

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a beef cattle producer and also a veterinarian from Western Australia. My comments will relate primarily to the domestic economic impact of the live export trade within Australia. I also wish to comment on the human/social impact of the trade and the recent/current events.

My family business includes a cattle station in the Pilbara, which has been in the family for nearly 100 years and is one of only a handful of original family businesses remaining in the region. In 2005 the business purchased a farm in the wheatbelt, the aim being to diversify and expand the business so that it can continue for future generations. I became a veterinarian with the aim of returning to continue the family business for another generation and also to provide a veterinary service to the remote regions of WA.

All of the above relies on a sustainable and stable cattle industry and live export is a major component.

The trade provides a second avenue, instead of domestic sale/abattoirs, for people to sell their stock. This creates healthy competition in the beef market resulting in improved stock prices and improved farm returns. I believe it would be a fatal step backwards to remove live export from the market and restrict Australian producers to the domestic abattoirs, regardless of their exporting capabilities. At the point of sale the primary producer has still lost a large percentage of the competing buyers. It will almost certainly result in a situation of oversupply of cattle, as we are already seeing, leading to further price reductions and ultimately the collapse of a lot of businesses. Further to that a large percentage of the cattle exported are of Bos Indicus breeding. The domestic abattoirs do not want this breed of cattle and often already pay a reduced price for such animals.

The competition and hence increased stock values that have resulted from live export being in the market have, in my opinion, resulted in better animal husbandry practices, management and welfare in the pastoral regions. Most pastoral producers have adopted vaccination protocols (for diseases such as botulism, tetanus, vibrio and numerous others depending on location and aetiological factors) in an effort to reduce stock losses and increase returns. Supplementation of minerals, vitamins and trace elements has become a standard procedure. The effort most people now make in improving their herd through selective breeding and management – to achieve reduced losses through calving, polled animals, reduce inbreeding and so on is enormous.

The role of the veterinarian in the pastoral regions has increased and people actively seek out advice to make improvements or deal with situations, such as management of pregnant females in a drought year, what medication and supplements can be given to cattle to reduce the impact of the stress of weaning or transport, parameters for replacement heifer selection to name a few. Without live export and the benefits it creates in the market place I believe everything will go backwards by decades. I doubt that what is a viable business plan for me at the moment will be so without live export in the future. We are all aware of the shortage of rural veterinarians and the difficulty in getting people to service the remote areas of Australia. Vets in these regions not only look after the production animal needs but also care for companion animals.

They treat individual health problems such as arthritis through to matters of public health concern such as worming and basic hygiene. In my opinion, if the beef industry is crippled to the point of being non-viable so are many associated veterinary businesses.

With regard to the social impacts, my greatest concern is for the small family enterprises. Most are already under severe stress from drought and/or floods, debt and rising input costs. The stress both financial and emotional that the current situation is causing should not be underestimated. The long term ramifications remain unknown. Is the cattle industry going to be viable for the future? Are we constantly going to be held to ransom by animal liberation groups? Does the government and society value the primary producer at all? For the first time in my life I am questioning what has been my life's goal, and I imagine a lot of other people are doing the same. There still seems to be a perception in the general public of "Kings in Grass Castles", in my personal experience nothing could be further from the truth. I stay because of a love the land, family loyalty and sentiment and "hope" of better times in the future. I question if this will be enough without the continuation of live export in the Australian beef industry due to afore mentioned reasons.

I read of increasing concerns about global food security into the future. It would seem that live export will become increasingly important on a global scale. It is my understanding that we have one of the most regulated and advanced industries in the world, especially with regard to animal welfare. It would seem logical to continue to "lead by example" and work with developing countries to raise standards of animal production and welfare, food processing/hygiene and so on to the benefit of the global community and animals world wide. At the same time one is also ensuring the survival, and hopefully improving the prospects, of our own domestic food producers and hence our own food supplies into the future. How intelligent are we as a society if we ourselves become reliant on food imports because we have crippled our own industries. I also wonder if we reach that point if society and the government will demonstrate the same concern for the animal welfare standards of the countries we import from or simply go with the cheapest imported product available.

I am 32 years old, have two young children and am 6 months pregnant with the third. I am involved in the beef industry and live export both as a producer and a veterinarian. The events of the past months have enraged me and I have an overwhelming feeling of injustice on many levels. I sit here today wondering if our family business and my vet business will be viable into the future (can I provide for my children?) and asking myself how the situation came to this based on the reported actions of so few.

Yours Sincerely, Dr Joanna Maguire, B.Sc.,B.V.M.S