

Australian sheep in live export are facing another year of horrendous suffering. There must continue to be a ban on exports during the highest risk period for heat stress, which should be extended to May to October, in accordance with the scientific evidence. The new Heat Stress Risk Assessment model recommended by the Government's own expert panel, must be applied throughout the year.

Standards for the preparation, loading and confinement of animals on board ship are set by the federal government through the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL), which were introduced following the Cormo Express disaster in 2003. However, these standards fail to meet the basic requirements of animal welfare or prevent exported livestock from suffering and dying on these voyages.

Animals experience a range of serious welfare problems caused by the conditions in which they are transported on live export ships, including heat stress, failure to eat, injury and disease, leading to morbidity and mortality. These problems are exacerbated by extreme heat and humidity, rough weather, and prolonged confinement for up to 31 days on board ship. The key issues affecting animal welfare on board live export ships are:

High stocking densities

Live export carriers can carry up to 70,000 animals on up to 10 decks, each fitted with fixed pens and metal non-slip flooring. Stocking densities inside these pens were set in the 1970s and have changed little since that time. Space allowances per animal are so small they do not allow for all animals to lie down at the same time, easily access food and water, move freely, or for sick or injured animals to be easily identified. These high stocking densities exacerbate levels of heat stress, failure to eat, morbidity, and mortality. Scientific evidence indicates that in order to meet animals' basic needs, space allowances in ship-board pens should be at least doubled – in other words, the number of animals loaded onto each vessel needs to be halved.

Lack of bedding or manure removal

Sheep on live export journeys are generally not provided with any bedding, nor are their pens cleaned out during the voyage. The pen floor is bare metal with a non-slip surface. Over the course of the journey, feces, urine, spilt feed pellets and water build up to form a layer of manure. On long-haul voyages, the heat and humidity means this can turn into dense, sticky mud, causing sheep to become bogged. Unless these sheep are assisted, they will slowly suffer and die from starvation or dehydration. Cattle decks are washed out during the voyage, and cattle are provided with a thin layer of sawdust or similar material as bedding, however, this is insufficient to prevent foot and leg abrasions or injuries

from occurring. As with sheep, cattle can also become coated in manure especially during hot and humid conditions.

Lack of independent and appropriate veterinary care

Government standards only require veterinarians to travel on live export voyages of 10 days or longer, and only one veterinarian is required per vessel, with the responsibility of caring for up to 70,000 animals housed over many decks. These veterinarians used to be government employees but now they are chosen and contracted directly by the exporter. Since this system was introduced in the 1990s, there have been several well-publicized examples of exporters exerting undue influence over veterinarians and of vets being ostracized by the industry for commenting on poor conditions on board.

High mortality rates and heat stress

Deaths on board ship are common on all sheep voyages and on some cattle voyages. This can vary from a small number to several thousand animals per voyage.

Mortality approximately doubles when sheep are transported from the Australian winter to the Middle Eastern summer (May to October). On average, sheep deaths are lowest in the first four months of the year, rise to a peak in August and remain above 1% until after October. Two separate government reviews (Keniry Review 2004; Farmer Review 2011) have indicated that the mortality rates of sheep exported into the Middle Eastern summer are unacceptably high.

Cattle are also affected by export during this period, especially European breeds exported from southern ports. Stocking density adjustments cannot protect animals from morbidity and mortality when temperatures approach or reach the heat stress threshold for the species concerned.

At their destination, exported animals may spend several months at a feedlot for fattening, or may be transported directly to a slaughtering facility. Evidence has shown that individual buyers in some countries will transport sheep in car boots and on roof-racks in temperatures that may exceed 40°C. Sheep have been documented being herded into a slaughtering facility, and then dragged one by one to the slaughtering area where their throats are cut and they are left to bleed to death over a drain. In some importing countries, cattle have been shown to face even more horrific deaths. In slaughtering halls, they have had their tendons slashed and sometimes their eyes gouged in order to bring them down and, finally, they have their throats cut, often with blunt knives requiring multiple cuts, and are left to bleed to death. Cattle and sheep destined for 'home slaughter' are no better off and may face equally cruel slaughtering methods. This is beneath the standards of animal husbandry that is mandated in Australia, as well as the U.S. Ideally, the adoption of a chilled and frozen meat-only trade

would prevent the suffering inherent in long-distance sea transport and save millions of animals from the cruel fate awaiting them in foreign destinations.

Aside from doing the really humane thing - transporting frozen meat, not live transport – it is incumbent upon Australia to mandate that live transport be suspended for the months May – October due to the extreme heat that causes unconscionable suffering and agony to these sentient beings.

I implore the Australian Government to adopt more humane practices regarding the transport of these animals to the Middle East and either suspend transport during May thru October, or better yet, stop the transport of live animals. It's just wrong to make these animals suffer.

Sincerely,

B. Holden



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