

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES ON RURAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT

The terms of reference set out as topics for examination under the above review unfortunately seem to imply a continuation of the livestock export trade, and that the objective is the improvement of standards, and compliance with these standards. Clearly the standards set so far have not been adequate, nor have even these inadequate standards been complied with. There is however, one huge stumbling block which renders this whole enquiry and associated discussion basically irrelevant and futile: - namely that conditions in Indonesia, and other Middle Eastern countries, are out of our jurisdiction, and/or control, and are not going to change. Religious beliefs, attitude towards animals, and traditional behaviour towards animals are never going to change, (along with issues such as no refrigeration for the thousands of animals slaughtered daily), therefore the export trade should cease now.

Over and above the issue of delivering animals direct for slaughter, is the fact that many animals are also exported to be raised in feedlots and/or by small landholders, in atrocious conditions, prior to slaughter, plus young heifers are exported for dairy purposes, (or is this a back-door route to the feed lots and abbatoirs ?).

What goes to relevance is that we cannot presume to preach to the Indonesians about their handling and treatment of animals, when we know their standards are abysmal and beyond our jurisdiction, while we ourselves continue to allow shocking practices of animal treatment to be practised daily in Australia in all fields of intensive farming; and particularly when our live animal exporters have continued to send their animals overseas for years in full knowledge of what treatment they were likely to (and did) receive. The trucking transporters, ship owners, the Stock and Land Agent companies, various Inspection Authorities, and various Veterinary Officers, all appear to have abrogated their responsibility (in varying degrees), in connection with their duty of care towards these animals. But the principal responsibility lies with the breeders and the vendors (i.e. the exporters), of the animals, and their failure to ensure these standards of welfare are met.

A similar situation arose a decade ago, resulting in the suspension of the live export trade to Egypt for 12 months. No doubt the industry itself was well aware then, as now, of the maltreatment of animals, but continued to export them until the problem was made public and became a political issue. These vendors can now no longer claim they do not know what has been happening to the animals - they know exactly what has been happening, and still don't care, as evidenced by their desperate efforts to continue this trade. The breeders may only be indirectly responsible, but they still continue to supply their animals to this terrible market.

In assessing the performance of the various participants in the live export trade, the following 5 contributing components are all relevant : -

1. The involvement of corporate entities in animal-based industries. Where shareholders and "profit margins" are involved, the concept of animal welfare, and the perception of animals as anything other than simply a "product", or a statistic on a piece of paper, go out the window.

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2. The existence of feedlots as an integral part of the industry, for the final preparation of cattle as a prelude to being shipped overseas, which brings into the discussion the whole question of intensive animal farming (for all animal industries), and whether there is adequate monitoring and inspection of these feedlots, as well as all intensive farming enterprises.
3. The necessary land transport component which is part of the live export trade brings into scrutiny the health and welfare issues involved aboard these trucks, the lack of adequate regulations, and the even poorer "policing" of these regulations.
4. An apparent intrinsic lack of knowledge of, (or complete disregard for), the physical and psychological needs of animals. Much stricter legislation must be implemented over the entire range of animal-based industries, along with increased powers of visitation and inspection of all businesses, plus increased powers of prosecution. This would undoubtedly result in the cessation of all intensive farming industries - including the feedlot industry, as part of the live export trade.
5. The whole question of overstocking and over-supply, in conjunction with poor land management, and resulting degradation of a fragile environment, (particularly in W.A. and N.T.), contributing to global warming; plus the questionable viability and sustainability of this whole industry feeding the live export trade.

Further discussion of the above points : -

Huge feedlots are part of this whole process of acclimatising cattle to being confined, to being handled and fed, and to adjust their diets preparatory to being transported to the docks and then loaded onto the ships. A minimum of 3 weeks is necessary for the gradual introduction of a change in diet, since this is the necessary time for new enzymes and gut flora to be fully activated. In W.A. and the N.T. large numbers of cattle, thousands at a time, are herded in from outlying paddocks into these feedlots by helicopters, mostly at full gallop. Following acclimatisation, they are then transported long distances to the ports.

Young heifers (130 kg. - i.e. aged 3 to 6 months), destined for the dairy sector in Indonesia are largely sourced in southern Australia, in Victoria, and are held in feedlots at Portland prior to despatch. They are either not looked after very well in these lots, or "fail to acclimatise", so there are a number or rejects deemed not fit to travel overseas. Of course there are still many deaths aboard ship, and along with the dead sheep tossed overboard on these voyages, they form part of what is colloquially known as "the shark run".

The role played by the large Corporate Stock and Land Agents in this whole export trade cannot be over-stated, as they are effectively the exporters at the point of departure. They purchase the stock from the producers, own the feedlots, (so are therefore responsible for the "care" of these animals), own some of the ships, and own and operate some of the "accredited" abattoirs in Indonesia. They are therefore in a position to rot the system. Say a number of young heifers are purchased at an agreed price direct from the producer, and they are then transported to the feedlot (say at Portland), to await shipment overseas. When the Veterinary officer inspects them, they have lost a lot of weight and some are deemed not fit to travel, so the contract price is downgraded accordingly, and paid by the Agent, who is now the owner and exporter of these animals. Those reject animals which

have survived are then agisted out and rehabilitated, and then later exported at the going export price, with the Stock Company as owner.

According to the ABARE report of 2008 on Live Animal Exports, the "trigger levels" for reporting deaths aboard ships, are 2 % for sheep on long haul voyages (14 - 21 days), 1 % for cattle on long haul voyages, and .5 % for short haul voyages (3 - 10 days). The overall (short and long haul) figure for cattle deaths from 1999 - 2006 is just under 1 %. In 2005-6 the figure for short haul shipping was .1 % (i.e. 600 deaths). 1 % of 600,000 in that year would have amounted to 6,000 deaths. Sheep tend to have to travel further to the ports, and the figures of deaths aboard ship are 1 % roughly. In 2006-7 Saudi Arabia alone imported 1.4 million sheep (i.e. 14,000 deaths in one year). The RSPCA and Animal Welfare organisations have estimated well over 2 million animals have died aboard ship as part of the live export trade.

The land transport to the docks is a long and stressful journey for the cattle, as travel regulations have been both inadequate, and not properly monitored. Therefore heat stress, dehydration and "travel sickness", are all likely. This has been recognised, and has resulted in new regulations being drawn up by the State Departments of Primary Industry in consultation with the RSPCA, but they are not yet in force. According to the ABARE report, the principal causes of death of cattle aboard ship are "heat stroke, trauma and respiratory disease" (i.e. exactly the same as on the trucks). In plain English, this means poor ventilation, psychological stress and/or actual physical injury, overheating and confinement affecting the immune system and the lymphatic system leading to pulmonary infection (pneumonia or pleurisy).

Sheep are far worse off. They travel long distances, especially in W.A., probably without the required stops for food and water, and are delivered straight to the docks, with very little (if any) holding time before being shipped out. Heat stress and dehydration are a huge issue for sheep, due to being crammed together on trucks with insufficient ventilation, especially on hot days, and especially due to problems dispersing body heat because of their wool. On a day of 38 degrees C (i.e. above normal body temperature), especially if it is humid, dispersal of body heat is virtually impossible, especially if the driver stops for lunch for an hour. Body temperature only has to rise a further 3 degrees (to 41 degrees - and stress alone can cause this), before permanent body tissue damage occurs - i.e. melt down. Because sheep do not have the necessary introduction over 3 weeks of a gradual change in diet, they are suddenly confronted aboard ship with a total dietary change, which they are unable to metabolise. ABARE reports causes of sheep deaths as "weakness, extreme weight loss and decreased metabolism because of insufficient food intake and salmonellosis". The "risk factors" for sheep deaths include "failure to eat pelleted feed, source of sheep (type of pasture), age, time of year, fatness, duration between leaving the farm and relative humidity". Which is political speak for - the sheep can't digest the new feed because they haven't got the correct gut enzymes, so unless they can live on their own body fat for 3 weeks they will have starved to death before they reach their destination: lack of food, poor ventilation, and overheating, along with stress, all combine, so the animals succumb to infection, and probably die from the combined effects of starvation and toxic shock. But since sheep are far less valuable than cattle, the mortality rate is an "acceptable" margin, (i.e. below "trigger point" levels, requiring investigation), and is a loss of profit that can be absorbed. This callous and heartless treatment of animals en route is only exceeded by the treatment meted out to them on arrival at their various destinations.

Animals have the same physical and psychological needs as humans - this is a scientific fact. Clearly the owners, (i.e. principally the large corporate stock agent companies), have no idea what the needs of the animals are, or how to look after them. However, all participants in this animal trade are culpable. The prevailing attitude of these breeders and exporters, (particularly where animals are destined for slaughter), is that animals have no "rights", which must be dealt with through enforceable legislation.

The ABARE report makes a number of references to concerns over welfare issues, and about the possibility of restriction or cessation of live exports, and what this might mean to the whole cattle and sheep breeding industries of W.A. and the N.T. in particular. Income for most breeders (up to 2007) only partially relied on this industry, and while the total number of beef cattle in 2008 was one third of all the beef cattle in Australia, the total percentage of income was only 6 % of the overall figure for Australia, and the average % of income derived per individual breeder was only 7 %.

The ABARE report also concluded that cultural and religious differences between Australia and the countries to which it exports were unlikely to be influenced by Australians, and unlikely to be changed. It also noted the susceptibility of this particular industry to changes in exchange rates, as well as climatic conditions such as drought. The final paragraph of this report contains the following: - "Further analysis is required to quantify the extent of the losses associated with the potential cessation of live export trade.... Further, as a consequence of any restriction on livestock trade, there may be requests by industry for government assistance to support any transition to alternative activities".

Two examples of the marginal state of various operators in this industry are attached (Appendices A and B). One breeder in the N.T. states that due to the recent cessation of exports, her cattle had now eaten out the holding paddocks and were now eating out the paddocks destined for the weaners. That is, there were no additional paddocks available. In other words, this property is overstocked, and very marginal, and highly susceptible to seasonal variations. This breeder indicated they had just had a very wet season, which in fact should have meant a lot of feed growth, unless the paddocks were already too devastated to recover. This breeder was already functioning at a loss, selling animals at almost one third below their production cost.

Similarly, if we are to believe the complaint of Midfield Meats, the viability of this operation stands or falls as a result of the pending removal of a 40% rebate for the costs of the Quarantine Inspection. This proposed change was flagged in 2009 as part of an upgrade in Inspection practices, and a compensation package of \$127 million was offered to the industry. No industry which cannot afford to pay for the Inspection costs of its own "product" can be considered viable. In the interim, Midfield Meats must surely be the beneficiary of the current over-supply of beef cattle in the domestic market, and able to source cattle cheaply from northern Australia, while selling frozen meat overseas, without the payment of these Quarantine Inspection costs.

The bulk of the breeding and live animal export industry itself has been established in the most marginal land in Australia, in the hot, dry interior of W.A. and the N.T., i.e. land which is totally unsuited for large numbers of hard-hooved animals, which are progressively causing further degradation to the environment. The CSIRO has warned (July 2011)

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that the temperature in Australia can be expected to rise by 4 degrees Celsius by 2050, and it has expressed concern that the coastal areas of Australia will not be able to produce enough vegetables and crops to feed us all, let alone compensate for the dry, arid centre of Australia. With the expected introduction of new possibilities such as carbon farming (i.e. carbon capture in soils and trees), surely there is now an option for alternative income for these large dry properties. The live export trade is cruel, non-productive, inefficient, unviable and unsustainable in the long term, and should be closed down immediately. These operators should concentrate instead on re-greening Australia and cooling it down, rather than destroying a fragile environment through overstocking marginal lands in a marginal industry.

Yours sincerely,

Philippa Shepherd.

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Well done, Mum: William and Lachlan from Waterloo Station in the Northern Territory give Mum, cattle farmer Emily Brett, a congratulatory hug after her conference at Parliament House. The conference raised the plight of the cattle industry following live export bans.

Northern cattlemen 'bleeding'

By JOHN CONROY

THE dire financial situation for live cattle exporters and those who rely on the industry will accelerate every day the Federal Government's ban on exports to Indonesia remains.

That's according to the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association, which says any resumption in trade could take weeks or even months to reach normal speed.

Association chief executive Luke Bowen, who arrived in Canberra yesterday for another week of emergency talks, said the Government needed to expedite interim export permits to Indonesia.

He said people were "bleeding" and the industry was on life support.

"It's worsening by the day and it will only accelerate," Mr Bowen said.

He said 6400 cattle had been compounded in the

Territory and 8000 across northern Australia.

Among NT farmers holding cattle is Emily Brett, who has 2300 cattle stranded on her property, Waterloo Station, in the Victoria River Basin.

The cattle have eaten out smaller holding paddocks and are now in larger paddocks where they are eating the feed for the next lot of weaners.

Mrs Brett, who bought the property seven years ago with her husband,

Dougal, and his family, said the burden was nearing breaking point.

"We've come out of a long wet season so we've ended up with a fairly decent overdraft, but now we haven't had that income to reduce it so were obviously paying pretty high interest and getting further and further into debt," she said.

The Bretts are selling steers to the Philippines at a loss, 140c/kg, down from a usual 200c/kg.

Midfield hit hard by rebate lift

'Uncompetitive' after reforms

WARRNAMBOOL
By ALEX SINNOTT

MAJOR employer Midfield Meats will be hit hard by a federal government decision to lift rebates for export inspection, the Coalition has claimed.

The meat processor will face a steep increase in government fees this financial year after the federal government axed a 40 per cent rebate on charges handed out by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS).

Midfield has claimed the industry reforms would make Australian farmers and abattoirs uncompetitive in the global meat marketplace.

Wannon MP Dan Tehan and New South Wales-based National Party MP John Cobb have called for an inquiry into AQIS fees and charges after many within the agriculture and manufacturing sectors raised concerns.

Midfield Meat International quality assurance manager Noel Kelson said the company was concerned that Australian producers and

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exporters would be disadvantaged by the reforms.

He said most major beef exporters had government-backed inspection systems.

"(These changes) would translate to approximately \$6 per beef carcass equivalent processed, an increase unable to be absorbed by the Australian export meat industry," Mr Kelson said.

"The fact is that our competitors in the global marketplace, such as the United States, Canada and Brazil, have well-developed co-regulatory inspection models that operate efficiently and effectively.

"The vast majority of these international competitors have their inspection systems partially or substantially funded by their respective governments as a service to public health and export trade earnings."



Former Agriculture Minister Tony Burke announced in 2009 that the federal government would offer the industry a \$127 million Export Certification Reform Package to compensate for the lifting of inspection rebates.

Mr Tehan said the federal government had failed to deliver on its pledge for an independent study on the legitimate costs of inspections to the government.

"As of 1 July 2011, all industries involved are facing increased costs and with the removal of the rebate the industries will have no choice but to either absorb or pass these costs on," the Coalition MP said.

"The motion will require the government to outline the completion of reforms and efficiencies before industries are required to pay extra fees and charges.

"It is quite clear if AQIS can't find the promised efficiencies, the government should maintain the 40 per cent contribution to inspection costs."

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