

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;
- i) expenditure and efforts on marketing and promoting live export to Australian producers;
- ii) ongoing monitoring of the subscription to, and practise of, animal welfare standards in all live export market countries;
- iii) actions to improve animal welfare outcomes in all other live export market countries and the evidence base for these actions.

I believe that over a number of years MLA has worked and succeeded to improve the welfare of Australian animals that are exported overseas. However this has proved to be not enough. A great deal of money has been paid by producers via levies to the likes of MLA and a good deal of faith was placed in them that these levies would go towards improving our industry. Many beef producers, especially in remote areas are inclined to do what they do best - produce beef. You work 60+ hours a week, are 100kms from your nearest business centre, have inadequate services which many people in metropolitan areas take for granted and a government who doesn't understand what it is that you do. Times are changing and as a new generation of cattle producers come through I think we as producers need to take more responsibility in safeguarding our industry. We cannot rely solely on a bunch of suits in an office 1000kms away to make the right decisions for our future. I do believe that the likes of MLA have a role to play within the industry and are working hard to make significant changes. I believe though for MLA to gain producers trust changes need to be made. Instead of roles being appointed by MLA officials, we as producers should be entitled to elect who we think has the most experience and will service our industry in the best possible way. I also think that a % of all levies paid (especially on Nth QLD, NT and WA cattle) should go specifically towards improving animal welfare. This fund could be handled jointly by MLA, the federal government and a well respected animal rights organisation such as the RSPCA.

As for efficiency of the government I firmly believe that before a minister is given a portfolio, they need to have had some background in that particular field. Being born in a remote area, doesn't qualify you to run a portfolio efficiently. If producers were supposed to have known what was going on in the likes of Indonesian abattoirs, then our government officials should have known as well.

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.

Australian cattle producers are already required to NLIS tag their cattle which enables traceability of domestic cattle through to slaughter. If we were able to implement this system in the likes of Indonesia we could trace our exported cattle to slaughter as well. It is up to the importing country though to implement this system so as not to dictate. As long as the cattle are being treated correctly and we are **ensuring** they are going to abattoirs who are complying with the OIE that is all that really matters. Monitoring by animal welfare organizations such as the RSPCA would be encouraged as all producers want their livestock treated humanely. There will always be risks involved in any industry but if animal welfare organizations worked with primary producers instead of against we could ensure together that our animals are treated humanely and our industry is the best in the world.

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;
- b)** Impact and role of the industry on local livestock production and prices;
- c)** Impact on the processing of live stock within Australia.

If Live Trade in Australia were to cease the economic impact would be tremendous to Northern Australia. Over time the flow on effect will filter throughout the whole of Australia, starting first with cattle producers who are involved in the domestic market. The cattle that would have once been sold through live export channels will flood the domestic markets. More product equals less demand, therefore reduced prices. Reduced prices means less dollars in the pocket and therefore less you are going to be able to spend in other industries. These cattle will also spend days on trucks getting to the domestic sales. More trucks on roads means the road conditions will deteriorate dramatically which will effectively lead to more accidents/fatalities.

Indigenous employment will be significantly effected as will many families who work on the remote cattle stations. Besides being very good at what they do and extremely hard workers, many staff who are employed in the remote areas have little qualifications to work in a different field.

Whilst processing the animals domestically would be ideal, in order to sell a product a business needs to fit within the market and sell the product your customer requires. Indonesia and many of the other countries that Australia currently exports to is not capable financially or economically to accept boxed meat. They have very little refrigeration and most meat is sold through wet markets. If Australia were to cease live export trade we would effectively lose these customers.

3. Other related matters.

After seeing snippets of the ABC Four Corners program that was aired, I was totally disgusted and shocked at what was filmed. After speaking to family and telephoning friends that are based in the Northern Territory, common sense kicked in and I made a point of finding out as much information as I could. I studied the reactions of people via social

networks such as Facebook and found that the people who had the most to say about it and were sending around petitions to 'Ban Live Export' had never before been involved with the cattle industry and the only contact most would have had with a 'Cow' is the 'Rib Fillet' they ate the night before at their local restaurant. The media had once again only shown one side of the story and had hit their mark by playing on the hearts of every animal loving Australian, whilst portraying graziers to be the devils sporn. I was equally shocked to find out that our government put an overnight freeze on live cattle exports without first taking into consideration what this would do to regional Australia. As with most things – we learnt the hard way.

No cattle producer who watched the Four Corners program condoned the treatment of the animals they saw in the footage. Every beef producer I know works hard to ensure their cattle are well looked after. You would go out of business very quickly if you didn't have your animals welfare in mind at all times.

The live export trade is extremely important to the whole of Australia. The world is in need of food and we as a country are able to provide it. Who are we to deny a third world country protein? We as an industry though must be responsible for ensuring that we are never put in this sort of position again. I believe that we as an industry also need to educate our fellow Australians so as to stand united not against one another.

Signed:	Patricia Gretton
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