

Response to Senate Inquiry on Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets.

Key points

The Terms of Reference should include an investigation that incorporates phasing out the live trade (i.e. a transition from live exports to a boxed meat only trade).

Every time we export animals overseas to a country that has lower standards, it is a failure - a failure of our duty of care to those animals and it is a failure to producers who need and deserve certainty of the stability of their markets – and for those who are genuinely concerned about the welfare of their animals. My preference is to end the trade forthwith, but the advantages of establishing an enhanced industry in Northern Australia are considerable, and will take time to implement.

a) the facilities, treatment, handling and slaughter of livestock, exported from Australia, in the importing country for consistency with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) recommendations and standards set out in Terrestrial Animal Health Code (2010) published by the World Organisation for Animal Health and other relevant standards

Using World Organisation of Animal Health (OIE) standards as a benchmark is not acceptable, as these fall well short of the Australian standards. They do not require upright preslaughter stunning (rendering the animal unconscious to pain) and they do not exclude the roping restraint, tripping and casting of animals that occurs in Indonesia and other importing countries, all of which causes unacceptable suffering.

Standards must be mandatory and include the requirement that animals are upright and stunned (rendering them unconscious to pain) prior to slaughter.

It is also essential that stunning equipment is well maintained. As a Veterinarian, I have been in Australian export standard abattoirs when stunners are functioning normally, and when the stunners have failed. The attendant Veterinarian then has the authority to stop the line operating until the fault is fixed. Magnificent animals lining up to be slaughtered, with stunning, is dreadful enough – when the stunners fail it is horrific.

b) the adequacy of the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) as they apply to the preparation and export of all livestock with consideration of responsibilities for compliance and enforcement of the ASEL

While the Standards take a “whole of chain approach” covering all aspects of the livestock export trade from planning through to on-board management, many

sections of the Standards lie outside the jurisdictional powers of the Australian Government, and could only be enforced under State and Territory legislation. No Australian State or Territory government has yet legislated to recognise the ASEL, and, as a result, large sections of the ASEL are effectively unenforceable. Once animals are on board on export vessel, Australia currently loses control of the management and welfare of those animals. No matter what guidelines or recommendations or conditions are put in place, it is impossible to guarantee that these animals will be humanely treated and humanely put to death.

c) the adequacy and effectiveness of current Australian regulatory arrangements for the live export trade

Current regulatory arrangements are totally inadequate. As soon as Australian animals leave Australia, *Australia loses control*, and Australian animals they have no protection against cruel treatment. Importing countries do not have basic animal welfare legislation/anti-cruelty legislation (or, enforce such legislation) and as such these animals have absolutely no protection once they leave Australia. Any assurance that Australian animals will be protected from cruelty and mistreatment is not guaranteed in legislation and therefore cannot be relied upon. It is impossible to supervise and scrutinize the behaviour of individual slaughtermen in individual abattoirs, and it is highly likely that the cruel practices which occur, and have been occurring for decades, will continue unabated and unchecked.

d) the types of livestock suitable (weight, age, body condition, breeds) for export as feeder or slaughter animals

No live animals should be exported from Australia as feeder or slaughter animals. Available scientific evidence shows that exporting animals live directly compromises their welfare. The best animal welfare outcome is achieved when the animal is slaughtered humanely as close to their point of production within Australia and under Australian law. Goats, deer, wild camels and pregnant animals are at increased risk when subjected to the stress of live export. Transporting animals from a cold (Australian Winter) to hot climate (Northern Summer and tropics) exacerbates heat stress (which can lead to suffering and a prolonged death). Animals unfit to load are not always identified.

e) the extent of monitoring required for each export consignment of feeder or slaughter livestock, in a manner that ensures accurate and transparent reporting to the Australian Government of the condition of the livestock from departure from Australia up to and including the point of slaughter in the country of destination

A high level of constant monitoring is required at each slaughter installation to ensure standards are met, particularly at the point of slaughter. For e.g. where MLA-trained operators may revert to old practices as soon as no one is looking. To change the mindset of slaughtermen from that of routine grotesque cruelty to humane handling of animals will

need years of education and supervision by Australian cattlemen, slaughtermen and Veterinarians.

Monitoring would also necessarily include Third Party Independent auditing, and permanent identification of animals from farm to post slaughter, and the presence of a Veterinary team on board each export ship.

The single most important and non-negotiable factor in all of this would be upright preslaughter stunning (rendering the animal unconscious to pain), using effective and functional equipment, maintained with a very high level of quality control protocols.

f) the risk management strategies necessary to address the welfare of animals from departure from Australia, up to and including the point of slaughter in the country of destination

Available scientific evidence shows that exporting animals live directly compromises their welfare. The best animal welfare outcome is achieved when the animal is slaughtered humanely as close to the point of production within Australia and under Australian law. There are risks to animal welfare at each stage of the journey from loading, to transport, at the feedlot, and at slaughter. **Stress is cumulative.**

In the case of cattle and pastoral sheep, these animals are unused to frequent handling and are fearful of humans. This increases the risk to their welfare throughout the live export process.

While it has been argued that the mortality rate amongst sheep and cattle on transport ships is low, the morbidity rates are extremely high, particularly in sheep.

g) other matters relevant to these terms of reference that the reviewer considers appropriate.

I am a Veterinarian and my prime concern is for animal welfare. The deficiencies in animal welfare standards in the countries of destination of our export food animals are so blatant that there is ultimately only one answer to this debate, which is to close down the live animal export industry.

Improvements to animal welfare standards in these countries are realistically so unlikely that the term "snowflake in Hell" comes to mind, no matter how well we monitor and attempt to educate.

Even the best run abattoirs in Australia are not pleasant places to be in, but the animals' handling is mostly good, and their stress and suffering is mostly brief and minimal.

The only sensible and humane response to this debate is to enhance the industry by building more export quality abattoirs in northern Australia, and processing animals in this country. Domestic processing creates more jobs, skills and opportunities, and vastly enhances the industry with a more sophisticated and highly trained and skilled workforce, rather than that of the present arrangement. A meat-only and value-adding to products trade not only means that our animals will no longer suffer torture and cruelty, but that Australia will be seen as a world leader in animal welfare, instead of condoning by tacit consent, or with half-hearted approval with conditions - impossible to maintain, the outrageous and abhorrent treatment of our animals which is a national disgrace. It is now

well known and well documented scientifically, that standards of animal welfare translate readily into standards of human welfare amongst the citizens of a nation.

Additionally, live export of animals is a high risk industry. Permits are issued on a 3 monthly basis, which provides no certainty of a continued market. A domestic meat-only export market, as occurs in New Zealand, is the only sensible solution economically as well. Then there is the risk of markets terminating due to country-of-destination domestic upheaval.

Destination countries are almost exclusively devoid of enforceable animal welfare /anti-cruelty legislation. This is not likely to change any time soon, despite the efforts of local animal welfare activists.

Staying in the market is not going to improve animal welfare. Australia needs to have enough moral fibre to take a stand and show leadership in this matter.