

Inquiry into the performance of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and agencies

1.1 At a private meeting on 10 October 2012, the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee (the committee) agreed to call the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and agencies, to a public hearing under Standing Order 25(2)(a) to discuss recent developments in live animal export arrangements.¹

1.2 The committee held a public hearing on 1 November 2012 and heard from the following entities:

- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Australian Livestock Export Corporation Limited (LiveCorp)
- Meat and Livestock Australia
- Australian Meat Processor Corporation Limited

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

1.3 The committee discussed a live export shipment of 21 000 sheep originally intended for export to Bahrain that did not gain permission to unload, due to concerns held by the Bahraini authorities about the health of a small number of sheep. The exporter made arrangements for the sheep to be sent to Pakistan, where, with the intervention of third parties, control of the supply chain was lost, and the sheep were eventually culled. Officers informed the committee that an investigation is currently taking place and the findings will be published once the report is finalised.²

1.4 The committee sought further information on the health of the sheep. Officers told the committee that the animals were passed as healthy and fit to load in Western Australia.³ Dr Conall O'Connell, former Secretary, explained that:

...the exporter let us know that they were having trouble unloading the vessel [in Bahrain], on the grounds that there appeared to be veterinary health grounds. At no stage did the [Bahraini] veterinary authorities actually reject the consignment on animal health grounds. In fact it was the port authority that asked the vessel to move off.⁴

1.5 Officers also informed the committee that the vessel had discharged sheep in Qatar and Oman prior to arriving in Bahrain.⁵

1 Under Standing Order 25(2)(a), Senate Standing Committees may inquire into the 'performance of departments and agencies allocated to them.'

2 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, p. 3. As at 11 February 2013, the investigation was still ongoing. *Estimates Hansard*, 11 February 2013, pp 62–63.

3 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, p. 5.

4 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, p. 4.

5 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, p. 4.

1.6 The committee also discussed how the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) operated in Pakistan. Officers told the committee that this was the first live export shipment to Pakistan since the introduction of ESCAS. Accordingly, additional measures, such as the presence of an independent monitoring officer from Meat and Livestock Australia personnel, and additional technical staff were deployed.⁶

LiveCorp

1.7 The committee sought further information on LiveCorp's involvement in the shipment of sheep to Pakistan. LiveCorp told the committee that it received updates on the vessel through the Industry Government Implementation Group.

1.8 LiveCorp also informed the committee that it provides technical support and services, and did so with this vessel, through consultants in relation to point of discharge, transportation, feedlot, management and handling.⁷

Meat and Livestock Australia

1.9 Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) informed the committee of its role in the live export trade to assist exporters with their ESCAS compliance, and not to act as an industry regulator.

1.10 The committee discussed MLA's involvement in the shipment of sheep to Pakistan. MLA officers told the committee that a security assessment of Pakistan was done prior to posting staff and consultants to Pakistan.⁸

Australian Meat Processor Corporation Limited

1.11 The committee sought information on the Australian Meat Processor Corporation Limited's (AMPC) role in the meat processing industry. Officers explained that the AMPC is a corporation that administers and invests in research and development activities on behalf of meat processors, which covers a range of areas such as market access, product integrity, food safety, and climate change capability.⁹

1.12 The committee also discussed abattoirs in Northern Australia, subsidies for importing live sheep, and the ACIL Tasman report: *An economic analysis of live cattle exports*.¹⁰

Senator Glenn Sterle Committee Chair

6 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, p. 6.

7 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, p. 8.

8 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, p. 11.

9 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, p. 15.

10 *Committee Hansard*, 1 November 2012, pp 15–16.