

CHAPTER 10

CONDITIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Unloading at Middle Eastern Ports

10.1 The ALEA stated that there are no delays in the berthing of sheep carriers in the Middle East unless bad weather intervenes. In all ports, sheep carriers are given priority. The ALEA stated that, in virtually all the Middle Eastern countries, there are unloading systems as good as, or even better than, those in Australia. The Bahrain Government, in particular, has taken action to ensure swift unloading.¹ The Harries Report to the South Australian RSPCA observed that at Kuwait under normal circumstances, there was no undue delay in the berthing and discharge of livestock, which were regarded as a priority cargo.²

10.2 However, other information received by the Committee indicated that delays in discharging of sheep in hot, humid conditions in the Middle East were very common. There is also evidence that because of delays and disputes there can be a sudden influx of sheep at ports in the Middle East. In April and May 1978 eight ships discharged a total of 240 000 sheep at the Iranian port of Bandar Shapour in the Persian Gulf. The 'Land' reported that 'this placed unacceptable strain on ship discharge facilities and the entire distribution system' and 'delays in unloading ships had caused heat stress in 40 degrees celsius temperatures and the loss of several thousand sheep'.³

10.3 Willson reported, in his voyage to the Middle East in January 1982, that the 'Persia' was held off Aqabah for nearly 24 hours but once berthed the unloading was rapid and

efficient.⁴ Paxton reported that the ports of Shuwaikh, Dammam, Jeddah and Fujairah also efficiently handled the disembarkation of livestock. However, he advised that the Australian Government should approach Middle Eastern governments to ensure that ships carrying livestock were given priority in berthing and that the unloading of livestock was done as smoothly and rapidly as possible in order to minimise suffering and losses. Livestock being held on a stationary ship in the Middle East were often given no feed and water.⁵

10.4 The Victorian RSPCA stated that 'what concerns us in the Middle East is the fact that these animals which arrive in the Middle East are then subjected to animal husbandry standards which are totally at variance with the way in which the sheep had been handled since birth in Australia'.⁶ However, various witnesses have reported satisfactory unloading of sheep from ship to shore. Dr Napthine of the Victorian Department of Agriculture described how, within one hour of docking at Kuwait, the sheep were efficiently run off the ship and then run 150 metres into a large, well-ventilated, holding shed. No unloading took place during the heat of the day, that is, between 1200 and 1600 hours.⁷

10.5 Miss Chris Larter, an animal welfarist associated with the Brooke Animal Hospital, Cairo, accompanied the 'Viborg' to Benghazi, Libya. She observed that the unloading was accomplished efficiently and the sea journey had not affected the sheep.⁸

10.6 However, unloading of the 'Persia' at El Adabia, Suez in September 1981 was described as follows:

'There were no facilities to handle the sheep at the port. The boat was delayed for three days before unloading could take place, during which time the sheep were without

water ... The men did not know even how to load the sheep, and our sources gave some advice. Sheep were escaping, being chased over the wharf by dogs and children, caught by the legs, and thrown on their backs into the trucks.⁹

10.7 Dr Temple Grandin reported that interviews with ships' officers and other people in the shipping industry indicated that some ports in the Middle East had good unloading facilities but others needed improvement.¹⁰ Her main criticism was that, at some ports, the sheep were unloaded directly on to trucks from the main ramp of the ship, which delayed unloading considerably. She suggested the use of a folding, raised unloading platform similar to the one used by Siba and Fares in Western Australia. Also, where sheep are unloaded directly onto the wharf, the gradient of the ramp on some ships may be excessively steep at high tide. Grandin believed that the angle of the ramps should not exceed 25 degrees and to prevent this steep angle the main ship's ramp could be rested on a platform with ramp extension.

10.8 Brennan reported that some ports in the Middle East are claimed to be worse than others, but he continued that mortalities during discharge have been recorded as quite high. Meischke reported that mortalities after unloading sometimes exceeded seven per cent.¹¹ This has been attributed to food and water rationing or deprivation, delays in berthing, delays in unloading, disorganisation on the wharf and inadequate road transport. He also noted that blind sheep slow the rate of discharge from ships.¹²

10.9 Dobson observed that the unloading of the 'Viborg' in Kuwait in 1983 took 21 1/2 hours. The period of unloading was unnecessarily long and the delay was due to the stock being immediately loaded on to trucks. Dobson and other witnesses have expressed concern about slow unloading in mid summer in the

Middle East because the high temperatures (up to 50°C), lack of water and overcrowding while waiting for transport to feedlot in the long loading races lead to much suffering and death.¹³ Willson noted on the 'Persia' at Jeddah that these delays contributed to the loss during discharge of 13 sheep through smothering in the alleyways and loading ramps.¹⁴

10.10 It appears that conditions and procedures for unloading sheep in the Middle East vary considerably in their efficiency and provisions for the welfare of the sheep.

10.11 Dr Peter Arnold told the Committee that 'there are some very, very good facilities available in the Middle East, probably better than what is here'.¹⁵ Dr Napthine referred to the facilities in Kuwait as 'excellent'. The sheep were run into a large concrete holding shed on the wharf which was well ventilated and had provision for feed and water.¹⁶ Lt Colonel Harries described the Kuwait facilities as 'well above average' and that layout, ventilation, feed and water provision were of a 'high standard'. It was used as a 'reservoir' between the ship and the road transport carrying the sheep to the company feedlot 20 km inland.¹⁷ Lt Colonel Harries was not able to see the wharf facilities at Bahrain. He understood that the sheep were held in pens on the wharf until they could be moved by road transport.

10.12 The unloading facilities are important in the distribution of sheep. The AMLC believed that Iran discontinued the import of live sheep because their handling facilities were under threat from Iraqi attack. 'They are so busy handling other commodities in through that port, that I do not think they want it congested with live sheep. I think they are having problems between the port and getting it into Tehran.' Mr Beeby added 'It is a long, long way over very hot, bad roads. We protested strongly about the problems associated with coming out of Bandar Abbas.'¹⁸

Road Transport

10.13 RSPCA Victoria stated that there are major problems with the transportation of the sheep throughout the country of destination.¹⁹ Although Dr Napthine found no evidence of overcrowding in Kuwait, Drs Arnold, Willson and Brennan have all referred to instances of overcrowding and inadequacies of transport.²⁰ Lt Colonel Harries noted that the road transports at Kuwait which were used for travel to the feedlot, were semi-trailers of Australian manufacture.²¹ Mr Ralph James of the Sheepmeat Council and Mr Vivian Burton of Metro Meat Ltd expressed similar views.²² However, Willson noted that at Jeddah, at the unloading of the 'Persia', the trucks were not well equipped to carry sheep and loading was often excessive. In addition, an intermittent shortage of trucks contributed to the unloading problems mentioned above.²³ At the unloading of the 'Persia' at El Adabia it was stated that the trucks used to transport the animals were 'entirely inadequate, some having sloping floors which caused the sheep to fall over'.²⁴ Paxton, who was stationed in the Middle East from March to September 1983, observed careless acts which prejudiced the welfare of the sheep, such as forcing sheep to jump from the back of trucks and tying of sheep's feet to transport them in trucks. He concluded that the transportation of sheep to the feedlot needed improvement in some countries, mainly those which had not developed expertise in sheep handling on a large scale, and also among some of the smaller importers.²⁵

Feedlots in the Middle East

10.14 On arrival in the Middle East, sheep may be held in feedlots for up to six weeks.²⁶ Paxton reported that large feedlots exist or are under construction at Kuwait, Fujairah, Riyadh, Damman and Jeddah.²⁷ Importers were investing

'considerable funds' in feedlots to prevent substantial economic losses resulting from the weight losses occurring in the sheep and cattle that land in the Middle East.²⁸

Feedlot Facilities

10.15 The Sheepmeat Council of Australia stated that feedlot facilities in the Middle East were of 'top quality'.²⁹ RSPCA (Victoria) did not accept this assessment³⁰ and the AMLC described conditions as 'improving'.³¹ Other information received by the Committee indicated that the Saudi feedlots were the best in the Middle East, most of the others were satisfactory and a few were bad.

10.16 These varying assessments require an examination of these facilities in greater detail. Napthine and Harries reported that fodder and water facilities in the Kuwait feedlot were practical and adequate consisting of metal feed troughs at the perimeter of the yard and two cement water troughs with an adequate supply of clean water. By contrast, at the feedlot in Bahrain which they visited, there was insufficient drinking space, the water troughs were dirty and the feed troughs were inadequate.³² Meischke reported that the cleanliness of the Bahrain facilities had deteriorated from the previous year.³³

10.17 The AVA commented that shade cloth had been installed in the major feedlots and this had reduced mortalities.³⁴ Harries and Napthine noted a significant drop in temperature on entry into the shaded yards in Kuwait, where 80 per cent of the area was effectively shaded. By contrast, the Bahrain feedlot had 20 per cent of its area covered with a corrugated iron roof.³⁵ Meischke noted that the provision of shade in Bahrain was worse than the previous year.³⁶ In Kuwait, plantations had been located on the perimeter of the feedlot to reduce the effect of the hot winds. Paxton noted that feedlots were not equipped with any means for drafting or restraining animals.³⁷

10.18 Feedlots in Bahrain and two large new feedlots in Saudi Arabia had been designed with Australian help, particularly from the AMLC.³⁸ Australian input might be increased through the Australian Development Assistance Bureau consideration of aid for feasibility studies for quarantine/abattoir complexes and in the tendering by the Australian Overseas Project Corporation for the construction of abattoirs and animal handling facilities.³⁹

Feed

10.19 Middle Eastern feedlots employ varying feed regimes. Harries and Napthine reported that in the Kuwait feedlot, the sheep were fed lucerne hay on their arrival at the feedlot, 50/50 lucerne hay and pellets the next day, and exclusively pellets on the third day.⁴⁰ Little hay is produced locally because of the harsh desert climate⁴¹ and it is expensive to import. In Kuwait lucerne hay was imported from China. The Kuwaiti pellets were manufactured at a feedmill owned by KLTT which adjoined the feedlot. The pellet was made with Australian barley (20 per cent), Iraqi dates (20 per cent) which were used as a binding agent, soya bean cake, lucerne and supplements. Napthine was told that the protein content was 15 per cent and the digestibility was good. There was no evidence of a dust problem.⁴² In Bahrain, Napthine and Harries observed that the feed was a powder - bran type feed. The AMLC representative stated that it had a high grain content.⁴³ The Committee received information that in Saudi Arabia the feed was usually whole barley used with a roughage such as wheat bran. No pellets were used. Whole barley is imported from Australia aboard the carriers but it is not known what percentage is supplied from Australia. Barley is also used in the Kuwaiti pellets. Paxton noted that livestock rations at smaller feedlots tended to be unbalanced and based on wheat bran and, to a lesser extent,

barley.⁴⁴ The AMLC reported that feedlots in the Middle East do make considerable use of bran and pollard.⁴⁵ There is evidence that these barley/bran diets are inadequate and may cause acidosis.

Feedlot Management

10.20 Paxton commented that there was wide variation in management skills used in the feedlots, but there was general acceptance that acquisition of management expertise was worthwhile. Australian management is increasingly being used.⁴⁶ The management of the large feedlots has a degree of government participation and integration with Australian enterprises.⁴⁷

10.21 Harries and Napthine observed the veterinary care available at the feedlots. In Kuwait, the sheep were inspected twice a day. Sick animals were isolated and treated and those beyond treatment were destroyed.⁴⁸ At Bahrain they observed 15 moribund sheep that were carefully stepped over by stockmen engaged in feeding. To avoid theft and abuse the stockmen were not permitted to destroy them but, at the request of the AMLC and Australian diplomats, arrangements were made for a government veterinarian to visit the area daily to destroy moribund sheep.⁴⁹ However, Meischke reported that, on his inspection a year later, the removal of the dead and the care of the sick were still neglected.

10.22 Stocking densities also appeared to differ. The feedlot at Kuwait, which has a capacity of 95 000 had an estimated stocking density of 1000 sheep per hectare.⁵⁰ In Bahrain the sheep were all in one large yard with a total area of at least 0.8 hectares.⁵¹

10.23 Feedlot mortality rates are an indication of management skill as well as good welfare practices. Brennan reported that mortality rates varied considerably.⁵² Napthine reported that between 1.0 and 1.5 per cent of the sheep died during the first week in the Kuwaiti feedlot. Arnold reported daily mortalities in Saudi feedlots of 0.08 per cent⁵³ whereas another source reported 0.4 per cent. The AMLC reported mortalities of below one per cent for the duration of the feedlotting period.⁵⁴

The Environment

10.24 The AVA reported a loss of sheep that was 'quite serious' caused by heat stroke induced by the very hot conditions to which sheep are exposed in the Middle East.⁵⁵ This was supported in part by Paxton who observed that during the northern summer, the Arabian climate could severely stress Australian livestock, already stressed by the sea voyage. Temperature, humidity and wind speed were all factors which determined livestock mortalities.⁵⁶

10.25 Australian sheep in the Middle East are at greater risk to disease and parasites exotic to Australia.⁵⁷ Australian sheep lack immunity to sheep pox, foot and mouth, rinderpest and other endemic Middle Eastern diseases which are also prevalent in North Africa, Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. Australian sheep are exposed to livestock imported from these areas and also to indigenous livestock.⁵⁸

10.26 Rinderpest, also known as cattle plague, is an infectious disease of cattle which can also affect sheep and goats. Mortality is almost 100 per cent.⁵⁹ In 1897, rinderpest devastated the African continent and wiped out nearly all cattle in South Africa.⁶⁰ In April 1985 it was reported that 240 Australian export cattle unloaded in Bahrain died from the disease. The remaining 260 cattle in the shipment had to be slaughtered. Bahrain was previously thought to be free of the disease.⁶¹

10.27 Sheep pox is a viral disease that is very severe and often fatal, with mortality rates reaching 70 per cent.⁶² It is possible to vaccinate Australian sheep on arrival and isolate them until they are immune.⁶³

10.28 Foot and mouth is another deadly viral disease which is dangerous because of its ability to spread rapidly. Paxton reported that the Middle East importers accept 'in principle' that Australian sheep should be separated from sheep and goats from other countries. This principle is fully applied in practice by only a few companies but it is gradually being applied more widely.⁶⁴

10.29 Screw worm fly is another serious threat to sheep health and welfare. Without treatment 'the animals are almost invariably killed by the parasite within about 2 weeks of the initial infestation'.⁶⁵ Meischke reported the prevalence of screw worm fly in Bahrain in 1981 and it was first diagnosed in south-eastern Saudi Arabia in 1980.⁶⁶ Both Napthine and Meischke reported no evidence of screw worm fly in Kuwait.⁶⁷

10.30 Overcrowding of feedlots can occur because of the increased demand for sheep during Sawm, the daylight fast during the month of Ramadan which occurs 11 days earlier in each Gregorian year. During Ramadan it is said that there is an increased demand for red meat as Muslims observe custom more closely. This demand is anticipated by purchasing extra supplies of live sheep.⁶⁸ The ALEA stated that there are facilities available to ensure that supply can be maintained at times of peak demand. However, Paxton observed that the increased demand could 'overwhelm' feedlots and result in suffering for livestock owing to inadequate shade, water and feed. He reported that in 1983 demand was over-estimated so that sheep were held for

longer periods than usual. Ramadan has coincided with the Arabian summer since 1980 and it will continue to do so until 1986.⁶⁹

Sheep Slaughtering Conditions in the Middle East

Halal Slaughter

10.31 Halal slaughter is the method of slaughter employed by Muslims both in Australia and the Middle East. According to the AMLC the requirements of halal slaughter vary from country to country:

'It has to be slaughtered by an Islamic slaughterman who has to say a specific prayer and, dependent upon the country that it is going to, he may or may not have to face a specific direction. The animal has to die by bleeding, and there is then some variation on the acceptability of whether the animal can be stunned or not. In some countries, if you can demonstrate that electrical stunning does not kill the animal such stunning is permitted. If there is any question of whether the animal is alive at the time of slaughter then some countries may not accept stunning.'⁷⁰

Pre-Stunning

10.32 The AAHQs stated that without pre-stunning halal slaughter was cruel.⁷¹ The Victorian RSPCA added that although halal slaughter in Australia could only with difficulty be regarded as inhumane because it consisted of stunning and the cutting of the throat at the same time, slaughter methods in the Middle East were inhumane because there were deficiencies in stunning and in 'inducing, as far as is practical, instant unconsciousness in the animal'.⁷²

10.33 The RSPCA (Victoria) criteria for humane slaughter are those adopted by the EEC. Whatever means of slaughter is used on the animal it should induce, as far as possible, 'instantaneous unconsciousness followed quickly by the physical death of the animal'.⁷³

10.34 The Victorian Department of Agriculture commented that stunning is not always as efficient as is assumed. Slaughtering sheep by severing the cervical blood vessels in the spinal cord is practised throughout Australia. It is argued in some quarters that if it is done correctly it is an effective method of slaughtering.⁷⁴ The AMLC indicated that sheep are slaughtered in the Middle East without the benefit of stunning.⁷⁵ Meischke visited slaughterhouses in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Kuwait. With the exception of Syria, sheep were slaughtered by cutting the throat and severing the spinal cord. He reported that in Syria the spinal cord was not severed.⁷⁶

10.35 Mr Jack O'Toole has visited the Middle East on four occasions since 1975 and has inspected halal slaughter conditions on each occasion. He commented:

'It certainly has not improved with every visit ... What is required in Australia is that the animals must be pre-stunned before they are slaughtered and that means that the animal is hit with an electric charge sufficient to bring it down; that is, to make it unconscious long enough for the throat to be cut and for the animal to then bleed to death. Preference among our people is that the throat should be cut in such a way that the joint between the neck and the head is severed so that the spinal cord is cut and the animal is properly in a state where it will not regain consciousness. We do a modified kill in Australia, which circumstances require us to perform, and that is that the neck is not always broken for the Muslim market, or for a market that we do service in the Middle East. That means that the throat is cut but the neck is not broken.

That ensures that the animal does bleed to death, but it may be able to regain consciousness before it bleeds to death, although it is unlikely if the stun has been done properly.

We believe that those standards are minimum standards. They are certainly not even approached in the Middle East in the places that I have seen, and in those circumstances we believe that the standards that we impose upon ourselves in Australia should have some relevance to the stock that we are exporting.⁷⁷

10.36 In a study by Newhook and Blackmore it was demonstrated that if all arteries in the neck were severed it took up to nine seconds for a sheep to lose consciousness. For animals with only one severed carotid artery this time was extended to 25 to 30 seconds and some detectable degree of brain activity continued for up to 77 seconds in sheep and 105 seconds in lambs.⁷⁸

10.37 Lt Colonel Harries commented that the Egyptians in their main Cairo College would accept stunning prior to slaughter as would those in Kuwait. He found that the problem was that the interpretation of the Koran was fragmented, with each religious leader having his own idea of what 'halal' meant. He believed that if stunning were promoted as part of a programme to increase efficiency in the use of equipment in the abattoirs, religious authorities in the Middle East may eventually accept it.⁷⁹

Abattoir Conditions

10.38 The general conditions of slaughter in the Middle East may also be unsatisfactory by Australian standards. Lt Colonel Harries commented on the Malakh Abattoir in Kuwait:

'It was a total mess when I saw it at that time (1981). Sheep were mobbed up and driven into a room. They were jumped on by slaughtermen and turned over and their

throats were cut, and they were left there in view of the other sheep, which we do not think is a good thing. It was all a massacre of the innocents. It was done extremely fast, I give them that, but it was badly organised, inefficient and incompetent, which gave a totally bad impression. The handling was fairly rough as well. They were full of protestations that this was only a temporary thing and it would be changed fairly shortly ... I am informed that it has changed for the better.'⁸⁰

10.39 Lt Colonel Harries also reported that at this abattoir there was no attempt to break the neck or sever the spinal cord. The entire operation was conducted in a welter of blood and would have been totally unacceptable in Australia on grounds of cruelty and lack of hygiene. Napthine reported that this abattoir was owned and operated by the Kuwait municipal authorities. It was built to handle 400 sheep per day but in 1981 was killing over 1000 per day. Napthine commented that the facilities were 'antiquated, inefficient and by Australian standards unhygienic'.⁸¹ Plans to build a new abattoir were 'in hand' in 1981 but they had been in hand for over four years.

10.40 Harries and Napthine also visited one small town slaughterhouse in Bahrain, which was not in operation at the time of their visit. They were informed that the method of slaughter did not differ from that in Kuwait. Napthine reported that it consisted of one large open room, the floor of which was guttered to allow for blood and waste disposal. Napthine regarded it as 'rather primitive'.⁸²

10.41 In Saudi Arabia most of the abattoirs are owned by the Government. They are operated by private companies on a contractual basis and the municipalities provide the veterinary inspections.⁸³ Modern abattoirs have been established in most of the major centres of Saudi Arabia in order to discourage home slaughter.⁸⁴ Mr Ralph James visited the Middle East in 1982 with the Australian Sheep Meat Study Mission. He inspected

abattoirs in Saudi Arabia that were available to sheep purchasers. The sheep were received at 4.00 pm, slaughtered overnight and delivered for 'hot' sale the next day.

'The horrendous stories of the way sheep are slaughtered there I believe are just not true. Modern abattoirs are stationed throughout and I understand are being improved.'⁸⁵

Non-Abattoir Slaughter

10.42 Messrs Dransfield and O'Toole, who were both members of the 1982 Sheep Meat Study Mission to the Middle East, commented on the practice of private slaughter. Sheep in small pens were bought from traders in the suburbs and then transported in high temperatures in the boot of a car to the abattoir.

'It was very cruel. I have seen those same animals put on the floor with a foot on the head and a knife just run across the throat.'⁸⁶

10.43 This procedure was encouraged in Saudi Arabia to stop backyard slaughter because disease has spread 'right throughout the community'. The abattoir built in 1982 was opened specifically to cope with slaughtering of livestock for the population, and no charge was made.⁸⁷ Jack O'Toole argued that it was a skilled job to kill an animal. Sheep were strong animals that needed proper handling to be killed humanely:

'You just cannot kill one every twelve months or on someone's birthday and do it humanely, because the animal must be controlled and it must be slaughtered humanely. There is no way that you can do that if you do it once a year and use inadequate methods or tools.'⁸⁸

10.44 Meischke reported that in many Middle Eastern countries the law forbidding home slaughtering is lifted for one or two days per year for religious reasons. He also commented that it is possible that slaughtering techniques used by the general population during this period may be inhumane.⁸⁹ However, there is considerable evidence that home slaughter occurs much more often and much more casually, and that there is no requirement that sheep be killed at a local abattoir.⁹⁰ In addition, the conditions of home slaughter may be inhumane by western standards. This was demonstrated with the ritual slaughter of a sheep in London to celebrate the return to London of an official at the Iranian Embassy, after a pilgrimage to Mecca for the celebration of the Id Al Adha religious festival. Had diplomatic immunity not been invoked charges may have been laid under the Cruelty to Animals Act.⁹¹