

19 September 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

Re: Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport Inquiry into *Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets*

I write to express Animals Australia's disappointment with the August 10 Senate Committee hearing into *Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets*. My concerns relate primarily to the failure of much of the questioning to address the Inquiry's terms of reference.

I am aware that committee procedures state that care should be taken to ensure that all questions put to witnesses are relevant to the committee's inquiry and that the information sought by those questions is necessary for the purpose of that inquiry.

Animals Australia has conducted ten investigations in the Middle East and South East Asia over the past eight years. We have gained detailed knowledge of importing markets, the risks to animals in those countries and the commercial arrangements required to ensure the humane treatment of Australian animals. Indeed, it is the work of Animals Australia with the Royal Family in Jordan that has led to significant improvements in that country, with 80% of animals now being stunned unconscious prior to slaughter.

Rather than spending the short time allotted to discuss these issues, which are all relevant to the Committee's terms of reference, a significant proportion of the questioning aimed to undermine the credibility of our organisation and investigator, Lyn White. I am deeply concerned that Senator Back was allowed to use parliamentary privilege to raise baseless allegations as to the veracity of the footage obtained in Indonesia, claims he has since failed to substantiate.

To elaborate; Senator Back alleged at the hearing that he had information from 'a very reliable source' that an Indonesian worker/s was paid to treat Australian cattle cruelly for the cameras during our investigation of abattoirs in that country in March. During ongoing questioning about that and other matters, Senator Back implied he had an affidavit which supported his claims. Senator Back subsequently (17/8/11) produced an affidavit that neither related to the abattoir in question, nor to the allegations of payment for the deliberate infliction of cruelty. Nor could he then or subsequently provide any other substantiation of these allegations.

The impact of the publication of these unsubstantiated allegations has been significant, not only tarnishing the reputation of one of the world's foremost private investigators, who until that point had worked anonymously, but also in casting doubt on the work of Animals Australia, which has a respected track record. Perhaps most counterproductive to the ultimate goal of improving animal welfare, was the implication that cruelty had not occurred in Indonesia, despite irrefutable and ongoing evidence that it is routine. Indeed, the industry itself admits cruel practices have been

occurring for some time (at least a decade), including for example eye interference (gouging in the worst instances), tail twisting prior to slaughter, the use of the trip boxes for slaughter which were reported to cause Australian cattle to at times break their jaws as they fell and then struggled to right themselves, and frequently incompetent multiple neck cuts of cattle which prolong the suffering prior to death.

For Senator Back to then leave the hearing to repeat these baseless allegations (and therefore risk further undermining our work) to a waiting press pack was quite frankly a disgrace. For his cited affidavit, released a week later, to provide no support for his claims leaves little doubt in our mind that this was a pre-meditated and blatant attempt to derail the hearing, to satisfy whose agenda, is yet to be seen. Regardless, the claims were deeply offensive and defamatory and whilst the damage is done, it is our strong view that a retraction and apology should be provided and Senator Back has received a letter from Animals Australia's lawyers to this effect. The full vision taken by Animals Australia investigators in Indonesia was supplied to the Chief Veterinary Officer. DAFF officers have indicated to the Committee (14/9/11) that they do not have any questions in regard to the veracity of the footage, in fact, the government's determination that the Mark I box breached OIE guidelines is primarily based on the evidence documented by Animals Australia.

Of further concern, was a line of questioning by Senator Back on Wednesday 14th September to representatives of the ABC Four Corners program. On August 10th Senator Back had alleged, again without supportive evidence, that an Australian Droughtmaster steer documented violently trembling at an abattoir in Medan, Sumatra whilst viewing other cattle being slaughtered had been 'stirred up' by Animals Australia's driver. The claim was totally denied by Animals Australia and vision from this abattoir demonstrates that this did not occur – vision that Senator Back has never requested to view. On 14th September Senator Back 'changed tack' to allege, again without supportive evidence, that this same animal had a condition called *transport tetany*; seemingly intent on finding any reason to publicly dispute that this animal was distressed and fearful due to its treatment and experience in the abattoir. Senator Back's assertions have since been vigorously disputed by a number of independent veterinary experts, once again calling into question Senator Back's conduct and motivation during this inquiry. Those expert statements will be provided to the Committee.

Animals Australia will always welcome the opportunity to contribute to government processes if the intent of these processes is to improve the treatment of animals. It is my sincere hope that despite these attempts to disrupt the hearing by Senator Back and deflect from the issue at hand – the terrible suffering of Australian cattle in Indonesia - the Committee's recommendations will indeed result in positive changes for animals.

Yours sincerely,



Glenys Oogjes
Executive Director