

To whom it May concern

Like many Australians, I was shocked to the core by the exposé of the cruel conditions to which Australian cattle are subjected in Indonesian abattoirs. I was elated when the Government suspended the trade, and devastated when, under Industry pressure, it reopened it again after less than a month.

I feel that this issue has not been resolved in a satisfactory manner at all, and I continue to feel deeply distressed at the thought of the cruel deaths to which we will once again be sending thousands of animals in Indonesia.

The Government has promised that International Standards will be observed in Indonesia, that animals will be tracked from farm gate to abattoir, and that the whole process will be monitored independently. These promises sound good, but when one looks at them closely, they are empty. "International Standards" were introduced to encourage Third World countries to phase out cruel slaughter practices. They are not on a par with Australian Standards. They don't insist on mandatory stunning, they allow for the cruel practice of rope slaughter, which we saw in Four Corners, and they are not enforceable. No Australian rules or promises are enforceable in a foreign country.

As for tracking and monitoring: ensuring that this in fact happens, is once again up to the live trade industry, which is a distressing thought indeed. Industry bodies, Meat and Livestock Australia and LiveCorp, have known about the cruelty in Indonesian abattoirs for years (a report commissioned by MLA and submitted to it in May last year, mention all the cruel practices exposed by Animals Australia), and did precious little to stop it. They developed and introduced the Mark 1 restraint box, which would be illegal in Australia and which as we have seen, encourages cruel practice (these boxes were not banned when the live trade suspension was lifted), they spent a large portion of their partly publicly-funded budget on PR, and seven times less (this was reported in the media) on animal welfare, and on trade had been suspended, they exerted incredible pressure on the Government to have it reinstated within a few short weeks, when another Industry body, the Australian Livestock Exporters Council, had told Agriculture Minister Mr. Joe Ludwig earlier this year that it would take the Industry at least five years to address animal cruelty

- To allow the Industry to monitor itself, when for years, self-regulation has ignored the cruelty that we saw on Four Corners, is incomprehensible. I have no faith whatsoever that MLA will improve the lot of Australian cattle in Indonesia, or that they will be honest with the Australian public.

If we have to have a live trade – and like many Australians, my strong belief is that this trade cannot be fixed and should be phased out – then we owe it to ourselves as a civilized nation with compassionate values to do everything that we can to ensure that our cattle, who have no choice but to meet the fate to which we subject them, die in the most humane possible way. The only way to do that is to insist on the involvement of the RSPCA and Animals Australia in monitoring the process. Unlike the MLA and other Industry bodies, they have proven that animal welfare is important to them. They have earned the right to be involved, and their involvement would go a long way towards allaying the grave misgivings that so many Australians continue to have about the live trade.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the live trade has become a divisive and destructive force in Australia. This industry has turned a blind eye to the terrible suffering to which it has subjected cattle for many years. When exposed, it tried to discredit Animals Australia and the ABC. When offered compensation, it said that it didn't want financial support, it wanted the trade to be reopened. It held the Australian public to ransom with stories of livelihoods lost and farmers on suicide watch. When the suspension was lifted, it kept the compensation and continued to complain of the hardship that the one-month suspension had caused it. Not once did it accept responsibility, or undertake to try to do better by the animals in future. This debacle has left a bad taste in my mouth. I no longer admire or respect farmers who are in the live trade. They are, after all, the Industry.

This is what the live trade is doing to Australia. Our Government owes it to the farmers, and to us, and to the cattle who will continue to suffer terribly in the live trade, to look into developing the local meat processing industry. We are a civilized nation. There has to be a better way. Yours Sincerely

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- Jennifer Lynne Spencer