

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Appointment of Committee

1.1 The Senate appointed the Select Committee on Animal Welfare on 16 November 1983 to inquire into and report upon:

'the question of animal welfare in Australia, with particular reference to:

- (a) interstate and overseas commerce in animals;
- (b) wildlife protection and harvesting;
- (c) animal experimentation;
- (d) codes of practice of animal husbandry for all species; and
- (e) the use of animals in sport.'

1.2 After preliminary hearings in May and July 1984, the Committee decided to concentrate on two or three areas of animal welfare at a time and report its findings and recommendations to the Senate on the completion of its examination of each area. One of the first two areas to be examined was the live sheep export trade.

1.3 At the time, there was criticism of the trade from animal welfare organisations, including the RSPCA and the Australian Federation of Animal Societies (AFAS). There were also serious industrial problems, mainly between the industry and the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU), which maintained that the trade was the cause of the closure of

many abattoirs and, consequently, the retrenchment of many of its members. The Committee considered that, in the circumstances, this area of animal welfare should be accorded priority. Although the Committee initially examined the export of all livestock, it eventually decided to restrict its examination to live sheep exports.

Evidence Presented to the Committee

1.4 The Committee took evidence from a wide range of organisations and individuals on all facets of the trade. A list of those organisations and individuals is contained at Appendix 1. Inspections were made of two carriers, the 'Al Khaleej' and the 'Mawashi Al Gaseem', and of feedlots near Fremantle, Devonport and Adelaide.

1.5 Unlike many other areas of the Committee's inquiry, where animal welfare organisations have presented well-documented submissions to the Committee, the Committee soon found that little information about the trade was publicly available and that which was available was either not easily accessible, scattered among many sources, or out of date. As a result of the public hearings, in which the Committee questioned many witnesses about the trade, there is now a considerable amount of information on the trade publicly available from a single source.

1.6 Although the Committee concentrated on animal welfare issues in the inquiry, it decided it could not exclude economic and other factors, particularly as some animal welfare organisations called for the trade to be banned. The immediate banning or phasing out of the trade would have significant economic consequences which had to be considered.