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Senate Standing Committees on Rural
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15 July, 2011

Senate inquiry: *Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets* Senate inquiry – submission by Humane Society International (HSI)

To whom it may concern:

Humane Society International (HSI), on behalf of our 40,000 Australian supporters, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Rural Affairs and Transport (the Committees) and takes this opportunity to express our disappointment with the July 6 decision of Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Joe Ludwig, (The Minister), in repealing the ban on export of Australian cattle to Indonesia, and reiterate our support for the ban and to Australia working towards an end date for all live animal exports.

HSI Australia has a long-term interest and concern for the live trade from Australia, and about the issue of “humane slaughter” in the region generally. We have in the past for example, in cooperation with our US office, the University of Bristol and the Indonesian Government, run a three year ‘humane slaughter’ training program at abattoirs in Bali and Java, highlighting the fact that effective humane slaughter practices actually increases the economic value of the product to the community.

The immense public outcry resulting from the ABC’s Four Corners Program (May 2011) which exposed the severe animal cruelty being inflicted on Australian cattle in Indonesian abattoirs, along with the recent information that both the Minister as well as industry bodies, LiveCorp and Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) had a long term knowledge of the inhumane treatment of Australian cattle in Indonesia highlights that a complete review of Australia’s animal welfare policies, frameworks and standards is long overdue and urgently needed, as is the establishment of an Australian Animal Welfare Council, to ensure that Australia is a world leader in animal welfare policy and practice into the future.

Specific areas relating to this inquiry are addressed and our recommendations are provided in further detail below:

- **HSI calls for an immediate ban of live trade to Indonesia**

The issues arising from RSPCA/Animals Australia's expose clearly demonstrate that whilst the live cattle export to Indonesia is a key player in Australia's livestock industry it has led to undisputed confirmation that the industry is in need of a review.

Over the past decade, Australia has exported 4.6 million cattle to Indonesia, Australia's cattle export industry's biggest trade partner. At the beginning of 2011, Animals Australia visited abattoirs in four Indonesian cities to document the treatment and slaughter of Australian cattle in Indonesian abattoirs, whilst RSPCA Australia conducted a scientific assessment of the investigation. Evidence showed horrific results; every slaughter facility breached international animal welfare guidelines, cattle subjected to torture such as eye gouging, kicking, tail twisting and breaking, leg breaking, and arduous and prolonged killings. Evidence from the investigation in Indonesia also showed that that Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and Livecorp have directly contributed to the inhumane treatment of Australia cattle in Indonesia.

As stated earlier, HSI echoes the disappointment from the wider Australian community in the recent premature decision by the Minister to reopen the export of Australian cattle to Indonesia. While we acknowledge the Minister is seeking improvements in the identification of Australian cattle in the supply chain and is seeking abattoirs which will be receiving Australian cattle to comply with international OIE standards, we note that such standards are well below those imposed on Australian abattoirs. Allowing Australian cattle to be slaughtered without the mandatory requirement for the animal to be stunned first is totally unacceptable, not only to HSI and our many supporters, but to the wider Australian public, farming community, veterinary associations and even Federal Members of Parliament.

HSI notes that the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party Caucus voted on the 14 June 2011 for a number of changes to be implemented before the reopening of live trade with Indonesia was considered. The Resolution from that meeting stated:

“Caucus calls for the immediate cessation of live cattle exports to Indonesia until all slaughter houses receiving Australian cattle comply with international OIE standards, encouraging the use of stunning and requiring ongoing independent monitoring.”
(June 14, 2011 Federal Parliamentary Labor Party Caucus)

Whilst the Minister promises OIE standards will be met, they are no longer the utmost in representing animal welfare standards. Many countries go above and beyond the OIE. Last month, the Dutch parliament voted to ban ritual slaughter of animals. The law said religious groups could continue ritual slaughter if they proved it was no more painful than stunning, but it was not clear how to do this. Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland ban ritual slaughter.¹

World leading expert in animal behaviour, Professor Temple Grandin, has reported that research agrees that throat-cutting without stunning does not induce instantaneous unconsciousness². Ritual slaughter remains to submit animals to some level of cruelty and is inhumane.

Nonetheless, if the government remains committed to the long-term future of the industry, HSI strongly recommends that the highest standards for animal welfare be implemented.

¹ Sekularac, I., 2011, Dutch vote to ban religious slaughter of animals, June 28, Reuters, available online at <http://reut.rs/jweLOe>

² Grandin, T. and Smith, G.C., 2004, Animal Welfare and Humane Slaughter, Department of Animal Sciences, Colorado State University, available online at <http://bit.ly/7zu1ZE>

This must include a guarantee that slaughter without stunning (in most cases, ritual slaughter) will not occur. Further, should the government chose to support the continuation of the industry, the MLA must be forced to comply with stricter standards and meet commitments made, including those already stated³.

To add, last year the Indonesian government introduced a weight limit of 350 kilograms per animal to encourage the need for Australian cattle to stay in Indonesian feedlots and stimulate a local feedlot industry. Extending time cattle spend in feedlots extends the time of discomfort for animals. Standards should impose the least amount of time necessary for cattle kept in feedlots. Animal welfare should certainly not be compromised over competing markets.

As the Terms of Reference require, in investigating and reporting on the domestic economic impact of the live export trade within Australia, HSI further requests that the Committee correspondingly explore available or potential alternatives for employment should the industry play a less significant role in domestic economies.

- **HSI supports the end to *all* live export**

Over 60 billion farm animals are reared for food every year worldwide. Most are transported for slaughter, often over long distances within and between countries, on unnecessary journeys taking days, weeks or even months. This massive movement of live animals means that at any given moment, more animals are traveling around the world than people.

Transportation is completely unnatural for animals. Forms of suffering caused by transport include hunger, thirst, discomfort, pain, frustration, fear, disease and distress. Suffering increases directly with the length of journey endured. The issue of whether live long distance transport of animals, only to be slaughtered at the journey's end, is justified at all when they could be slaughtered at one of the nearest abattoirs deserves much more attention.

Please refer to the report, *Beyond Cruelty, Beyond Reason: Long distance transport and welfare of farm animals* (See attachment, or online at <http://bit.ly/iYw5eb>), which HSI was involved in as part of a global initiative to end the long distance transport of animals.

HSI supports the reopening of abattoirs in Northern Australia that would not only ensure Australian jobs, but would also prevent the unnecessary discomfort and stress on animals being shipped overseas. We also see such a process as an opportunity for Australia to train international abattoir workers in administering far greater animal welfare standards, which can then be administered in abattoirs around the world.

While we understand there are difficulties in some countries in regards to the availability of refrigeration, therefore currently making calls for the slaughter of farm animals in Australian abattoirs and the export of frozen products unacceptable to some, HSI would recommend industry and the Australian Government investigate programs that could see the provision and installation of community refrigeration services in identified regions.

Accordingly, HSI supports the passage of the Live Animal Export (Slaughter) Prohibition Bill 2011 [No.2] and the Live Animal Export Restriction and Prohibition Bill 2011 [No. 2] which would see an end date for all live animal exports within 3 years.

³ Meat and Livestock Australia, 2011, Important facts about livestock exports to Indonesia, available online at <http://bit.ly/IHVIR2>

- **HSI calls for a review of Australia's animal welfare policies, frameworks and standards**

HSI is in strong support of Professor Clive Phillips' (Foundation Chair of Animal Welfare, Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics, University of Queensland) proposal for an *Australian Animal Welfare Council* to provide accurate independent advice on animal welfare matters that are in the National interest. Please see the attached document for further details of this proposal.

The recent and overwhelming public concern about live export, which is a federal responsibility, highlights the need for a national agency to address animal welfare issues. In light of the recent situation of the treatment of Australian cattle exported to Indonesia, and the recent reporting of the lack of credible research into slaughter of such cattle in Indonesia, HSI is supporting calls for the establishment of an *Australian Animal Welfare Council*, to be an independent body to manage animal welfare funding and provide accurate independent advice to Government on animal welfare matters affecting the national interest.

The need for this review, and subsequent establishment of an *Australian Animal Welfare Council*, is long overdue and urgently warranted. Australia has a tremendous opportunity to become a world leader in animal welfare policy and practice now and into the future.

Please see the *Case for an Australian Animal Welfare Council* (attached) for further details.

As one of the leading animal welfare organisations in Australia, HSI welcomes any opportunity the government requires in assisting this inquiry and its resolutions.

HSI appreciates the opportunity to provide comment for the inquiry into Animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets and would be happy to provide further information on any of the points outlined above if required.

Yours Sincerely,

Verna Simpson
Director
Humane Society International

[Attachment]

The case for an *Australian Animal Welfare Council*

Recent events involving the welfare of Australian cattle in Indonesia, and the public's overwhelming response and concern over this issue have brought animal welfare to the forefront of decision making. In light of this situation, and the recent reporting of the lack of credible research into slaughter of Australian cattle in Indonesia, it is clear that Australia needs a Non-Departmental Public Body to provide accurate independent advice on animal welfare matters. Such a body was very effective in the United Kingdom in the form of the Farm Animal Welfare Council, until recent government cuts necessitated a down-regulation of its role. It was able to present an informed opinion that was independent of industry and animal advocacy interests on the key animal welfare issues of the day. In Australia the livestock industries are of much greater relative importance than in the UK and such a body is essential to inform government, industry and the public on animal welfare matters. It would consult widely and receive written and verbal information from interested parties, before issuing reports to government for consideration. State governments already have the Animal Welfare Advisory Committees, which investigate regional issues, but the recent concern about live export, which is a federal animal welfare responsibility, highlights the need for a national agency to address animal welfare issues. In addition, the investigations by several state AWACs into similar animal welfare issues is wasteful of experts' time and taxpayers' money.

The membership of an Australian Animal Welfare Council should include a team of experts with a knowledge and experience of animal welfare science and practice, veterinary medicine, livestock production, enforcement, retailing and consumer interests and a lay person. It is recommended that the Council would focus on farm animals, but would have the power to investigate other animal uses when the need arises, for example laboratory animals.

The Council would aim to bring about effective and rational improvement in animal welfare through eliminating avoidable suffering, implementation of new knowledge about animal responses to management practices and reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of alternatives to current practices. Specific recommendations on changes in legislation would be an essential part of the Council's function.

The Council would bring together the activities of a number of disparate government and other bodies that have animal welfare as a key component of their activities, The Live Export Standards Advisory Group, The state Animal Welfare Advisory Committees, The Australian Animal Welfare Strategy, the NHMRC Animal Welfare Committee, the National Animal Welfare RD&E Strategy. The advantages in terms of independence, efficiency and clarity of operation are significant. The Council would also provide a more effective interface with relevant bodies overseas, such as the Office Internationale des Épizooties (OIE, World Animal Health Organisation) and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

The Council would include Standing Committees for the major animal groupings that are tasked with keeping a watching brief on topical welfare threats to industry and identify experts able to respond rapidly to emerging threats. Such a group would have anticipated the threat to the northern cattle live export trade, for example, or the sheep trade to the Middle East.

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