



The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP

Minister for Agriculture
Federal Member for New England

Ref: MC15-005253

Dr Dennis Jensen MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Jensen *Dennis*

Thank you for your letter of 22 June 2015 about a petition received by the Standing Committee on Petitions concerning the live export trade. No one condones animal cruelty, least of all the Australian Government.

Australia has arguably the strictest system in the world to ensure our exported sheep and cattle are treated as humanely as possible. The Department of Agriculture's review of the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS), released in January 2015, found that more than 99 per cent of livestock sent overseas since the systems introduction in 2011 were exported without reported incident and in accordance with standards set by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

In fact, the OIE itself has said the Australian livestock export industry is leading the world in animal welfare and that industry's investments in improving implementation of OIE welfare standards has its full and unequivocal support.

In addition the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL) sets basic standards, as required by Australian, state and territory government legislation, ensuring animal welfare outcomes underpin all aspects of the trade. ASEL includes standards for sourcing and on-farm preparation of livestock; land transport of livestock for export; management of livestock in registered premises; vessel preparation; loading; on-board management; and air transport of livestock.

The reality is that livestock exports are an important, ongoing trade for Australia. The industry employs around 10 000 people, contributes significantly to the country's economy, supports many rural and regional communities, and underpins better economic returns at the farm gate.

Furthermore, Australia's disease free status and our reputation for quality ensures we are able to sustain live exports and the meat processing industry, servicing both domestic and international market demand for high value, superior meat.

In many ways, the two sectors complement one another, with the export trade playing an important role domestically. Competition between exporters and meat processors has helped to regulate national livestock prices, ensuring they remain competitive and improving returns to Australian livestock producers. This has helped to sustain and increase livestock production, benefitting both the meat and live export sectors.

While many markets are now demanding more chilled and frozen meat, there are still some countries that retain strong cultural preferences for live animals. In some cases, lack of refrigeration also prevents Australia from servicing all its export markets with processed meat products. The livestock export industry is a key player in meeting this market demand.

If the live exports were to cease, the drop in sheep and cattle prices combined with the rise in transport costs and the loss of revenue, particularly in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, would be significant. This would have further ramifications on the viability of Australia's meat sector which already has higher processing costs than competitor countries.

While the value of the live export trade has grown to \$2.34 billion since this government came to office in October 2013, it is worthwhile noting that it is still only a small part of our overall meat trade. Australia processes significant volumes of meat onshore for export—about \$9.8 billion worth in 2013-14.

The government accepts that there are a wide range of views on the issue of livestock exports within the community however we remain strongly committed to ensuring that this important trade can continue under the world-leading standards that are currently in place.

I note that when the Standing Committee on Petitions has considered this response it will be presented in the House and posted on the Committee's website.

Thank you for taking the time again to contact me in relation to this important matter.

Yours sincerely

Barnaby Joyce MP

30 JUL 2015