

2 May 2006

The Hon. Peter McGauran MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

BY POST & EMAIL: Peter.McGauran.MP@aph.gov.au



Dear Minister

SUSPENSION OF LIVE EXPORT TO EGYPT

We refer to the above and to our correspondence of 1 March 2006.

Lawyers for Animals Inc ('LFA'), is an association of lawyers and others, seeking to reform the law to minimise or eliminate the needless suffering of animals.

LFA wishes to congratulate you on your principled decision to protect the welfare of Australian cattle by suspending live export to Egypt. We appreciate the political pressures a Minister for Agriculture must deal with in relation to a vociferous live export industry (which clearly has its own conflicting interests at stake); however, your decision demonstrates that you are also responsive to the wider public interest in animal welfare, and that you recognise that animal welfare is in itself a valuable outcome.

We agree that it is incumbent upon you as the Minister for Agriculture to make decisions which are not only considerate of your particular industry stakeholders' interests, but which are also mindful of the need to protect farm animals from unnecessary cruelty.

We now urge you to give greater efficacy to your principled approach to animal welfare by terminating all live export to Middle Eastern countries. The suffering associated with the live export of animals is well documented (see **Attachment 1**). A recent documentary by the television program *60 Minutes* ('the documentary') simply provided the general public with *more* evidence of what those who are familiar with the trade already know: Live export is synonymous with abject cruelty and must not be permitted to continue.

The documentary also demonstrated irrefutable evidence that the practices undertaken at Bassateen Abattoir do not accord with Australian animal welfare standards and that both Government and Industry have been aware of the barbaric practices at Bassateen for some considerable time. In our view, until such time as all importing countries have comparable animal welfare standards to those in our own jurisdiction, all live export from Australia should be wholly terminated.

Our understanding is, however, that the Government is considering lifting the suspension on live export to Egypt if it can be shown that Australian cattle can be 'traced' within Egyptian abattoirs, and protected from cruelty practices such as eye-stabbing and tendon-slashing. Even if this implausible outcome were possible, we urge you to consider whether it is ethically tenable for Australia to lend commercial support to a facility which inflicts such acts of abject cruelty on *any* animal, let alone 'our own'.

Central to any civilised society is the fundamental moral norm that we should avoid causing other living beings pain or distress. In other words, there is a basic 'public interest' in avoiding cruelty to animals. It is evident in several regards in Australia, including the democratic enactment of our animal protection statutes. Even if our Australian animals could be spared acts of cruelty in foreign facilities, it besmirches our own track record as a civilised nation to provide any commercial support to those facilities if they subject other animals to those acts.

We reiterate it is essential that you act now and terminate the live export trade immediately. This is the only ethical response in the face of Egypt's continued defence of its abattoir practices. We also urge you to recognise that the Australian public interest in animal welfare extends to animals from other jurisdictions. We must not provide any economic support to facilities which violate our own standards – to do so would simply be hypocritical.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Ms Eliza Poulton, Chair, Law Reform Committee, on 0407 545 905 or via email: eliza@lawyersforanimals.org.au.

We look forward to receiving a response from you.

Yours faithfully

Lawyers for Animals Inc.

www.lawyersforanimals.org.au

Suffering Associated with the Live Export Process

In 2004, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, approximately 3,397,140 sheep, 637,748 cattle and 50,486 Goats were exported overseas.

The respective mortality rates associated with the practice of live export, are unacceptable. Approximately 1-2% (34,000 – 68,000) mortality for sheep, 1% mortality for cattle (6,378) together with 3-5% of cattle (19,132 – 31,887) rejected for ill health and up to 3% (1,514.58) mortality for goats.

There is irrefutable evidence that long distance sea transportation of animals causes stress, distress, injuries and illness. Animals exported in this manner are exposed to, inter alia: overcrowding, oxygen deprivation, heat stress, pneumonia, trauma, diarrhoea, blindness and ammonia poisoning which causes respiratory ailments.

The suffering of Australian animals during transportation is commonplace and by no means exceptional.

Upon arrival at the importing destinations, it would appear the suffering and acts of cruelty continue and in many instances increase exponentially.

Importing destinations, including Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Yemen have negligible or non-existent animal welfare standards. In actuality, the treatment the animals endure at the importing destination, were they to occur in Australia, would be considered illegal.

Economic benefits to a ban on Live Export

Arguments in favour of live export, espoused on purely economic grounds, are completely devoid of merit. According to the Heilbron Report¹, the cessation of live export wherein Australian animals would be slaughtered in Australia (pursuant to Australian animal welfare standards) and the meat products then exported overseas, would in actuality, increase Australia's gross domestic product by approximately \$1.5 billion and create approximately 10,500 jobs.

Furthermore, according to the AMIEU, live exports are actually directly responsible for the loss of approximately 20,000 jobs and the closure of approximately 70 regional abattoirs. In this time of

¹ Impact of the Live Animal Export Sector on the Australian Meat Processing Industry" S.G. Heilbron Pty. Limited April 2000 commissioned by the Australian Meat Processor Corporation Limited

industrial unrest, we suggest that these statistics alone are an important consideration for the Federal Government.

In addition, Government and Industry funds, such as those already provided to Bassateen Abattoir, which were apparently used to paint the walls of the Bassateen Abattoir, install a restraint box (never used) and resurface the roads leading into Bassateen Abattoir would be arguably better spent within Australian borders where animal welfare can be ensured. Despite Minister McGauran's comments to the contrary, Bassateen Abattoir is not a "good example" of Australia's involvement in live trade to the Middle East.

In 1985 the Senate Select Committee argued that live export should be phased out. The Senate Select Committee proposed that the Federal Government promote and encourage alternatives to live export, endeavouring to eliminate live export entirely. In 1991-2000, during the ban on live export of sheep and cattle from Australia to Saudi Arabia, the exports of chilled and frozen mutton and lamb increased three fold, demonstrating that alternatives to live export were acceptable to the Middle Eastern market.

Cultural necessity - a common misconception

The common misconception that the Middle Eastern custom of eating freshly slaughtered meat or animals slaughtered pursuant to Halal methods, therefore necessitating live export of sheep and cattle, is a fallacy. Halal slaughter requires that:

- (a) the animals be faced to Mecca;
- (b) the animal be dedicated verbally to the prophet prior to having its throat cut;
- (c) the animal not to be killed in the presence of others;
- (d) the animal not to be bound before slaughter;
- (e) the animal to be killed with one swift cut to the throat, causing as little pain as possible;
- (f) the animal to be treated kindly; and
- (g) Halal slaughter in Australia requires the animals to be stunned (unconscious) prior to slaughter (Clearly, a ritual that is not practiced at Bassateen Abattoir).

In addition, approximately 70% of exported Australian animals which are killed in the Middle East, are refrigerated following slaughter and transported to butchers throughout the Middle East for sale, consequently undermining any argument based on cultural requirements.