

Live Animal Exports: What you need to know

What is live animal export?

During the last 30 years, Australia has sent more than 150 million sheep and cattle to be slaughtered in other parts of the world, such as the Middle East and South East Asia and the Middle East. Livestock ships can carry up to 100,000 animals for voyages lasting up to 3 weeks. More than 2 million animals have died on these ships en route, deaths deemed an 'acceptable' loss by an industry that puts profit above all else.

Investigations conducted by Animals Australia in Middle Eastern countries have exposed the terrible cruelties inflicted upon Australian animals in these countries. Most importing countries have not one single law to protect animals' welfare. Once in the Middle East, Australian sheep are routinely purchased, bound, and shoved into car boots in a region where temperatures reach 50°C in summer. Both sheep and cattle have their throats cut whilst fully conscious, suffering prolonged, distressing and painful deaths.

Live animal export is inherently cruel, immoral, and indefensible.

How many animals are exported from Australia? Where do they go?

Sheep

More than 4 million sheep (4,045,400) were exported to the Middle East in 2006. Following the lifting of the temporary ban on live exports to Saudi Arabia (due to the rejection in 2003 of the MV Cormo Express), exports to that country again reached more than 1 million a year, followed closely by Kuwait (862,163 in 2006). Other primary destinations include Jordan, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Tens of thousands of sheep die on the ships before they reach the Middle East (36,408 on-board deaths in 2006).

Cattle

Each year Australia exports more than half a million cattle (in 2006 the figure was 618,645). Most go to South East Asia - the majority to Indonesia - and more than 119,000 cattle were exported to the Middle East (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel) during 2006. A temporary suspension due to an Animals Australia expose of cruel practices, meant that no cattle were sent to Egypt in 2006. Hundreds die on the sea voyage, and more succumb to illness and disease after arrival. Smaller numbers of goats, deer, buffalo, and camels are also exported live.

Why does Animals Australia (and all other major and international animal welfare organisations) oppose long-distance sea transport of animals?

Long-distance sea transportation necessarily means multiple handling, intensive stocking densities, different food and competition for food/water, changes in climatic environment (winter to summer), at times unforeseen problems (fire, cyclone, rejection by importing country), and other factors which cumulatively cause stress, distress, and, often, injuries and illness. Most Australian grazing animals are rarely handled and are fearful of - and stressed by - human handling.

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What are the major causes of illness and death on ships that carry Australian sheep to the Middle East (the primary destination)?

Sheep die on every ship that leaves Australia. The causes of death on board ships have been studied extensively during the last 25 years and are:

Inanition (failure to eat) 47%
Salmonellosis 27%
Trauma 12%
Miscellaneous 14%

'Inanition' is term used when sheep – grazing animals familiar only with eating grass - fail to eat the pellet food provided. This causes metabolic changes which make them susceptible to other problems such as overwhelming salmonella infection and diarrhea. In addition to these deaths, many animals suffer, but survive, illness or injury. For example, sheep are susceptible to eye irritations and infections caused by dusty environments on board and some eye problems (e.g. pink eye) can cause blindness even during a 2 week voyage. In addition, it is not known how many more animals die due to illness soon after unloading.

What happens to animals when they arrive in the destination country?

Upon arrival in overseas countries, animals endure further transport, feed-lotting, and handling practices (dragging, trussing, transportation in car boots), practices that are both unacceptable and illegal in Australia. The routine slaughter method in the majority of importing countries is cutting of throat without pre-stunning. Animals killed in this way can endure prolonged, painful, fearful deaths. Such slaughter is, quite rightly, illegal in Australia.

What of the live export industry claim that it can influence animal welfare in importing countries?

This piece of public relations propaganda has only emerged since Animals Australia has been exposing practices in Middle Eastern countries. In fact, the truth is exactly the opposite. The presence of Australian animals in the importing countries conveys the dreadful message that Australians approve of their animal welfare practices. Rather than inspiring change, the perception that a western nation approves of their practices, condemns not only Australian animals, but local and other imported animals to continued years of appalling treatment.

It is recognized in international diplomacy that the only way that one nation can influence needed change in another is through trade sanctions - not through contributing to the issue of concern - in this case supplying the very animals that are the abused. There is also considerable irony in this claim by the live export industry. As a 'teacher' one would have every right to question their credentials to convey the importance of animal welfare.

This is an industry responsible for sending millions of Australian animals to their deaths in countries recognised as some of the cruelest in the world.

What control does Australian industry have over the treatment of Australian animals once they are imported into another country?

Simply: none. Once Australian animals arrive in an importing country they are entirely subject to the customs and practices of that country. None of the countries to which Australia sends animals for slaughter have equivalent animal welfare protection laws, and the vast majority, particularly in the Middle East, have either no such laws, or inadequate or un-enforced laws. Australia's Minister for Agriculture attempted to protect the welfare of Australian animals in Egypt by negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Egyptian government in which they agreed to treat Australian animals in accordance with international standards. Animals Australia's December 06 investigation documented continual and extensive breaches of that MOU.

What about the industry claim that if we don't do it, someone else will - and the Australia industry is 'world's best practice'.

In Australian society, it has never been a defence to participation in a crime (whether legal or moral) to suggest that 'if I didn't do it, someone else would have.' Would we accept Norway suggesting that they should be allowed to kill whales in the Antarctic because they shoot straighter than the Japanese? Would we accept China continuing its bear bile industry on the basis that it is 'world's best practice' and more 'humane' than Vietnam's? No. Some things are just wrong - and no amount of profit makes them right.

World's best practice in a cruel and unnecessary trade is not something to be proud of. All of the importing countries in the Middle East also import chilled lamb and mutton - and the demand is growing. Australia's chilled meat trade to the Middle East is already worth more than the live export trade. It will only increase if we don't provide the alternative option of live animals.

Don't Middle Eastern customers and Muslim consumers demand live animals so that they can be assured they are killed in the halal manner?

Australia has some 40 certified halal export slaughterhouses, with the slaughter of each animal overseen here by Muslim officials who are licensed by importing countries. The animals are slaughtered in Australia and their carcasses exported chilled or frozen.

In Australia, Islamic leaders have approved the pre-stunning of sheep and cattle prior to the cutting of the throat.

Because electrical stunning is 'reversible' - the animal is not injured and is still alive - the practice is consistent with Islamic requirements. Halal accreditation of meat is administered under the 'Australian Government Supervised Muslim Slaughter Programme'.

Many other countries are also exporting chilled halal meat to the Middle East in recognition of this growing market. Of interest is that during recent investigations by Animals Australia (2003, 2005, 2006) in the Middle East, the Australian animals being killed were not being killed according to halal requirements. Similar inconsistencies have been reported by other independent observers in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries in recent years.

What of the live export industry claim that live animals are required in importing countries due to inadequate refrigeration?

This is an easily challenged claim. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait - historically the two largest importers of Australian sheep - are extremely affluent oil-rich nations. It is a fallacy that there is a lack of refrigeration, or of refrigerated trucks with which to distribute chilled or frozen meat, in many of these increasingly westernised ME importing countries.

Many consumers already buy their meat from supermarkets (similar in size and variety to those in Australia) and 'western' style restaurants abound in many Middle Eastern countries. This trend is likely to continue. In April 2005 the MLA said of the Middle East importing countries: *"it is projected that the percentage of young people...with increasingly westernised tastes will rise over the next 20 years...the likely outcome of this will be changing consumer purchasing patterns and preferences for convenience foods over the next 5-10 years."* This report also noted that *"hypermarket growth is booming in the UAE... (and) strong growth in Saudi Arabia...is expected to continue for at least the next five years."* (MLA Market Briefs - Middle East).

One the major importers of live Australian sheep into the Middle East, Kuwait Livestock Transport and Trading (KLTT), markets on its website frozen microwavable meals and a wide variety of processed products produced from Australian sheep (see www.kltt.com.kw).

During the previous ban on live sheep and cattle from Australia to Saudi Arabia (1991 - 2000), there was a 3-fold increase in exports of chilled and frozen mutton and lamb to that market (reported in the Heilbron Report, 2000) - clear evidence that consumers in the ME will accept meat from animals killed in Australia (see factsheet: *Halal Meat - A viable Alternative* which shows that the Middle East already imports sheep meat equivalent to more than 2.8 million live sheep annually).

What about members of our rural community? How would they be impacted upon by a ban of on live animal export?

Animals Australia acknowledges that life in rural areas can be challenging and difficult. Farmers face the uncertainty of nature - drought and floods - and such economic variables as the rise and fall of the Australian dollar.

Farmers are renowned and respected for their ability to diversify their farming operations to changing conditions and markets. If Australia banned the live export of animals it would bring to

the fore Australia's valued international disease-free meat status, which adds immense potential to further market and extend our current exports of our chilled meat exports to this region. There are also many Australian sheep farmers who run profitable enterprises without exporting live sheep.

A seminar held by the McKinnon Project in late 2003 discussed the issues that would be faced by farmers in the absence of a live export industry. A presentation by the McKinnon Project's Senior Veterinary Adviser, Dr John Webb Ware (BVSc, MVs Melb), outlined how the loss of income from live export could be overcome through flock restructuring to vary the balance of income from lamb or wool. Live animal export has also impacted on other members of rural communities.

The Australian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) has opposed the live export trade for many years due to its role in the closure of abattoirs throughout regional Australia. The AMIEU claims that 70 abattoir closures and the loss of up to 12,000 jobs are directly attributable to the live export trade. The closure of abattoirs has occurred due to inadequate supplies of sheep and cattle and because of competition for animals with the live export industry buyers. Both of these factors contribute to make local slaughter uncompetitive. Local abattoir closures do not only affect individual abattoir workers; the loss of employment created by a major industry - with the resultant departure of families forced to leave to seek employment elsewhere - affects the viability of all local businesses in small rural and regional towns.

Clearly, far greater long-term security for both Australian farmers and Australian workers in meat processing industries in Australia could be created through vigorous marketing of Australian chilled disease-free meat to importing countries. While Australia continues to offer live animals - which to importing countries provide the added incentive of job creation and value-added products through local killing and processing of animals - the full potential of Australia's chilled carcass trade will never be explored or realised.

Is it true that mortality on ships is now greatly reduced, and is comparable with on-farm death rates?

Mortalities on board ships have reportedly been reduced over the past several years, but still tens of thousands of animals die each year (over 36,400 sheep in 2006), and many more suffer. Further, it is incorrect to state that (reported) on-board death rates are comparable with the 'on-farm' death rates of sheep. Reported mortality rates on export ships are far greater than 'normal' death rates on-farm. Estimates vary, but former LiveCorp CEO Mr Kevin Shiell has publicly claimed that the death rates on-farm would normally be in the order of 3% per year (LiveCorp media release, 20/10/2003). This figure covers all sheep on all farms, and therefore encompasses the more vulnerable sheep - ewes during pregnancy and lambing, and older sheep prior to being sold.

By contrast, the vast majority of sheep sold into the live export trade are young (usually 2-3 year old) wethers (castrated males). Australian sheep farmers have advised Animals Australia that they would be upset to lose even 1% over an entire year of this class of sheep, which they consider to be animals in the prime of their lives. During just a 2 - 3 week voyage to the Middle East, on average approximately 1% of these carefully selected sheep will die. On the livestock vessel Al Kuwait, met by investigators in Kuwait City in November 2003, approximately 1000 of these 'strong and healthy' Australian sheep died during a 14-day voyage described by the stockman on board as having been conducted in perfect conditions, i.e. mild temperatures and calm seas.

The Cormo Express disaster highlighted the welfare implications of live animal transportation by sea. Clear evidence was provided that the longer sheep are kept on a ship, the higher the mortality rate. On the Cormo Express, just under 10% (nearly 6000 animals) died during 11 weeks they spent on the water. This was despite Australian vets and an independent OIE (World Animal Health Organisation) veterinarian proclaiming (soon after the rejection) that the animals were in good health.

Has the adoption of the 'Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock' (introduced in the 'shack-up' after the Cormo Express rejection) led to substantial changes for Australian animals during and after live export?

The 'Standards' do not and cannot alter the inherent problems of long distance transportation - fear and stress, inanition in sheep, transportation to another hemisphere and climate (particularly for sheep), and the inherent and persistent dangers of the sea. And of course the Australian 'Standards' cannot influence what happens to animals in the importing countries.

Already there have been persistent and significant breaches of the standards documented. Injured and ill animals are often transported to shipside in Fremantle (where 80% of sheep are exported from). This is despite the Standards requiring individual inspection by Government officers before loading at feedlots. In Fremantle this inspection only occurs shipside.

Further, sheep that fail to eat the pellet diet provided (at feedlots and on ships) are not routinely detected and excluded from live exportation. Inanition (failure to eat) is the direct cause of 47% of sheep deaths on ship, and the precursor to deaths due to salmonellosis (a further 27%).

This failure to detect and exclude these animals from shipments led to the suffering and ultimate death of approximately 28,000 sheep in 2005 alone (74% of 38,960 reported sheep deaths on board).

Does the inclusion of a veterinarian on board each ship to the Middle East protect the welfare of our animals on board?

A single veterinarian on a ship is in charge of up to (and sometimes more than) 100,000 animals, and will therefore have great difficulty attempting to treat all sick animals. Sick or moribund animals are not even routinely euthanased, let alone any pretense made of treating all sick animals.

Again, a veterinarian (and/or stockman) would be able to recognize ill animals, and perhaps direct the quarantining of animals to prevent a greater spread of diseases, or may attempt to reduce the impact of a heat stress episode, but the presence of a single veterinarian and/or stockman cannot change the key problems on livestock ships, nor can these individuals influence the treatment of animals after unloading in an importing country.