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*Why the export trade in live animals must end*

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## Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a concise rationale for ending the export trade in live animals, both from the perspective of the inherent cruelty involved, and the loss of employment in the meat processing sector as a result of jobs specific to that sector, and to others which traditionally depended upon it. These job losses, estimated by the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union at 40,000, have resulted in significant job losses and marginalization in regional centres in which meat processing was the only, or the major employer.

## Executive Summary

Australia exports sheep, cattle, goats, deer and camels (and on occasion horses) principally to the Middle East and South East Asia. Animal protection groups, both conservative and the more radical, contend that the trade is both cruel and unnecessary, and further, that the trade receives inordinate protection from the Federal government, which accords its reports "Commercial in Confidence" protection. This occurs in spite of a number of reviews of the trade (Independent Reference Groups of 2000 and 2002, Keniry Review, 2003) recommending that the industry be more "transparent" and "accountable".

These reviews usually follow a disaster, or series of disasters in the industry, and their recommendations are rarely, if ever, implemented in full.

It is important to note that the former Federal Government consistently attempted to mislead the Australian people with regard to Memoranda of Understanding it has signed with a number of Middle Eastern countries

The Australian Government has recently signed memoranda of understanding (MoU) on the live animal trade with the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Eritrea, and is in negotiation with Egypt, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Syria and Iran, and now also Libya <sup>1</sup>. (It is to be noted since that two Memoranda of Understanding were signed with Egypt). These Memoranda of Understanding ONLY address the issue of unloading the animals in the importing country/ies in order to avert another such damaging incident as the "*Cormo Express*" in 2003. One MoU with Egypt purports to protect the animals within OIE guidelines, but as Animals Australia has been able to prove, as an agreement it is worthless. Furthermore, OIE guidelines provide only for the minimal standards in animal welfare.

The objections of animal protection groups are based on:-

- The inherent cruelty of the trade
- The stress and suffering of animals on long sea voyages on old, substandard ships

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<sup>1</sup> "Australian Position on the Export of Livestock, November 2006"

[http://www.daff.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/146753/gov\\_position\\_statement.pdf](http://www.daff.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/146753/gov_position_statement.pdf)

- The mortality levels on the journeys (mortalities for both sheep and cattle in fact increased between 2005 and 2006, from more than 28,000 to over 35,000)
- The industry's claims that 2% mortality rates for sheep and 1% for cattle (depending on the length of the voyage) are "acceptable", given the tens of thousands of animals to which these percentages translate)
- The egregious cruelty to which the animals are subjected in importing countries
- The methods of slaughter in importing countries, which are believed to be illegal in Australia (therefore it is a moral question whether these animals should be sent to places where such brutal slaughter practices exist). These practices have been filmed and documented by peak animal welfare organization Animals Australia and others on several separate occasions in recent years, the last as recent as 2007 in Oman, Jordan, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. This investigation was featured on ABC's "7.30 Report" in November 2007.
- Although most animal protection groups do not seek to promote the slaughter of animals, they recognize that a frozen/chilled meat trade is infinitely less cruel than the live export trade

## Background

In 1985, the Senate Standing Committee on Animal Welfare recommended that, if it were judged in animal welfare grounds alone, the trade in live animals should end. Economic forces prevailed over cruelty, and the industry has since that time lurched from one disaster to another.

Mortality rates on long-haul voyages continue to fluctuate, and the animals die from starvation, heat exhaustion, respiratory distress and trauma.

In 2007, Animals Australia obtained, with great difficulty, AQIS mortality reports for 2006, and the picture is alarming. It clearly demonstrates that exporters continually breach the mandatory Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock, and more disturbingly, that no meaningful sanctions are imposed upon them.

Amongst the worst of the reports relates to a voyage of the “*Maysora*” to Southern Israel in November 2006, on which almost 450 cattle died either on the ship or shortly after unloading. The following photos of Australian calves were taken at the Tzofar feedlot in Southern Israel in November 2006.



It is also worth noting that none of the ships used in the live export trade is Australian; all are flag of convenience ships with third world crews. The “*Maysora*” is operated by Jordanian owned Livestock Shipping Services, and has a history of animal welfare problems, yet it continues to operate between Australia and the Middle East.

The cattle who died on this voyage were southern bred cattle, shipped to searing temperatures (the ALES requires a heat stress modelling exercise to be undertaken in these circumstances, but there is no evidence of this). 248 cattle died on the ship, from acute pneumonia, heat exhaustion, and septicaemia from open wounds as they were forced to lie in the excrement on the ship. A further 200 died of pneumonia shortly after unloading.

For this disaster, the exporter was ordered to provide additional space for the animals and to carry additional antibiotics on a subsequent voyage.

The last voyage to leave Devonport, Tasmania, on the Kuwaiti vessel the “*Al Messilah*” also featured as amongst the worst when 1,632 of the 71,309 sheep loaded died. AQIS noted that Tasmanian sheep do not adapt to long haul equatorial voyages. Further issues identified were starvation, heat exhaustion and disease, and it was confirmed by observers that up to 50% of the sheep loaded were not given the mandated period in the “registered premises” (feedlot) to accustom them to the

pelletized feed on the ship. A large number of the animals delivered to, and accepted by, the feedlot were diseased but were loaded anyway. This was noted by observers and reported, but no action was taken. It was further noted that there was insufficient feed for the duration of the voyage.

Animals Australia has conducted four investigations into handling and slaughter practices in the Middle East, specifically Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar. The television program “Sixty Minutes” has on three occasions run Animals Australia’s investigations into the handling and slaughter of animals in the Middle East, with an unprecedented viewer reaction.

In 2001, vet Dr Petra Sidholm presented a comprehensive account to Government and industry (LiveCorp) clearly detailing the lack of any animal welfare standards in Australia’s Middle Eastern export markets. A slaughter box was installed at the infamous Basetin slaughterhouse only after “Sixty Minutes” showed cattle having their leg tendons slashed and eyes stabbed to disable and disorient them prior to slaughter.

In 2003, Animals Australia went to Kuwait, and filmed and documented the fate of Australian sheep (and deer) at the local municipal slaughterhouse, and outside a jewellery store.



*This Victorian sheep had its leg severed while it was still alive and conscious*

But even after the “Sixty Minutes” exposure, animal welfare groups knew that conditions had not improved despite industry continuing to purport progress in animal welfare. In late 2005 and early 2006, Animals Australia went to Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar and investigated the

claimed 'improvements' and confirmed what they already knew to be true. No improvements had been made; the restraining box is not and appeared not to ever have been used. Once again, "Sixty Minutes" ran the film of the fate of cattle at the Bassetin slaughterhouse, showing leg tendons being slashed and eyes being stabbed, with the knives in their eyes being used to hold the heads in place for the throat slashing. Tails of dying animals were slashed or cut off. Minister McGauran's best response was that "they may not be Australian cattle", but animal advocates knew they were by the breeds. "Sixty Minutes" had planned to run a story on the fate of Australian sheep in the five Middle Eastern countries, but found that the audience who watched the film footage of the cattle was so horrified that many could not continue and turned it off.

Since then, the industry has lurched from one disaster to another.



(Tail slashing of dying animal)



(Eye stabbing of dying animal)



(Australian sheep slaughter in Oman)



(Dead and dying in Bahrain feedlot)



(Oman - last survivor kicked in the face)



(Oman - unloading sheep with broken legs)



(Kuwait - unloading with sticks)



(Oman - treading on dying sheep)



(Kuwait - Australian sheep slaughtered in filthy toilet)

In June 2006, a clear picture of Australia's commitment to "improve animal welfare in importing countries was provided by none other than Meat and Livestock Australia's Bahrain-based veterinarian, Nigel Brown. Brown, in Middle Eastern (but not Australian) newspapers, claimed that hog tying sheep's legs and slamming them into car boots was quite acceptable "it makes them feel safe", he said, adding that it is "common practice" in Australia and Europe.

At the end of 2006, Animals Australia returned to Egypt to meet the "Maysora", carrying the first sheep to be sent there since the signing of two Memoranda of Understanding with that country, which were claimed to ensure the welfare of Australian animals. In the full knowledge that there would be no adherence to the MOUs, they were able to film and document continuing appalling treatment of the Australian sheep and cattle



*This young bull was thrown off a truck with his legs hobbled then his tendons were slashed as he was collapsed in the gutter*



*Terrified young bull prior to slaughter*



*Young child, impassive about the sad remains of the bull*



*Australian sheep being dragged to slaughter*



In 2004 the Western Australian State Government budgeted \$118,000.00 toward 'monitoring the trade'. There is no monitoring the trade. Government does not monitor (as confirmed by *60 Minutes*) and there is no independent policing of this live export trade.

LiveCorp is totally self regulating and perform their own audits, but only if animal mortalities exceed 1% for cattle and 2% for sheep aboard the ships. Other animals; goats, deer, camels and horses, are not subject to audit by LiveCorp.

The most significant disaster in terms of animal suffering and death occurred in 2003 with the Cormo Express, renamed Merino Express. This fiasco cost the Australian taxpayer in excess of \$11m. There have been other numerous disasters, however, the costs to the taxpayer have never been publicised. see [Death Files](#).

While the taxpayer continues to prop up and support a trade, which has been shown to be blatantly cruel thousands of jobs have vanished in Australia due to the abattoir closures.