

SHIRE OF DERBY/WEST KIMBERLEY

The Shire of Derby/West Kimberley encompasses a significant number of pastoral leases and is essentially cattle country. Other activities within the Shire such as mining, tourism and the Curtin Detention Centre, whilst generating business and boosting the local economy to a certain degree, are not permanent fixtures. It is the enduring beef industry that has sustained the local economy through good times and bad and there are numerous suppliers and contractors attached to the industry who all rely on it in varying degrees for their livelihood - station staff both permanent and casual, stock feed suppliers, musterers, drovers, transport companies, holding yards, port facilities, petrol companies, cattle buyers, auction houses, veterinarians, banks, government agencies, fencing contractors, hardware stores, supermarkets and a host of others.

The recent suspension by the Federal Government to the shipment of live cattle to Indonesia engendered fear and uncertainty throughout the community and we make our submission to highlight some vital points in support of the live cattle industry which seem to have been overlooked.

- Indigenous men and women from our remote areas have worked with cattle and on cattle stations since livestock was first introduced into the region and stations established. These remote area people have few other employment prospects as they do not readily leave their own traditional lands. In the majority of cases, Aboriginal stockmen have learned their craft from their forefathers and have a deep affinity with the cattle industry. Any loss of employment for these people due to the downsizing of operations would be tragic.
- Vast tracts of the pastoral land in the Shire are suited only to the running of stock due to the rough terrain and the very severe climatic conditions.
- Any talk of alternative beef handling and marketing is not an option for the pastoralists in this region. There is no infrastructure (abattoirs) for the alternative handling of beef in the Kimberley or the Pilbara.
- Whilst other markets for our beef are “out there”, it is Indonesia on our doorstep which takes 75% of the Australian live cattle export trade and they rely on wet markets for daily domestic consumption. Average annual value of live exports is around \$1billion minus the costs involved in the acquisition, preparation and transportation of the animals.

- The delay in lifting the restriction on live exports to Indonesia now makes it a certainty that pastoralists have literally “missed the boat” and will take some time to recover. It is apparent that a significant number will not be in any position to pay Shire rates. The Shire relies on those rates to maintain rural roads that are used by tourists, pastoralists, locals and Indigenous communities.
- The window to cash in on tourism is small – sometimes no more than 4 months per year and not even then if stations are inaccessible to vehicles. When this does occur, stations drove their cattle to the nearest accessible pick up point.
- Pastoral properties are central to the Kimberley with large parcels of land that are mainly maintained by pastoralists in regard to weeds, fire control, land management practices etc.
- The majority of pastoral stations in the Kimberley are owned and operated by small family businesses or Indigenous groups that are attempting to create their own business opportunities and have a path for employment for future generations.
- Live cattle export is in the most the only alternative for income for pastoral stations within this area and the trade needs to continue.

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