

Kim Coffey

I have taken an interest in the issue of live export ever since the media dubbed Ship of Shame story some years ago. It is astounding to think that after all this time, with the ever-increasing awareness Australians have towards animal welfare issues, that our live export trade is still rife with unacceptable cruelty.

Whilst reference is being made to OIE standards, these fail to measure up to what most Australians find acceptable. Any standards that do not require a person to stun an animal before slashing its throat, thereby convicting the animal to a drawn-out, painful and fearful death, certainly fail to meet a level that I consider acceptable. To claim that we must factor in what is acceptable in developing countries is nothing more than a convenient escape clause for those who are seeking to justify barbarism on the flimsy premise of profit. We are the ones selling our livestock into those conditions, and we are not underdeveloped or struggling, and we are in a position to show compassion. We fight to save our citizens when they fall foul of laws or events whilst travelling on foreign soil, without dismissing them as merely being at the unavoidable mercy of whatever developing country they find themselves in and travelers are on foreign soil by choice, as opposed to these animals that we are sending overseas. Further, Australians don't condone or enable long-standing cultural practices that we find abhorrent such as female circumcision, or imprisoning the victims of rape under the law of zina, so why would we so casually condone or enable this form of injustice and cruelty in another country on the basis of culture? In any case, stunning cattle before slashing their throats is not contrary to cultural beliefs in Indonesia; it is simply something they previously did not have the technology to achieve.

Clearly the live export industry has proven itself unable to be entrusted to monitor the standards of the treatment of exported animals. Evidence gathered by the investigations of animal welfare groups have revealed that the involvement of Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and LiveCorp in Indonesia has actually contributed to and facilitated brutal treatment of Australian cattle. Those metal crates with MLA stamped on the side, as shown on Four Corners, only succeed to further enable atrocious treatment of cattle, and to do so under a banner that seemed to imply the approval of Australia.

The system itself allows for corruption, and has allowed the cruelty to continue unabated for many years. Only a very naive person would believe that nobody knew how these animals were being treated and killed. Exporters select and pay vets, and those who speak out are merely silenced. Allowing the same industry to pay auditors is hardly likely to produce different results. The suggestion that the proposed system has anything new to offer is a sham, merely intended to create a smoke screen in the hope that the public will feel placated, and forget.

I remain stunned that the government has been so easily swayed by the live export industry. According to a report released by Animals Australia, the export industry to Indonesia produces as much income as the Domino Pizza Chain. If Dominoes were shut down for not meeting standards acceptable under Australian law, would the government bow to pressure from them to reopen their trade after a fleeting one month suspension, during which time nothing had actually changed? The Indonesian slaughterhouses concerned have not even allowed further investigation of their facilities during the last month.

As a concerned Australian, I urge the government to cease live export. Animals should be slaughtered on Australian soil, and exported as refrigerated meat. I have great respect for New Zealand for taking that position.

As a fallback position, I would expect mandatory stunning of all livestock before they have their throats cut. I would also expect regular independent unannounced examinations of all

facilities handling Australian animals, conducted by vets and animal welfare groups, armed with recording equipment, with full public access to all footage taken. An industry that has nothing to hide would not object to scrutiny; and I do mean independent scrutiny. By necessity this must exclude anybody on the industry's payroll, and exclude any method whereby reports are first censored or filtered by industry, or even by any level of government that has already demonstrated itself capable of quashing or silencing previously identified concerns. Any person, department, or entity, who has already demonstrated a capacity to conceal the truth about the reality of animal welfare in live export, should be entirely removed from the process of assessment.

Anything less, and I will continue to feel as ashamed of my government, and any persons involved in the perpetuation of such cruelty, as I did the night that Four Corners show aired the distressing footage taken by Animals Australia. This is not something I personally intend to forget, or let disappear behind governmental platitudes.

As a final plea to decision-makers: If anyone can say that we should continue this on the basis that someone derives an income from it, then clearly those people don't think it is morally wrong to beat animals, gouge their eyes, frighten them and torture them, kick animals with broken legs, and make countless thousands of sentient beings endure a slow, conscious, painful, terrifying death on a concrete floor swimming in their own blood. Because humans won't condone, or enable, something they think is immoral simply on the basis that it earns money. For example, child pornographers make their income from peddling kiddie porn and yet nobody tries to defend that on the basis of "oh we can't shut it down, think of the poor child pornographers and how much money they will lose. How will they pay their bills." And we certainly don't make an industry out of it for the purpose of keeping our economy buoyant, nor move it offshore and consider it out of our realm of moral responsibility. We stop it with firmness and certainty because we believe it is immoral. Laws evolve to reflect the values and morals of society. Child labour was once legal, and slavery, and women couldn't vote, but our laws change to reflect our changed attitudes to issues based on our morals. So in the end this is not really about money, but about where Australians draw the line about what is moral and what isn't. Harping on about the fact that it earns money, is just a distraction; an excuse to not consider the moral and ethical issue at the heart of live export. Saying it is about money is a front for, "I don't have a moral problem with torturing animals". I believe that the greater percentage of Australians do have a moral problem with it. I certainly do. And our government should respect that, not ignore it as they appear to be doing right now.

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