

20 November 2012

Dear Senator,

Live animal exports

We refer to the '4 Corners' program '*Another Bloody Business*' screened on ABC 1 on 5 November 2012 and would ask that you consider supporting the transitioning of live animal exports to domestic processing and meat exports on grounds which include the following, namely:

- (a) the recent slaughter of 21,000 Australian sheep in Pakistan was described by industry and the Minister for Agriculture as "exceptional" or "unprecedented" whereas in fact in the last some 30 years there has been a litany of incidents or disasters in the transport of sheep to foreign markets, ranging from fire on the ship to animals asphyxiating in large numbers where the vessel's air-conditioning has broken down: for a list from 1980 see <http://liveexport-indefensible.com/facts/litany.php>
- (b) indeed, it will be recalled that it was the 2003 journey of the *Cormo Express* (where almost 60,000 sheep were stranded on board the vessel for more than 2 months unable in steamy Middle Eastern waters to find a country to permit it to dock and unload its animals) which led to the Kerin Review, which in turn resulted in legislative enactments discontinuing self-regulation by industry of the on-board trade. But even with government regulation, the incidents and disasters continue. And the supposedly "independent" auditors under the government's ESCAS system are paid by the exporters;
- (c) one of the two insuperable obstacles to securing humane outcomes is that no Australian jurisdiction exists once the animals are disembarked dockside: the recent slaughter of 21,000 sheep in Pakistan is yet another in a series of appalling examples;
- (d) a further insuperable obstacle is that in all our foreign markets there exists an attitude to animals which is not commensurate with our own: this not only goes to rough and inhumane handling, but also to the manner in which animals are slaughtered;
- (e) it is simply disingenuous for industry and the Minister to maintain all is well because

significant improvements have been made. In fact, all that has taken place is that systems have been improved so that exposure to barbaric treatment has been lessened. But no humane outcomes have been secured, whether in the journey or in the treatment of the animals in foreign markets where, for example, large numbers are still slaughtered without pre-stunning. Continuance of the trade guarantees one consequence: ongoing suffering, including from incidents and disasters. In these last respects, we refer in particular to the candid answer by the Deputy Secretary of the federal Department of Agriculture, Mr Philip Glyde, when asked on the '4 Corners' program whether there could be a similar incident in the future if Australia continued to trade with Pakistan, namely:

We could have a similar incident in any of our markets [emphasis added];

The Deputy Secretary's observation is undoubtedly correct and goes to the heart of the difficulty in securing humane outcomes in foreign markets where no Australian jurisdiction exists and where the attitude to animals is so different;

- (f) indeed, when industry spokesperson, Ms Allison Penfold, was asked on the '4 Corners' program whether her industry would send sheep back to Pakistan, she said :

Well, look, there is a voluntary suspension in place, and until such time as circumstances are right in that we have certainty around animal welfare, there won't be shipments.

And there's the rub: there will never be any "certainty around animal welfare";

- (g) however, while the record of industry in the last 30 years in respect of the welfare of exported live animals can only be described as shameful, the role of a federal department which views itself as the 'friend of industry' has defied the public interest of proper welfare protection. A recent example is how the department connived with the exporter, Wellard, in approving Pakistan as an alternative destination to Bahrain in the event of emergencies. When the *Ocean Drover* departed Fremantle in August, Pakistan was *not* approved as a port of destination for slaughter of Australian animals. But once it subsequently became known that there was a difficulty on the part of the Bahrain authorities with alleged disease in the sheep, Wellard and the department sought to keep from public view negotiations to secure an alternative destination for the sheep. And so the department signed off on Pakistan whilst the *Ocean Drover* was in transit from Bahrain to Karachi. It is thus plain that the approval was fast-tracked. Such was the focus by the department then on securing the alternative port rather than the welfare of the 21,000 animals that it did not disclose to the Pakistani authorities the fact of the shipment's rejection by Bahrain on the ground of alleged disease. Nor for that matter did either the exporter or the importer disclose this fact.. It is not to the point that the sheep were disease free. What is to the point is that the department (and the exporter and the importer) chose to run the gauntlet with the animals' welfare. For not surprisingly, the relevant Pakistani veterinary chief officer said:

If it is harmful for the Bahrain, it's not harmful for Pakistan? Why? Because we are not humans?;

- (h) the awful fate of these 21,000 animals was in retrospect sealed at this point. It also

illustrates how powerless are the best endeavours of an Australian department where the animals have already been disembarked. And this could happen in any market: see (e) above;

- (i) the department suffers from the most self-evident conflict of interest in seeking to perpetuate the trade whilst, on the other hand, accepting responsibility for securing proper welfare of exported live animals. Would a minister or department of resources be placed in charge of the environment? Plainly, if the public interest is to be satisfied, an independent office of animal welfare should be established free of direction or staffing by a minister or department of agriculture. A national statutory authority or commission could be established, for example;
- (j) of the 24 million sheep raised for annual slaughter in 2011, less than 3 million were exported live to foreign markets. Indeed, according to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences at the time the trade to Indonesia was suspended last year, there would be a negligible economy-wide impact from the trade's suspension, but the impact on northern Australia would be more significant;
- (k) during the last 20 years or so the beef industry shut down processing plants in Australia's north in order to earn about 10 cents a kilogram more from live exports, no matter the consequence for the animals' welfare. The Northern Territory abattoirs at Tennant Creek and Katherine were closed, with the one at Katherine closing more than a decade ago. There were thus left only four small abattoirs in the Territory, with a capacity of fewer than 50 animals a week. Presently, there does not appear to be an abattoir above a line drawn from Townsville in the east down to Perth in the west. The major live cattle exporter, AAco, is taking commendable steps to establish a large abattoir south of Darwin. In this respect, the former Queensland Minister for Primary Industries (Mr Tim Mulherin) by media release dated 6 July 2011 said:

Over-dependence on a single export market and the lack of competition for meat processing capacity in northern Australia are significant issues for the industry...The suspension of the live export trade by the Federal Government highlighted these problems and put more than 60,000 tonnes of beef a year at risk. ...strategically-located abattoirs could have access to over 3 million cattle in north and northwest Queensland. An enormous swathe of Australian cattle country currently isn't served by local meat processing facilities. A new abattoir could reduce the need to truck cattle large distances to southern processing plants and provide alternative markets for producers;

- (l) when the great English parliamentarian, Lord Wilberforce, more than 200 years ago sought adoption of a Bill to end the slave trade, the economic impact upon employment and investment in docks, ships and warehouses, was argued to be a sufficient reason to oppose its passage. Ultimately, the slave trade was abolished in 1807 by the English parliament, despite fierce opposition based upon the economic impact. It should be noted that at the time many did not view slaves as human, or at best perhaps they viewed them as sub-human. The analogy thus with the plight of the hapless animals in today's trade is plain. It is the course of human history that a money-based vested interest opposes reform where even great suffering may be ended. Such a vested interest though ultimately did not hold sway with the thinking

of the concerned legislator some 200 years ago where the public interest as a matter of humanity was required to be honoured. Nor should it do so today; and

- (m) the public interest question is simply this: why should we permit the export of live animals to foreign markets where their treatment derides the very moral norm which animates the enactment of Australian animal protection statutes and standards? *The Australian* newspaper in an editorial last year asserted that in the case of live cattle exports to Indonesia, Australia should not export its own morality. However, it is respectfully put that this misses the short point that perhaps instead we should seek to abide by it.

We should be grateful for your comments.

Yours sincerely,

Graeme McEwen
Chair