security initiatives.

Increase funding to the National Food Relief Sector

Ongoing and increased funding is needed to support the Sector to address the need.

Action: Assess the need and work with the Sector to develop a funding plan to address it.

Food Donation Tax Incentive

A Food Donation Tax Incentive is needed to encourage businesses that don't already donate food to donate surplus food rather than dispose of it. This policy would reduce waste while significantly increasing the volume of food available for redistribution to those in need. Estimates indicate that up to 100 million extra meals could be donated per year. This would add to the 160 million meals the Sector provided in 2024.

Action: Implement a National Food Donation Tax Incentive, ensuring a more sustainable and effective food rescue system.

Why These Recommendations Matter

These actions will:

- Alleviate food insecurity for millions of Australians.
- Improve food security in regional, remote, and Indigenous communities.
- Strengthen the resilience and capacity of the Food Rescue Sector.
- Reduce food waste and its environmental impact.
- Align with Australia's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 2: Zero Hunger, and Goal 12.3: Halving food waste by 2030.

The upcoming federal election presents an opportunity to address Australia's food security challenges. The government can create a sustainable and equitable food system, ensuring no Australian goes hungry.

We call on all political parties to prioritise food security and commit to implementing these vital measures in their election platforms.

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