



1 FEB 2012

Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator for Queensland

REF: MNMC2012-08898

The Hon. John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 29 November 2012 enclosing a petition submitted for the consideration of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions regarding live animal exports from Australia to the Middle East.

I understand the expectation that, as Minister responsible for the matters raised in the petition under Standing Order 209(b), I will lodge a written response with the petitions committee. Please accept the following as my response for consideration by the committee, presentation to the House, recording in *Hansard* and posting on the committee's website.

Over the last eighteen months, the Government has worked with the livestock export industry to raise standards and increase control and oversight. The new regulatory system for the export of feeder and slaughter livestock, the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS), aims to ensure that exported Australian livestock are treated in accordance with the international animal welfare standards set by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) throughout the entire supply chain. ESCAS sets the highest animal welfare standards for exported livestock anywhere in the world.

The Government understands and shares the community's concerns about the welfare of Australian livestock exported for feeder or slaughter purposes, particularly in light of the recent culling of the consignment of Australian sourced sheep in Pakistan. Animal welfare remains a top priority for the Government in our livestock trade.

Throughout the events in Pakistan, the Government sought through senior-level representations to prevent the culling and maintained its evidence-based position that the sheep were fit and healthy for human consumption. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), as the industry regulator, is undertaking an investigation of the alleged ESCAS non-compliance and will make the results of the investigation public when it is completed. All relevant information is being considered to determine if regulatory action against the exporter is warranted, and if it is, what it should entail. The events that took place were distressing not only to the Australian community, but the industry and government alike. It is important to recognise however that this was an isolated incident that is not a reflection of the trade as a whole.

In addition, it is also important to note that, as a result of ESCAS, Australian sheep for the Islamic festival Eid al Adha were required to be processed in OIE compliant abattoirs in the Middle East and over 80 per cent of cattle being slaughtered in Indonesia are now stunned before slaughter.

As well as helping to raise animal welfare standards internationally, ESCAS ensures the viability of a trade that is worth \$1 billion a year to the economy and provides 10,000 jobs in regional communities. The system enables industry and the government to identify individual supply chains, enforce improvement in supply chain processes and ensure that exporters are held accountable for animal welfare outcomes. If incidents do occur, there is now a mechanism for DAFF to investigate allegations of animal welfare breaches and take regulatory action where appropriate.

Suggestions that the live trade could be completely replaced by chilled and frozen meat fail to take into account the requirements of the market and the problems sourcing skilled labour and transport solutions in remote Australia. While Australia has developed a boxed meat trade, the lack of refrigeration and cold chain facilities in some export markets, as well as strong cultural preferences for freshly slaughtered meat, precludes Australia from currently servicing all of its markets with processed meat products.

I thank you and the committee for your interest in this important issue. For more information about the ESCAS regulatory framework and results of investigations please go to www.daff.gov.au/aqis/export/live-animals/livestock/escas.

Yours sincerely

Joe Ludwig

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator for Queensland

27 January 2013