

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

18 July 2011

Dear Committee

INQUIRY INTO IMPROVEMENTS IN ANIMAL WELFARE FOR AUSTRALIAN LIVE EXPORTS AND RELATED BILLS

Thank you for the opportunity to make the following submission to the committee's inquiry into the live export trade on behalf of the agricultural sector, particularly cattle and sheep producers, operating in my electorate of O'Connor.

As you are aware, on June 7 Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Senator Joe Ludwig, made the decision to suspend live animal exports to Indonesia following a report aired by Four Corners on May 30. This suspension has had a devastating impact on cattle producers and associated industries in my electorate of O'Connor, and across regional Australia generally.

Australia is the world's largest exporter of sheep and cattle and the live export trade is an essential trade for the Australian economy. The industry provides thousands of jobs for regional Australians and has a major economic influence on many regional communities. In 2009, the live export sector contributed \$996.5 million and underpinned the employment of around 10,000 workers in regional Australia. It is vitally important to take these figures into account throughout any discussion on the future of Australia's live export trade.

The flow-on effects of closing down Australia's live export industries would be catastrophic for regional Australia, and it is important that the committee looks seriously at the ramifications for regional Australia should the industry close. Advice I have received from key stakeholders, including the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA, WA Farmers Federation, the State Minister for Agriculture Hon Terry Redman and local livestock producers indicates that they remain supportive of the live export trade and would oppose any plans to close the trade.

The following submissions outline why it is vitally important for regional Australia that the live exports trade continues.



Short-term and long-term impacts of a ban on the live export industry

The short-term and long-term impacts of closing or phasing out the live export industry are significant. The committee needs only look at the recent fallout of the one-month live export suspension to Indonesia to gain an understanding of the enormous impact the total closure of this industry would have on regional Australia.

"The impact of this decision will be ongoing and remain serious. Significant damage has been done to the industry at all levels."

- Hon Terry Redman MLA, WA Minister for Agriculture and Food, July 6, 2011.

Banning live exports would have a devastating economic impact on various industries, including transport companies, mustering companies and stockyards.

"It costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to keep our operation running. We still have to pay our bills on a weekly basis and we have to maintain our machines, which costs a lot of money. If we don't have live export in the north, it will destroy the industry."

- Lance Conley, operator of Lone Eagle mustering services, The West Australian, June 9, 2011.

"For us at the port it means less work and a lot less money. And it tumbles down the line, everyone will be affected by it, that's for sure. It'll make bringing up three kids a lot harder than it already is. This is going to make it even harder. We normally do 20 or 30 cattle boats each season, so that's a whole lot of money we're missing out on,"

- Joseph Carter, Wyndham Port stevedore, The West Australian, June 9, 2011.

"Without the live export market, it's going to make a big difference for everyone up here; there are not many options."

- Glenn Connell, North West pastoralist, The West Australian, June 9, 2011.

"People will be ruined over this."

- Marie Muldoon, Northern Territory pastoralist, The West Australian, June 9, 2011.

In the event that a ban was instituted in the short term, the economic impact would be compounded by animal welfare issues that would arise almost immediately as pastoralists will be left with thousands of animals they are unable to sell. In many cases, this will see farmers forced to cull their stock numbers in the most cost effective way possible – using firearms – or letting livestock roam free until they die of malnourishment.

"The only thing pastoralists can do with them is to turn them out into the bush. Those cattle will eat out what will remain of pastoral foliage, at which time, when there is no food left, the inevitable will happen. Of course we will then see a deterioration of the rangelands as well. If they think they have an animal welfare problem now, they haven't seen anything yet,"

- Dr Chris Back, WA Senator and former veterinarian, Kalgoorlie Miner, June 25, 2011.

"When they get too skinny to stand up, they fall over in creek beds and they cannot get up. It takes about a week to die. It's absolutely horrendous, crows pick at them and dingoes also start surrounding them. It's horrific. People don't understand how horrific this is."

- Dr Gehan Jayawardhana, Northern Territory veterinarian, The Australian, July 6, 2011.

Alternatives to live export

Some organisations, including the RSPCA, have made claims that the cessation of the live export trade would be beneficial to the Australian economy by allowing livestock to be processed within Australia. However, in reality, this is impractical, if not impossible.

History shows us that abattoirs in the north of Australia are not commercially viable, due to the seasonal nature of cattle production in the north and the difficulty in transporting livestock during the wet-season. The cost involved with transporting livestock from the north of Australia to abattoirs in the south of Australia is significantly prohibitive.

Some groups have also recommended exporting frozen or chilled meat to Indonesia. However, proponents of this recommendation have overlooked the fact that the majority of the Indonesian population is living without access to refrigeration. Further, Indonesian people do not just eat the meat of the cattle as we do, but also utilise the fat and the skin of the animal for other products. As such, they are reliant on receiving whole cattle, not boxed beef.

Australia's role in overseas animal welfare

Australia's involvement in the live export trade has enabled us to influence welfare issues from within the system. Without Australia's involvement, Indonesia will simply choose to take livestock from other countries that do not care about animal welfare or improving standards; the investments Australia has made in animal welfare overseas would be lost.

"Australia is the only country likely to make the investment necessary to partner with Indonesia to lift welfare standards. Because we are a major supplier of livestock to Indonesia, we can use our influence to make positive

change.”

- Hon Terry Redman MLA, WA Minister for Agriculture and Food, June 8, 2011.

“Withdrawing altogether is not going to stop cruelty to animals in Indonesia – in many ways it is like turning a blind eye. Banning exports from Australia is not going to miraculously stop animal cruelty in Indonesia.”

- Hon Wendy Duncan MLC, Member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, June 10, 2011.

Australia has a proven track record in improving animal welfare standards overseas in the past decade and has invested substantial funding to ensure animal welfare standards are met. In 2004-2005, the Federal Government committed \$11.3 million to fund upgrades of the live export supply chain to the Middle East, including the stationing of a veterinary counsellor in the Middle East, upgraded handling procedures for importing countries, and start up costs for a new industry regulatory system. In the 2009 Federal budget, funding was announced for a new, expanded program called the Live Trade Animal Welfare Partnership to ensure the industry meets world's best practice in animal welfare.

Diplomatic issues

As was recently evidenced by the suspension of live exports to Indonesia, any sudden withdrawal from the live export trade is likely to have significant international ramifications for Australia. The recent live export ban significantly damaged relationships between Australia and Indonesia, and a permanent ban would cause considerable more damage.

Australia plays an important role in Indonesia's food chain, and any threat to this food chain would be taken very seriously by the Indonesian government. Australia also exports significant quantities of live export to Israel, Malaysia, Japan, Mexico, Chile, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar. Based on the recent live export fall-out with Indonesia, it can be expected that other nations would react unfavourably to Australia discontinuing the live export trade.

Summary of Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Federal Government creates a governing body responsible for overseeing the processing of Australian animal welfare overseas. This body would be responsible for inspecting, auditing and maintaining the standards of certified overseas abattoirs to ensure they operate at an international standard.

2. The Senate Rural Affairs and Transport Committee examine the recent impacts of the live export suspension to Indonesia to gain an understanding of the full reality of ending the live export trade permanently.

Conclusion

There is no denying that the footage witnessed across the nation on Four Corners several weeks ago was horrific. This footage highlighted the need for change in the live export industry. The Federal Government and the Australian people have an important role to play to ensure that those horrific animal welfare issues are never repeated, but we need to do this in a practical way. There is no doubt that animal welfare must remain paramount in any discussion we have regarding live exports. If animal welfare can be guaranteed – and it can for many overseas destinations – then there should be no reason to seek to discontinue the trade.

To close down the live export trade would lead to serious environmental and animal welfare issues within Australia, as well as significant economic impacts, particularly in regional Australia. Further, it is vital that Australia remains in the live export trade in order to continue to work with overseas countries to improve animal welfare standards. A dedicated body tasked with overseeing the live export trade is necessary to ensure the future of the live export industry, and the Federal Government must play a role in establishing and overseeing this body.

I thank the committee for taking the time to read this submission, and I hope my concerns, and the concerns of regional Australian communities, are taken into account during this process.

Yours sincerely

TONY CROOK