

Senate Inquiry: Improvements in animal welfare for Australian live exports

The live export industry cannot be trusted to self-regulate and Government has failed in its role as the live export trade regulator to “exercise leadership” and “influence outcomes” in its management of the country’s animal welfare strategy. MLA has admitted to knowing about cruelty as far back as 2000 and Government has been warned about the abuse to cattle but nothing has been done. The miserly \$4million (including \$1.5m of taxpayers money) that they spent on installing 103 Mark 1 restraint boxes and associated training over the last ten years, demonstrates that the industry has never been concerned about the welfare of the animals. Everything they have done in the name of animal welfare has only been done to increase profits or appease the Australian public when the inherent cruelty of the industry is exposed. When it comes to animal welfare in this industry, only independent auditing funded by Australian taxpayers is acceptable.

The recent resumption of trade based on the OIE code is evidence that Government also is not concerned with the welfare of the animals. These International standards are so low that they allow the slaughter of fully conscious animals – stunning is not mandatory – and that is totally unacceptable. They also do not require upright restraint nor do they prohibit traditional roping slaughter – also unacceptable.

The Mark 1 restraint box does not even comply with the minimum OIE standards, which state that, “methods of restraint causing avoidable suffering should not be used”. To quote Professor Temple Grandin they “breach every humane standard in the world”. By installing these devices, instead of encouraging animal welfare, MLA have facilitated and encouraged cruelty. After thirty years, Australian livestock is still ending up in abattoirs that do not even comply with minimum international OIE standards.

The Indonesian ministry’s livestock dept. chief, Mr. Prabowo Respatiyo Catarroso, conceded there were no regulations in Indonesian law that could be used to sanction abattoirs found to have abused animals. He also admitted there were no regulations in place to punish individual offenders. (The Australian - 2nd June 2011)

Australia can only encourage animal welfare and the use of stunning in importing countries; we have no authority to make any demands. This fact alone renders “supply chain assurances” worthless. Importing countries have no incentive to change as long as Australia and other countries are willing to export live animals without concern for their welfare. Mr. Sembiring, chairman of Indonesian Meat Importers Association (Aspidi) said, “the issue

of animal welfare (in abattoirs) has not been dominant here before because we haven't seen this threat before". (The Australian – 2nd June 2011)

This statement implies that Indonesia thinks that Australia either accepts or is indifferent to their practices in animal handling and slaughter, and that only because of the threat of a ban on live exports do they take the issue of animal welfare more seriously. If this trade continues, millions more Australian animals will suffer torture and prolonged, agonizing deaths while the Australian government passes the ball to the live export industry and they in turn, as always, do nothing.

Question – Since the first live export vessel was loaded and sailed from Australia, has any importing country ever approached Australia requesting guidance, expertise and knowledge in relation to animal welfare and humane slaughter practices?

IN RELATION TO ITEM 1. (a) (i)

Promoting live exports as a means of greater profit at the expense of animal welfare is totally unethical. The idea of luring producers into this inhumane industry after everything we have seen, after all the reports that have documented the cruelty and the negative economic impact of live exports on the domestic meat production sector, defies belief. It's all about greed. Maximum profit at any cost – in this case the cost is maximum pain and suffering by Australian livestock.

We hear producers saying how much they care for their livestock, tending to their wellbeing and nurturing them, but they have no compunction in sending them on long sea voyages fraught with risks to their welfare to end up in abattoirs where there is no notion or concern that animals experience distress, pain and suffering. I wonder if any producers, other than those who run MLA and Livecorp, have ever had enough concern for the welfare of their livestock to visit the abattoirs where their animals are slaughtered and witness for themselves how the animals they reared and nurtured so caringly are brutalized so appallingly.

Question - Has MLA or Livecorp ever filmed animal handling and slaughter practices at abattoirs similar to those the Australian public saw on Four Corners and shown that film to Australian producers before they became involved in live exports?

IN RELATION TO ITEM 2.

There is already more than enough information available to draw the conclusion that live exports cost Australia more in jobs and revenue than they provide. These reports show that live exports are undermining Australia's domestic meat processing sector. Live exports equals Australian job losses. In Queensland, live exports are threatening the viability of that state's meat processing sector.

The Australian Meat Industry Employees Union does not support the live export industry, blaming it for the closure of around 150 rural and regional abattoirs and the loss of 40,000 jobs.

Concerning live exports to Indonesia, they are aiming towards self-sufficiency in beef production, so hopefully this market has a limited future.

CONCLUSION

We should not lose focus on what is, or should be, the first and most important concern in this issue; that is the welfare of the animals.

This industry should have never been allowed to get off the ground without first making sure that animal welfare standards in importing countries were at least equal to Australian standards.

A cruel industry that only reacts when it is exposed, importing countries that have no animal welfare laws and no incentive to change, and an Australian government that is willing to subject its livestock to minimum OIE standards that do not even require the mercy of stunning and can't, or doesn't want to see the long term benefits of ending live exports, will only entrench this inhumane industry deeper into Australian society.

As Mr. Paul Holmes a Court said - (Australian Financial Review, 9th June 2011) - "if the torture that was filmed by Animals Australia happens to just one beast, it is not good enough".

Only by banning live exports forever can we guarantee that Australian animals will not suffer inhumane treatment in importing countries.