

Submission – Independent Review into Australia’s Livestock Export Trade

Dear Sir/Madam

The majority of the Australian Electorate has been horrified and deeply shamed to learn of the cruelty and abuse that awaits our live export animals in countries where there are no animal welfare standards. The RSPCA and Animals Australia have extensively investigated and reported on the cruelty and torture inflicted upon our animals in Indonesia and the Middle East, as a result of the Live Export industry. These reports have never been addressed by our Nation.

The industry bodies involved in this abhorrent trade, Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and Livecorp, have shown that they have not implemented any animal welfare change whatsoever regarding the continued abuse of our animals over the past 30 years. In fact, it appears to have worsened. The Mark 1 restraint boxes, funded by Australian taxpayers, were supplied by MLA, who knowingly allowed these barbaric restraints to be used, resulting in the horrific abuse of these animals. The world’s leading cattle expert Temple Grandin describes these restraint boxes as ‘violating every humane standard in the world’ – how then, has the use of these boxes been sanctioned by the Australian Government?

That these industry bodies were aware of and complicit in this abuse is shocking and morally unacceptable. If Australian abattoir workers inflicted the torture that we saw on Four Corners, they would be prosecuted under Australian animal cruelty laws.

The majority of Australians were completely unaware of this travesty. Irrefutable proof of the appalling cruelty that awaits our exported animals has now been documented on the Four Corners Program and shown to Australia and beyond. The majority of Australians are now completely aware and demand change. Such change can only be affected by a complete ban on live export.

The fact that it took a non profit organisation to bring this horror to light, against a backdrop of many years of industry knowledge is inexplicable. As well, Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig was given a briefing more than eight months ago which warned of the threat posed to the livestock industry by the horrific treatment of cattle in Indonesia. The confidential briefing recommended the Government “exercise leadership” and “influence outcomes” to protect the industry or face “a real risk they could lose public acceptance” (as reported in The Australian). Due to the absence of leadership to stand up and make ethical and moral decisions, this is now the situation.

The cruelty that awaits our cattle exported to Indonesia is abhorrent and indefensible. Documented brutality to the animals prior to slaughter shows them being tripped to the floor by ropes, having their eyes gouged, being whipped, punched and kicked, having their tails broken and leg tendons slashed. Then, whilst bellowing in pain and terror, they are slaughtered in the most horrific way. Are we as a nation so morally bankrupt that we put dollars above the pain and suffering of these sentient beings who can't speak for themselves?

The proposed use of World Organisation of Animal Health (OIE) standards is completely unacceptable. They are far below Australian standards and do not require upright pre slaughter stunning, nor do they exclude the trip rope method.

The religious argument we hear for live export to these regions is to ensure the slaughter is Halal. However, Islamic Law states:

Muslims are enjoined to slaughter their livestock by slitting the animal's throat in a swift and merciful manner, reciting God's name with the words, "In the name of God, God is Most Great" (Qur'an 6:118-121).

This is in acknowledgement that life is sacred, and that one must kill only with God's permission, to meet one's lawful need for food. (About.com – Islamic dietary law.)

There is nothing merciful or swift in the atrocities we have witnessed. Surely the slaughter performed in the 11 investigated abattoirs in Indonesia would be in breach of Islamic Law, which dictates that excessive pain during slaughter is a sin, as is slaughter with a blunt blade, as described in Wikipedia.

New Zealand's ban of Live Exports is proof that it can be done without detriment to our national farming industry. By moving away from live exporting, they worked on processing within their own country. The results are clear, New Zealand's export has grown – they export more now than they did ten years ago, the value of export has grown and processing jobs have been created and are staying within New Zealand. Australia's major meat processors have confirmed that Australia has the capacity to process all cattle and sheep currently going to live export. Industry claims that 10,000 jobs in the rural sector would be at risk however the majority of those jobs would remain if animals were processed in Australia. Thousands more jobs would be created by increased national processing.

It is morally and ethically wrong for Australia to send their livestock overseas where the outcome is nothing but horrific torture. The mode of transport itself is a dreadful experience for our cattle and other livestock before they even arrive at their destination. The amount of animals that die enroute to these countries is unacceptable and damning. And so very unnecessary – there is a viable alternative; all processing must be done within Australia and subject to Australian standards and law.

Historically, Australians have gone into battle for what they believe is right. There are no enforceable animal welfare regulations or penalties, and therefore no protection for our animals, in these importing countries. The only way to be a catalyst for real welfare improvements is to send a very clear message that we will not export our animals to countries that will not be accountable for the inhumane treatment of animals.

If we cannot ensure the wellbeing and humane, respectful handling of our animals from the moment they leave our shores to their eventual slaughter, a total ban on all live animal exports is the only way forward.

Let history show that Australia saw a great wrong and the leaders of the time had the strength and courage to right the shame of live animal export.

Yours sincerely

Glenys Lawton