

Introduction

As director of a wildlife-based not-for-profit organization in Australia and a member of the World Society for the Protection of Animals for the past decade, I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

It must first be acknowledged that this inquiry has come about as a direct result of the failure of Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and Livecorp to accept responsibility for the live export trade supply chain. This is a manifestation of organizational weakness and ineptitude. The failure to consider supply chain issues demonstrates nearsightedness and a lack of accountability to the cattle producers from which MLA takes regular levies. In human terms, it demonstrates a lack of character and a lack of resolve to act in accordance with ethical principles.

It is appropriate that the terms of reference for this inquiry focus upon the extent to which relevant industry bodies – including MLA and Livecorp – are implicated in the suspension of trade as a direct result of their failure to act to resolve animal welfare issues in the supply chain.

I commend Senator Rachel Siewert for introducing the motion to conduct this inquiry into the upper house.

Summary of Recommendations

- That the government debates the Live Animal Export (Slaughter) Prohibition Bill 2011 as part of a broader discussion as to whether the live export trade can ever meet humane standards.
- That the government acknowledges the serious failures of Meat and Livestock Australia to address animal welfare issues in relation to live export of sheep to the Middle East and live export of cattle to Indonesia.
- That, prior to any resumption of trade, all overseas facilities that accept live Australian animals require accreditation by Australian government officials working in conjunction with an animal welfare organization such as Animals Australia.
- That the government redirects a proportion of cattle producer levies from Meat and Livestock Australia to a dedicated government-run fund.
- That the fund be managed by a tripartite body consisting of representatives from Animals Australia (or a similar organization), industry and government.
- That the fund be used exclusively towards training and assessment of overseas abattoir workers to Australian animal welfare standards and the auditing of overseas equipment and facilities.
- That all workers involved in training, assessment and auditing of overseas facilities be Australian workers answerable to the relevant animal welfare organization.
- That the government recognizes that it is inappropriate that the new Industry-Government Working Group on Live Animal Exports excludes representatives from not-

for-profit animal welfare organizations and that a tripartite body must be convened in order to restore public confidence in oversight of the industry.

What has been the role and effectiveness of Government, Meat and Livestock Australia, Livecorp and relevant industry bodies in improving animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets?

The recent suspension of the live export trade to Indonesia was prompted by public outrage following media exposure of horrific animal cruelty endured by Australian cattle in Indonesian abattoirs.

Similarly, the live export trade to the Middle East was suspended several years ago due to public condemnation of the treatment of sheep both en route and during 'processing' overseas.

In both cases, not-for-profit organization Animals Australia was instrumental in documenting animal welfare violations and raising public awareness to the point that the Government felt compelled to act.

In the case of the suspension of live export to the Middle East, the suspension was lifted after Meat and Livestock Australia promised to take action to mitigate the abuse.

According to Animals Australia – a voice independent from government or industry – animal rights violations continue undiminished in the Middle East except for in Jordan where the organization has worked to sustain cultural change¹.

Prime Minister Gillard has made it clear that the government raised concerns over the welfare of Australian cattle exported to Indonesia as long as six months ago and has directly linked the inaction of MLA to the current suspension of trade.

It is clear from these examples that MLA has proved unable or unwilling to deal with animal welfare issues and has not delivered on what it has promised. On this basis it is important that government does not succumb to industry or political pressure to reinstate the live cattle trade to Indonesia without confidence that standards will dramatically improve *and that improvements will be sustained once media interest in the issue subsides*.

Given that the public cannot have confidence in the industry organizations, an important part of ensuring public confidence in improved standards is through allowing not-for-profit organizations such as Animals Australia unfettered access to facilities for regular audits. MLA and the government should jointly fund the work of animal welfare officers working under the banner of a not-for-profit organization such as Animals Australia to access facilities for audits

¹ White, Lyn, "There's no excuse for inhumanity to animals" in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, 13 June 2011.

and to train and assess abattoir workers. A proportion of the levies paid by cattle producers to MLA should be channeled to an animal welfare fund for this purpose. The fund should be managed by a tripartite body consisting of Animals Australia (or similar organization), government and industry.

Training, assessment and auditing of facilities, equipment and staff should be done in accordance with established Australian animal welfare standards rather than international standards as the Industry-Government Working Group on Live Animal Exports² has said will occur. It is not appropriate that the welfare standards afforded to animals differ according to location. Animal welfare experts agree that international standards that allow for the slaughter of fully conscious animals are inhumane. It should be noted that stunning of animals prior to slaughter is consistent with Halal requirements.

The above recommendations apply to all live export trade facilities including those in the Middle East.

What has been 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;

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

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

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

The only major animal welfare initiative by MLA in Indonesia has been roundly condemned by most parties as inhumane. The slaughter boxes introduced by MLA into Indonesian abattoirs in the wake of the government expressing its concerns about animal welfare violations *some six months ago* is considered inhumane by the world's foremost slaughter expert³.

An investigation of the MLA website reveals MLA have done virtually nothing to promote or improve animal welfare standards with respect to all Australian live export market countries: until the current trade suspension.

² Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, "Industry-government communiqué / Industry-government working group on live export meets", 14 June 2011, <http://www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/export-trade/gov-response-to-cattle-mistreatment-in-indonesia/communique-gov-ind-working-group>

³ White, Lyn, "There's no excuse for inhumanity to animals" in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, 13 June 2011.

Instead, a message from the Chairman posted within recent days outlines how MLA *will* work to initiate a response so as “to give government renewed confidence in the trade so they can promptly re-open it”. Initiatives include sending 8 Australian stock handling experts for “intensive training” over the *past two weeks*, and training of 30 animal welfare officers *in June*. There is no evidence whatsoever that any of the measures listed were introduced prior to the public outrage that accompanied the airing of animal welfare abuses in the Australian media in recent weeks and caused government to suspend the trade.

Indeed, if there was any doubt as to whether the initiatives announced are anything other than a knee jerk response, the Chairman concludes that “we are committed to the speedy resumption of the trade to Indonesia”.

The fact that MLA refused to cooperate with the government’s reasonable request to access \$5 million from the MLA-held contingency fund suggests that the industry peak is prepared to hold the government – and the Australian community – to ransom to ensure that trade resumes, *whether or not there is any real improvement in animal welfare outcomes in Indonesia*.

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

- i) formal and informal monitoring and reporting structures;***
- ii) formal and informal processes for reporting and addressing poor animal welfare practices.***

Again, there is no evidence that there is any effective monitoring of animal welfare practices in place. MLA *intends* to introduce an audit checklist and *intends* to introduce requirements for abattoirs overseas to have training programs in place. The Industry-Government Working Group on Live Animal Exports *is yet to* enact a supply chain assurance program including a traceability system⁴.

The question is: why is MLA prepared to act finally? The answer is simple: MLA does not care about animal welfare, but for profit and will therefore say anything to ensure the trade suspension is lifted.

MLA has not denied that the government raised serious concerns over animal welfare abuses in Indonesian facilities some six months ago. This means that MLA cannot plead ignorance to knowledge of animal welfare abuses. The Australian public has had to rely upon the compelling documentation of animal welfare practices by groups like Animals Australia and the RSPCA.

⁴ Meat and Livestock Australia, “A message from the Chairman – On the ground in Indonesia”, <http://www.mla.com.au/About-the-red-meat-industry/Livestock-exports/Animal-welfare-in-Indonesia/A-message-from-the-Chairman-on-the-ground-in-Indonesia>

Conclusion: A “Beautiful food market”?

Managing Director of the MLA, David Palmer, has called the live export trade to Indonesia a “beautiful food market”⁵. It is unlikely that the majority of Australians share his vision. Instead, Australians have been repulsed by cattle lying helpless whilst being whipped mercilessly in the face or lying, fully conscious but unable to move as their throats are slashed. Accustomed to a culture that lacks accountability to humane standards, to cattle producers and to the Australian public, Palmer believes that “we’ve got to get the politics out of the whole thing”⁶. In doing so, he shows a fundamental misunderstanding that, rather than evoking a partisan political response, the failure of his organization to respond to animal welfare abuses in the supply chain – despite the instructions of government – has evoked a universal condemnation from the Australian public who will not readily forgive or forget.

It is doubtful that transporting live animals in cramped conditions to slaughter can ever be humane and it is likely that future generations will look upon the current shipment of millions of animals per year as an indication of a fundamentally uncivilized society. Over time, it is likely that such an industry will become unviable as consumers reject live export and animal organizations continue to increase their membership and influence. In the meantime, the industry peaks should be put on notice and, in order for trade to resume; animal welfare training and assessment as well as auditing of equipment and facilities should be undertaken by not-for-profit organizations accountable to a tripartite board and partially funded by cattle producers. Each overseas facility receiving Australian animals should be independently accredited before live export trade is allowed to resume.

⁵ Gray, Darren, “Cattle boss – We’ve simply got to fix it”, 18 June 2011, www.smh.com.au

⁶ Ibid.