

DISSENTING REPORT

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No.2) 2004

In my view, the proposed amendments to the *Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry Act 1997* (AMLI Act) contained in this legislation do nothing to address the longstanding and serious concerns about the live animal export trade. Given that the legislation is part of the response to the recommendations of the Keniry inquiry which was established in an effort to address widespread community concerns about the industry, this is unsatisfactory.

Under the Bill, funds normally disbursed to the Meat and Live-stock Australia (MLA) will be diverted specifically to LiveCorp, which promotes the further expansion of live export trade. LiveCorp is not only being handed a life-line, it is also being given an opportunity to exert even greater influence in matters related to the industry.

In addition to the intrinsic cruelty to animals involved in the live sheep and cattle trade, in my view there is clear evidence that the trade directly costs jobs in Australia.

If there was any genuine intent to get better animal welfare outcomes in the livestock industries, attempts would be made to develop economically viable alternatives to live exports. There is an existing trade in processed and frozen meat which is much larger in value than live exports, yet nothing is being done to further develop this as alternative, despite it clearly being a viable alternative.

The support for LiveCorp extending its role and responsibilities to that of the live-export industry's research and development body seems incongruous under the circumstances; particularly considering the number of previous attempts made to improve the performance of the industry.

The Australian Democrats do support the notion of compulsory fees for the purposes of research and development on animal welfare issues while the trade continues, as long as this is not done as an alternative to better developing viable alternatives to the industry. However, it is completely inappropriate for any portion of the levy being directed into marketing of any type.

I fail to see how spending more to market and promote an industry that has major animal welfare problems can do anything to reduce those problems. Given the industry's long standing record of denying animal welfare problems and only acting on these matters whenever an incident occurs which highlights the clear cruelty involved, it is hard to see how extra marketing funds would be used for anything other than PR exercises to counter the bad publicity that is inevitably going to continue occurring.

Whilst spending money from an industry levy on research & development may appear to have more validity, I have little confidence there is any real likelihood of this spending involving any significant or meaningful focus on animal welfare matters.

From the evidence presented to the Senate Committee, there has clearly been no real effort made by industry to date consult with animal welfare groups about the development of the guidelines for determining how the research and development funds would be spent. There has also clearly been no meaningful attempt to involve animal welfare groups in the formulation of this legislation or its application. The very limited time which peak groups such as the RSPCA and Animals Australia had to do a submission for this Committee inquiry and their consequential inability to give evidence at the public hearing reinforced the simple fact that there is still no serious recognition of the innate cruelty involved in this trade. The level of public concern at this cruelty is clearly large and continuing. It will not go away or be mollified by being ignored or by just responding with a better funded marketing and PR campaign.

In addition to full accountability and transparency of the imposition and collation of such fees, I believe any monies raised by the levy should only be used in the following ways:

- to enable research to be undertaken into animal welfare and animal health issues, and that these issues are central to all industry funded research and development;
- that the scientific merits of every proposed research and development project be examined to ensure improved animal welfare is its core goal, and that the progress of individual research and development projects be assessed to ensure the funds are being well utilised;
- to facilitate the establishment of an advisory group which includes at least two animal welfare representatives, to have input into the type of research undertaken using the R&D funds collected from industry;
- an annual audit be conducted of the entire research and development process to ensure its complying with the spirit and intention of the Keniry Report; and
- production and publication of annual reports and any completed papers in relation to research and development.

The Australian Democrats view the welfare and health of the animals in the livestock export trade as being fundamental to the imposition and collation of compulsory levies, and urge the Senate to support amendments on this basis.

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Australian Democrats