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5 February 2003

The Hon KM Chance MLC
Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Midwest, Wheatbelt and Great Southern,
11th Floor Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
West Perth WA 6005

Dear Minister,

Live Animal Export Industry

On 20 January 2003, I went aboard the live animal export ship, "MV Bader III" which was docked in the port of Fremantle, loading sheep and bound for Saudi Arabia. This was day three in port and day three for some of the animals aboard. My guide was Mike Balsdon, Manager (West) Maritime Operations, Australian Maritime Safety Authority ("AMSA"). Mike is also the chief surveyor and a former ship's engineering Officer.

This animal cargo was approximately 100,000 sheep and approximately 800 cattle. My first question is "why approximately?" Doesn't AFFA, AQIS, or AMSA know the exact numbers of animals on these ships? If they do not know the loading numbers how do they know what the real mortality rates are?

During the two hours aboard I noted many serious problems in regard to the onboard management of the animals. As I walked around I made mental notes and manually checked as much as I could in regards to the watering and food systems setup, pen-stocking densities and the animals' appearances and body condition.

I alerted Mike as I came across the problems listed below.

1. Troughs too high for majority of sheep. Sheep under watered, underfed

2. Trough number totally inadequate for numbers of animals in each pen.

3. Watering system faulty and not in accordance with specifications

4. Water and food troughs contaminated. Food quality very poor.

5. Many sheep in unhealthy condition

6. Cattle underfed, under watered, pens overstocked.

7. Stocking densities in pens too high

The details of each of these issues is listed below.

**1. Troughs too high for majority of sheep. Sheep under watered, underfed**

All the troughs are too high. Lambs, hogget's and small breed sheep could not reach for water and food. The tallest sheep could just reach. Different sized sheep were mixed together in the same pens. The crew was aware of this and in one area had placed empty troughs upside down, inside the pens in line with the outside water troughs to act as a step for the small sheep. Sheep will not do this. Goats will. The "steps" were in fact preventing all animals from getting to these water troughs.

**2. Trough number totally inadequate for numbers of animals in each pen.**

The numbers of troughs were totally inadequate for numbers of animals in each pen.

**3. Watering system faulty and not in accordance with specifications**

Many troughs were bone dry. Others contained low levels of rusty water. None of the troughs I saw were filled with clean water. The fact that the troughs were dry and the troughs contained rusty water indicated that the troughs had not been filled for three days while animals were on this vessel.

The float switches were set too low in the water trough, which means that the troughs would only fill to about half level. The ship's watering system stated that the filling of the troughs is required to be automatically operated. However, overhead to each trough was a valve connected into the PVC water line which runs to each trough. This valve has to be turned by hand to allow water to flow from the valve to the trough. This is a manually operated system. All the valves that I saw had been turned to the "off" position.

Mike and I turned on a number of valves. Only one allowed water to flow to the troughs. The trough continued filing and overflowed because the float switch was faulty. We had to turn off the manual valve to prevent further overflow.

**4. Water and food troughs contaminated. Food quality very poor.**

Both food and water troughs were polluted with faeces. The troughs were filled with powder from pellets. A few handfuls of pellets were scattered over the top of this. A handful crushed easily. They were either very poor quality or very old. Good quality fresh pellets do not crush by hand.

On one section of the foredeck of the ship I noticed a pile of stock feed bags. They were unlabelled. A number were damaged, spilling the contents. They contained poor quality rough cut oaten chaff. This is “bulk” food only with very little nutritional value.

**5. Many sheep in unhealthy condition**

The overall condition of sheep in pens appeared average to poor. Some were quite bony. The actual condition of the sheep was probably a lot poorer than they appeared as many of them had two to three month old fleeces, which tend to hide the condition of the undernourished sheep.

Many sheep on the ship had dirty backsides. The last truckload, which was still on the wharf, had dirty backsides also. Scouring can be caused by stress, disease, or contaminated feed and water. Many sheep had signs of dehydration.

I saw quite a few with a watery eye condition. I have never seen this before. The staining and dried clumps of mucous on the faces of the sheep indicated to me that they probably had this problem prior to coming aboard. I also pointed out to Mike several cases of “pink-eye”.

All the lambs and hoggets had long tails. This is bad farming practice. Long tails are unhygienic in our climate and harbour bacteria. The Muslim religion does not require animals to be in tact prior to slaughter. Whethers have no testicles and have been exported to Muslims countries for 30 years.

**6. Cattle underfed, underwatered, pens overstocked.**

Below deck where the cattle were penned it was hot and humid, even though the ventilating system was operating. I did not see any outlet which would allow the hot air to escape. In fact, the ventilation was just re-circulating the hot air. It is no wonder that many cattle perish from heat stress on these ships if this was any indication of the conditions.

The water troughs had low levels of water. The food troughs contained powdered pellets and faeces. The number of troughs was inadequate for the number of cattle in each pen.

This breed of cattle had broad muzzles. They would have had difficulty in getting their muzzles into the troughs and getting to the water, especially as the levels of water were low.

The cattle were too tightly packed. Having two less animals in each pen would have allowed several to lie down and rest or sleep at a time. It would also allow air to flow freely between the animals, reducing their body temperature and help ward off heat stress (provided, of course that the animals are ventilated with fresh cool air.)

Animals come in all shapes and sizes, common sense has to prevail when stocking these pens.

I picked up several pads of faeces from a food trough. They were quite small and well defined. This indicated that this animal was underfed and under watered.

Some of the animals in the pen were lean, and were at an early stage of dehydration. I could see that the animals were stressed and suffering already and they were still in port.

**7. Stocking densities in pens too high**

The stocking density of the pens, especially the long pens was criminal. The long pens contained wall to wall sheep. I calculated that each pen held about 600. When a pen full of sheep were all pushed to the rear of the pen the space left inside the pen was no more than about three metres by four metres. This is not enough room to allow even 300 sheep to move freely or get to food and water. It is not enough room to allow the air to flow around their bodies to keep them cool, or allow them to lay down to rest or sleep. Animals that chew their cud need to rest for at least six hour a day so that their rumen acts effectively as a digestion and fermentation unit.

Sheep have a naturally high body temperature. This high density of packing the animals will create extra heat in each pen and especially in the central pens. If the animals have wool the propensity to suffer heat stress increases.

While the pens remain overcrowded, merely improving the ventilation will not be sufficient to adequately address the heat stress suffered by the animals.

Packing the pens this densely will also lead to high levels of airborne bacteria, which leads to many gastrointestinal problems.

**Reasons for high moralities.**

Typically, industry mortality reports read: “the reason is not clear as to why these animals have died, the majority of deaths occurred within three to four days from port of loading, however tapered off from then on.”[1]

Blind Freddy could see that the majority of deaths are caused by overstocking the pens. These animals die of thirst and hunger because they cannot get to feed and water, they die of heat stress because the air from the ventilation does not circulate around their bodies to keep them cool.

Animals can also deteriorate from sleep deprivation because they cannot lie down, adding to the mortality rates. I believe that they also die from motion sickness which stops them from eating and drinking. Experiments on rats and pigs have indicated

[1] IRG Report October 2002.

that these animals suffer from motion sickness like humans, but no research has been conducted in relation to sheep, goats or cattle.

It is only when deaths occurs in vast numbers in each pen (and this will happen within three to four days at sea from port of loading) allowing the remainder to access food and water troughs, rest and keep cool, that the mortality rates start to decline.

**The MV Bader III**

The MV Bader III was a converted cattle ship manufactured in France. The troughs were cattle height. The loading ramp and metal spiral ramps which lead to every deck above and below were designed for large hooves. Where was the "conversion"? It is still a cattle ship.

It was taking three days to load and the last semi -load of sheep were being forced out of the truck by being vigorously jabbed everywhere on their bodies by metal cattle prods by the truck drivers. They were reluctant to move from the makeshift sheep ramp to the cattle ramp. The leading sheep were jabbed ferociously to get them moving. However, once the leaders moved, the rest followed racing up this ramp at a pace that would have caused many injuries. They would have also sustained injuries from hitting the walls of the spiral ramps as they encountered each bend.

Mike said, "There they go, and totally stressed to begin with." I re-named this ship the "MV Bad III". I left this vessel very angry, appalled and distressed and decided to fax the captain to let him know about the conditions that I saw on his ship. I sent the attached fax on 21 January 2003.

I would like to believe that my actions have prevented many premature deaths and prevented much suffering for these animals. It was obvious that the crew of the MV Bader III had no idea how to care for animals. Thousands could die from their lack of commonsense, ignorance and lack of supervision.

There was no vet or stockman to rectify these problems and who is to blame? Everyone in the industry is to blame:

- the Captain, Officers and crew of the ships;
- the exporter;
- ALEC, LiveCorp and MLA;
- AFFA;
- AQIS;
- AMSA; and
- The farmers.

So what are you going to do about this, Minster, to ensure that these animals get more humane treatment and their welfare is addressed? What action are you going to take after reading my letter and fax?

You certainly have not scored any "brownie points" in regard to that statement you made to the press recently when you were in Dubai. This statement[2] outraged many people in WA, including myself.

If you had the "ticker" you would follow the progress of the MV Bader III to the point of flying several officials to the port of destination in Saudi Arabia to inspect this ship and its cargo prior to the animals being unloaded. This would tell you the whole story, and you could read the captain's report first hand.

I believe that rubbery figures from the industry (ship agents, the exporter) are sent to the government departments. Each of the departments (AQUIS, AMSA) have trouble agreeing to the facts (mortality rates, causes of death, etc), The departments then have to consult each other and settle on what figures will be released. This is why it takes almost six months to get the figures to the public, and why they are not reliable.

Minster, would it be possible for you to go aboard one of these ships to see for yourself? I ask that you go unannounced; otherwise much sprucing up will occur prior to your arrival. I also suggest that you go when the animals are still being loaded.

I have a copy of the IRG October 2002 report. I have also read the recommendations and attachments. I also have a copy of the Action Plan for the Livestock Export Industry and I am aware that another committee, the ICC, has been formed. The ICC seems mainly concerned with eastern states problems. The IRG Report recommends that "all states and territories that have not already done so should ensure a consistent legislative basis on agreed national animal and welfare standards to underpin industry initiatives and this be given priority."[3] What action is your Ministry taking in regard to this recommendation?

The Report also recommends a definition for animal welfare for the livestock industry: "the welfare of animals for export can be assured by considerate husbandry on farm and to destination, high health standards and by provision for conditions suitable to express normal behaviours and allow freedom from suffering."[4] Is this the standard that you require for the Western Australian industry?

In conclusion, I believe that, for maximum effect in reducing mortality and suffering of the animals, the officials should target the ships at first instance. I believe that some of the problems could be rectified immediately by ensuring that independent vets and

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[2] "*Adverse public reaction seems to have died down, maybe the public accepts it is simply a trade… and they are not offended – the horror stories of large-scale death and suffering on sheep ships are just bloody awful and nobody regrets them more then the trade.*"
[3] Recommendation 3, IRG Report, October 2002.
[4] Recommendation 10, IRG Report, October 2002

stockmen are mandatory on each voyage, the cost of this should be recouped from the industry by a levy.

I await your reply.

Yours sincerely,

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TRISH BROWN

**ADDITIONAL NOTES**

In 2001:

- 6,712,332 sheep were exported from Australia; 4,300,234 of these were exported from Fremantle.
- 72,620 goats were exported from Australia; 50,942 of these were exported from Fremantle.
- 794,496 cattle were exported from Australia in 2001. It is estimated that 75% for these were exported from Fremantle.

These figures were taken from "Live 206: Live Export trade from Australia. Summary Information" published by Department of Agriculture Western Australia. April 2002.