

SUBMISSION

REGULATION OF AGRICULTURE

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION - DRAFT REPORT - AUGUST 2016

I come from a farming background.

I am concerned that the agriculture policies of successive federal governments have lacked innovation and have failed to develop sustainable agriculture strategies in line with changing community expectations about animal welfare.

For transparency and objectivity, an *independent* Office of Animal Welfare should be created to have responsibility for animal welfare. Such an independent office should extend its jurisdiction to live export of all animals. Incidents of animal abuse should be investigated by an *independent* national statutory authority rather than the Department of Agriculture. (See Example of live export below)

The Abbott government, for example, divested itself of responsibility for animal welfare by abolishing the Australian Animal Welfare Advisory Committee under the guise of cutting unnecessary and inefficient regulation and handing over responsibility for the delivery of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy to the states and territories.

It also watered down the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance Scheme (ESCAS) live export regulations under the guise of reducing red tape, even though all animal welfare organisations condemned the effectiveness of the existing ESCAS regulations in preventing animal abuse, and thus community expectations on good animal welfare outcomes are very low.

I strongly support draft recommendations 5.1 and 5.2 of the draft report

The Productivity Commission is right to recognise that animal welfare regulations are not meeting community expectations about the humane treatment of farm animals – and this concern ranges from practices in intensive and everyday animal farming to the live export of Australian farm animals.

The Productivity Commission is right to recommend an *independent* national statutory body for animal welfare.

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS ON ANIMAL WELFARE

As farms get bigger to create so-called 'productivity gains', animal welfare suffers. Factory farming of hens (for meat or eggs), ducks, pigs, cattle feed lots and large dairy enterprises are becoming unacceptable to Australians. They do not condone caged animals, high-density stocking, de-beaking of hens, dehorning without

anaesthetic, teeth clipping of pigs and other mutilations in the name of productivity and profitability.

In its quest for productivity, the farming community must never forget that the consumers who buy their products are increasingly demanding improvements in animal welfare and transparency in animal husbandry methods.

We have already seen how big companies like Coles, Safeway, Aldi and some IGAs have responded to the loud and clear community calls for the phasing out of cage eggs and sow stalls. Subway, McDonalds and many other fast-food outlets have also responded to community concern about animal welfare and will phase out cage eggs.

PRODUCTIVITY and SUSTAINABILITY

The world is changing fast – its population is growing and its environment is suffering as a result. It is unsustainable and backward thinking for Australian farmers to continue wasting cereal crops and water resources on increasingly unpopular intensive animal farming and sending live animals around the world in ships when those resources could be more profitably directed to feed the world in new ways.

Scientists and innovators in other parts of the world are searching for new sources of food production that do not involve animals but are plant focused. People like Bill Gates, Sergey Brin (Google) and Peter Thiel (Paypal) – to name a few - are backing lab-grown meat. US companies such as Hampton Creek and Impossible Foods are developing meat and egg substitutes that are already in the market place. A New Zealand company, Sunfed Meats, will be releasing plant-based ‘meat’ products later this year.

As Bill Gates says, the world needs Productivity AND Sustainability. They are not isolated goals.

The production of these plant-based foods of the future will not bring with them the animal welfare problems that are so worrying for the community.

Unless high standards of animal welfare and transparency are maintained, the community will increasingly follow the trend to buy and eat plant-based alternatives. The current agriculture model in animal husbandry is increasingly being viewed as bad for the environment, bad for community health and bad for the animals. The health issues associated with meat have been well documented, and include the World Health Organisation’s pronouncement on the carcinogenic properties of meat.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST – an example

LIVE EXPORT IS AN EXAMPLE WHERE COMMUNITY CONCERN ABOUT ANIMAL WELFARE AND THE NEED FOR AN INDEPENDENT OFFICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE IS PARAMOUNT.

Some 31 years ago the report of *The Senate Select Committee of Inquiry into Animal Welfare in 'Australia Export of Live Sheep from Australia', 1985* stated:

... if a decision were to be made on the future of the trade purely on animal welfare grounds, there is enough evidence to stop the trade. The trade is ... inimical to good animal welfare, and it is not in the interests of the animal to be transported ... for slaughter. (p.xiii)

...reforms will help to reduce but not eliminate stress, suffering and risk ... Therefore a long-term solution must be sought. The substitution of the refrigerated sheep-meat trade for the live export trade offers such a solution. The federal government should promote and encourage the expansion of the refrigerated sheep-meat trade to the Middle East and other countries, with the aim of eventually substituting it for the live sheep trade.

This report was ignored. Live export continues – as do the constant revelations in the media of the inhumane treatment of animals both on live export ships and in importing countries, despite the introduction of ESCAS.

The Department of Agriculture's website 'Regulatory Compliance Investigations' currently lists unfinished investigations going back to 2 December 2014. There are a total of 22 investigations still in progress. This does not meet community expectations about the welfare of animals.

The Department of Agriculture has a conflict of interest – it cannot represent farmers, live exporters and those making a living from animals while at the same time conduct reviews and ensure compliance with animal welfare laws - and ESCAS in the case of live export. (Very few live exporters receive penalties for ESCAS breaches and continue to export animals even whilst under review for past breaches – a major cause of community concern.)

Only a small proportion of farmers are engaged in live export; yet this unpopular and cruel trade costs taxpayers millions of dollars to administer through the Department of Agriculture employing large numbers of staff in Canberra and elsewhere.

All Australian farmers are tainted with the ignominy of live export in the minds of the community, even though Australia's earnings from live export are small compared with chilled meat exports, which has the benefit of providing employment for meatworkers, trucking companies, infrastructure workers, stockmen etc.

ESCAS is a failure, because Australia has no legal jurisdiction in other countries. Ineffective as ESCAS has proved to be, it does not even include exported breeder

cattle and as a result, the media has also reported abuse of dairy breeder cattle that are exported live. Another failure to meet community expectations.

Australia does, however, have legal control over the live export ships through the issue of export licences.

Despite this, animal welfare on live export ships is well below community expectations.

In June 2016 the media reported that a former live export vet, Dr Lynn Simpson, was removed from her job with the Department of Agriculture after providing an honest report about conditions on live export ships. The media's graphic photographs of dung-lagged and injured cattle provoked yet more community outcry about animal welfare.

In *The Maritime Executive* on 1.8.2016, Wendy Laursen refers to the research work on live export ships by Dr Sue Foster, a vet and spokesperson from Vets Against Live Export. Dr Foster studied the Department of Agriculture investigation into High Mortality Voyage 46 on *Bader III* where 4000 sheep died of heat stress. (This tragedy was not reported to the department within the statutory 12 hour time frame.)

This tragedy was not an isolated event, and authorities have still not addressed high mortality rates associated with heat stress.

If live export is to continue, Independent vets (not funded by the shipping companies) should be placed on live export ships to ensure compliance with animal welfare standards and accurate reporting of mortality statistics.

Dr Foster concludes in the article that most risks cannot be eliminated or even reduced enough to make the trade acceptable to the community.

The live export industry falls short on community expectations on animal welfare because there are no independent vets on export ships, no transparency about reporting of events that occur at sea and the conflict of interest of the Department of Agriculture in ensuring compliance and meting out appropriate penalties. The delays in investigating breaches of ESCAS are equally unacceptable.