

SENATE SUBMISSION

Over the past 30 years Australians have seen many distressing reports of the foulest abuse of animals one can imagine. Tragically the latest episode in Indonesia was up there with the worst of them. Apparently even more depraved footage taken during that Indonesian investigation was not shown because it was deemed to be too upsetting for viewers.

Twenty six years ago in 1985 the Senate Select Committee of Inquiry into Animal Welfare in Australia concluded in its report, *Export of Live Sheep from Australia*, that

... if a decision were to be made on the future of the trade purely on animal welfare grounds, there is enough evidence to stop the trade.

The committee concluded that the government should expand the refrigerated sheepmeat trade with the aim of substituting it for the live sheep trade. But the trade continued.

The report described horrific stories. One of the most distressing was the observation that bottlenecks were occurring when unloading sheep in the Middle East because blind sheep were holding up the others. What sort of people sell blind animals on a nightmare sea trip to be killed while fully conscious?

One would hope we had moved on from there. But, no, the atrocities keep coming year after year.

The public only knows about them thanks to animal welfare groups, including Animals Australia with its eight investigations since 2003. Members of the public should study the list of depravity on the Animals Australia website. It should be compulsory reading for members of Parliament and those who devise the standards and regulations.

Every time an atrocity in the live sheep trade makes the headlines, the public is outraged. The government and the industry dive for cover and try to pretend it is an isolated incident. Then although the furor may dissipate – which it invariably does as people get on with their lives and the media chases another story – many more people will have joined the cause to fight against live exports the next time.

The MLA website boasts that Australia has the best live export animal welfare standards. If it is true, that makes it even worse that it abandons the animals to developing countries that have no laws whatsoever to protect them and where they are slaughtered while fully conscious.

The MLA spends more on marketing than it does on animal welfare. The MLA knew there was cruelty going on in Indonesian abattoirs. It published reports about the problems with the restraining boxes. But it did nothing to stop the cruelty, despite having a responsibility for animal welfare under the Australian standards. So despite the MLA's public relations spin about education and training and influencing developing countries to develop humane slaughtering techniques, it has been an abysmal failure. Australia has no jurisdiction in Indonesia.

Self-regulation by the industry is an absolute farce. This week there were allegations on the *Australian* newspaper website that a vet working on a live export ship had been instructed by the exporter to reduce goat mortality figures down from 18 to 11 in his report for AQIS. The vet refused. Despite that it was alleged the exporter sent AQIS a copy of the vet's report on his letterhead declaring that only 11 goats had died. For three years the vet had been trying to raise the matter with the relevant government departments. Little wonder the public has no confidence in the industry when these types of stories emerge so frequently.

Australia is the largest exporter of live animals in the world. Have the cattle producers and exporting companies wondered why that is? Other countries choose not to engage in this miserable trade. Civilised countries do not treat sentient beings like coal or iron ore commodities.

New Zealand banned live exports of sheep for slaughter after the *Cormo Express* fiasco in 2003. The New Zealanders export processed meat only; this has the bonus of value-adding and providing jobs.

Aside from the animal welfare considerations, NZ was not willing to risk its international reputation and jeopardise causing a backlash against its other agricultural products from consumers revolted by the cruelty inflicted on innocent animals when exported live.

Australians showed their horror at the *Four Corners* revelations by causing meat sales to drop by 15 per cent virtually over night.

It is a disgrace that a civilised country like Australia could send its animals to developing countries that do not have laws to protect them. I always thought Australia followed the rule of law. What we see with live exports is middle age barbarism at its worst.

Once the animals leave our shores, Australia can never ensure their wellbeing.

The live trade is administered by business men in suits who care for profits. There is no humanity, morality or ethics. Successive governments, Liberals, Nationals and Labor have been complicit in drafting standards and regulations that are full of bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo and do nothing to safeguard the welfare of animals.

The public have spoken. The animals cannot. The government must phase out live exports and transition the industry to produce chilled and refrigerated meat for export.

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