

2011 Senate Inquiry – Improvements in animal welfare for Australian live exports for inquiry and report by the Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee

From Mr Jim and Mrs Pam McGregor, – grass and beef farmers in the Great Southern area of Western Australia

We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

Term of Reference 1 – We make the following points:

- Much has been achieved in improving animal welfare standards in Australia's live export markets BUT dealing with foreign countries with long-standing traditions, customs and cultures with the aim of changing these to meet our standards will never happen quickly, perhaps if at all.
- Given that many of the Australian bred animals are not owned by Australians at the point of slaughter, how much control over that process is our right?
- Would we be happy to have countries from which we import food investigate how that product is handled in Australia?
- We understand that much of the food we import from overseas is not subject to the same regulatory testing as our domestically grown food produce has to comply with. Is the ban placed on live exports, now lifted, not a double standard issue?

Term of Reference 2 – We make the following points:

- The impact on regional and remote employment in the time from Minister Ludwig imposing the ban and then lifting it has been profound enough for the Prime Minister to allocate substantial funds through Centrelink. However, we understand that these funds will be very difficult for those affected to access so in some ways that funding offer is hollow.
- We understand that viable processing abattoirs across northern Australia would be difficult to maintain because mustering is not possible for 12 months of the year due to seasonal conditions.
- Transporting costs to southern abattoirs or to finishing facilities is cost prohibitive for the northern beef industry and would certainly have a major impact on the southern beef industry markets.
- The overall impact of trying to process all the northern beef cattle in Australia will be negative, to say nothing of the time it would take (years) to build up facilities and markets for processed red meat. It has to be remembered that many of our overseas customers have wet markets, in part because of the aforesaid traditions, customs and cultures, and in part because there's no or very little home refrigeration available.

Term of Reference 3 – We make the following points:

- The programme which started this situation on Four Corners was, we understand, presented to the ABC by Animals Australia. If this is the case, did the ABC check on the veracity of the footage they put to air? Were they aware that the agenda of Animals Australia is, we understand, to stop all animal production for human consumption, turning all humans into vegans?

- We are aware of at least one approach to the ABC requesting equal time to show the other side of what was aired on 230th May – as yet not actioned by the ABC. One does wonder why not!
- Does the Australian Federal Government and Government Departments have protocols in place to deal with the sort of emotive propaganda from pressure groups? These groups can cleverly manipulate public opinion on a massive scale through media outlets – radio, television and perhaps especially the internet. If there are such protocols in place, they were clearly inadequate to avoid the bad, knee-jerk reaction to the Four Corners programme on 30th May 2011 by Minister Ludwig which adversely affected so many Australians whose servants Members of Parliament and their departments are. Serious consideration needs to be given urgently to either developing such protocols or reviewing any existing ones.
- Have MLA had access to appropriate diplomatic support from Canberra in their efforts to upgrade slaughter standards in Indonesia? If not, why? It must be remembered that MLA is funded by red meat producers and the tax payers of Australia through the Federal Government.
- There seems to be in some circles a negative attitude to the red meat industry (sheep, cattle and goats) because of the perception that the methane they “belch” out is contributing to global warming/climate change, and that Australians would help ‘save the planet’ by taking ‘red meat off the menu’. There were massive herds of ruminants and grazing animals living in the great grasslands of the world in a perfectly sustainable system that lasted for thousands of years. The health of the grasslands depended on the grazing animals – their methane output then was not a problem nor is it now, except in the minds of some mis-informed scientists. Methane is not a problem in our atmosphere, does not contribute to global warming and is recycled into CO₂ and H₂O in relatively short periods of time. If we take away the reason for farmers keeping livestock by denying them markets, we will undoubtedly hasten the demise of the world as we know it. We suggest it is important for anyone interested in the future of our planet to access Allan Savory’s website www.savoryinstitute.com/ending-global-climate-change/
- We must remember that the beef industry and producers are subject to rigorous market forces. Part of the reason beef prices rose in Western Australia last spring was the competition from Turkey. These cattle were shipped live to Turkey to be fattened and processed there. The other part was the demand from the Eastern States of Australia which were enjoying their best season for years. By denying beef producers access to these markets (there was much unjustified opposition to the movement east as well) many more beef farmers would have opted out of the industry or sustained another year of loss, or at worst would have had to destroy animals in the paddocks because of lack of feed due to the drought in WA.
- There is no reason why live shipping should not continue providing the standards being used and advocated are practiced.
- We generally enjoy a high standard of living in Australia partly because of the cheap goods we import from Asia. We cannot expect to export to these countries product processed here in Australia with our high cost structure at a price they can afford. In addition, there’s not a demand for chilled processed beef – the market in Indonesia is generally the wet market because of the aforesaid tradition, customs and cultures as well as the lack of home refrigeration.