

CHAPTER 5

ROAD AND RAIL TRANSPORT TO FEEDLOT

Duration of Journey

5.1 The ABAH Model Code of Practice for Road Transport recommends that for:

'mature ruminant animals (sheep, cattle, goats and buffalo), a rest period of between 12 and 24 hours should be provided after each 36 hours of travel. The period of travel may be extended to 48 hours if a full 24 hour rest period is then provided.'¹

These recommendations are identical for rail transport.²

5.2 The Committee has received conflicting evidence on the maximum duration of the journey from farm or saleyard to the export feedlot. The AMLC stated that sheep are purchased sometimes many thousands of kilometres from the port of loading and are then transported by road or rail to an assembly area or depot.³

5.3 One submission indicated that the rail journey from Armidale, NSW to the Adelaide feedlots could take three to five days.⁴ The Brennan Report indicated that it could take from two and a half to four and a half days to complete the journey from southern Queensland to Adelaide, a distance of approximately 2000 kilometres. This would include 24 hours for yarding prior to departure, actual road transport of 20 hours, arrival at feedlot after curfew of 12 hours and eight hours for holding in yards for drafting and vaccination. This makes a

total of 64 hours, that is nearly three days, without food and possibly without water. It does not include various additional delays which may occur.⁵

5.4 The ACLA supplied the following details of the maximum time for the journey to port from a number of centres : Dubbo, 16 hours; Cootamundra, 15 hours; Armidale, 22-24 hours;⁶ Bourke 24 hours.⁷ The ACLA believed that 24 hours was the maximum duration of the journey although it was suggested that there may be occasions when sheep going to Portland would take slightly longer.⁸ In Tasmania the maximum duration of the journey is about six hours.⁹

5.5 Some sheep are not sent from Queensland or northern New South Wales direct to Portland or Adelaide. They are held further south for six to 12 months and are shorn before being sent to Portland. There is also some evidence of specialist export operations being established on properties within reasonable distances of the feedlots.¹⁰

5.6 The stress of road transport has been implicated as a predisposing cause in the development of salmonellosis.¹¹ There is also the view that the duration of inappetance following transport is proportional to the length of starvation during transport.¹²

5.7 The AVA commented that 'prolonged periods of transport are contrary to the best interests of the welfare of animals and under certain circumstances may be inimical to the economic interests of the owners as well'.¹³

Road Transport Versus Rail

5.8 The NSW Department of Agriculture said that when sheep were first transported from New South Wales the majority went by train, but this has been reduced to about ten per cent.¹⁴

5.9 There is also evidence that, in Victoria, mortalities for rail transport are five times greater than for road transport; 0.1 per cent compared with 0.02 per cent.¹⁵ This has been attributed to the enforced, prolonged deprivation of food and water for the sheep.¹⁶

5.10 The AMLC emphasised that the rail system:

'particularly in some states, has not given due consideration to the animal welfare needs of the livestock. Hence producers and buyers have tended to adopt road in preference to rail as, in many instances, they are not prepared to accept the manner in which their livestock are treated.'¹⁷

5.11 Rail truck quality varies considerably among the States. The NSW Department of Agriculture suggested that in NSW the older trucks should be removed.¹⁸

Transport Design and Improvements

5.12 There is inadequate knowledge and control of stock crate design.¹⁹ There are suggestions that the standard of stock crate design employed in Western Australia should be used as a model for construction in the eastern States²⁰ and that there is room for improvement in the design of loading and unloading facilities.

Livestock Mortalities during Transport Phase from Farm to Feedlot

5.13 The available mortality statistics are meagre. There is no uniform recording system. Transport casualty classifications range from dead sheep only, to dead, moribund, lame, injured and 'downer' sheep. The Western Australian Department of Agriculture and the ALEA were not able to supply statistics to the

Committee. The Victorian Department of Agriculture was able to do so from spot checks on a confidential basis.²¹ Other estimates ranged from 0.04 per cent to 0.15 per cent although Elders told the Committee that it incurred mortalities of 0.2 per cent for 1983-84.²² This lack of statistics hinders research into sheep losses, both for the trade and also for the transportation of livestock within Australia.

5.14 The Committee RECOMMENDS that details of sheep mortalities sustained during transportation from farm to feedlot be forwarded to the AAHQs for collation and analysis.

5.15 A research project funded by the AMRC to analyse mortalities, including transport mortalities, is being undertaken in Western Australia.²³

Rejection of Livestock at the Feedlot

5.16 At the feedlot the sheep are drafted by both feedlot management and a representative of the exporter. The ALEA stated:

'We insist on total freedom of drafting off any that are not acceptable and there have been cases where we have sent back truck loads, either because we do not consider that they were the sheep that were bought or because we doubt that the buyer has inspected them - we are dissatisfied. We want to cull them at that stage because our investment in the sheep is minimal at that stage. Once the animal gets on to the feedlot, that is a quarantined area. The animal is then anthraxed and any culls after that must be held for six weeks before they can be moved.'²⁴

5.17 The sheep that are rejected fall into three categories. The damaged or badly crippled are humanely destroyed immediately. The lame are put onto grass in a separate paddock

and kept under observation. Underweight sheep are put onto feed for inclusion in the next shipment.²⁵ The rejects may be traced to their source if there is a line of 100 or more available, but this is often difficult to do because a shipment may include sheep from up to 200 suppliers.²⁶ Tracing is also dependent upon the legibility of the wool brands, if they are used.

5.18 The ACLA stated that if the sheep are rejected at the feedlot the owner bears the cost of their disposal but if the shipper has taken delivery at the farm gate, they are his responsibility.²⁷

5.19 The ACLA commented that feedlot delivery was introduced by the shippers²⁸ and has been the established practice in Western Australia and South Australia since the trade began. On-farm delivery is only occurring to any extent in New South Wales. In all other cases the vendor takes responsibility for delivering stock to the feedlot. It is perceived that 'if the producer has the responsibility for losses he will prepare his sheep better'.²⁹