

# **Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport on Animal Welfare Standards in Australia's Live Export Markets.**

**Prepared by M A CLINCH, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2011.**

## **Animal Standards in Australia's Live Export Markets.**

### 1. Introduction and Background

Having spent many years in the Northern Territory, I have a long term interest in all live export from the Northern Territory, and elsewhere in Australia. I expect that my interest in, and knowledge of the animal welfare issues in live export is greater than that of the average member of the community.

### 2. Animal Welfare organisations, and long term interest in live export

For many years I have been concerned about this trade, and have supported the PACAT(Tradeban) and Animals Australia organisations. Both are dedicated particularly to the welfare of farm animals.

PACAT stands for People Against Cruel Animal Transport, and is also known as Tradeban. Its work focuses on the export of hundreds of thousands of sheep, mainly from Fremantle in Western Australia. These sheep have usually travelled many kilometres in crowded road trains before reaching port.

Sheep are shipped in appalling conditions on journeys lasting six weeks to the Middle East, from various Australian ports. Thousands of sheep have died on these journeys. Reaching their destinations, many are mistreated in local slaughterhouses, or by being tied onto car roofs, or stuffed into car boots, to be bled to death by amateur home butchers.

Lesser numbers of cattle are transported to the Middle East, including Egypt. At one stage this trade was suspended due to horrific slaughterhouse practices.

Animals Australia has been the organization most active in documenting this long distance, and Middle Eastern cruelty. At one time a member of the Royal family of Jordan responded to requests for assistance. Video reports from the Middle East, recorded by Animals Australia, have been recently shown on 'Sixty Minutes'. Much organization and courage is involved in obtaining these proofs of animal welfare breeches to the Australian public. It will not tolerate such revolting treatment.

### 3. Live Cattle Exports from North Australia

The last 18-20 years have seen a growing live cattle trade from WA, Darwin, and more recently North Queensland ports, particularly to Indonesia, with some I think, to the Philippines. Up until now, this caused less concern because of the shorter sea voyage. There was no general public awareness of how the cattle were treated.

However, through contacts in the trade, I had heard concerns about some neglect of animals after landing, probably because of unfamiliarity with their needs. One presumed that these 'teething' problems would be ironed out by those responsible. Now however, it is seriously concerning to see cattle in feed lots, with rope halters threaded through their noses. This is a cruel particularly for cattle fresh from rangelands.

This northern trade has grown, 'like Topsy', to huge numbers since the early days. Its huge value is often quoted by the industry for its value to Australia. Recently, there has been talk of exporting northern cattle to Middle Eastern, and North Asian markets. This cannot be supported. Recently Indonesia placed a maximum limit or 350kg on its imported cattle. This may stimulate a desire to export live to other markets.

### 4. Reputation of Meat Industry Agencies for Animal Welfare in the Live Export trade.

Meat Industry agencies, particularly Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), seem far from respected by those watching animal welfare issues in the live export trade to the Middle East. The meat industry claims sufficient supervision on ships, training in abattoirs, and more humane slaughtering installations, particularly for cattle.

Welfare groups watching the live export trade are disappointed with developments, seeing little overall improvement, and continuing horror incidents. We ask why ordinary Australians must financially support scrutiny and monitoring, for the sake of the animals, when this is a multi-million dollar industry with peak bodies funded by levies.

Now the public has seen the shocking revelations about Indonesian abattoirs on 'Four Corners' on television. There was an undeniable public reaction, with a record breaking online petition producing 245,000 signatures for the Commonwealth Parliament within about two days, lobbying of local MP's, and two new bills to phase out live exports, in favour of an Australian value added meat industry.

This public outcry resulted in an absolute ban on live exports to Indonesia, until the new standards had been established in all Indonesian slaughterhouses killing Australian cattle.

##### 5. Industry View of the Role of Government, and Meat Industry groups.

During the Government suspension of trade to Indonesia, meat industry peak groups blamed others for the hiatus situation whilst some smaller cattlemen said they would rather go broke than see cattle suffer as shown. Industry organisations and media kept saying 'BUT' ..., let's get back to business, because other countries will take our trade.

The RSPCA was been wrongly blamed for the stop in the live exports, and being the cause of months of extra cruelty. However, it is the long term failure of peak industry bodies to act that really led to the ban. In the prelude to the actual ban, we are now told that Meat and Livestock Australia failed to respond to approaches from Minister Ludwig which might have avoided the ban. In addition, Meat and Livestock Australia, we understand, refused to assist with funds to support cattlemen's families during the ban.

Perhaps the best documented expose of this failure of meat organisations to accept responsibility for the industry is given in an interview on ABC 7.30 Report on 5 July, 2011. Attachment A contains a copy of this transcript. Senior experienced cattlemen are critical, particularly of the MLA's use of contributed funds.

## 6. Commonwealth Government's suspension of Live Cattle Export to Indonesia.

The ban was imposed by the Commonwealth Government, following the Four Corners program. It stated that the ban would stay in place until all abattoirs handling Australian cattle meet the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) guidelines in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

These guidelines are not accepted by animal welfare groups like the RSPCA, because they do not make pre - killing stunning mandatory. Thus they are regarded as not preventing animal cruelty in slaughterhouses, even in Australia. Animal welfare groups insist that stunning is essential, so that the animal is unconscious when killed. This is not inconsistent certified Halal killing in Australia.

Guidelines are never sufficient in self regulation. This has been proved so far, in relation to live exports. Promises and assurances at the highest levels have consistently not been enough. Legally binding legislation with penalties is essential in Animal Welfare, as in many other areas, such as Child Abuse. Without mandatory legislation, including compulsory stunning, and supervision, there can be no certainty that cruelty at the point of death can be prevented.

## 7. Mechanisms for improving Animal Welfare, upgrading accountability, reporting and monitoring the same, in an open industry.

The Inquiry's terms of reference emphasise openness in faithfully monitoring animal welfare in the live export industry, regardless of destination. However, the real knowledge of the industry by the general population has been minimal. Public relations strategies used by the industry have been exposed by dedicated animal welfare groups, Sixty Minutes, and the Four Corners program.

The 'cat is out of the bag', catching the attention of the Australian people. They are no longer ignorant of the cruelty of the live export trade, and will not tolerate an industry which lets cruelty happen in order to maximise profits. Grace and favour guidelines are proved not enough, strict regulation is required, and if this is impossible overseas, as expected, the meat industry must come back to Australia. New Zealand has made this decision for its own self respect, and we must do the same, for the sake of our nation's reputation in the world.

As Indonesia requires a feedlot system, it is extremely unlikely that 'tracking' individual animals for watertight welfare assurance will ever be feasible. In addition, Indonesian feed lots have potential and real animal welfare problems of their own.

#### 8. Economic Impact of Live Export trade on the local meat industry.

The recent animal welfare emergency has come about because our meat industry has maximised profit by avoiding the cost of slaughtering in Australia. Originally this was justified by a Islamic requirement for halal killing. However, as humane halal killing is now certified in Australian abattoirs, that prescription is no longer necessary.

The Indonesian government has announced its decision to make its own meat industry self-sustaining by 2014. The Australian meat industry must adjust itself to this reality, and develop its box meat industry through local abattoirs, to add to an export trade that already exists.

Territorians are remarking on how local meat industry public relations statements are deploring how the ban on live exports would adversely affect Aboriginal workers, leaving them unemployed. This is ironic. We cannot remember ever having seen such a concern expressed before.

#### 9. Benefits of a meat industry based on Australian abattoirs.

The most effective way for ordinary Australians, outside the meat industry, to demonstrate how the live export industry impacts on the domestic economy, is to describe how it would provide so much more local employment if killing was done in Australia.

In northern Australia, the present 'Intervention' points strongly to the need for economic change in the rural Aboriginal community. The Northern Territory Government is focussing on 'growing up' twenty-two towns as new economic centres. It is looking for 'industries' to provide an employment core in these towns.

Meat abattoirs of various sizes are a logical candidate here. However it should be remembered that the seasonal opening of abattoirs in the NT was historically occasioned by labour disputes. This would need to be overcome to make it worthwhile for investors to build and open abattoirs.

Darwin had a huge abattoir during World War I with chilling capacity. This is not rocket science. As far as I am aware, there are no abattoirs for cattle in the Northern Territory, and certainly none in the Top End.

An abattoir based meat industry in the NT would provide employment for stockmen, transport workers, agricultural and feedlot workers, abattoir and chilling workers, and those involved in value added processing, marketing, and exporting. Killing carried out close to source would save those huge greenhouse 'miles' involved today in trucking cattle directly to ports, and save costs to the producer. Similar economic benefits could be experienced in regional towns all over Australia.

Some cattle interests in the NT claim that *Bos indicus* cattle are fit only for export, because their meat is relatively poor. On the other hand, local fodder growers claim that feed lotting is feasible in Northern Australia.

The recent ban has shown clearly that there is overstocking in Northern Australia. The *Bos indicus* breed survives better in the tropics than *Bos taurus* because it forages a greater range of natural vegetation, including shrubbage, as well as grass. This makes overstocking with Asian cattle have more impact on natural vegetation.

## 10. Time for Change in the Meat Industry

As I write this submission, it has been announced that the Commonwealth Government's has lifted of its ban on live exports to Indonesia. It has done so without securing guarantees of animal welfare in abattoirs, particularly no stunning before killing. It is assumed this is to ease the immediate pressure on cattle producers. One producer, the South African Western Australian Pastoral Company at Moola Bulla in WA, had threatened to shoot 3,000 cattle, rather than send them to southern markets.

However, the Government has stated that the lifting of the export ban is conditional on the standards of the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) guidelines in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code being mandatory in Indonesian abattoirs killing Australian cattle. To do so, individual Australian animals must be tracked from arriving in Indonesia through the food lot, to the slaughterhouse floor. This is a very big ask, requiring Indonesian tracking technology, and will increase costs.

## 11. Summary and Conclusion

The live export of sheep and cattle has grown without proper restraints. Lacking judicious open management, regulation and control, it has gone to the brink. Cruelty is intrinsic to this meat trade in a way that has now been stated very clearly to be unacceptable to the Australian people. Meat industry self regulation has not worked, just as it did not work with the multi-million dollar Australian Wheat Board(AWB).

Guidelines in themselves are useless, the application of them being non compulsory, unless there are strict penalties. Binding legislation, with is essential. Legislation currently proposed allows three years for the meat industry to review, reform and re-organise, so that live export can cease.

The ban on live cattle to Indonesia has been a watershed event. Great numbers of Australian people are now aware of cruelty being involved in live export, feed-lotting and slaughtering. Ultimately this cruelty cannot be eradicated all throughout the widely flung Indonesian islands.

In the case of more distant countries, shipping distances, and, given our experience to date, the extra problems of remote monitoring, tell against the trade continuing. Developing countries will become more accepting of imported chilled meat. Our own people will not go back to tolerating the cruelty of Australian live export trade, now they can now visualise it.

Some meat industry interests claim that this ban has severely damaged our important relationships with Indonesia. Instead, I have observed mature understanding and respect on behalf of their government. Indonesians are in the process of establishing their own meat industry.

There are major economic and social benefits in developing a locally killed and value-added meat industry. This will increase local Australian employment, and provide more 'boxed exports' to the growing middle classes throughout Asia.

The Australian people will be satisfied only when pre-killing stunning is mandatory in slaughtering animals, and live export has ceased.

## Attachment

A

Transcript of 7.30 Report Interview with Meat Industry identities, on the Role of Meat Industry peak bodies, and the government in the Live Export Industry.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
Broadcast: 05/07/2011

Reporter: Hayden Cooper

It's one month on from the suspension of the live cattle trade and many within the industry say they've been betrayed by the Government and the industry group that is meant to support them.

## **Transcript**

LEIGH SALES, PRESENTER: The fallout from the ban on live cattle exports is growing by the day, with producers now turning on their own. Major players have told 7.30 they've been betrayed: not just by the Government, but also by the industry group designed to support them. They say the situation is so dire that one grazier is now preparing to shoot thousands of his stranded stock. In a few days, the Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd will fly to Indonesia to try and rescue the situation. Hayden Cooper reports.

HAYDEN COOPER, REPORTER: I can't emphasize it clearly enough: it is a disaster happening at the moment. We started off with a crisis, it has matured to a disaster and history is going to record it as a travesty of judgement.

GRAEME ACTON, BEEF PRODUCER: For someone that's been in business for forty years, and believes that I'm a conciliatory person, I communicate; I believe the handling of this situation with one of our major trading partners, right on our



doorstep, has been nothing short of disgusting.

HAYDEN COOPER: From the rangelands of the Northern Territory, across to the lush pastures of north Queensland, and even onto the Southern Tablelands of New South Wales, tension is rising to the surface. This is an industry fighting for survival, and one that's hot with rage at its treatment by authorities in Canberra.

CATTLE FARMER: What you've done here to this group of people in this room is absolute bloody bullshit.

HAYDEN COOPER: There's no player with more to lose from the trade ban than David Farley. He's in charge of the nation's largest cattle producer, Australian Agricultural Company, and he believes no corner of the sector will escape unscathed.

DAVID FARLEY, AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURAL COMPANY: I think there is collateral damage right across the board here. There is collateral damage at the level of diplomacy, at the level of trade engagement, and of course you could say there's collateral damage happening to MLA. The dollars we're talking to prop and sustain this industry at the moment are substantial. This actually make the pink batts debacle look small beer.

HAYDEN COOPER: MLA, or Meat & Livestock Australia, has been in damage control for weeks, as graziers nationwide ponder a troubling question. Who's to blame for the failure to detect and stop animal cruelty at Indonesian abattoirs? It's a question that all graziers, north and south, feel they have a stake in. Tell me about the levies that you pay?

JOHN CARTER, BEEF PRODUCER: We pay five dollars for every beast we sell, and of course we find that very irritating, because we're really not seeing any return on that money at

all.

HAYDEN COOPER: John Carter's family has been farming on the New South Wales Southern Tablelands for 130 years. He's a former Chairman of his state's meat industry authority, and he's an arch-critic of MLA.

JOHN CARTER: I think it's a disaster. It's spent \$1.7 billion of producer and taxpayer money, and we've got nothing to show for it.

HAYDEN COOPER: The Australian Beef Association, of which John Carter is a member and former head, is the most vocal enemy of MLA. The live cattle trade ban has emboldened their crusade for reform, and much of their criticism relates to the way producer and taxpayer money is spent.

JOHN CARTER: Well, I think it's worse than AWB, because AWB at least was selling the product for producers, putting a floor price in. MLA doesn't sell one kilogram of beef. It's just really basically a sort of parasite on the sideline.

HAYDEN COOPER: In 2010, MLA reported revenue of \$171 million. \$82 million was spent on research and development. But it's the recipients of the money that prompt questions of accountability, and the fact that grants were paid to companies associated with several MLA directors. For example, director Ian Mars is the Australian CEO of the world's biggest meat-processing company, JB Swift. MLA paid Swift Australia \$2.4 million for research. Former director Bernard Bindon was an adjunct professor at the University of New England. It received \$2.5 million from MLA. And director Lucinda Corrigan is the deputy chair of the Future Farm Industries Research Centre. It was paid almost \$800,000. There are several more examples, but critics of MLA don't suggest corruption, just a lack of transparency. Despite the director disclosures, they say not all research projects and their individual costs are available. Is it

possible to follow the money?

JOHN CARTER: No, it isn't. All we can follow is that about 25% of it or about 18 million actually went to companies associated with the directors of MLA. But how it was spent, we do not know, and we believe this is very serious.

DAVID PALMER: MEAT & LIVESTOCK AUSTRALIA: I think our transparency is intact. Our investment strategy has been intact.

HAYDEN COOPER: David Palmer's term as managing director of MLA finishes within days. He is spending his last moments in the job defending the record of his team and his board.

DAVID PALMER: And I think it's highly appropriate. They're not, I should say, not a part of the decision-making process. They're not in the room, as it were, when those decisions are made. So our transparency and our processes, I think stand, I know they stand the test of time. And they meet the satisfaction of the Department of Agriculture in Canberra.

HAYDEN COOPER: What then does the future hold for Australia's northern cattlemen? The resumption of trade with Indonesia appears elusive for now. Some fear it will never be the same.

CATTLE FARMER 2: As I understand it, Indonesia has said, "We've had a gutful of you, no more."

DAVID FARLEY: Not only do we have a diplomatic, we also have a trade breakdown that needs to be negotiated and fixed quickly at the moment.

HAYDEN COOPER: David Farley warns of an impending ecological disaster, and the first signs of that are emerging. One station owner in Western Australia's Kimberley region warns

he's preparing to shoot 3,000 cattle.

DAVID FARLEY: This is clear and present danger. Not only for the north of Australia, but for every Australian. The implications of this, especially with biosecurity and ecological security in the north, will filter right down through the south.

HAYDEN COOPER: Either way the issue could be destined for the courts.

NORMAN HUNT, LAWYER: At the moment I'm receiving instructions from a number of live exporters who are very concerned. Some of them have invested in properties in recent years, an investment they would not have made if they'd known what was happening and the potential risks. Some of them bought cattle recently in good faith, thinking everything was OK. They've asked me to brief senior counsel, which I have done. And I guess we're waiting for the dust to settle and gathering all the information we need before final decisions are made.

HAYDEN COOPER: And so the wait goes on for a new day to dawn on this \$300 million industry. Until it does, there will be little joy for the graziers and the administrators who govern them.

DAVID PALMER: There's a lot of great learnings to be had but first and foremost the recovery of the business with Indonesia, the resumption of trade is the absolute priority. It will be solved. There will be a solution. We will get back to business. The speedy resumption has always been our number one priority.

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2011/s3261900.htm>