

Sally-Anne Witherspoon

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SUBMISSION TO LIVE EXPORT REVIEW

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My husband and I are graziers who run cattle breeding operations on Cape York and other North Queensland areas.

First of all, we were stressed to see footage of animal abuse in Indonesia and do not condone such actions. We are realists and understand that there will always be shocking cases of human and animal welfare abuse in any nation on earth. Cats, dogs and horses are found neglected in all areas of Australia and 99% of Australians would condemn such neglect and would act to prevent such abuse. Australia does not ban the ownership of these animals, but we do educate and legislate to achieve better outcomes for them all.

As a producer of cattle for live export to Indonesia we believe this should be the case for the trade to Indonesia as well – educate and facilitate better animal welfare. So far, we have achieved beneficial outcomes for the majority of stock being slaughtered in Indonesia and we will be pushing our Meat and Livestock Corporation to fast-track and augment current and new programs to achieve the best possible outcomes for all slaughter animals in Indonesia and, if possible, the rest of the world.

We find the current animal welfare groups' campaign to stop “Australian” cattle from going to Indonesia very insular in its outlook. If our cattle aren't going there, then cattle or other livestock will definitely be sourced from other nations and these animals will have nobody standing up for them as far as humane treatment goes. Do these welfare groups believe that Australian animals have more rights than foreign animals? As you would be aware, Indonesia is in no position to substitute these live animals with refrigerated beef as there is a vast proportion of the population who live without electricity and who buy their beef at the “wet” markets every day. There will be cattle slaughter happening whether we are there or not.

Northern Australia is very reliant on the live export of cattle and the rushed introduction of a ban on the live export of cattle to Indonesia was ill-conceived, badly managed and devastatingly timed as well as very detrimental to our diplomatic relationship with our northern neighbour. Cattle were left stranded at ports, on trucks and in station yards across the North, where the sheer bulk of numbers resulted in bad welfare outcomes for some cattle and debilitating emotional trauma for the people involved. One could argue that the export ban was timed to have the most dramatic effect on the trade and people involved. We hope that this effect was unintentional because, if not, then there are some evil people with evil intentions.

Graziers were left in terrible circumstances but I really believe that the Government could not have fully understood the effect that the ban had on the aboriginal owners, managers and workers that are involved in the industry in the north of Australia. There are many indigenous people involved in the grazing industry in the north because it is a lifestyle that suits them and it is an area in which they can excel due to their natural abilities and joy of life. The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) operates quite a few stations across the north and the Corporation provides many opportunities for

indigenous youth, and others, to take part in training and working in the cattle industry. The ILC directly exports their own cattle from the North and this ill-conceived ban has put many aboriginal jobs at risk. The on-flow effect of these job losses would be despair and more propensity for alcohol and drug abuse as these capable people are left jobless. As you can imagine, it is difficult for indigenous people to uproot and shift to other areas for jobs because of family and tribal ties that keep them close to their homelands or support groups.

Another effect of the ban on the live export of cattle was that, even now, people in the north of Australia will be forced to send sale cattle down to southern abattoirs which are all located south of an imaginary line from Perth to Townsville. The sheer cost and animal welfare concerns regarding the transport of these cattle is monumental and, if the ban was re-applied, then the market would be so depressed that it would not be economical to send them south. I would imagine that there would be large scale destruction of these trade cattle as a result.

There is an argument that we could have processing works in the north and this is certainly needed for a vibrant industry. Unfortunately, the logistics of having an unpredictable Wet Season every year makes the viability of abattoirs questionable in the north. This fact has resulted in the closure of all the large northern abattoirs over the past 30 years or so with no resultant new works being built in the area. Most of these closures happened prior to the emergence of the live export trade so arguments that put forward the idea that live export has killed off the abattoirs are not valid.

In conclusion, we implore you to look at the practical side of the live export debate and not be too swayed by the radical “green” elements in politics whose ultimate agenda is to stop the consumption of all animal proteins and to turn us all into vegans. The north of Australia needs the business and our neighbours in Indonesia need the protein!

Signed,

Sally Witherspoon