

Banning live trade is not the answer to bad treatment



**COMMENT by
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THE issue of live exports is back in the media with the recently announced suspension of live cattle to Egypt. Similar to the fall out when the Indonesian situation broke, no one was more shocked and horrified by the vision aired in the *Four Corners* program – *A Bloody Business* (ABC, May 2011) than Australian producers.

I am not defending current practices. Everyone agrees that constant improvements are necessary across many aspects of animal handling and welfare. Radical

reactions however, such as completely banning live animal export, are not the solution.

The fiasco caused by Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig's knee-jerk reaction to the *Four Corners* report is evidence of this.

The impacts of his sudden ban are still being felt by farmers Australia wide. Most evidently is the viability of the northern cattle industry and significant reduction in the value of cattle in domestic markets due to increased supply from northern Australia of animals which would have previously been eligible for export.

Exporting carcasses is not the answer. Australia already exports huge volumes of meat.

Last year 62 per cent of national production or \$6.3 billion worth of red meat alone was exported to regions, such as North America, Asia and Europe. There are a number of reasons why live export to regions such as Indonesia (population 250 million) and the Middle East (population 400m) is the only way to meet their markets.

Religion in these regions dictates the rituals and processes that must be adhered to in the preparation of meat for consumption. The greatest shortfall of exporting chilled or frozen meat is that the households have limited electricity supply – let alone refrigeration.

The process of live export does not subject animals to adverse conditions. Contrary to uninformed assumptions, animal hygiene is paramount. Only provisions of the highest quality are provided.

Accredited export veterinarians monitor health and wellbeing on every voyage.

Banning Australian live export would simply result in them sourcing animals from the many other countries willing to meet these lucrative markets. Brazil and other South American nations, in particular, generally require much lower animal welfare standards.

While Australia provides to these developing nations, we have the opportunity to educate and influence how we expect animals to be treated.

This will ultimately result in much better

animal welfare standards. The reason that research into practices such as live export displays such negative portrayals is due to the highly vocal nature of its opponents. Australian farmers are good at what they do.

Banning of Australian live export is no solution to the animal welfare issues in these developing countries. While we are supplying that market we have the ability to influence their practices.

A ban will only impact producers. With 76 Australian farmers leaving the industry every week, farming is already tough enough.

Everyone agrees change is necessary, but not radical, knee-jerk blanket bans. Look beyond the obvious impacts of such actions at the actual longer-term consequences for animals entering these regions. Welfare activists – let's co-operate, not condemn.

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