

'Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets'

Senate Inquiry being conducted by
the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee.

Submitted by

Raelene Hall

July 2011

SUBMISSION

I make this submission in support of the Australian live export industry for consideration in the 'Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets' Senate Inquiry being conducted by the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee.

I refer directly to the Terms of Reference that the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee will inquire and report on and my opinion in relation to each Term of Reference is as follows:-

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;

Australia is the only country that has made the effort to improve animal welfare standards in countries where their stock is exported to. There has been a lot of finger pointing and innuendo about what has/has not happened in terms of the welfare of Australian stock exported overseas but my personal experience and knowledge is that Australia uses best practice in all areas of animal welfare when it comes to Live Export up to and including the treatment of animals when arriving in a foreign country. No system is absolutely perfect and there is always room for improvement in any industry. We must always be conscious of the fact that once the stock has been sold to another country they own it. Whilst no one in the stock industry wants or tolerates cruelty to animals nor do we have the right to ride rough shod over other countries. We need to discuss, educate, assist and encourage improvements for all animals in countries we export to.

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

Producers are already paying more than enough in this area so any extra funding required should be coming from the Government. The MLA and Livecorp do a great job of promoting our live exports to producers but it is those city centric people who do not understand the scenario of paddock to plate chain who also need to be educated.

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

This is a huge enterprise and I venture to say Australia does more of this than any other country that is involved in the live export market. It is imperative that all parties involved

eg. Livecorp, MLA and also the Federal Government are involved in this process and that there is open and honest accountability from all as to what is happening in these countries. It is not good enough for the Government to sit back and point the finger at MLA for not picking up problems, they should be working alongside them and be in full knowledge of the facts.

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

NLIS is one quick and easy way to ensure that livestock are fully traceable when they leave the country. This can be put into place immediately and whilst it is another cost to the producer I believe it is one they will accept with good grace if it means their stock can be tracked fully.

Bodies such as MLA should be encouraged and supported to continue their work in countries we export to. There has been an amazing amount of work done so far and this should be highlighted and acknowledged whilst knowing there is and probably always will be, more to be done in the area of animal welfare in some of these countries.

That said Australia cannot be held responsible for every animal welfare issue of countries we export to.

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

i) formal and informal monitoring and reporting structures;

Those people involved in the live export industry are conversant with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock –updated just this year. This document covers every aspect of animal welfare as it relates to live animal export. From planning the Consignment to Post Disembarkation animal welfare is at the forefront.

The livestock export industry is closely supervised by the Government. Exporters must comply with a wide range of strict licences, regulations and standards.

The Australian Government has developed a Live Animal Export Incidence Response Plan, which provides a framework for consultation, coordination of incident management between the three spheres of government and industry, and decision-making processes in the event of an incident involving live animals en route from Australia. This plan provides for the involvement of appropriate government and industry organisations and effective and efficient resolution of incidents.

In regards to the countries we export into we can, as said previously, discuss, educate, assist and encourage improvements for all animals in countries we export to.

ii) formal and informal processes for reporting and addressing poor animal welfare practices.
I believe this is also covered by the information under point i

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;

The live export trade is a vital part of the agricultural/livestock industry of Australia. Some properties rely on it entirely for their income whilst many other subsidiary businesses/people are employed down the line of the industry. This ranges from the helicopter pilot to the truck driver, to the shops in rural/remote areas who service those farming for live export. It is not just a northern industry as many mistakenly believe –livestock from all parts of Australia are involved in live export.

As the world's largest exporter of live sheep and cattle, the industry employs 13,000 Australians and contributes \$1.8 billion to the economy

[\(http://www.liveexportcare.com.au/GetTheFacts/\)](http://www.liveexportcare.com.au/GetTheFacts/)

My father and mother in law have been on their pastoral property for over sixty years, raised three sons and still live/work on the property alongside two of their sons, their daughter in law and grandchildren. Two of their grandchildren are now third generation to work the land here. They have never sought or asked for Government assistance. What they have achieved (and it is a lot) has been through their own hard work and enterprise.

Losing the live export market will not completely destroy our business but the flow on effects from that ban and any further bans may well do. If we have to compete in the sale yard with thousands more cattle prices will drop. When prices drop to the point it is uneconomical to sell our cattle, what then? Our area does not get a wet season and so droughts are not uncommon. For this reason we have always been very careful not to overstock but if we can't sell the cattle, what options do we have? Let them suffer? No - we will have to destroy them—a heartbreaking experience –and on top of it we then have no income.

There are not enough abattoirs in WA (or Australia) to kill all the beef that is currently exported. 'Build more/open more', is the cry –easier said than done. Firstly someone has to have funds to do so. Finding workers for abattoirs was and will always be a problem especially when competing with the mining sector for workers. They can't compete financially and in terms of the type of work on offer and the benefits. Are they going to be able to process the numbers that may come in during the northern dry season? Are consumers going to want to eat the Bos Indicus breeds from the north –research and history shows not? Will a glut force prices down until selling stock becomes unviable? More than likely.

We support the local town using the one grocery store, the Post Office, the bank agency, the fuel depot, the hospital and the local library/telecentre, to name just a few. All of these will be impacted because the majority of people in Shire are pastoralists, just like us. Some will leave, if they can sell their land, some will walk away so again our rural and remote communities will be taking a step backward.

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

Live export and local livestock production have worked hand in hand in Australia for many years. Whilst many believe we should be processing all Australian beef on shore the reality is that Australia cannot just handle that amount of meat and not all of our export customers want boxed meat, frozen or fresh. The ban on Live Export has impacted on local prices with a downward trend, due to an uncertainty in the market place. The naive view of some that meat prices in supermarket would come down due to surplus of stock available to domestic markets just shows how far the rural/city divide has become.

c) Impact on the processing of live stock within Australia.

The live export trade has not, I feel, had a significant impact, positive or negative, on processing of live stock within Australia. It has been said that abattoirs in Australia were mostly closed down due to the start of the Live Export trade. Historical facts will show that more abattoirs in Australia were closed due to union and wage issues and the difficulty in getting staff than anything to do with Live Export.

There are not enough abattoirs in Australia to kill all the beef that is currently exported. 'Build more/open more', is the cry –easier said than done. Firstly someone has to have funds to do so. Finding workers for abattoirs was and will always be a problem especially when competing with the mining sector for workers. They can't compete financially and in terms of the type of work on offer and the benefits. Are they going to be able to process the numbers that may come in during the northern dry season? Are consumers going to want to eat the Bos Indicus breeds from the north –research and history shows not? Will a glut force prices down until selling stock becomes unviable? More than likely.

3. Other related matters.

It is vital that the live export industry is kept open for many reasons.

The producers in parts of Australia who rely on it for their income need to be able to keep their business running

Closure of the live export markets will lead to an animal welfare crisis in our own country as there will be thousands of head of stock not wanted or required in the domestic market with nowhere to go, leading to overgrazing and starvation in the rangelands.

If we choose to not export to any countries, including our northern neighbours, we have no chance at all of improving animal welfare in that country nor do we have any protection if they choose to bring in livestock from countries with little or no bio security controls. It would take very little to bring a disease into our country if that was the case and our entire livestock industry could be destroyed, not just the live export side.

My father and mother in law have been on their pastoral property for over sixty years, raised three sons and still live/work on the property alongside two of their sons, their daughter in law and grandchildren. Two of their grandchildren are now third generation to work the land here. They have never sought or asked for Government assistance. What they have achieved (and it is a lot) has been through their own hard work and enterprise.

Losing the live export market will not completely destroy our business but the flow on effects from that ban and any further bans may well do. If we have to compete in the sale yard with thousands more cattle prices will drop. When prices drop to the point it is uneconomical to sell our cattle, what then? Our area does not get a wet season and so droughts are not uncommon. For this reason we have always been very careful not to overstock but if we can't sell the cattle, what options do we have? Let them suffer? No - we will have to destroy them—a heartbreaking experience –and on top of it we then have no income.

If our country is to grow and flourish then Live Export has to be part of our continued agricultural and economic growth. I am all for banning animal cruelty –not Live Export.

I am greatly concerned about the number of radical animal liberationist groups whose aim is not to halt live export but to bring an end to farming altogether.

I believe the lines between animal welfare and animal liberation are getting very blurred and it needs to be made very clear this is about animal welfare.

Signed:	Raelene Ann Hall
Address:	
Date:	15 July 2011