



Animal Liberation

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SENATE INQUIRY INTO ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS IN AUSTRALIA'S LIVE EXPORT MARKETS

SUBMISSION BY ANIMAL LIBERATION ACT (ALACT)

There is widespread agreement in both Australia and the international community that the live export of animals is inhumane. Every animal protection organisation in the world opposes the export of live animals on the basis of its inherent cruelty. This includes groups such as RSPCA Australia,¹ which otherwise accepts the general use of non-human animals for food and clothing. Even Australian courts have found that the live export of animals is cruel.²

Animal welfare standards within the live export trade

The unnecessary suffering inherent in the live export trade begins before the animals even leave our shores. The transportation of animals to the various ports for shipment can lead to disastrous animal welfare outcomes, as was the case in the Northern Territory in 2008 when a Queensland-based trucking company was charged with failing to provide food and drink and inflicting suffering on 1,500 goats bound for the live export market. Three hundred goats died as a result of the pre-shipment transportation.³

The transportation of Australian farm animals to live export markets overseas also results in serious negative animal welfare outcomes. For example, in 2002 a high number of animals were exported live from Australia, including approximately 6 million sheep and 1 million cattle. Of those animals, over 75,500 sheep died during export, while 2,219 cattle died at sea. In that year 1,808 live-export goats also died at sea. In the following year Australians were appalled by the Cormo Express tragedy, where thousands of sheep were forced to spend over 80 days on board the ship, with 5,691 sheep dying during the journey (or 9.82% of the total number of sheep on board). Again in 2008 35,425 sheep and 987 cattle died at sea. Yet these mortality figures do not give a true representation of the suffering animals endure during transportation to live export markets. In addition to those who die en route, many more animals suffer diseases and conditions such as salmonellosis, infectious keratoconjunctivitis, inanition, and trauma injury. This widespread and endemic suffering happens beyond Australia's borders, and far away from the eyes of the public. It is difficult to imagine that animal industries within Australia would be allowed to get away with such a high incidence of unnecessary animal suffering.

Those animals who do survive the sea journey are offloaded in countries with minimal to no animal handling standards, and then slaughtered in ways that involve an incredibly painful and prolonged death.

The Australian standard for killing food animals is to stun them before slaughter 'in a way that ensures the animals are unconscious and insensible to pain'.⁴ It has long been argued that pre-

¹ www.rspca.org.au/

² *Rural Export & Trading (WA) Pty Ltd v Hahnheuser* [2007] FCA 1535 at para 70; see also *Department of Local Government and Regional Development (WA) v Emanuel Exports et al* (Magistrates Court 8 Feb 2008).

³ www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/03/26/2199669.htm

⁴ *Australian Standard for the hygienic production and transportation of meat and meat products for human consumption*, clause 7.10; available at www.publish.csiro.au/Books/download.cfm?ID=5553

slaughter stunning of food animals cannot be adequately implemented in importing countries. The Australian Government has recently acknowledged this in its new requirements for the live export of cattle to Indonesia.⁵ These requirements insist merely that Indonesian abattoirs comply with World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) slaughter standards. As is well known, OIE standards do **not** include pre-slaughter stunning. Australia should not tolerate a trade that involves lower animal welfare standards than accepted in our own country. Even the Pastoralists and Graziers Association in Western Australia recently pushed for mandatory stunning before slaughter for live export animals.⁶

Industry players such as Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) have themselves admitted that mandatory stunning of animals cannot be successfully implemented in countries such as Indonesia. For example, the difficulties in obtaining either import permits (stun guns are treated as weapons by many importing countries), or approval by the 300+ religious authorities across Indonesia, as well as the limited access to electricity, are factors militating against any realistic implementation of pre-slaughter stunning in that country.⁷

Apart from the inherent cruelty and unnecessary suffering involved in any slaughtering of animals for food, the above reasons alone are enough to mandate the end of the live export of animals from Australia. But there are other inherent problems with the trade.

The best transportation and slaughter standards in the world are worthless if they are not meaningfully enforced. Historically the complexity of the regulatory framework governing the live export trade, and its myriad and disparate responsibilities spread across a large number of parties, has meant that it is difficult to ascribe particular responsibility for problems and to monitor and ensure compliance with requirements. The complexity of the regulatory regime also makes it difficult to identify breaches and impose sanctions.

These features of the trade show little signs of changing, even with the recent upheaval regarding the export of cattle to Indonesia. The new export guidelines implemented after the suspension of the trade was lifted place the onus on exporters to demonstrate they can meet 'supply chain assurances.'⁸ What will happen if they do not meet those assurances, or how often the processes and slaughterhouses will be audited and by whom, or who will check that Australian animals go where they are supposed to go, has not been made clear. Aspects of the recent events in Indonesia do little to inspire confidence in the Australian public that the Government's new framework requirements will be met. There are over 750 slaughterhouses in Indonesia, yet no Australian Government official was able to inspect a single Indonesian abattoir during the recent live export suspension.⁹ And the inhumane cattle slaughter techniques revealed in the recent Four Corners program about live cattle exports to Indonesia¹⁰ are reported to be more widespread in that country than the live export industry has admitted.¹¹ The inability to assure the Australian public that the necessary checks will occur in Indonesia, together with the evidence from similar investigations in other countries by Australian animal protection charities over the past decade, is further evidence that acceptable animal welfare

⁵ www.liveexports.gov.au/

⁶ www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201107/s3263961.htm

⁷ www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201106/s3245271.htm

⁸ www.liveexports.gov.au/

⁹ www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201107/s3263622.htm

¹⁰ www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2011/s3230894.htm

¹¹ www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2011/s3238015.htm

outcomes cannot be guaranteed in Australia's live export markets. If they cannot be guaranteed, then the trade must cease.

Environmental consequences

The live export trade also has a deleterious effect on the environment. While the environmental aspects of the trade are outside the terms of reference of the inquiry, they should nonetheless be considered. There is widespread concern about the impact of live export cattle species (eg *Bos Indicus*) on biodiversity, conservation and natural resource management in the vast areas in which they graze. The ecological consequences of the trade should be taken into account in any consideration of the viability of the trade as a whole.

Meat and Livestock Australia

Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) is the producer-owned company responsible for the 'red meat and livestock' industry's marketing and research and development. As the RSPCA's chief scientist has commented, 'putting welfare in the hands of this industry is like putting public health in the hands of the tobacco industry.'¹² It simply defies logic to have an industry that profits from the exploitation of farm animals regulate itself regarding the welfare of those animals. Even the current Federal Agriculture Minister has conceded as recently as May 2011 that 'the live export industry has been slow in improving animal welfare.'¹³

In any case, history has definitively shown that the industry, and MLA in particular, cannot be trusted to protect the welfare of Australian animals exported live overseas. The evidence from several investigations carried out by animal protection organisations over the last decade have consistently revealed the willingness of the live export industry, and its representatives such as MLA, to export animals to countries regardless of how cruelly they will be treated upon arrival. The widespread nature of this negative view of the industry was amply demonstrated during the Keniry Livestock Export Review in 2003 when numerous submissions emphasised the ineffectiveness of industry 'self-regulation.'¹⁴ Unfortunately recent events surrounding the export of cattle to Indonesia have again shown that very little has changed.

Even MLA itself has acknowledged that it has failed to deliver on animal welfare.¹⁵ In response to the recent Four Corners program, MLA stated that industry representatives have 'worked for a decade in Indonesia [but] haven't seen scenes like this before.'¹⁶ In other words, MLA was unable to detect animal welfare abuses that a small animal protection charity with a fraction of its resources was able to document and bring to the Australian public. Yet MLA has also recently stated that it has 'been working up here for many years and we've always known there's issues.'¹⁷ In ALACT's opinion these revelations not only show that MLA is ineffective, but also suggest that it cannot be trusted.

The live export industry's recent plan 'to improve' animal welfare in its key markets further demonstrates its ineffectiveness in achieving acceptable animal welfare outcomes in those markets. Under the plan, Industry gave itself *until 2015* to implement its commitment that

¹² www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2011/s3236960.htm

¹³ www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201105/s3226375.htm

¹⁴ www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/reports/keniry

¹⁵ www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201106/s3236533.htm

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201106/s3239751.htm

Australian animals would only be supplied to facilities meeting OIE standards.¹⁸ In other words, the treatment of Australian cattle that was revealed on the Four Corners program would have continued for several *more* years (if not longer), if left to the industry itself. This inability to improve animal welfare standards with respect to Australian live export market countries is clearly unacceptable if Australia wishes to be taken as a world leader in animal welfare standards in agriculture. The recent travesty involving live exports of cattle to Indonesia confirms that the live export industry is incapable of protecting the welfare of the Australian animals it profits from.

Purported justifications for the trade

Supporters of the live export trade justify its continued operation largely on economic grounds. It is, however, difficult to accept the economic justification for the trade when its continued existence has been at the expense of many thousands of jobs in Australia over the past several decades. And of course no amount of profit can justify the completely unconscionable and unnecessary pain and suffering that millions of sentient creatures are forced to endure so that a tiny minority of Australians can get even richer.

Another purported justification for the trade is that the animals have to be slaughtered in situ because the importing countries lack refrigeration or prefer to purchase the slaughtered animals in ‘wet’ markets. Again, however, a more compelling explanation is simply that the tiny minority of Australians who profit from the live export industry make even more money exporting animals overseas than killing them in Australia. As killing animals is cheaper overseas, many more animals can be produced and shipped offshore for fattening and killing than if they were to be fattened and killed in Australia, where labour, feed and infrastructure costs are far higher. Also, if refrigeration really is a problem, then Australia could help many more people in poorer countries by installing refrigeration infrastructure rather than ineffective and inhumane abattoir equipment.

One of the weakest arguments used to justify the live export trade is that it is necessary to provide protein to poverty stricken citizens of other countries. Yet millions of people around the world from across the socio-economic spectrum live happy and healthy lives on plant protein (including most of ALACT’s members and supporters). The ludicrous suggestion that the live export industry is necessary because it provides poor people in other countries with protein is also completely unsustainable in this age of global warming. Animal agriculture is one of the largest contributors to global warming, as revealed in the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations’ recent report entitled *Livestock’s Long Shadow* (2006).¹⁹ The world needs to be looking for *alternatives* to animal protein, not making more of it.

Finally, perhaps the most implausible of all the arguments used to justify the continued operation of the trade is that it allows the Australian farm animal industry and the Australian Government to improve animal welfare in overseas destinations. For example, in response to the 2003 Keniry Review the Australian Government invested \$4 million to improve animal welfare practices in importing countries. Since then, however, Australians have had to witness the investigations by animal protection organisations showing the brutal treatment of cattle in Egyptian abattoirs, the unconscionable post-arrival handling of sheep in the Middle East, and most recently the abhorrent butchering of cattle in Indonesian slaughterhouses. If this horrendous treatment counts as ‘improved animal welfare’, then it is little wonder that most decent Australians want this trade to end.

¹⁸ www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201105/s3224222.htm

¹⁹ The report is available at www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.HTM

The only acceptable animal welfare outcome – a permanent ban on live exports

A recent poll indicated that 79 per cent of Australians support the permanent phasing out of live exports.²⁰ Such overwhelming support is not a recent phenomenon. Seventy-six per cent of the submissions made to the Keniry Review in 2003 expressed views opposed to the live export trade. One of the biggest petitions made to the Howard Government was a petition to stop the export of live animals from Australia (over 177,000 signatures). And of course most recently, in just one week over 230,000 Australians joined a petition to the Prime Minister and the Agriculture Minister calling for the trade to cease. The Government's recent decision to lift the suspension of the live trade to Indonesia demonstrated that it has not listened to the concerns of Australian people.

It is therefore clear that the only way to ensure adequate animal welfare standards for Australian farm animals exported live from Australia is to stop exporting them. The trade must simply be banned – forever.

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²⁰ www.abc.net.au/rural/news/content/201103/s3170122.htm