

15 July 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport
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Dear Committee Secretary

Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets

The Independent Panel which conducted an assessment of the welfare of Australian cattle in Indonesia in March 2010 would like this submission to be considered by both inquiries into animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets.

In March 2010, I led a panel of four independent experts to assess the welfare of Australian cattle in Indonesia against the guidelines of World Organization for Animal Health. Those guidelines allow for the slaughter of cattle without stunning. We presented our findings to Meat and Livestock Australia and Livecorp in May 2010. The report was publicly released in January 2011. It contained the profiles of the Independent Panel. I am not aware of any query about the expertise or independence of any member of this international panel.

The Independent Panel observed Australian cattle that had been loaded at Darwin arrive at the Port of Lampung, and while the cattle were being unloaded onto trucks. We observed how the cattle had settled after arriving in the quarantine section of one feedlot. The welfare of cattle in three feedlots in Java and three feedlots in Sumatra was assessed. The loading of cattle for transport to abattoirs was observed at three feedlots. The slaughter of cattle was observed at eleven abattoirs. These abattoirs included a traditional Indonesian abattoir, abattoirs that used restraint boxes designed by MLA/Livecorp, others which used "Copy boxes" developed by Indonesian abattoirs to restrain the cattle, and one abattoir designed on Australian standards that used stunning. The Independent Panel reported its findings to MLA and Livecorp in May 2010. A copy of this report released publically is shown Attachment 1.

Three critical aspects were identified by the expert panel as significantly influencing animal welfare in Indonesia. These were:

- Animal management; including handling, nutrition and animal suitability
- Slaughter; including facilities and method of slaughter
- Animal welfare standards and their practical application

Of the recommendations made through the report, encouraging the use of non-lethal stunning during slaughter and developing an increased appreciation of the animal welfare and production benefits gained by importing cattle suited to the conditions were considered foremost.

Our report was discussed with RSPCA Australia at a meeting at DAFF on 15 December 2010, and released publically on 27 January 2010. In response to an analysis of our report conducted by RSPCA Australia Science that was submitted to Minister Ludwig, the Independent Panel provided the Minister with the report shown as Attachment 2.

The ABC Four Corners Program “Bloody Business” screened on 31 May 2011 dealt with the treatment of cattle sent live to Indonesia. I was interviewed on 27 April 2011, before the Four Corners team had travelled to Indonesia, and was not shown any of the video footage that had been obtained by Animals Australia. I have since analysed the Four Corners Program “Bloody Business”, and as a result have submitted a complaint to the ABC. The Head of the ABC Audience and Consumer Affairs Unit has informed me that my complaint has been referred to ABC Legal who will respond in due course.

As the ABC conceded on air, the program showed horrifying images of cruelty that many Australians found unbearably sickening. It is hard to imagine a more emotive TV broadcast. Viewers were presented with some of the worst examples of cruelty to cattle ever shown on Australian television.

The program was also intensely political. It dealt with cruelty to animals, the export of live cattle, the right of Australian primary producers to make a living by exporting their produce, the right of people of our nearest significant neighbour – Indonesia - to eat meat imported from Australia, religious practises within Islam, and differing social attitudes to animal welfare and hygiene in Asia.

From my observation, as one who holds no brief for either side, there is a long standing state of hostility, indeed war, between primary producers and animal rights activists in this country. Many in the cities regard primary producers in the outback as being too rich and a law unto themselves. Many in the bush regard animal rights activists as mad. (The Four Corners reporter referred to them during our interview as ‘vocal.’)

Notwithstanding these deep divisions in the Australian community, the ABC acknowledged its assistance from, and appeared to support, the policies of both the RSPCA and Animals Australia to ban the live export of animals for slaughter. Each of those organisations has political objectives that are opposed by at least some Australians, and each is capable of using the media to advance those objectives.

Since the screening of the ABC Program and monitoring the news articles written subsequently, the Independent Panel is of the view that if all the recommendations made in our report submitted in May 2010 were implemented, along with an auditable system to ensure that Australian cattle only went to approved abattoirs, most of the welfare concerns could be addressed,

Lyn White who provided the video footage for the ABC Four Corners program made the statement: *“The fact that I was unable to help them, all I can do now is to ensure that they receive some sort of justice, and the only way that is going to occur is if what they have had to endure prevents other animals from receiving similar treatment.”*

The Independent Panel is of the view that banning the export of cattle as proposed in the two draft bills would not lead to improvements in the welfare of cattle in Indonesia, or in any other country which imports Australian livestock.

Yours faithfully

Ivan W Caple

Attachments