

Inquiry: Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets.

To whom it may concern

Please find outlined below, my submission to the Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets.

The Live Export industry has been the subject of numerous investigations by welfare organisations such as Animals Australia and the RSPCA. These investigations have routinely uncovered the horrendous conditions and treatment of Australian livestock, and it appears any action to rectify these conditions has only ever been as a result of these investigations by outside charity organisations, and even still, with decades passing and millions of dollars spent, little change has been effected in the standards of the export markets.

Once Australian livestock leave our shores, they are no longer protected by our welfare standards or legal system. This leaves them significantly vulnerable to mistreatment, especially when they are being sent to countries where it is common knowledge that animal welfare is not culturally relevant.

The inclination to view these animals as statistics, numbers and graphs, must be avoided. These animals are living breathing creatures. Each individual animal has the capacity to experience pain, fear and suffering. To send our Australian livestock to countries with sub standard welfare conditions is a betrayal to these animals, whom, having been bred into our care, should remain in our care to their point of slaughter.

A statement on the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website "The Australian Government does not tolerate cruelty towards animals and will not compromise on animal welfare standards"¹ is at complete odds with this trade, that has had cruel practices regularly and repeatedly reported:

1. From the point of loading, where electric goads etc have been reportedly used on animals face and ano-genital regions
2. On ships, where animals die of inanition, respiratory conditions, are rendered blind due to salt spray on open decked ships, have limbs broken, suffer infections and die of septicemia
3. On unloading, once again with goads, ships are often left at port for several days before the animals are unloaded, causing great levels of heat stress due to poor ventilation, weakened animals being dragged off boats by limbs or skin.
4. On arrival – live sheep continue to be thrown into car boots or tied onto roof racks. Animals Australia reports have shown that MLA "in the ute not the boot" initiatives are merely resulting in purchasers of these sheep picking up the creatures from a truck around the corner from the dock. It has not changed cultural practices. In Indonesia, it is reported that a 300km journey will "routinely" take 11 hours, the cattle are transported

¹ <http://www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/export-trade>

on trucks with no on board water sources, and the cattle are not rested mid journey (Independent report commissioned by MLA and Livecorp from Jan 2011).

5. In the slaughterhouses – the Australian cattle are in general “wilder” than the Indonesian cattle that are hand raised. As such, they require more physical restraint to subdue them in the face of their impending slaughter. From the abattoir workers point of view, they have little cultural concern for animal welfare, there are no legal implications for them to treat the animals well, and according to an independent report commissioned by MLA and Livecorp, 70% of the meat from Australian cattle slaughtered in Indonesia ends up in meatballs, where the quality is not questioned. Therefore, there is no cultural nor quality based reason for not stressing and torturing these animals, and it achieves the desired result, so what impetus is there for them to stop?

My response to the terms of reference are outlined below:

1. Investigate and report into the role and effectiveness of Government, Meat and Livestock Australia, Livecorp and relevant industry bodies in improving animal welfare standards in Australia’s live export markets, including:

a) The level, nature and effectiveness of expenditure and efforts to promote or improve animal welfare standards with respect to all Australian live export market countries;

- i) expenditure and efforts on marketing and promoting live export to Australian producers;

I believe the marketing expenditure and efforts of MLA and Livecorp to Australian producers has been completely inappropriate, on the basis that they have not been able to ensure animal welfare conditions, and have not reported the level of these conditions accurately to those they are marketing to. Australian producers have been lured into this sordid trade on the falsehood that welfare conditions were predominantly “good”. The balance between dollars spent on marketing, modifying negative perceptions and those spent on actual improvements to animal welfare is telling.

- ii) ongoing monitoring of the subscription to, and practise of, animal welfare standards in all live export market countries;

Both MLA, Livecorp and the Government have been made aware of welfare issues involved with the live export trade a long time ago. There has been extremely little action if any, in relation to monitoring the subscription to, and practise of, animal welfare standards in all live export market countries. Animals continue to be dragged, thrown in boots, tied onto roof racks, kicked, whipped, have their tails twisted and or broken, eyes gouged, and

this has all been documented in the independent report commissioned by MLA and Livecorp in January of this year (2011).

- iii) actions to improve animal welfare outcomes in all other live export market countries and the evidence base for these actions.

There has been little action taken to improve ACTUAL animal welfare outcomes in live export market countries. Introduction of Mark 1 boxes have resulted in “copy boxes” being made, these may be a step up from the traditional rope slaughter practices in Indonesia, but it’s a step from heinous to horrific, and produces its own set of welfare concerns. Treatment reported on in the independent report commissioned by MLA and Livecorp sparked the Animals Investigation so that they could see the reality of what lay behind the concerning findings. The fact that an individual could visit several abattoirs at random in Indonesia and find the same horrific treatment of cattle routinely occurring, and then have that treatment confirmed by ABC reporters, surely indicates that this treatment is endemic, and no amount of training or money is going to solve what is a cultural issue that Australia has no jurisdiction over.

- b) The extent of knowledge of animal welfare practices in Australia's live export markets including:

- i) formal and informal monitoring and reporting structures;
- ii) formal and informal processes for reporting and addressing poor animal welfare practices.

I have heard from an Australian cattle farmer, that in relation to the tracking devices, the NLIS ear tags can easily be cut from the ear (without touching the ear) despite claims to the contrary. I also find it worrying that an individual with his fingers in the MLA pie is involved in the development of this system. Moreover, there is no point in implementing a costly, potentially ineffective tracking system², if the abattoirs have not got to adhere to appropriate standards. OIE guidelines are not acceptable to the Australian public.

Once again this industry that has shown time and time again that it cannot be relied upon to self regulate, is being given just that opportunity. The definition of stupidity is trying the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.

² <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/animals/cattle-industry-takes-paddocktoplate-tagging-with-a-pinch-of-salt-20110620-1gby9.html#ixzz1Ps6pCOAx>

2. Investigate and report on the domestic economic impact of the live export trade within Australia including:

a) Impact on regional and remote employment especially in northern Australia;

There may be impacts in the short term for regional and remote employment in Northern Australia. Reports have stated this figure to be around 10,000, however this number includes those who would retain their positions if we were to move to a chilled meat trade (truck drivers, shearers etc). The figure should also be viewed in conjunction with the loss of jobs the introduction of this trade has caused, through cannibalisation of up to 40,000 meat industry jobs. Also, there is no justification for cruelty, and there is no way of preventing cruelty to our livestock once it leaves the protection of our shores, our standards and our legislative capacity.

b) Impact and role of the industry on local livestock production and prices;

The live export industry is having a significant negative effect on local livestock prices. The Australian and International public are horrified that this trade is continually allowed to continue in spite of a continual flow of evidence uncovering it as an inherently cruel trade that profits on the back of mistreatment to our livestock. Individuals have lost faith in the farming industry on the basis that MLA have continually spent much more on modifying the public's negative perception than it has on actually improving animal welfare – a blatant cover up. This organization is also involved in the domestic market, and as such, this has tainted opinions of the transparency of what occurs in Australian farms and abattoirs. If we can't trust them overseas, why should we trust them here?

c) Impact on the processing of livestock within Australia.

Australians need to move to much greater levels of transparency to the public of farming processes in general – the public has very limited knowledge of how livestock is farmed within Australia and it is difficult to compete with organisations like MLA who spend millions of dollars advertising their “product”. I’m not suggesting scare campaigns about the horrors of factory farming, but there needs to be a middle ground. At the moment the public are only seeing one side of the story, and that is the highly polished “happy cow” stories peddled by the likes of massive industry bodies like MLA. We need more clarity and bodies like this one need to be held more responsible for the welfare of their ‘product’ than they currently are.

Stunning should also be made mandatory in Australia, there is no need to process livestock otherwise as leading clerics from both Islam and Judaism have accepted that stunning still allows Halal and Kosher product.

3. Other related matters.

The welfare risk to animals within the Live Export Trade is extreme and at odds with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries claim that the Australian Government does not tolerate cruelty towards animals and will not compromise on animal welfare standards” The only way to successfully manage these risks is to slaughter our livestock on our shores, where they are protected under Australian standards and legislation.

The Australian public has spoken louder and for longer than with any other issue in Australian history. The government still refuses to hear our concerns. This trade is inherently cruel, damaging to our international profile, and unnecessary.