

Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets

Submission

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I am opposed to livestock exports and offer the following reasons why I believe it can not be allowed to resume to Indonesia and why it should be ceased to all countries.

1.

Checks should have been done, procedures and processes should have been put in place to care for and protect our livestock before the first shipment of animals was sent 30 years ago.

2.

The conditions on the transporting ships can at best be viewed as being inadequate for protecting welfare of the animals. The health and wellbeing of the animals on the journey cannot be guaranteed. The number of deaths on the journey remains unacceptable. The manner in which the animals suffer before death in transit is also unacceptable.

3.

Australia has been exporting livestock for 30 years and to Indonesia for 18 years. 18 years of involvement in Indonesia has led us to the pictures recently broadcast by the ABC's 4Corners program. 30 years of involvement sees cruelty also continuing in the Middle East, this has been documented by Animals Australia in Kuwait in 2010. If all of these years of exporting livestock has only got us to here; with so much animal cruelty still occurring, it is obvious that it is not more time that is needed. What is needed is a full ban on livestock exports.

4.

It is impossible to guarantee the fair treatment of our animals once they leave our shore. Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) have known about conditions in the Indonesian abattoirs (and in other countries) and have been unable to make the necessary changes in these countries to ensure the wellbeing for every animal we have exported for slaughter. The Australian sponsored boxes which have been installed in over 100 Indonesian abattoirs have not made improvements to animal welfare; instead they have contributed to the cruelty. The design of the boxes would need to be significantly altered in order to allow them to be used with stunning methods. These boxes have been described by vets (Melbourne Age, 28 June 2011) as being an "inhumane device which should never be used for the slaughter of cattle". World renowned expert, Temple Grandin in her interview on 4Corners, described the boxes as "violating every humane standard there is all around the world". Yet, in a 2011 promotional video, MLA say they are "setting the benchmark for animal welfare" and describe the boxes as "efficient, effective and profitable".

5.

MLA have proven to be more concerned with profits than that of animal welfare. MLA is reported in The Australian newspaper on June 16 2011 as planning to spend seven times as much on marketing (\$23M) as improving cattle welfare (\$3.4M) this year. This is despite them receiving repeated reports over the past decade that animals exported to Indonesia were being abused. In the same article, MLA chairman Don Heatley was reported as saying in a statement the previous week: "If this disgusting cruelty had been witnessed by any Australian industry representative before now, action would immediately have been

triggered to bring it to a halt." Yet, now that all of Australia knows exactly what they know about the treatment of the cattle, they continue to insist the trade be continued. The only reasonable conclusion to draw from this is that they are most concerned with maintaining their profits and not with the welfare of the animals.

6.

There is a large amount of evidence that MLA, Livecorp and the Government have known about the cruelty for a number of years. MLA received reports detailing this cruelty as early as 2000, but still has not made an impact to or been able to tangibly improve the welfare of the cattle. The motivation for attempting to make any improvements to animal welfare appears to have not been in direct response to learning of animal brutality and a concern for the animals, but rather the fact that prices had fallen by up to 30% due to the poor taste of the meat which was found to be caused by stress during the slaughter process.

A report in the Melbourne Age (June 7, 2011) claims that Meat and Livestock Australia and exporter Livecorp were aware in 2005 of the potential backlash that such footage (as seen on 4Corners) would provoke, with a report recommending that as an imperative it have "a document prepared and a simple and accurate media response in the event of an overseas or Australian media report on slaughter practices in Indonesia"

This same newspaper report details information found on MLA's own website:

- A cow being stabbed 18 times at one abattoir in March 2010
Cattle regaining their feet after being felled for slaughter and "significant animal welfare issues identified".
- Reports of cattle smashing their heads on concrete plinths.
- Repeated examples of installed restraint boxes failing to provide a humane death.
- A culture of "unnecessary painful action" by inexperienced local staff trying to incapacitate cattle, to avoid personal injury, revealed in a 2005 report

Cameron Hall from Livecorp is reported in the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) on June 5 2011 as saying "We have never hidden the fact that there is poor handling and poor standards in a number of Indonesian processing facilities. What we saw in that video was barbaric acts of cruelty that are totally unnecessary."

In the same SMH article Ms. White from Animals Australia was reported to say entry to the abattoirs was relatively easy. It was not unusual to have Australian visitors on the killing floor, especially because, just weeks before, inspectors from Meat and Livestock Australia had visited one of these premises. Just weeks before Ms. White was there, someone from MLA had also been there. Just weeks before!

7.

The training programs and assistance with infrastructure MLA have been involved in over the past 11 years have not improved conditions for the cattle in Indonesia. During this time, they claim to have been providing training to abattoir workers in using the Australian restraining boxes. It has also known that the turnover of employees is very high so it is very difficult to maintain high knowledge and skill levels. The video evidence provided by Animals Australia shows that the distress of the animals is not reduced in these abattoirs compared to abattoirs without them. It is easy to come to the conclusion that much of the problem could be that there are issues associated with the training itself and that the abattoirs have inadequate equipment to protect the welfare of the animals and so therefore could be further improved. But what must not be overlooked is the fact that we can not enforce any standards or practices outside of Australia no matter how good our training is or how good the equipment might be.

8.

There is no guarantee that if we accredit a number of abattoirs in any country that our animals will not be sold to other abattoirs or to individuals where slaughter methods have not been approved and can not be monitored. Accredited abattoirs will also not be bound by law to maintain our standards. Being accredited means they are capable of meeting standards. And being in another country means they are not answerable to Australian law. Accreditation therefore does not and will not ensure the welfare of Australian animals.

Reports suggest there will be up to 20 Indonesian accredited abattoirs. Depending on which report is read, the number of Indonesian abattoirs varies between 120 and 700. There are also many mentions of registered and unregistered abattoirs. With just the number of abattoirs being difficult to obtain, the risk of Australian cattle ending up in an unaccredited or unregistered abattoir is too great; it would be nearly impossible to know where each and every one of our animals is slaughtered.

9.

The Government wants to expand the National Livestock Identification Scheme to WA and NT to track cattle being sent to Indonesia. An audit 2 years ago, found the system to be unable to track 34% of 57,000 audited cattle under the scheme. Losing track of ANY cattle is unacceptable and could result in animals again being brutalised in abattoirs including in those that have already been exposed for cruelty. The Melbourne Age reported (21 June 2011) of a 'NSW stock and station agent, whose company is in partnership with MLA, said an expansion into Indonesia of livestock identification would do little to guarantee the humane slaughter of beasts because non-compliance was widespread'.

Other overseas markets can not be forgotten in relation to the Identification scheme; in these markets too, it will be impossible to police that the livestock are not being on-sold to unaccredited abattoirs or to individuals.

10.

Concerns regarding lack of refrigeration can be addressed by Australia assisting in the installation of cool rooms in market places. Australia has had plenty of money to contribute to animal cruelty, we could now instead contribute significantly to animal welfare by assisting in the installation of cool rooms (or similar) for sellers to hold and store meat for sale. Refrigerated meat will mean consumers must take their meat home to be cooked immediately, but they already need to do that now even when buying from a wet market. Being able to buy smaller amounts of meat could also be easier for many people. It could be easier to cook and store the cooked food and it could also be more affordable in smaller quantities.

11.

If we can first rectify the issues with the export journey itself, we then need to expect and demand the same Australian standards for Australian animals exported overseas. Australia exceeds World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) standards for livestock processed in Australia. If something is required for our animals while they are in Australia it needs to be demanded for them if they are sent overseas for processing or for other production such as dairy. It is also not possible for us to enforce our requirements in another country. If the welfare of our livestock cannot be protected under Australian standards overseas then we can not allow our livestock to be exported to these systems where welfare standards and legal enforcement is not the same.

12.

Australia has much more economic gain to be made if the animals are processed here under Australian law. We have a good reputation for our food quality, and successfully exported chilled meat to Egypt after cruelty was uncovered there. We can process Halal meat using stunning here in Australia; this will greatly increase animal welfare. Employment for Australians is greatly increased; it takes more people to process animals into meat than it does to load them on a ship. In a Jakarta Globe article on June 5 2011,

Bustanul Arifin, a professor and economist for the Institute for the Development of Economics and Finance in Indonesia says "It would be more profitable for Australia to export packaged meat rather than send cows to Indonesia". Farmers will still sell their livestock and will be able to do so with the knowledge their animals are protected by Australian standards which are legally enforceable. Australia will still earn export dollars. More Australian lives will benefit from keeping the processing in Australia. Exporters such as Livecorp and MLA will have to adjust their businesses to suit the new conditions and may face financial impacts in the process. But, they have had 30 years to improve conditions for the animals or to change and redirect their business at their own pace into greater exportation of processed meat. It is not the fault of the livestock that their businesses are in danger now; it is their own greed that led them to these potentially difficult financial times. The livestock have suffered enough over the last 30 years; they have earned their right to fair treatment now.

13.

Australia needs to consider New Zealand's stand on this and look at how they have managed without exporting live animals. They have proved that it is possible to be a viable country after ceasing livestock exports. They ceased this trade in 2007 without detriment to their country. Australia is just as capable, if not more capable of also ceasing the trade while maintaining a strong economy and good international relations.

14.

Livestock being sent overseas as breeding stock, for dairy production, or any other reason also need to be included in these considerations. We cannot send live animals to another country that does not have our Australian standards as their legally enforceable minimum. And we should not be sending any livestock for any reason without improved conditions and mortality rates on the journey.

15.

It is not a reasonable argument that the trade be allowed to continue because profits will be lost. It is not reasonable to be allowed to profit from cruelty in the first place.

It is obvious to me that the industry bodies have proven to be incapable of raising animal welfare standards in exporting markets. It is also clear from this that they do not value the importance of ensuring the welfare of the livestock they export. The Government has had many years to investigate and make changes to the industry. Yet, after all the years Australia has been exporting livestock there has been very little improvement to animal welfare; and in some cases it could be argued animal welfare has instead declined. Time has proven we can not guarantee the welfare of exported livestock once they leave our shores. Australia needs to move to exporting chilled and frozen meat only. Processing the animals in Australia will provide producers with a viable business and will increase employment opportunities. Above all, by not sending live animals offshore for processing we ensure their welfare by processing them here under Australian standards which are enforceable by Australian law.

"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated" Mahatma Gandhi