



# **MLA submission: Inspector General of Live Animal Exports Amendment (Animal Welfare) Bill 2023**

**August 2023**

## **Introduction**

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) welcomes the opportunity to present this submission to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee regarding *the Inspector General of Live Animal Exports Amendment (Animal Welfare) Bill 2023*. MLA plays a critical role in supporting Australia's red meat and livestock sector through the provision of research, development, and marketing activities for the industry as the declared marketing body and research body under the *Australian Meat and Livestock Industry Act 1997*.

MLA is a service provider for R&D and has no power or authority in cases of compromised animal wellbeing throughout the supply chain. MLA plays no role in the auditing or enforcement of animal welfare standards and guidelines and is not responsible for setting welfare policy.

MLA's investment in Animal Wellbeing research, development, extension and adoption (RDE&A) aims to safeguard and improve Australia's livestock wellbeing. Consideration of animal health, welfare and biosecurity are inextricably linked in defining livestock wellbeing. MLA invests in the Livestock Export Program (LEP), jointly funded by MLA and LiveCorp to deliver animal welfare improvements in Australia and in overseas markets. MLA has no legal power in export markets and is not the regulator of ESCAS-approved (Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System) slaughter facilities. Under ESCAS, it is the legal responsibility of the exporter to report breaches to DAFF. The shipping process of the livestock export trade and associated requirements for livestock are regulated under the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) by DAFF. ESCAS does not apply to voyages or airfreight and only relates to post-discharge, in-market processes to the point of slaughter.

MLA staff and consultants do not travel on livestock vessels and therefore are not exposed to on-board conditions or performance under ASEL. MLA becomes aware of breaches of ASEL when DAFF releases reportable incident information.

MLA notes the submission provided by the Red Meat Advisory Council (RMAC) to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) in March 2023 on this issue, and supports the broad principles outlined by RMAC in their submission.

## **About the industry**

Australia's red meat and livestock industry is comprised of more than 74,000 businesses and collectively services 25 million Australians and over 100 export destinations every day with safe, high quality and nutritious red meat. Approximately 433,000 people are employed directly and indirectly in the industry, representing 1.5% of Australia's key industry total employment, and 29% of Australia's direct employment in agricultural production.

Australia is home to about 1.5% of the global cattle herd and 5% of the global sheep flock, yet we are the fourth largest beef exporter (after Brazil, India and the United States). Approximately 70 percent of Australia's red meat production is exported.

## **Animal welfare**

Animal welfare and wellbeing is one of the major pillars of MLA's five-year Strategic Plan. Our investment in animal wellbeing research, development and adoption safeguards Australia's livestock biosecurity and prioritises the wellbeing and proper care of our livestock. This, in turn, contributes to the industry's economic and environmental sustainability.

The principles guiding the animal wellbeing program include increased efficiency of animal production, improvements in on-farm animal welfare and consumer perceptions of animal welfare, and profitability for producers. The main two pillars of investment in the program are:

1. The development of safe, effective, long-acting vaccines and therapeutics. Investment in this pillar focuses on the development of vaccines and therapeutics utilising modern technology (novel delivery systems/antigens, sustained release formulations). The key focus

is on endemic and exotic diseases, as well as vaccines that will prevent fertility in cattle in pastoral systems.

2. The mitigation of the impact of, and need to perform, surgical husbandry procedures. Investment in this pillar focuses on managing the downside risk of adverse consequences associated with either poor animal welfare outcomes or shifts in public sentiment related to red meat production welfare. Investments in this pillar are a continuation of the search for effective analgesia (efficacy and duration of effect) for unavoidable painful procedures like castration, tail docking and dehorning. The program continually seeks 'replacement' as the preferred strategy (particularly for invasive operations), although 'refinement' or 'relief' (from pain) may be required in the short and medium term. Solutions are assessed in terms of the 'average consumer' because consumer perceptions and perspectives are pivotal to continued social licence and to continued production and consumption of red meat.

MLA's commitment to and investment in the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework (ABSF) and the Sheep Sustainability Framework (SSF) also ensures broad collaboration across industry and the value chain to continually improve animal welfare and match the requirements of consumers and the value chain with those of primary producers. These frameworks are customer facing and industry-led, linking the entire supply chain to drive positive improvement on a range of factors. This includes a strategic focus on animal welfare.

MLA encourages the government to consult with industry and engage with the ABSF and SSF regarding any animal welfare metrics established under the proposed Inspector-General. These frameworks work closely with industry and the value chain to create meaningful and practical change that can be measured and reported upon. These frameworks are a foundation to Australia's leading position within animal welfare.

In order to engage with industry, it is important the proposed Inspector-General consults with the red meat industry and focuses on positive measures of animal welfare and gives strong consideration to the animal welfare activities covered under the beef and sheep frameworks.