

# Submission

## Improvements in animal welfare for Australian live exports

### Introduction

I am not affiliated with any organisation in the live export industry nor am I a member of any animal rights or welfare groups. My personal interest in the live trade industry began in 2003 after the Cormo Express incident made world headlines where 57 000 sheep languished for three months and 6000 died.

My submission discusses the values and business of the live animal trade.

### The Business of Animal Cruelty

Excerpt from The Age, *Sheep onboard a national shame*, by Michelle Grattan (September 24, 2003)

“Peter Singer, who calls for euthanasia in this case, insists the entire live trade is a "disgrace" that should be stopped. "It's a terrible ordeal for the animals at the best of times. They have a nightmare voyage, and then they get treated brutally after they land, as if they were just sacks of wheat rather than living, feeling animals”.

And this:

“Every year or two, there is another major scandal . . . The federal minister says that he will implement reforms, but then . . . the same thing, or something worse, happens again.”

The above quote from 2003 could be referring to the Indonesian affair which is why the call for these submissions was instigated. The reason that this quote could be so aptly applied to any of the extensive number of incidents of cruelty in the live trade industry since 1980 is because the trade is inherently problematic and unfixable.

The first document I found in my research in 2003 was the 1985 Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare that concluded, on animal welfare grounds alone, the live export trade should be stopped. The document itself implies that the trade is flawed.

The mountain of evidence gathered over 30 years has proved the 1985 Senate Select Committee's conclusions to be 100% correct. Even with a vast public relations

budget, live trade stakeholders have admitted to the issues of animal cruelty in the trade. Accounts of extreme animal abuse are widespread.

There is also a long list of disasters on ships from 1980-2010. One that makes my stomach churn is 65 000 sheep abandoned to burn alive on a ship out to sea.

The 'Bloody Business' aired on Four Corners showed cattle being stabbed repeatedly (one worker presenting his blunt knife to camera). We saw eyes being gouged, bones being broken and cattle slamming their heads in agony. I want to mention these things in detail because often stakeholders brush over animal abuses quickly to minimise the extremity and widespread nature of the abuse that is occurring. On a personal note, I can say that I was very upset and have lost sleep over the footage I have seen.

Prior to the Four Corners program, going right back to my original interest in 2003, I saw footage of sheep being dragged along by broken legs, being trussed up with rope and shoved into car boots in 40°C for home slaughter in the Middle East.

Like the cattle in Indonesia, after being what can only be defined as torture, the sheep in the Middle East are slaughtered with their throats cut while fully conscious.

One of the images I have never been able to get out of my head is the asphyxiation of sheep desperately gasping for oxygen on a ship (Channel Nine, 60 Minutes, Richard Carlton, 2003). I read that this is a common problem that occurs on ships due to heat.

The Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare of 1985 implies that animal cruelty is inherent in the live trade itself. The acts of cruelty are not random occurrences by individuals but are embedded in the very systems of the live trade business.

Therefore, no matter how you spin it or sanitise it, the live animal trade is a business that makes its living on the misery of animals.

### **The Contribution of Taxpayers**

Taxpayers funded the live export trade with \$1.6 million and an example of the use of our funds is the supply the notorious metal restraining boxes installed by Meat and Livestock Australia. The footage on Four Corners shows cattle slamming their own heads against the metal in agony.

The world's foremost authority on cattle handling, Temple Grandin, says that "a box designed to make cattle fall down . . . violates every humane standard . . . around the world".

## **The Government**

Although our federal government continues to be complicit in the abuses by sanctioning the trade, politicians across all party lines are making a stand because, like me, they viewed the reality of the live trade industry - defenceless living things pitifully bellowing their incomprehension, pain and terror.

## **Solutions**

Excerpt from a media release, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, *Australian Muslims are Against Animal Cruelty*, by Dr Ameer Ali (24 February, 2006)

“Muslims in Middle Eastern countries readily except frozen lamb and mutton from Australia once it is Halal certified.”

And

“Dr Ali said that the Australian Muslims do not support the cruel treatment of animals”

From statistics quoted from Meat and Livestock Australia, the combined export value of meat exports (lamb, mutton and beef) in 2008 was 6.29 billion while the combined value of all live animal exports in 2008 was 0.959 billion.

Beyond the ethical issue of making revenue from misery, every new scandal in the live trade continues to create a community backlash and, on a wider level, damage Australia's international reputation.

An alternative to pursuing a trade that is will continue to be problematic for those trying to run a business is to expand the bulk of the export meat trade made up of chilled and frozen meat products.

## **A Price on Carbon, why not a Price on Harm?**

The public is becoming less tolerant and in fact more furious about animal cruelty in animal husbandry. As consumers become aware of the practices involved in intensive farming there is a movement towards buying free range.

Currently we are putting a price on pollution to stimulate industries to become cleaner because we want a better future for our children and grand children. The wider question underpinning the terms of references is, do we also have a place for ethical husbandry within economic rationalism?

If we can get corporations to change behaviour to pollute less, then why can't we get them to change behaviour to harm less?

Imagine if the meat industry had to pay a Cruelty Tax if it used animal husbandry practices that broke Australian animal welfare laws? Animal welfare laws being those that applied to all Australian animals including farm animals whether in Australia or being exported overseas by Australians.

Just like the Carbon Tax, market mechanisms would stimulate innovation in the meat business that would better reflect Australian values and laws that do not condone animal cruelty.

If polluting industries can be encouraged to make the transition to cleaner industries, then why can't the live export trade make the shift to cruelty-free practice and still make a buck?

### **South Africa and New Zealand**

South Africa banned live trade on cruelty grounds in 1997. New Zealand has all but completely banned live trade. It appears to only export sheep for breeding purposes. Other countries that have moved on from live trade may be able to provide useful ideas for other opportunities for the export meat trade.

### **Final Thoughts**

If we deny compassion for farm animals because we can project 'otherness' onto them looking upon them as 'only animals' then we make a grave mistake. Because denying a fair go to the voiceless, powerless and the vulnerable - because we as the powerful can - and because economics overrules all else - then what is to say that this same dynamic will not be applied to the aged, the disabled or other vulnerable groups?

The arguments used by industry and government to justify the unconscionable practices in live export always place economic concerns above ethics. A reporter from Four Corners sums up the morality of the trade by speculating if one day we will look at our treatment of animals in the same way we now view the slave trade - with astonishment, shame and horror.