

Twenty-six years ago a Senate Committee on animal welfare concluded that if the future of the live export trade was to be determined on animal welfare grounds alone, then it should end.

That Senate Committee did not act on its ethical instincts. As a result, 160 million animals have been exported to countries where laws do not protect them from cruelty and 2.5 million have died on ships.

This June, that far-reaching decision led to Australians being confronted – for the umpteenth time – with the shocking cruelty to which the live trade exposes animals.

Like many Australians, I could barely watch the footage of cattle being tortured in Indonesian slaughterhouses, screened on *Four Corners* and leading to the suspension of live trade to that country in June 2011. The sight of grown beasts shivering with terror as they watched their fellow beasts being slaughtered with the most abject cruelty, have been burned into my mind, and into the minds of many other Australians.

Based on evidence that the industry is incapable of raising animal welfare standards in its export markets to an acceptable level, and that Australia cannot ensure the wellbeing of our animals from the moment they leave our shores, I was distressed when one month later the Government announced that the trade was being resumed. It is my firm belief that this will amount to a continuation of the cruelty that we have seen on *Four Corners*.

It is my sincere hope that this Senate Committee, unlike its predecessor, will consider the terrible suffering of animals in the live trade when it makes its decisions.

1. 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:

Meat and Livestock Australia, which represents 47,000 cattle and sheep farmers, lot feeders and other parts of the meat production industry, and which receives a considerable amount of taxpayer funding, argues that Australian involvement improves animal welfare standards in importing countries, and that live exports should continue for this reason. Put differently: Australia should supply live animals for Indonesian abattoir workers to slaughter, so that in slaughtering them the workers can learn to adapt to Australian standards.

This goal is not only inhumane but has been proven to be unachievable.

Reports available on MLA's website show that the industry first recognised the need to improve the treatment of exported livestock in 2000, after it emerged that Australian beef was being discounted by up to 30 per cent because of chemical changes associated with stress during the slaughter process. (*Cattle welfare ignored as meat body spends big on marketing, The Australian, June 16*)

MLA records also show that industry has known about systemic cruelty to cattle in Indonesia for at least a year before the *Four Corners* program was screened. A report commissioned by MLA and LiveCorp and handed to them early in 2010, extensively documents every aspect of the abuse revealed by *Four Corners*. It makes references to the shortcomings of the Australian-made restraining boxes, warns about the non-compliance with World Organisation for Animal Health standards, and says only four abattoirs in Indonesia have stun guns. It includes accounts of slaughtering fully conscious animals, which suffered protracted, agonising deaths.

http://www.daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1886477/indonesia.pdf

Yet in a statement following the public outcry after *Four Corners*, MLA chairman Don Heatley said: "If this disgusting cruelty had been witnessed by any Australian industry representative before now, action would immediately have been triggered to bring it to a halt."

The reality is that the industry has failed to improve animal welfare conditions in Indonesian abattoirs. In response to questions by the *SMH*, it said: "MLA, the

livestock industry and government do not have the power to enact legislated animal welfare standards in Indonesia. We have, however, worked with Indonesian operators to provide training and infrastructure to make animal welfare improvements."(*Meat industry knew of Indonesian cruelty last year, Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 June 2011.)

Judging by footage taken by Animals Australia and screened on *Four Corners*, these improvements have not been successful.

The reason is partly that no country or organisation can enforce animal welfare conditions in another country. As Ruth Hatten, legal counsel at *Voiceless*, writes: "...the longstanding classification in law of animals as property plays a big role in the level of control that Australia has over animals it exports overseas. Once our animals have been sold and delivered to an importing country, they are subject to the customs and practices of that country. Herein lies a big part of the problem - none of the countries that Australia exports animals to have adequate animal protection laws....Indonesia passed a Farm and Animal Welfare law at least 18 months ago but without regulations providing sanctions, there are no penalties if the law is breached."

The Australian Government resumed live export to accredited abattoirs in Indonesia that comply with OIE standards. Hatten writes: "These (unenforceable) standards do not provide the same level of protection as the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock and, most importantly, do not require pre-stunning, an inherent problem with the inhumane practices seen on *Four Corners*."

For Australia to legislate against cruelty in its own abattoirs, while at the same time exporting animals to countries which have no enforceable laws guarding against abattoir cruelty, is hypocritical to say the least. If cruelty to animals is not acceptable to us, it should not be acceptable to us anywhere, and we certainly should not be shipping animals to countries where we know that they will suffer prolonged, painful deaths.

The best way to convey the message that Australians do not tolerate cruelty to animals in importing countries, is not to send animals there.

That the MLA was more concerned with polishing its public image than with improving animal welfare standards, is irrefutable. *The Australian's* Amos Aikman (*Cattle welfare ignored as meat body spends big on marketing*, June 16 2011) writes that, according to company documents, "MLA planned to spend seven times as much on marketing as on improving cattle welfare this year, despite receiving repeated reports over the past decade that animals exported to Indonesia were being abused".

MLA planned to spend \$3.4 million on improving animal welfare in 2010-11 compared with \$23m on marketing beef exports, out of total expected earnings of \$173m, Aikman points out.

The live trade industry is adept at masking its hypocrisy and double standards with emotional appeals for sympathy with the economic hardship that an end to the trade would mean to farmers. For example, if the industry were to be believed, the suspension had caused irreparable damage to the relationship between Australia and Indonesia. After the suspension was lifted, West Australian Agriculture Minister Terry Redman said that the government could have worked with industry "to get the same result without the damage done to the relationship to Indonesia". (*Stunning not mandatory and activists unhappy about boxes*, *The Australian*, July 8 2011)

However, the very next day Indonesia's Minister for Coordinating the Economy, Hatta Rajasa, denied that the suspension had caused a rupture in ties. "The bilateral relationship of two countries has ups and downs, just like a love story," he said. (*Indonesia promises better abattoirs*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 9-10)

Industry double standards and hypocrisy were clear when in January 2011 Agriculture Minister, Joe Ludwig, approached the Australian Livestock Exporters Council to ask it to fix animal welfare problems in the trade ("[PM insists she can't move faster on live exports](#)", July 5), and was told that a comprehensive solution could take five years. Yet when in June the trade was suspended, the same industry put incredible pressure on the government to reopen it, arguing that the animal welfare issues could be fixed in days.

The shameless manipulation and double standards of this industry and its political supporters leave a bitter taste in the mouth of anyone who has followed the unfolding of the events following *Four Corners*.

Given that the MLA did spend a small portion of its budget on improving animal welfare conditions in Indonesia, it is enlightening to consider what that funding was used for.

MLA has frequently claimed that its training programmes at Indonesian abattoirs have improved animal welfare standards there, and that they will continue to do so in future. It blames the dismal outcome of these efforts on high staff turnover at the abattoirs. Yet it is not clear how it plans to ensure a different outcome in future.

Industry presence in Indonesian abattoirs seems to have had so little effect on workers' attitude to cruelty that it is difficult to see any positive outcome to future training efforts. In an interview with *The Age* (*It's all about the evidence, says world-changer White*, June 9) Animals Australia's Lyn White says that no effort was made to prevent her filming the abattoir scenes. "Because they have had Australian livestock industry representatives there on a consistent basis, they were in no way fearful."

MLA has also contributed to animal welfare in Indonesia through the development and instalment of the Mark 1 restraint box. About 100 of these are used in abattoirs across Indonesia, despite the fact that, on the evidence of the RSPCA and internal MLA reports, they perpetuate painful slaughter practices, despite the fact that they would be illegal in Australia, and despite the Australian Veterinarians Association having called for a ban of the boxes.

The MLA is now up to Mark 4 boxes, but the Mark 1 boxes are still in use, and under the government's new standards they have not been banned.

It is difficult to imagine how the industry could ever have imagined that this equipment would ensure humane slaughter, and even more confounding to grasp how it and the government can continue to tolerate its use.

That the MLA could have spent publicly subsidised research and development funding on equipment that has been universally condemned as cruel, also raises serious questions about both the content and transparency of its research and development activities. Clearly, the MLA's research and development activities should be scrutinized on an ongoing basis.

As a taxpayer, I am disgusted that the fruits of my labour have helped to finance the painful deaths that thousands of animals have suffered as a result of Industry research and development programmes. The thought that my taxes will continue to fund cruelty to animals now that the live trade has been allowed to resume, is abhorrent to me.

I also have grave concerns over the government allowing this industry to continue to police itself. Under the new standards that exporters have to meet to be able to sell live cattle to Indonesia, agriculture companies will have to prove they can track their cattle from Australia's shores to Indonesia abattoirs, which will have to be audited by independent commercial audit firms. Yet the cost of hiring these "independent" firms will be shared between exporters and importers. Industry-funded audits lack credibility; it is difficult to believe that transparency can be ensured without access to abattoirs for animal welfare groups and media.

The live export industry and its peak body, the MLA, clearly cannot be trusted with the welfare of animals, or to tell the truth to the Australian public. In the words of Senator Andrew Wilkie, who in June introduced his Bill to phase out live exports over three years: "Meat and Livestock Australia has been fleecing producers for years, raking in enormous fees off the back of the lie it was looking after the interests of the Australian live animal export industry and the beasts it deals with, only to be busted as an irresponsible, incompetent, dishonest and uncaring bunch of cowboys."

<http://www.rspca.org.au/assets/files/Campaigns/171O1544.pdf>

The truth is, however, that live exports could not have come into being, nor could it have been allowed to flourish, without the support of successive Australian

governments, who have time and again turned a blind eye to reports of abject cruelty to animals in the trade. There have been numerous reports of cruelty to animals shipped to the Middle East, and conditions at abattoirs in Egypt led to a temporary suspension of live trade to that country. The welfare of sheep and cattle aboard ships has also been in the headlines over the years – over 2.5 million animals have died on route since the 1980s.

According to Lyn White, Animals Australia made the decision to go to the media rather than the government with its Indonesian footage because it believed that Agricultural Minister Joe Ludwig would be as unwilling to act decisively as he was last November, when he was presented with evidence of the brutal treatment of Australian sheep in Kuwait.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard took weeks to respond to the latest evidence of cruelty in the live trade, and when she did, it was to ensure the industry that it had “a bright future” once animal welfare issues had been addressed. Nine Labour backbenchers expressed grave concern over the resumption of live trade to Indonesia because the new conditions did not require stunning and because responsibility for independent audits of supply-chains would be in the hands of industry, who they held responsible for the cruelty. Yet when Mr Andrew Willkie asked Ms Gillard to allow a conscience vote on the live exports Bills currently before Parliament, she refused.

It is scandalous that our elected representatives, like their predecessors, allow, fund and morally support an industry built on shocking cruelty and which, as a result of this support, has grown in size to generate large, unethical profits. Clearly profit is the sole reason why live exports have been allowed to expand and flourish over the past decades, and clearly governments should have sought other ways to develop areas from which export animals are sourced.

2. The domestic economic impact of the live export trade within Australia

In a recent interview with ABC Radio, Jim Anderton, the New Zealand Agriculture

Minister responsible for phasing out the live trade in that country, in 2002 (sheep) and 2007 (beef) gave two compelling economic reasons for following this course of action. In the first place, we live in a global village where consumers are increasingly concerned about animal welfare issues. A country that gains a reputation “for playing loose and fast with animal welfare” , is likely sooner or later to find itself at the receiving end of consumer boycotts.

(<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/saturdayextra/stories/2011/3245820.htm>)

This view was echoed by The Australian Meat Industry Council , whose spokesman Tom Maguire recently said that the meat industry's reputation was being hurt by the atrocities, with public confidence in the beef industry waning.

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/cattle-abuse-known-in-2000-20110606-1fpb0.html>

Beef consumption within Australia has reportedly decreased by 15-20% in the weeks after the Indonesian footage was screened.

Mr Anderton also pointed out that adding value to what in economic terms is a commodity, is considerably more lucrative than exporting “raw” product.

Various independent reports have concluded that the live export industry has led to the closure of meat processing works in the NT. In 2010, a report commissioned by Australia's leading meat processors – Teys Bros, Swift Australia and Nippon Meat Packers Australia – found that live exports cause Australian job losses and undermine the beef processing industry as well as Australian chilled beef exports.

Farmers suffering economic hardship as a result of the suspension of the trade have made for emotional footage. Yet thousands of jobs were lost, and continue to be lost, thanks to the live trade.

The industry has made dire predictions of what would happen if live exports were to be banned. According to the 2006 Hassall Report, produced by a group affiliated with the live export industry, it provides employment for 13,000 people.

Yet the 2000 Heilbron Report, commissioned by the Australian Meat Processor Corporation Limited and undertaken by SG Heilbron Pty Ltd, says that the trade employs just over 3000 people in jobs which exist because of the live animal trade. All other jobs claimed by the industry would exist regardless of the continuation of live export. The Heilbron report estimates that live exports costs some \$1.7 billion in lost GDP; around \$280 million in household income and about 12,000 jobs – mostly in regional areas.

<http://www.wspa.org.au/wspaswork/liveexport/default.aspx>

When introducing his Bill to phase out the live trade to Parliament, Senator Andrew Wilkie said in this regard that “...the argument is ridiculous that banning live cattle exports to Indonesia will somehow destroy the beef industry, because the direct and indirect value of the red meat industry in Australia is something in the order of \$17 billion dollars and employs some 55,000 workers. By comparison the live export trade comes in at about \$1 billion and 10,000 workers. In other words, ending the live export trade will have a marginal effect, even more so when the workers shift to the processed meat sector.”

But ultimately, the cruelty of live exports goes beyond economic concerns. To quote *Voiceless* founder, Brian Sherman: “The arguments used to sustain unconscionable practices in animal agribusiness invariably place economic concerns above ethics. But the paramount consideration, the one that appeals to our better natures, must surely be the moral argument invoked by *Four Corners*, whose reporter mused that we may one day look at our treatment of animals the same way we now view the slave trade; that is, with astonishment, shame and horror.”

The live export trade is morally indefensible. There is no economic reason on earth that can justify Australia being party to the cruelty of this trade, which has repeatedly been exposed. That the economy of the south of the US was dependent on slavery

was not a good reason to support the continuation of slavery. That money earned by children working in mines in the 19th century helped poor families survive was not, ultimately, an argument in favour of the exploitation of child labour. The Northern Territory will survive the short-term loss of a market – just as the cotton plantations survived the loss of their slaves and the mine owners the loss of their child labour.

It is impossible for Australia to guarantee freedom from cruelty for cattle sent to Indonesia, or indeed for any animals sent for overseas slaughter. It is not even possible to know what goes on inside Indonesian abattoirs. We have been relying on animal welfare groups and the media to keep us informed, but after *Four Corners* it is difficult to see how this will continue. Not even the Australian Minister for Agriculture was allowed to enter an Indonesian abattoir during his recent visit to that country, and the fact that no other mainstream media outlet has conducted an investigation, is indicative of the obstacles in the way of doing so. The new “independent audits” once again puts animal welfare in the hands of an industry which has proven many times over that it cares nothing for the suffering of animals.

One thing is certain: Australians can ever again claim that they did not know. Neither can cattle farmers. And neither can the government and other political parties.

The Greens and Mr Wilkie and Senator Xenophon’s Bills will be voted on soon. The Prime Minister has turned down Mr Andrew Wilkie’s request to allow a conscience vote. Yet members who vote against the Bills do not vote in my name.