

13<sup>th</sup> July 2011

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport  
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Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Secretary,

**Re : Animal welfare in Australian live export**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the current inquiry into animal welfare issues associated with the live export trade.

Please find attached a submission that portrays the response of both the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and MLA/Livecorp to a discovery made outside of the usual funding framework.

My concern arising from disclosing the cause of 'shy feeding' to these agencies centres on the welfare issue, and the matter of false representation.

- From a welfare perspective , animals that are passed as fit to travel are, in fact, unsuitable for export.
- The authority responsible for certifying animals as being fit to undertake a sea voyage has misrepresented the health of many since late 2002.

Further details of these welfare matters can be presented upon request

As an allegation of this nature can be sensitive, could you please withhold personal identification

Yours sincerely,

Barry Thomson

## **A preventable flaw in animal welfare during Australian live export.**

### **A. Background**

In 1985 the Senate called for greater research into the poor outcomes being reported by the Australian live animal export trade.(1)

Appreciable effort and cost was expended attempting to uncover the cause of the unpredictable spikes in deaths during sea transport.

In the past, many of the losses in live animal consignments were not readily explained.

The majority of deaths at sea were due to animals not eating - the so-called 'shy feeding' syndrome, with secondary complications arising from this inappetence.

Together with the attendant susceptibility to secondary diseases, (such as salmonellosis/enteritis), shy feeding could account for to up to three quarters of all mortalities.

The spikes in deaths due to shy feeding were unpredictable, either by rhythmicity, breed or origin.

As the cause was unknown and unidentifiable, animals were passed as fit to travel by the relevant live export authority.

### **B. New knowledge**

This situation changed in 2002 when the cause of inappetence in export livestock was identified through privately-funded research.

This discovery was disclosed to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2002 in confidence. The reasons for shy feeding were comprehensively explained in the submitted report *'Inappetence in Export Livestock Australia and New Zealand'* – April 2002.

Later, the same research findings were made available to MLA/Livecorp.

It was expected that, after the breakthrough was disclosed, both organisations would evaluate, and then implement the research findings.

However, since that time neither agency has publicly acknowledged or officially acted upon this new information,

### **C. Welfare implications**

Since preventable harm is a welfare issue, the Government was duty-bound to undertake an appraisal of work that signaled a reduction in the incidence of shy feeding in the live export trade.

This obligation needs to be discharged; - by either finding the concept to be true, or by rejecting it as being false.

Doing nothing represents a neglect of the duty of care to exported animals that is a key part of government.

If the inappetence study is correct in its conclusions, the failure to act has allowed many sub-clinically ill animals to be placed needlessly at risk.

In particular, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service has; -

1. failed to act to identify those animals unfit to endure the sea voyage
2. neglected to ensure that the shipboard environment is not injurious to the health of these animals.

1. The Australian Government's position statement on the export of livestock requires that animals be assessed for fitness to undertake the proposed journey (2).

This assessment must be based upon the available scientific evidence. Even if that evidence comes from private research.

→ Identification of animals likely to be at risk during the export process can be done simply and cheaply prior to loading.

2. Animals are still being placed at risk in potentially lethal conditions on board live export ships. The risk was explained to those responsible for ensuring welfare and health standards, but no official action to counter this threat is publicly noticeable.

→ Amelioration of the harmful conditions within animal housing can be readily achieved, and is not expensive.

Morally and legally, AQIS is in breach of its duty to ensure that all export animals are fit to undertake a sea voyage.

In 2011, the Senate is again inquiring into the welfare of animals exported from Australia.

Inexplicably, the central issue is the failure of those responsible to take the necessary steps to protect the health and welfare of all exported animals.

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(1) Report of the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare ; '*Export of live sheep from Australia*', 20 June 1985.

(2) Australian Position Statement on the Export of Livestock - November 2006