

Senate Inquiry into Animal welfare standards in Australia's Live Export Markets

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a) The level, nature and effectiveness of expenditure and efforts to promote or improve animal welfare standards with respect to all Australian live export market countries;

There has been an increasing improvement across our Industry over the past 20 odd years to change facilities and infrastructure to enable animal welfare standards to be elevated to where they are today. The cattle boats have come a long way in being state of the art vehicles of transport to their overseas destination. Cattle put on weight on the cattle boats and there are fewer deaths on these boats than there are on cruise liners.

Roadtrains carrying cattle to accredited export depots have also improved so there is little stress on these animals in transit

Low stress stockhandling on the part of the producers also enable these cattle to be transported without ill effect.

The feedlots in Indonesia utilize all by-products that are available from crops and pastures e.g. copra, corn and sugar cane. The feedlot animals in Indonesia are in such good condition internally and externally that the entire animal is available for consumption by the housewife who shops at the wet market for meat that they know has just been killed. They prefer their meat fresh and in many cases do not have refrigeration. Meat is used as a condiment in Asian countries, unlike our diet in Australia which is predominately Steak and Vegetables.

MLA and Livecorp have been improving the conditions in abattoirs with the introduction of restraining boxes which have been refined and improved over time. The only abattoirs that they can work on is non government abattoirs, and it is believed there are over 700 abattoirs in Indonesia, so improvements will be slow with a lot of money needed as well as patience in dealing with these people of a different culture to us.

i) expenditure and efforts on marketing and promoting live export to Australian producers;

We as producers in the Top End of Australia are always working towards promoting our cattle to the live export trade. We do this with the type of cattle we breed, and how we handle our cattle on the station before they are transported for Live Export.

We have found that Brahman or Brahman cross cattle are the most suitable for the live export market. These cattle do well in our harsh environment where we have two distinct seasons – wet season and a dry season. The type of meat required by the consumers in Asia is for the use as a condiment in the meal, so quality is of lesser importance. Brahman meat is not the desired meat of southern Australian consumers, so they have a perfect place in our environment which complements the Live Export trade. My family chose to move to Australia in the early sixties from America as we could see that it was a free and democratic society. We also needed more land for our ever growing family and land was becoming scarce in the area we lived in America. Our family was instrumental in introducing Brahmans to the Territory in the 1960's and we were also part of the live export trade that was resumed in 1970's and 80's.

To see our Federal government bow to a Television program without consultation with Industry, State Governments and the Indonesian Government, makes me question how democratic and free we are in Australia now. Where is the integrity of this Federal government? To shut down a whole industry with one stroke of a pen is irresponsible and will take years to reconstruct.

The Four Corners program only showed one aspect of slaughtering animals in Indonesian abattoirs. They also filmed abattoirs slaughtering animals in humane ways but chose not to show both sides to the general public, knowing full well the impact of their show on the personal conscious of southern Australian mentality.

I mention this as Northern Australia is more aligned with Asian than we are with our fellow Australians who live in the urban 'feedlots' of southern Australia. I say feedlots as most would not have any idea how their meat gets to the supermarket and would be appalled if someone showed them a video of cattle being slaughtered in Australia. Unfortunately, something has to die for a piece of meat.

We live in what was a prosperous industry which had huge flow on effects to the wider community be it helicopter pilots, hay producers, agents, shop keepers, truck drivers, aboriginal communities as well as the producers who run the properties and the staff they employ. We are used to huge draw downs of our cash flow because we generally only sell cattle at one time of the year – usually in the dry season when we can get our cattle out on our gravel roads, and this money is used to pay existing bills leading up to the Dry Season and to keep the business afloat for the next year. To have the rug pulled out from under us, just when we were getting to this

point in time in our program of selling cattle has been cruel on the part of the Federal Government who has demonstrated so little understanding of how our industry works and operates. It seems that we are run like a TV reality program where the most emails for the contestant are the winner. In this case the most emails to politicians were to ban live export. So it was declared the winner – for Animals Australia but not the cattle industry. What happened to an inquiry to find out what was behind this Four corners exposure, there were abattoirs in Indonesia who slaughtered their animals humanely, but all doors were shut when live export was banned. I don't believe people in Southern Australia even realize the impact on the people in Indonesia who rely on this industry for their own employment. We know this because we are more aligned with these people; we are closer in distance to Asia than we are to Sydney or Melbourne where most of the animal activists live. It would appear that the Government is a puppet of these Animal rights group and are quite easily swayed by their input rather than getting any input from the people that are so busy working and creating an economy for this country. We were criticized for not been fluent in the internet media and were left behind to start off with, but our industry soon learnt how to be on the internet with the best of these activists. A day in the life of a cattle producer is up before dawn, and finishing up well after the sun has set. Once home, a meal would be waiting, a few phone calls were made and then to bed to start another day. There are generally no weekends, unless there are functions on that involve the whole communities. To offer welfare as a bandaid is a real slap in the face to people who would prefer to work than go on the dole, and here is our government encouraging them to be on welfare. The Business Hardship payment is a joke, \$20000 will go nowhere with the size of accounts we pay for our fuel, our labour, our supplement, our mustering costs, animal health bank interest costs etc.

ii) ongoing monitoring of the subscription to, and practice of, animal welfare standards in all live export market countries;

I believe that animal welfare standards have been monitored and improved continuously in the past for our Asian export countries. I know there can possibly be improvements in the trucking of animals once they arrive in the Asian country, but they are a 3rd world country, so raising them to our standards is a long process involving money, time, man power and patience. This also applies to abattoirs in Indonesia and we are dealing with over 700 abattoirs, not just a few like we have in Australia. A lot of these abattoirs are Government owned, so we are unable to just demand them to change without Government (Australian) to Government (Indonesian) consultation.

I question our hardnosed determination to control a product that has been sold to another country and being paid for by that country. If I was to sell a product to another person and that person pays for it, do I have any right to demand how they use that product because that is the way I think it should be done. This is exactly what we are telling/demanding of the Indonesians. They are of another culture and we are assuming they should be living and eating the same as we are. We think they shouldn't have a wet market, yet we forget that most Indonesians do not have electricity and culture demands that they purchase fresh meat every day for their daily meal. Who is it for us to decide that they need better hygiene practices and refrigeration so that they can get meat out of a box? These people use every part of the animal; there is nothing left when they have finished with it. If they were to get boxed meat, then they would be missing out on most of the protein that suits their diet, even though we as Australians wouldn't even dream of eating or using those side products.

The whole process of receiving cattle overseas from our cattle boats, transporting them to a feedlot, feeding them for the required time which I believe is 60 days, and then taken to an abattoir for slaughter and then sold in the wet market employs a lot of Indonesians who rely on this live export market for their livelihood. We have just slashed those employment opportunities for them.

iii) actions to improve animal welfare outcomes in all other live export market countries and the evidence base for these actions.

Animal welfare is an ongoing program, whether it be in Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei or Middle East countries. Australia is the only country that is addressing these issues and is not something that will happen overnight as you are dealing with people who live in a totally different culture to what we are use to.

b) The extent of knowledge of animal welfare practices in Australia's live export markets including:

i) formal and informal monitoring and reporting structures;

Cattle are not trucked from properties unless they are suitable for transport. They are checked by Vets and Stock Inspectors at accredited export yards before transport on cattle boats. There is always an AQIS vet present when cattle are loaded onto the cattle boats. There is always a person on board the boat for the duration of the trip to ensure animal welfare is adhered to.

ii) formal and informal processes for reporting and addressing poor animal welfare practices.

In Australia, the producer is aware of poor animal welfare practices as are the stock inspectors and Vets who visit their properties. Once trucked from the properties then what is said in (i) above.

2. Investigate and report on the domestic economic impact of the live export trade within Australia including:

a) Impact on regional and remote employment especially in northern Australia;

A producer employs staff on the basis that they will be paid for their time. So if there is no cash flow coming in, then the producer will do only what is required with their cattle with extra staff and then the staff will have to be put off. The rest of the work on the property will generally then be done by the family members. I dare say even the children who would be doing school either through School of the Air or at boarding schools far away will be recalled to help on the property. The flow on effects are so far reaching that boarding schools in southern states will be affected by this ban. People who come to work on cattle properties do so as they generally have little or no interest in welfare. They are prepared to work and enjoy the lifestyle. If they cannot find work, then they will drift to the mines or be forced onto welfare.

b) Impact and role of the industry on local livestock production and prices;

The ban on the live export in June saw an immediate drop in prices of cattle not only in the Northern Territory but in southern states as well and there are no signs yet of any improvement. It was bad enough to have the rug pulled out from under you, but to have the value of your cattle slashed as well. This has also flowed onto the value of the land owned by the producer who has borrowed from the banks on the higher value of the land prior to the live export ban. Banks are now talking of revaluation which could put a lot of property owners in a precarious situation in relation to their equity along with not having any cash flow.

Selling cattle to the live export was our only avenue living in this part of Australia. We have all known that it is not good business sense to have only one market, but with the absence of abattoirs in the area of Australia stretching north from Townsville to Perth due to poor returns, we have put more emphasis on value adding to the live export market.

The 350 kg limit really put limits on this market but like all cattlemen, they work around these sort of problems and adjust their management to suit the market. To have no market at all is just criminal on behalf of our Federal Government who have not even thought about the flow on effects and consequences of their actions.

Listening to media coverage of late, especially Agricultural Minister Joe Ludwig, it is so obvious that he just doesn't get it – get the damage he has imposed not only on a whole industry, but to our country and our relations to our Asian neighbours.

He gets a wage every week so he, like the animal activists don't know what

it is like to have no income for 12 months, knowing that when you sell the cattle you have waiting to go on a boat to Indonesia will relieve the financial pressure and keep you going for the best part of another 12 months.

Joe Ludwig visited Indonesia just before this live export ban, and never bothered to even visit an abattoir, yet he consistently says in the media that he has brought this industry to task through letters that he sent to MLA that we have not responded to, so we have deserved the ban. However, investigation has shown that the letters he is referring to were not addressed to MLA but to Livecorp and he actually commends them on the work they are doing on animal welfare in the Middle East. So nowhere was Indonesia mentioned.

The huge black dog is just lurking around the corner here, and this whole live export ban will have an immense affect on human health and welfare as they brace themselves to go through another 12 months without income – how do they pay their invoices that they have proudly paid in the past, how to they lower themselves to receive a Centrelink payment – that is not in their culture to do that, how do they interact with their banks, suppliers and employees who all need to be paid. How many good people are going to take the only way out of this mess and that is to leave it all behind – they have had enough of Government intervention and life is just too hard now, regardless of years of total commitment to their industry and country.

So we have two issues here, Cattle welfare which is a sleeping giant and will emerge as the dry season progresses and grass becomes scarcer and have nowhere to go and Human welfare. How much has this industry got to endure before everything blows up in our faces?

c) Impact on the processing of live stock within Australia;

I do not see any alternative, as this area in Northern Australia is suited for breeding Brahman feeder cattle which are not welcome in southern feedlots.

If we had to sell our cattle to a southern market, it would cause a slump in the overall Australia Beef price to the producers.

3. Other related matters.

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