



Live export shipments to Egypt tipped to resume

By MARY GOODE

LIVE exports to Egypt look set to resume after Middle East whispers indicated negotiations between Australian and Egyptian authorities were nearly complete.

The indication comes a week after the Egyptian General Organisation for Veterinary Services, Cairo, proposed to complete standards in slaughter and transportation by October 30 this year.

There are also reports that Elders is considering investing in an Australian-owned meat processing plant and feedlot at Sokhna, near Cairo, which is expected to be completed in six months.

Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) Middle East representative Nigel Brown said the progress made on both sides would speed up the resumption process.

"I am told by Australians and Egyptians that discussions towards agreeing on a formula to rescind the suspension of trade are almost complete," Dr Brown said.

He said although the Sokhna abattoir was not essential for the resumption of Australian imports, its presence would help.

"Plans to develop such a facility will help by confirming the desire of the Egyptian authorities to progress their improvement program," Dr Brown said.

Trade was suspended six months ago after graphic footage was aired on Australian television showing imported cattle being treated by Egyptian authorities outside industry guidelines.

Although the footage and accompanying reportage attacked Egypt's animal welfare standards, Dr Brown said he

believed an Australian plant would be well-supported.

"From my own discussions with Egyptians over the past four years, I believe they would be happy to have a new plant operating to Australian standards," he said.

"It remains to be seen how such a facility would operate but training local staff in appropriate techniques is essential.

"I imagine it will be unlikely that a full complement of Australian slaughtermen will be employed.

"Likewise, possible Australian Quarantine Inspection Service accreditation will depend on many things and seems unlikely to occur automatically when it commences work."

Dr Brown said his work with MLA and LiveCorp had constantly worked toward raising standards in Egypt toward those of Australia.

"I see the presence of a feedlot and abattoir facility with high standards of animal welfare and meat hygiene as a wonderful opportunity to prove to Egypt that it can have a world-class facility if it establishes its own national standards and enforces them effectively," he said.

Dr Brown said it could be challenging for an internationally owned company to set up in Egypt.

"Not only are staff away from familiar products and equipment but standards of labour, work ethic and work conditions are significantly different as is command structure plus a tendency to prevaricate," he said.

"Communication with workers is also problematic.

"Different social and business mechanisms apply, many of which are not appreciated by some people."

Dr Brown said Elders faced



some hard tasks ahead.

"The group has to cope with all of the above plus the vagaries of currency fluctuation, sourcing of livestock, fodder and the global economy," he said.

"Egypt is a highly price-sensitive food market and is stretched within its own agricultural resources, which often requires patience to overcome.

"Align that with outbreaks of disease, from which Sokhna is well-protected geographically, and it is a high-risk enterprise."

Dr Brown said he supported the move by Elders to invest in the plant.

"Cairo is about two hours away from Sokhna and has a population of about 20 million people, almost the entire Australian population in one urban mass, and Egypt is a land of meat eaters who generally prefer beef."

Dr Brown said it was important that Australia made sure Egypt was given practical support to take advantage of the Elders opportunity, and not waste the chance to continue raising animal husbandry and

welfare standards.

"I have already offered the abattoir manager my own support and MLA/LiveCorp training in line with our ongoing strategy across the region," he said.

"It is a facility that can be used as a national benchmark and for training fundamentals of animal husbandry and production to a wide audience."

Dr Brown said the abattoir was an impressive 25,000 head facility, within 800m walking distance along a race from the port.



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