

Julie Lewin

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## **SUBMISSION – SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES ON RURAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT**

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I am just an ordinary, typical Australian who has never been an animal rights activist, but I cannot avert my eyes from the *inherent* cruelties of our live export trade, and I feel compelled to protest in the strongest of terms.

### **Points of Discussion**

1. Neither the Australian government, MLA nor any other agency can possibly *ensure* animal welfare in overseas countries. They do not have the mandate, authority, power or ability to enforce any animal welfare standards, international or otherwise. It is a hollow promise that is sure to disappoint.
2. Far from protecting the welfare of animals involved in the live export trade, **MLA has facilitated cruelty** by designing and installing over a hundred Mark 1 cattle restraint boxes in Indonesia, as well as other countries in Asia and the Middle East. The Mark 1 restraint boxes have to be upgraded to meet the abysmally poor international standards. What a vile and contemptible state of affairs, what a disgrace. If that is not damning evidence against MLA's false claims of caring for animal welfare and the inappropriateness of self-regulation...

**Rather than influencing change, Australia's live export industry's willingness to supply animals has contributed to animal cruelty.**

3. The Australian Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is a highly regarded, respectable organization. Their animal welfare standards are scientifically informed, regularly updated and reflect the general values and ethics of contemporary Australian society. Theirs is the correct yardstick by which to measure animal welfare and to review Australia's live export trade.
4. Had MLA followed RSPCA's guidelines, sought their advise, invited their inspectors for regular and surprise visits, been transparent, invested in their peer-review research on cattle, sheep and goats, collaborated on joint projects not only with the RSPCA but reputable university researchers etc etc etc, then none of this is likely to have ever happened. MLA has zero credibility and should obviously be replaced, but any new structure must function transparently and operate under the scrutiny and authority of the RSPCA, possibly with another independent organisation.
5. Had MLA spent millions of dollars on *fruitful* Research & Development projects over the past decade, there would be more humane ways of slaughtering animals, new methods of preserving unrefrigerated halal and kosher beef, lamb and goat, and a vibrant international demand for Australian top quality, pre-packaged, value-added meats. We would have a revitalised, modernised array of domestic slaughterhouses, innovative farm-based modular mini-abattoirs, new cuts of meat and semi-prepared meat products

and a bright future for our regional meatworkers and innovative chefs.

Instead we've seen a contraction of the number of functional Australian abattoirs, ever longer distances between farmgate and slaughterhouse, lay-offs and depressed employment prospects for regional Australian meatworkers, and cattle producers who have put all their eggs in one (export) basket.

6. MLA needs a Judicial Inquiry. Their longstanding denial of incontrovertible evidence of cruelty, their obstinate refusal to accept any responsibility for creating this mess, their poor leadership, their lack of transparency and their refusal to release money from the \$40 million Industry Emergency Fund makes them more than deserving of a probing investigation.

As part of my submission, I include a copy of a letter sent directly to MLA

Yours sincerely

Julie Lewin.

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Dear Mr Heatley, Palmer, Boyden, Mars, Harper, Burbidge, Trefort, Carroll, Ms Corrigan and Mr Anderson,

In preface to my letter, let me assure you that I have no ill feelings towards anyone on a personal level.

I write to express my outrage that while Australia's live export animals were enduring horrific cruelties during 2005-2008, MLA spent \$50M advertising and portraying itself as "transparent" and "committed to animal welfare"<sup>1</sup>.

I'll leave it to others to comment on transparency issues, but "committed to animal welfare"? I can hardly contain my contempt for what is either self-denial or deceit. I worked as an intensive care nursing sister for fifteen years and have a pretty strong stomach for gruesome things, but the cruelty of "stun gun-less" slaughterhouses and other brutalities against animals fills me with the deepest disgust and anger.

Not only has MLA dismally failed to protect the welfare of animals involved in the live export trade, it has facilitated cruelty against cattle by designing and installing over a hundred Mark 1 cattle restraint boxes in Indonesian slaughterhouses (and now, it seems, in Malaysia, Libya and Brunei as well). The MLA restraint boxes have been loudly denounced by virtually everyone who has seen them - Temple Grandin, Australian vets, the RSPCA, Aust Meatworkers and many thousands of Australians who saw the Four Corners exposé. How is it that MLA condones that which everyone else unhesitatingly condemns? Why has MLA needed a full-blown fiasco before devising an apparently more humane Mark IV version?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/cattle-slaughter-takes-gloss-off-media-blitz/story-fn59niix-1226083782412>

How long did MLA think it could continue to turn a blind eye to systematic cruelty? Surely MLA knew the atrocities couldn't remain a secret forever? And surely MLA knew the average Australian would be aghast? Or is MLA so inured to animal brutality that the horror simply fails to register?

Like Senator Katter, I was enraged by almost every statement made during a Lateline interview<sup>2</sup> of Michael Finucan, MLA's export manager in Jakarta. For instance, Mr Finucan didn't seem overly concerned that of the Indonesian slaughterhouses which process cattle from Australia, only 6% have stun guns. This is unacceptable to the vast majority of Australians who expect – nay, demand – that animals are treated humanely. Is MLA so far removed from the values of contemporary Australian society that it doesn't even recognise fundamentals?

In a way it doesn't matter whether MLA is "toweringly incompetent", as suggested by Senator Katter, or hideously out of touch with Australian values, shamefully inured by everyday cruelty, hopelessly impotent to effect change, blinded by cocksure arrogance and/or anything else. Whatever the factors, the result is that MLA has failed everybody including the cattle, sheep and goats under its pitiful "protection", the livestock producers and others who have invested in the live export trade, and the wider Australian public who should be able to rely on those entrusted with animal welfare responsibilities. I don't only feel let down by MLA – I feel betrayed.

Whether you admit it or not, MLA is largely responsible for creating the current crisis. By ignoring irrefutable evidence of brutality in report after report, year after year, MLA virtually guaranteed the tumultuous eruption of a live export fiasco. If MLA didn't see the crunch a long time in the coming, you really need to ask yourselves why.

By obstinately continuing to push the live export barrow, MLA seems stuck in yesteryear. MLA's myopic refusal to consider modern Australian attitudes towards animal welfare is a disastrous strategy, because it sets MLA in conflict against the Australian ethos. The rise of ethical vegetarianism and the domestic demand for free-range eggs, chicken and pork is a case in point. Such practices can only continue to increase because battery farming, sow stalls and other such farming practices are increasingly acknowledged as inhumane and therefore unacceptable.

If MLA members got bang for the gazillions of dollars spent on R&D over the past decade, there would be new ways of preserving unrefrigerated halal meats and a vibrant international demand for Australian top quality, pre-packaged, value-added meats. We would have a revitalised, modernised array of domestic slaughterhouses, new cuts of meat and meat products and a bright future for our regional meatworkers and innovative chefs.

**Under the title of "Industry Integrity", MLA states "The Australian community is becoming more interested in the ethics of food production..."<sup>3</sup> Indeed. The ethical and humane treatment of animals is precisely what this issue is all about, and it is driven, at least in part, by science.**

**The more we learn about animal cognition and behaviour, the more educated, civilised and secular a nation we become, the more compelled we are to demand humane farming practices. For example, sheep have sophisticated social lives, can recognise up to 100 individual faces (sheep and human) and maintain the memory for at least 2**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2011/06/09/3239294.htm?site=brisbane>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mla.com.au/Marketing-red-meat/Industry-integrity>

**years. Researchers at Cambridge University recently discovered that sheep can even outperform chimpanzees on psychological tests involving cognitive flexibility.<sup>4</sup> Goats have long been acknowledged for their capricious intelligence, as any farmer with a substandard fence will tell you! Cows have highly developed nervous systems, form very strong social bonds and have a rich array of communication.**

MLA has no credibility. MLA's image is indelibly stained with slaughterhouse cruelties, and for as long as MLA continues live exports, no amount of ritzy advertising in glossy magazines or fundraising BBQs for Japanese tsunami victims can ever erase the sickening images of sheep being dragged on their bellies or of bloody cattle being butchered alive.

I have never been an animal activist. Like most reasonable Australians, I simply believe that all animals should be treated decently and humanely. Defining what is meant by humane can be problematic, but I accept that the standards set out by our own RSPCA are scientifically informed and reflect the values of the broader Australian community. Whatever is endorsed by RSPCA is good enough for me but everything less – including the pathetically insipid international “standards”, I strenuously reject.

Long distance transport and the live export trade are *inherently* cruel. As clearly demonstrated by MLA, animal welfare cannot be controlled once the cattle, sheep and goats board the ships and planes, and the whole concept of live exports can only become increasingly repugnant to the Australian people.

I feel ethically obliged to continue my opposition to long distance transport and live exports.

Yours sincerely

Julie Lewin

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn20109-zoologger-the-sharpest-mind-in-the-farmyard.html>