

Deaths, Lies, and Audiotapes

An analysis of mortality rates aboard the *MV “Cormo Express”* and how Federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss misled and lied to the Australian public

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Author

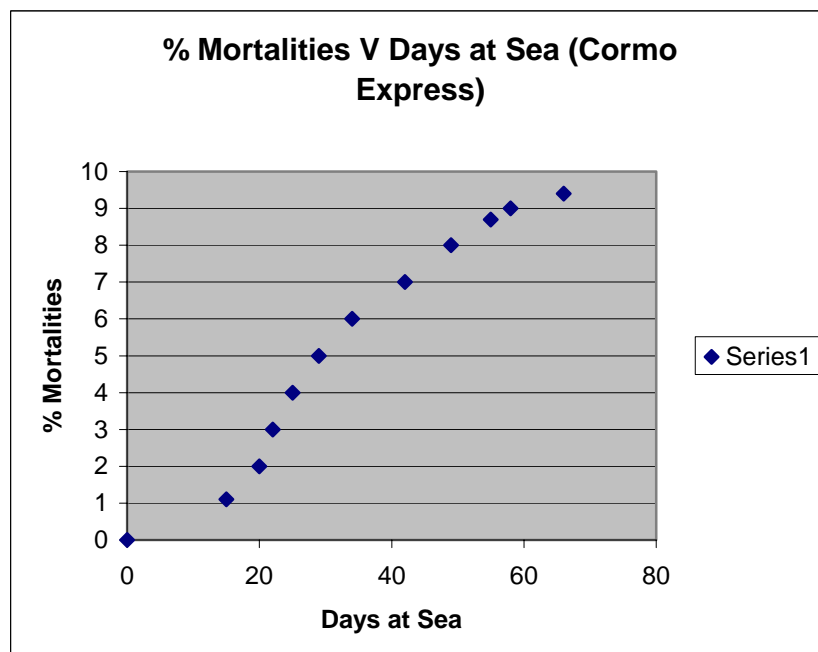
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Abstract

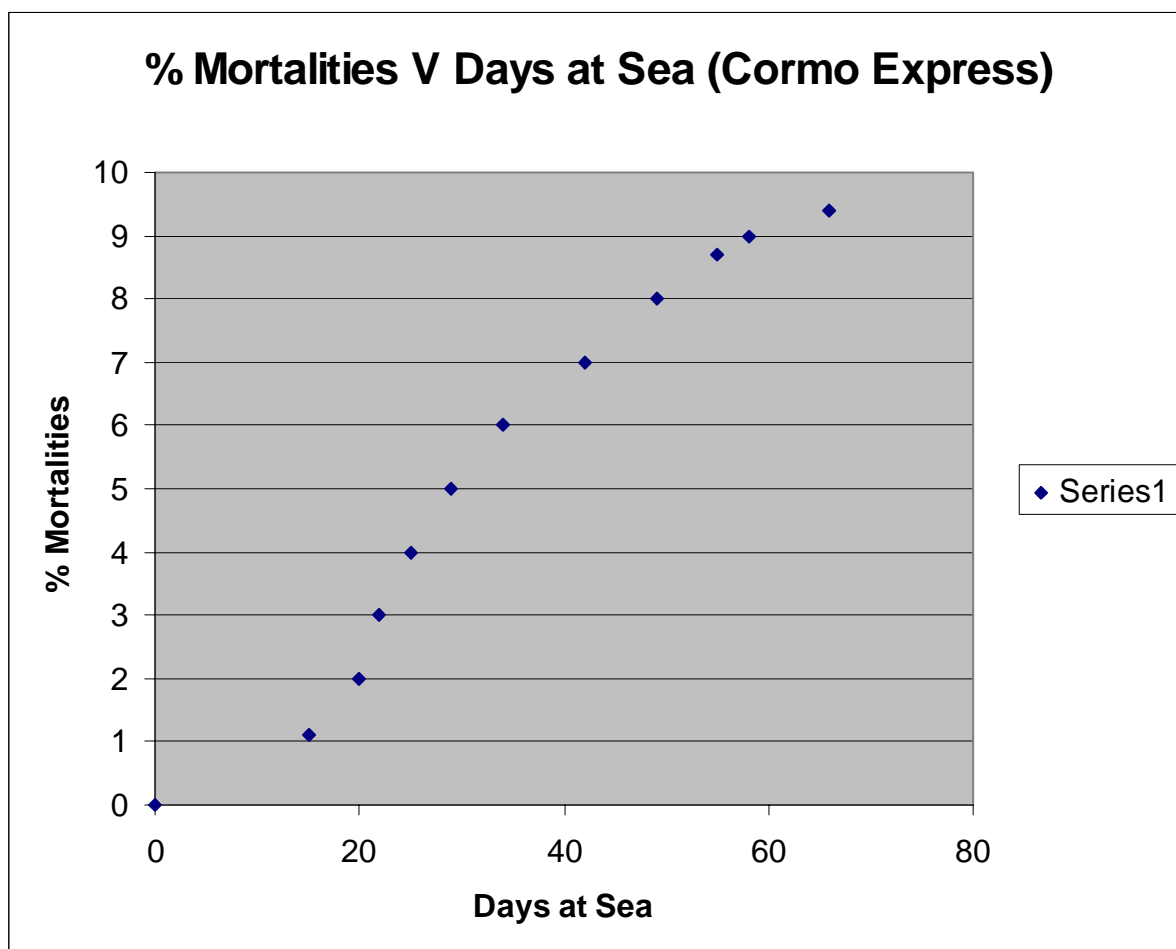
This document is an analysis of death rate figures obtained from the Australian AFFA website at www.affa.gov.au. The analysis is based on the government departments own internal death rate counts on board the MV “Cormo Express”, and simply compares the public statements of the Federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss to the facts now reported by the department. It is shown that at the time that Minister Truss was publicly assuring the Australian public that the sheep aboard the Cormo express were well and in good condition, that death rates were still alarmingly high with no prospects of reducing. The reader is drawn to the inevitable conclusion that the Minister deliberately misled the Australian public about the high sustained death rate aboard the “Cormo Express”.

Graph of Sheep deaths V Days at sea

(from official AFFA data Appendix 1)

When the time points of days at sea are graphed against the % deaths detailed in the official AFFA document, then the following graph is produced;

(Note: Arrival at Jeddah after 16 days at sea, 1.1% mortality)



Analysis of Graph

The above sheep deaths v days at sea graph is readily produced to give a graphical view of what was happening on board the “Cormo Express” for the full duration of the voyage. What this graph immediately shows is that the mortality rate was alarmingly high for almost the entire duration of the “Cormo Express” disaster, with a rapid and sustained escalation of deaths after 16-17 days at sea (the expected journey length), and a high relatively constant death rate between 22-70 days at sea. It can readily be seen from the graph that large numbers of deaths occurred immediately after rejection by Saudi authorities, due in part to the ship being stationary with little air flow at the port of destination. The death rate after this time is also markedly higher than usual and very large numbers of sheep were dying continually throughout the journey, right up until the animals were finally offloaded in Eritrea. The death rate even after it levels off after 22 days at sea is still very high and above mandatory reporting levels for the remainder of the journey.

These figures can be summarised by averaging over the three phases of the journey. During the normal shipment phase, approximately 640 sheep died over 16 days at a rate of about 40 sheep per day. Then in the seven days after arrival at Jeddah, the stationary phase, a massive 1150 sheep died at an average rate of 150 sheep per day. Then as the ship flounders at sea for a further 50 odd days in its lost at sea phase, another 3,500 sheep die at a roughly constant rate of approximately 75 sheep per day, nearly double the initial journey death rate. There is no sign of a significant decline in that death rate during the protracted third phase of the crisis.

With the publication of the AFFA figures and the above understanding of what happened aboard the ship, it is then interesting to compare the government’s public statements during this time, to see if they accurately reflect the situation of sustained high death rates on board the “Cormo Express” over the last two phases of its journey.

So, exactly what did Warren Truss say while the above graph showed high levels of mortalities on an ongoing basis?

(See appendix 2 for the detailed full media releases and statements referenced in date order)

28th August 2003 (7 days after arrival in Saudi Arabia) – Mortality was already at 3% (Mortality was 1.1% on arrival at destination port Jeddah 21st August 2003)

Truss: “Unfortunately, the Saudi authorities were not prepared to agree to an immediate re-examination of the shipment by Saudi vets. Similarly, on animal welfare grounds, Australia was unable to accept a suggestion that the sheep remain on board for a further 7 to 10 days before being reinspected”.

Author’s note: The reason that Truss says a further seven days stationary in port is unacceptable is obvious from the graph. Huge numbers of animals were dying in the stifling heat, 1.9% in fact in 7 days, at a rate of 150 sheep per day, massive losses. So what does Truss then go on to say about the sheeps’ condition?

TRUSS LIE # 1 *“The consignment is healthy and in good condition, and the ship has taken on additional feed. It will now depart Jeddah for an alternative port, where the sheep will be inspected by an independent veterinarian and then discharged for delivery to*

customers. The welfare of the animals will be the number one priority in deciding the port of discharge"

Author's note: The sheep have been dying of suffocation and other illnesses in massive numbers, and the reason for departure was because of the massive death rate in the stifling heat. They are far from healthy and in good condition as Truss claims, the situation is clearly dire on board and out of control.

14th September 2003 (Deaths now over 6% and showing no signs of decreasing)

"I am informed that the "Cormo Express" is currently moving and is well ventilated, with temperatures on board currently around 30 degrees," Mr Truss said.

Author's note: Here you can see verification of the problem that had occurred in the stationary port. It is a veiled acknowledgement that there was a problem without ventilation. But instead of acknowledging what is happening, he goes on the attack against groups who suspect the truth.

22nd September 2003 (Death rate over 7% and climbing)

TRUSS LIE # 2 "The Australian veterinary officer on board the "Cormo Express" in his most recent report has advised that: *"The sheep consignment is maintaining its excellent condition and there are no health issues affecting the sheep. It is estimated that the entire sheep consignment has gained 2kg to 3kg per head in body weight during the voyage. The daily mortality rate remains low ... deck conditions are acceptable and have remained relatively dry throughout the voyage ... crew morale remains high in spite of the increased workload that has resulted from this long voyage."*

Author's note: Truss tries to hide behind quotes from the vets on board and repeats the claim that the death rate on board remains low. It is far from low at this time as is clearly evident from the graph. Just another blatant lie.

Minister Truss said claims by *60 Minutes* that film shown in their earlier program was of Australian sheep seemed to be inconsistent with an admission by Animals Australia on its web site that "scenes of sheep suffering and dying of heat stress" used by *60 Minutes* "was footage of European animals".

"The Government is determined to ensure appropriate practices are followed in the live export industry and will continue to work with industry to improve outcomes. Cattle mortalities have reduced from 0.34 per cent of stock shipped in 1999 to 0.10 per cent in the latest reported figures for 2003 and sheep mortalities have declined from 1.34 per cent in 1999 to 0.76 per cent".

Author's note: The above two paragraphs are pure deception. Truss is desperately trying to make it look like death rates are low (they are actually high at 75 deaths per day) and that file footage does not accurately reflect what is happening on board the "Cormo Express". Not quite lies, but incredibly deceptive public statements from the Minister who has not yet admitted publicly the massive number of sheep deaths.

Truss then openly criticises Animals Australia and *sixty minutes* for alerting the public to the suffocation problem which was suspected to be occurring on board the "Cormo Express" when it was stationary in stifling conditions, and tries to deny the suffocation clearly evident in the graph ever occurred. A shameful deceit when it is clear that precisely the sort of suffocation raised in the *60 minutes* program had actually occurred.

23rd September 2003 (*"Cormo Express" Death rate over 7% when following statements made by truss*)

Author's note: TRUSS DENIES ACCUSATIONS HE IS LYING

"Australian Agriculture Minister Warren Truss today rejected claims by animal rights groups that the Australian Government was lying about the health status of sheep on board the Cormo Express."

Author's note: Well, the government's own figures now show we were right, that huge deaths occurred while stationary in port and then a very high death rate for the remainder of the journey. The evidence is clear, Truss was lying to the Australian public, and then attacked the groups who were telling the truth.

Truss then starts hiding again behind statements from third parties, in a desperate attempt to hide the actual losses on board;

"The Australian veterinary officer on board the "Cormo Express", in his most recent report, has advised that:

"The sheep consignment is maintaining its excellent condition and there are no health issues affecting the sheep. It is estimated that the entire sheep consignment has gained 2kg to 3kg per head in body weight during the voyage. The daily mortality rate remains low ... deck conditions are acceptable and have remained relatively dry throughout the voyage ... crew morale remains high in spite of the increased workload that has resulted from this long voyage."

A spokesman for the Dutch owners of the *"Cormo Express"* today told Paul Murray on Radio 6PR that:

"... I would consider it as a positive signal that the sheep still remain in good condition considering the time they have been on board since the departure from Fremantle in early August. We've taken extra measures to improve the conditions of the sheep with fresh fodder and water supplies brought in. We've brought an additional crew onboard, we've also set course to open sea with the vessel where conditions are cooler and much more comfortable for the animals. Sheep are continued to be well fed, they are watered and they are staying in a ventilated environment where we have maximum air changes per hour so they are relatively good condition, they're eating well and they are even gaining weight at the moment which is also a positive sign..."

A Meat and Livestock Australia vet, and an independent international vet, found in their report that:

"The overall condition of the stock was very good despite the prolonged voyage. During the inspection not a single water trough was seen empty of water. Similarly feed-troughs all contained food and no individuals were seen either thirsty or hungry. Nothing was identified to suggest the presence of a major outbreak of scabby mouth on board MV Cormo Express during this voyage. Therefore we found no sanitary reason that can justify any eventual rejection. From the evidence of this visit, it is our opinion that the veterinarian, the stockmen plus the captain and crew of MV "Cormo Express" are to be congratulated for their efforts in assisting the animals under their care during a difficult voyage."

The latest report from the Captain of the MV *Cormo Express* received today commented that:

"The sheeps(sic) are doing well".

Minister Truss said the Captain had reported the average temperature as 32 degrees Celsius - lower than the temperatures experienced on many Australian farms."

Author's note: This last comment is a particularly ridiculous and ignorant statement, as sheep are not kept in such close confinement on Australian farms, and the problem arises because of the water spillage and high humidity from close confinement and lack of ventilation and high manure build-up. Temperatures are only a small part of the sheep ship death trap equation.

24th September 2003

TRUSS LIE # 3:

In a door stop interview, Truss flatly refuses to acknowledge how many sheep have died. This is significant, because he has been lying about the conditions on board the ship and trying to deceive the public that all is well. Had he admitted how many animals had died, people would know he was lying.

QUESTION: What is the welfare of the sheep?

WARREN TRUSS: *The latest reports from the ship's captain is that they're still doing well. They've taken on additional food. They've got adequate water supplies and so their condition is quite good.*

QUESTION: How many have died? (**Author's note: real answer is over 7%**)

WARREN TRUSS: *I've already indicated that more than 2% of the animals have died and that triggers automatically a fully and open investigation into the shipment. Now, once that investigation is under way, then all of the information will obviously be available. I'm aware that there's speculation in various places about the numbers of deaths. You can read all that sort of thing. I am merely confirming that the number of deaths is above the 2%, which triggers a public investigation. That public investigation will be held. The report will be made public and everybody will be able to assess all of the issues - what's happened and what's been done to seek to resolve it.*

30th September 2003

TRUSS LIE #4 Death rates now over 8% but truss still claims all is well!

"Advice overnight from the task force indicates that logistical and security concerns in southern Iraq mean discharge in that country is less likely," Mr Truss said. "Diplomatic efforts are continuing to secure an alternative destination in the region. I am advised that the "Cormo Express" is about to take on additional feed for the sheep and supplies for the crew. The sheep are healthy and have adequate supplies of feed and water."

4th October 2003 World Animal Health Organisation vet confirms *Cormo Express* sheep are healthy and free of disease

TRUSS LIE # 5 These claims despite 8.7% of sheep are now dead

Australian Agriculture Minister Warren Truss today welcomed the findings of an independent international veterinarian that the sheep onboard the "Cormo Express" are healthy and fit to be landed in any country in the Middle East region.

"The Australian Government is continuing negotiations with countries in the Middle East in an attempt to gain approval to land the sheep in the region," Mr Truss said.

The "Cormo Express" is expected to spend another two to three days re provisioning in Kuwait.

"Dr Gardner Murray, Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, yesterday boarded the Cormo Express in Kuwait to inspect the sheep. Separately, an independent veterinarian, Dr Ghazi Yehia, from the Office International des Epizooties (OIE or World Animal Health Organisation) also examined the consignment.

"The OIE veterinarian examined sheep on all decks of the ship, studied veterinary reports, mortality figures and post mortem summaries, and interviewed the on-board veterinarian.

"In his official report, the OIE veterinarian confirmed that:

- the sheep are fit, healthy and suitable for human consumption (following normal veterinary inspection);
- there is no evidence of any infectious or contagious disease;
- there is no evidence of any disease to suggest the consignment would be unsuitable for admission to any country in the region; and
- there is no evidence that there has been a significant outbreak of scabby mouth aboard the vessel at any time during the voyage.

"The OIE veterinarian also noted that it is important to land the sheep quickly in the interest of their welfare."

Author's note: It is interesting that Truss says all is well with the sheep, yet the above statement from OEI vet finally admits the welfare of the sheep is being compromised and they need to be landed.

5th October 2003 (the death rate now nearly 9%)

"The OIE vet found that the sheep are fit and healthy, free from disease, and suitable for admission to any country in the region.

11th October 2003 Radio Interview transcript from AFFA site

TRUSS LIE # 6

Author's note: Truss finally admits how many sheep have died after several weeks, but lies about the death rates (he says 20/30 per night, but it has been 75 per day for many weeks)

QUESTION: The death toll at the moment? How many sheep have died?

WARREN TRUSS: Er, I don't have the exact number, it's about - something over 5,000. Around about, you know, 20, 30 or so die each night. So that's just in round figures.

22nd October 2003 Radio Transcript

Author's note: Now the most leading statements of all. Truss has admitted the number of deaths by now, but tries to claim that not many deaths occurred since leaving Jeddah when the ship starts moving again. But now look at the graph. Truss is believing his own PR spin, the graph shows clearly that sheep died in high numbers throughout the remainder of the journey, at an average rate of 75 deaths per day. Truss is quite clearly misleading the Australian public here.

COMPERE: Instead though we've had 50,000 dying sheep and an international shame, haven't we?

WARREN TRUSS:

Well, the number of deaths is obviously a concern, but since the vessel has left Jeddah and Saudi, the number of deaths has obviously been quite small (**TRUSS LIE #7**). When the ship was in the port, in the very hot weather there are often large numbers of deaths. One of the few good things that's happened with this whole affair has been that the weather's been relatively kind and the temperatures quite low and so the numbers of deaths have been quite modest in the last week or two (**TRUSS LIE #8**).

But nonetheless, we want the sheep off the ship as quickly as we possibly can. We've been able to adequately provision it now - that was a very difficult task in Kuwait. And since we've taken on a whole of extra provisions, cleaning equipment and all sorts of things. Blood tests have been taken on the sheep, and a lot of work has been done to help prepare for the journey back to Australia, which is also quite a long journey. And then also to put in place additional measures that we will need to take as soon as it gets close to our waters. And to take additional blood tests with more veterinary people on board so that we can make a full and complete assessment about their suitability to come back to the mainland.

COMPERE:

How many of those sheep have died?

WARREN TRUSS:

It's about 5 ½ thousand from memory at the present time. The public won't wear bad animal welfare outcomes and frankly, neither will I. And the industry knows it's got to be above reproach and it's got to work very hard at ensuring it's improving its performance and ensuring that sheep that leave this country, or cattle for that matter, arrive safely at their destination.

24th October 2003 when 9.6% of sheep had died!

Author's note: In the next two statements, Truss admits actual deaths but still tries to say animals are healthy, further deception.

Both Ministers acknowledged the independent veterinary reports that clearly demonstrated that the sheep are healthy, free of disease and safe for human consumption

It is eight weeks since the MV "Cormo Express" was turned away from Saudi Arabia.

Mortalities on board the "Cormo Express" as of 22 October (the latest date for which figures are available) were 5581, or 9.63 per cent

24th October 2003 Q and A

"It is important to note that the vessel's good management of the consignment has been confirmed through a series of inspections by Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, an

independent veterinarian and veterinary officials from the Eritrean Ministry of Agriculture - all of whom have reported that the sheep are free from disease, healthy, in good overall condition and acceptable for human consumption”.

Author's note: Finally, a quote from chief government vet Gardner Murray (Appendix 3) where he claims that the “Cormo” sheep are better than some routine shipments. This is extraordinary, on a shipment where 10% of sheep died, he claims some routine shipments are worse, and says drought sheep are worse as well. What an indictment of the industry! You can't do much about droughts, but you can certainly stop live exports if sheep routinely get treated worse than these “Cormo Express” sheep!

Question: How would you compare the sheep's condition to the sheep that we have sent to the [indistinct]?

DR MURRAY: They're in far better condition than the ones I've seen during the drought. And in fact arguable they were in better condition than two of the ships that landed sheep when I was in Kuwait.

CONCLUSIONS

YOU CANT TRUST TRUSS

Appendix 1

Official time line of events from AFAA website at www.affa.gov.au

Timeline of events

Date	Action	Additional information
6 Aug	MV “Cormo Express” departs Fremantle, bound for Jeddah (in Saudi Arabia) with 57,937 sheep aboard.	
21 Aug	Vessel arrives in Jeddah at 6am. Departs Jeddah at 3pm. Mortality rate 1.1%.	Saudi Arabian quarantine officials at Jeddah allege 6 per cent of the sheep are infected with scabby mouth.
22 Aug	Vessel journeys to Aqaba, Jordan.	
23 Aug	Vessel stands off Aqaba - entry is refused	
24 Aug	Vessel in Red Sea en route to Jeddah.	
26 Aug	Vessel returns to Jeddah. Australian delegation meets in Riyadh with the Saudi Arabian Minister of Agriculture. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) Livestock Export Taskforce established. Mortality rate 2%	Pelleted feed is loaded. The delegation consists of the Australian Ambassador and senior officials from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS). They met to request a second veterinary inspection, and to discuss ways in which better communication and clearer guidelines might assist the livestock trade. Formed to facilitate the management within DAFF of the response to the MV “Cormo Express” incident.
27 Aug	DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.	
28 Aug	Australia suspends livestock exports	Media release issued by Australian

to Saudi Arabia.

DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

Mortality rate 3%.

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss and Australian Trade Minister, Mark Vaile.

29 Aug Vessel leaves Jeddah.

Pelleted feed is loaded before departure.

30 Aug Vessel enters Gulf of Aden.

31 Aug Mortality rate 4%.

During September and October, more than 30 Countries are approached in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, SE Asia and East Asia.

1 Sept Vessel in Arabian Sea.

DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

2 Sept DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

3 Sept Vessel enters Strait of Hormuz.

4 Sept Vessel docks at Umm Al Qaywayn, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

Mortality rate 5%.

5 Sept DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

8 Sept DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

9 Sept DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

10 Sept Vessel leaves Umm Al Qaywayn.

Pelleted feed is loaded.

11 Sept Mortality rate 6%.

12 Sept Vessel docks at Fujairah (UAE). Pelleted feed is loaded.

DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

13 Sept Vessel leaves Fujairah.

14 Sept Vessel in Arabian Sea.

Negotiations to secure a destination to unload the sheep continue, handled at the commercial level by the foreign owner. [Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss.

15 Sept DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

18 Sept Vessel docks at Khor Fakkar (UAE). Pelleted feed is loaded.

DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

19 Sept Vessel leaves Khor Fakkar.

Mortality rate 7%.

20 Sept Vessel at sea – Gulf of Oman

21 Sept Vessel at sea – Arabian Sea.

22 Sept Australian Government continues to assist the Saudi owners of the sheep to find a suitable destination for the stock.

Vessel anchors off Khor Kalba (UAE).

Australian veterinary officer on board the “Cormo Express” reports that the

[Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss.

Pelleted feed is loaded.

sheep are healthy and in excellent condition.

Minister Truss refutes media claims the sheep will run out of fodder.

The Australian Government advised by master of the ship that there is adequate fodder on board and arrangements are being made to take on additional supplies.

DAFF Livestock Export Taskforce meets.

[Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss.

23 Sept Reports from the Australian veterinary officer on board the ship and a Meat and Livestock Australia vet state that the sheep are healthy and in good condition.

[Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss.

24 Sept Australian Government purchases the sheep on behalf of the Australian live export industry. Cost: \$4.5 million.

High-level whole-of-Government taskforce established to manage the issue.

[Transcript](#) from doorstep interview of Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, at QEAC conference

Negotiations for a suitable destination continue with various countries.

Vessel at sea - the Arabian Sea.

25 Sept Australian Government and Industry team dispatched to the Gulf.

Vessel at sea - the Persian Gulf.

26 Sept Vessel moves to the northern part of the Persian Gulf off Kuwait.

Mortality rate 8%.

30 Sept Diplomatic efforts to secure an alternative destination continue.

A team of senior Australian

[Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry animal welfare experts in the Middle East work on gaining approval for the sheep to be unloaded. Forestry, Warren Truss.

1 Oct A specialist group is established to provide the Director of Animal and Plant Quarantine with technical and scientific advice. The specialist group comprises veterinary and other specialists from the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Western Australian Department of Agriculture, the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL), the red meat industry, and the University of Melbourne.

2 Oct Vessel berths in Kuwait. Pelleted feed is loaded. Provisioning continues until the vessel leaves Kuwait on 16 October for Australia to ensure adequate feed on board for the return voyage.

An inspection of the sheep is conducted by an independent vet (OIE regional representative).

The sheep are also inspected the Australian Chief Veterinary Officer. This is the first of six inspections he conducted while the vessel was berthed in Kuwait.

Mortality rate 8.7%

3 Oct Specialist group meets in Canberra.

7 Oct National Management Group (NMG), the key advisory body to the Australian Government on the consignment, meets. Discusses response issues, considers advice from various technical groups and the consultative committee.

Mortality rate 9%.

8 Oct Specialist group meets in Canberra.

9 Oct Specialist group meets with Industry Consultative Committee. Discusses communication arrangements (strategy, media, PR, Web, call centre, industry/community liaison, etc.) and interagency cooperation.

Meeting of Trade Working Group to discuss market impacts and strategies for dealing with impacts.

Live Sheep Communications Committee meets.

10 Oct Minister Truss announces an investigation into the live animal export industry.

NMG meets.

Live Sheep Communications Committee meets.

Dr John Keniry, appointed to head the inquiry. The review will examine animal welfare codes of practice in the live export trade, the type of livestock suitable for the trade, the specific factors behind the Cormo Express situation, and arrangements for animal exports to Saudi Arabia.

[Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss.

11 Oct Specialist group meets with Industry Consultative Committee.

12 Oct Specialist group meets with Industry Consultative Committee.

13 Oct Live Sheep Communications Committee meets.

14 Oct NMG meets.

Live Sheep Communications Committee meets.

15 Oct A draft evaluation document prepared by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is passed to the OIE (world animal health organisation).

16 Oct Vessel leaves Kuwait for Australia (unless an alternate port can be negotiated).

Government and Industry Slaughter-at-Sea Working Group meets.

Mortality rate 9.4%.

Discusses the slaughter-at-sea option and to prepare a policy paper for NMG.

17 Oct NMG meets.

20 Oct NMG meets.

Media briefing and press conference
by ACVO, Dr Gardner Murray.

23 Oct Government and Industry Slaughter-at-Sea Working Group meets. Discussed NMG comments regarding policy paper.

Live Sheep Communications
Committee meets.

24 Oct Government announces that an agreement has been reached with East African nation of Eritrea. Off-loading of the sheep begins at the Red Sea port of Massawa. [Media release](#) (joint statement) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss and the Eritrean Minister of Agriculture, Arefaine Berhe.

NMG meets.

25 Oct Sheep continue to be unloaded in Massawa (Eritrea). [Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss.

26 Oct Members of the review panel tasked with investigating Australia's livestock export industry announced. [Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss.

Sheep continue to be unloaded in
Massawa (Eritrea).

30 Oct Last of the sheep offloaded. [Media release](#) issued by Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss.

Appendix 2

Media Releases and transcripts of key interviews from Warren Truss relating to the health of sheep on the *MV Cormo Express*

Livestock exports to Saudi Arabia suspended

14th September 2003 *Cormo Express*

22 September 2003 *Cormo Express*

22nd September 2003 Fodder on *Cormo Express*

23rd September 2003 *Cormo Express*

24 SEPTEMBER 2003 *Cormo Express* doorstep transcript

26th September 2003 *Cormo Express* - the latest

30th September 2003 *MV Cormo Express* - update

4th October 2003 World Animal Health Organisation vet confirms *Cormo Express* sheep are healthy and free of disease

5th October 2003 Kuwait provides valuable assistance for sheep aboard *MV Cormo Express*

10th October 2003 Minister announces live export industry review

11th October 2003 Transcript Doorstop Interview – Warren Truss, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry Sheep stranded on board the *Cormo Express*

22nd October 2003 Transcript Interview – Warren Truss, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry ABC Radio 936 Hobart Sheep stranded on board the *Cormo Express*

24th October 2003 Eritrea accepts 52,000 sheep from Australia

24 October 2003 *Cormo Express* Sheep Disembark in Eritrea
Q&A

26th October 2003 Live animal export review panel announced as almost one third of *Cormo Express* sheep unloaded

28th August 2003

Livestock exports to Saudi Arabia suspended

The Australian Government has suspended further shipments of livestock to Saudi Arabia pending the negotiation of an effective mechanism to ensure the safe entry of livestock to the country.

This decision follows the rejection of a shipment of 57,000 Australian sheep by Saudi authorities. Saudi Arabia's quarantine officials at the Port of Jeddah alleged that some 6 per cent of the animals in the shipment were affected by scabby mouth.

By contrast, the assessment of the experienced AQIS-approved Australian veterinarian on board the *MV "Cormo Express"*, was that fewer than 200 sheep, or 0.35 per cent of the shipment, were affected. This number is well below the 5 per cent tolerance level agreed between Saudi Arabia and Australia.

In light of this major discrepancy, a delegation consisting of the Australian Ambassador and senior officials from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), met in Riyadh on 26 August with the Saudi Arabian Minister of Agriculture to request a second veterinary inspection, and to discuss ways in which better communication and clearer guidelines might assist the livestock trade.

Unfortunately, the Saudi authorities were not prepared to agree to an immediate re-examination of the shipment by Saudi vets. Similarly, on animal welfare grounds, Australia was unable to accept a suggestion that the sheep remain on board for a further 7 to 10 days before being reinspected.

The Australian Government has called in the Saudi Charge d' Affaires to express its concern with the Saudi decision.

The consignment is healthy and in good condition, and the ship has taken on additional feed. It will now depart Jeddah for an alternative port, where the sheep will be inspected by an independent veterinarian and then discharged for delivery to customers. The welfare of the animals will be the number one priority in deciding the port of discharge.

Given its global reputation for the health and quality of its sheep, goats and cattle, Australian exporters are confident of finding alternative markets for our livestock. The live export trade to Saudi Arabia was worth A\$195 million in 02/03.

In the meantime, Australian and Saudi officials will work closely together in an effort to develop agreed guidelines that would allow the trade to resume.

14th September 2003

Cormo Express

The Australian Government is using every avenue at its disposal to secure the welfare of sheep on board the *Cormo Express* in the Middle East, Federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss said today.

"I share the concerns of many Australians about the welfare of these sheep, and we are exercising every possible influence and diplomatic avenue at our disposal to try and resolve the situation," Mr Truss said.

He said it is important to recognise that, since the sheep left Fremantle, they have been the property of a foreign company, and are on-board a foreign ship on the other side of the globe. There are, therefore, clear practical and logistical problems in any intervention. The Government has no authority to order the owner to pursue any particular course of action.

The consignment of 57,000 sheep loaded in Fremantle was rejected by the Saudi Arabian authorities, who claimed the sheep had unacceptable levels of the disease scabby mouth.

There was a large discrepancy between the levels of scabby mouth alleged by the Saudis and the infection rate as reported by the experienced Australian veterinarian on board the vessel. An independent veterinary inspection has since confirmed the consignment was healthy.

"I am informed that the "*Cormo Express*" is currently moving and is well ventilated, with temperatures on board currently around 30 degrees," Mr Truss said.

"The vessel has taken on new supplies and the sheep have adequate fresh water and fresh food. We have intervened to assist the owner of the sheep and stand ready to do what we can to facilitate a resolution to this issue.

"I am informed that negotiations are continuing to secure a destination to unload the sheep. These negotiations are at a very delicate stage and are being handled at the commercial level by the foreign owner.

"Australian diplomatic posts overseas have been briefed and remain ready to offer assistance to facilitate any importing government requirements.

"Australian Government officials were in the Middle East last week, and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service has acted to ensure all provisions covering livestock export protocols with Australia's Middle East clients are met in full.

"To avoid similar problems with future shipments, the Government decided on 28 August that livestock exports to Saudi Arabia would be suspended until an effective mechanism to ensure the safe entry of livestock into Saudi could be negotiated."

Further media inquiries:

Minister Truss' office:

Tim Langmead - 02 6277 7520 or 0418 221 433

22 Septembe2003

"Cormo Express"

The Australian Government will continue to give top priority to assisting the Saudi owners of the sheep on board the *"Cormo Express"* to find a suitable destination for the stock, Australian Agriculture Minister Warren Truss said today.

"Those seriously interested in the welfare of the sheep are asked to consider that the need to negotiate a satisfactory outcome in sensitive talks with other governments should be the overriding concern at present," Minister Truss said.

"Those negotiations can be compromised by unsympathetic reporting of the issues. For commentators, reporters or animal liberation activists to paint the situation in any way that is likely to undermine the confidence of potential buyers is not helpful to the welfare of the sheep."

The Australian veterinary officer on board the *"Cormo Express"* in his most recent report has advised that:

"The sheep consignment is maintaining its excellent condition and there are no health issues affecting the sheep. It is estimated that the entire sheep consignment has gained 2kg to 3kg per head in body weight during the voyage. The daily mortality rate remains low ... deck conditions are acceptable and have remained relatively dry throughout the voyage ... crew morale remains high in spite of the increased workload that has resulted from this long voyage."

For motives that remain unknown to the Australian Government, the shipment of 57,000 sheep loaded in Fremantle was turned away from its intended port in Saudi Arabia before unloading.

Australia acted on 28 August to suspend the trade with Saudi Arabia in order to ensure that there was not a repeat experience by any other shipments to that country. Efforts to assist the owner of the sheep find another market are continuing, and livestock shipments to other countries in the region have continued without incident during this period.

Minister Truss confirmed that there would be a full investigation into this voyage. An investigation is triggered when there are more than 2 per cent mortalities on a shipment.

"Naturally, we want the sheep unloaded as quickly as possible - that is the desired outcome and that is what our diplomats and skilled negotiators are endeavouring to achieve around the world."

Minister Truss said claims by *60 Minutes* that film shown in their earlier program was of Australian sheep seemed to be inconsistent with an admission by Animals Australia on its web site that "scenes of sheep suffering and dying of heat stress" used by *60 Minutes* "was footage of European animals".

The Government is determined to ensure appropriate practices are followed in the live export industry and will continue to work with industry to improve outcomes. Cattle mortalities have reduced from 0.34 per cent of stock shipped in 1999 to 0.10 per cent in the latest reported figures for 2003 and sheep mortalities have declined from 1.34 per cent in 1999 to 0.76 per cent.

22nd September 2003

Fodder on "Cormo Express"

Reports claiming the sheep on the "*Cormo Express*" will today run out of fodder are untrue.

The Australian Government has been advised in a report from the Master of the "*Cormo Express*"s that there is adequate fodder on board and arrangements are being made to take on more.

23rd September 2003

“Cormo Express”

Australian Agriculture Minister Warren Truss today rejected claims by animal rights groups that the Australian Government was lying about the health status of sheep on board the “Cormo Express”.

The Australian veterinary officer on board the “Cormo Express”, in his most recent report, has advised that:

“The sheep consignment is maintaining its excellent condition and there are no health issues affecting the sheep. It is estimated that the entire sheep consignment has gained 2kg to 3kg per head in body weight during the voyage. The daily mortality rate remains low ... deck conditions are acceptable and have remained relatively dry throughout the voyage ... crew morale remains high in spite of the increased workload that has resulted from this long voyage.”

A spokesman for the Dutch owners of the “Cormo Express” today told Paul Murray on Radio 6PR that:

“... I would consider it as a positive signal that the sheep still remain in good condition considering the time they have been on board since the departure from Fremantle in early August. We've taken extra measures to improve the conditions of the sheep with fresh fodder and water supplies brought in. We've brought an additional crew onboard, we've also set course to open sea with the vessel where conditions are cooler and much more comfortable for the animals. Sheep are continued to be well fed, they are watered and they are staying in a ventilated environment where we have maximum air changes per hour so they are relatively good condition, they're eating well and they are even gaining weight at the moment which is also a positive sign...”

A Meat and Livestock Australia vet, and an independent international vet, found in their report that:

“The overall condition of the stock was very good despite the prolonged voyage. During the inspection not a single water trough was seen empty of water. Similarly feed-troughs all contained food and no individuals were seen either thirsty or hungry. Nothing was identified to suggest the presence of a major outbreak of scabby mouth on board MV “Cormo Express” during this voyage. Therefore we found no sanitary reason that can justify any eventual rejection. From the evidence of this visit, it is our opinion that the veterinarian, the stockmen plus the captain and crew of MV Cormo Express are to be congratulated for their efforts in assisting the animals under their care during a difficult voyage.”

The latest report from the Captain of the MV “Cormo Express” received today commented that:

“The sheeps(sic) are doing well”.

Minister Truss said the Captain had reported the average temperature as 32 degrees Celsius - lower than the temperatures experienced on many Australian farms.

Australian Veterinary Association National President Dr Jo Sillince said today in a media release entitled *AVA says no need to slaughter healthy sheep*:

“The AVA questions the ethics of the animal rights groups calling for the slaughter of more than 50,000 healthy sheep.”

Minister Truss said his first priority remains the welfare of the sheep.

"It is high time that all of those people who care for the welfare of the sheep do not seek to undermine the work of the Australian Government and the Saudi owner of the sheep in the delicate, commercial and diplomatic negotiations to find a home for the sheep," he said.

24 SEPTEMBER 2003

"Cormo Express" doorstop transcript

**AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY
WARREN TRUSS**

**DOORSTOP AT QEAC CONFERENCE, HYATT HOTEL,
CANBERRA 24 SEPTEMBER 2003**

QUESTION: Can you give us an update on the situation of the sheep in the Middle East?

MINISTER WARREN TRUSS: Well, look, the Government is in discussions with the owner of the sheep, to seek to find a home for them so that they can be unloaded as quickly as possible, preferably as near as possible to their current location.

QUESTION: Can you tell us what countries Australia is negotiating with at the moment?

WARREN TRUSS: Well there are a large number of negotiations under way. We're talking to at least 10 different countries. There are a lot of options and I'm optimistic that we'll find a successful solution.

QUESTION: Iraq won't...

QUESTION: ...solution be? Give us a timeframe?

WARREN TRUSS: Obviously it's not possible to put a timeframe on commercial negotiations. There are a lot of very complex issues associated with negotiating these things through. I've already mentioned on a number of occasions that the sheep are actually owned by a Saudi importing company. They're on a Dutch ship with a Philippines flag and they're thousands of kilometres outside of Australia's territorial waters. To the best of my knowledge they've broken no Australian laws and so our capacity to intervene is limited, but what we are trying to do is play a constructive role in facilitating successful negotiations both through commercial and diplomatic channels.

QUESTION: Is Iraq one of the countries that we're looking at?

WARREN TRUSS: I've always avoided speculating about which countries are involved in discussions because, whenever we do that, that damages the negotiations. The less speculation, the easier it is to negotiate an outcome.

QUESTION: Clearly it's an important thing for Australia though if Cabinet addressed it yesterday.
[Indistinct] pushing it off. But certainly it's an important issue here as well.

WARREN TRUSS: Well, I appreciate that it's an issue with high public interest in Australia. I share the concern of those who are worried about the welfare of the sheep. That is our highest priority and I can assure you that my only desire in this matter is to get a successful outcome with the least damage to the sheep.

And because I'm not - the reason why I'm not as forthcoming sometimes about these issues is purely because of my desire to have a successful outcome as quickly as possible in the interests of the sheep.

Now, I know we have a free press in Australia and I know people want to know all these sorts of things. But in this particular instance it's sadly the case that, when we speculate about these sort of things particularly when there's talk about the sheep being unwell or

unhealthy or things going wrong, that makes everybody associated with the negotiations more nervous and an outcome more difficult.

QUESTION: What's...

QUESTION: ...died.

WARREN TRUSS: Sorry?

QUESTION: So far all attempts have failed to find a new place to take those...

WARREN TRUSS: No, that would be an incorrect statement. The negotiations are continuing with a large number of countries. There are several quite advanced proposals and I remain optimistic that we will have a satisfactory outcome and quite soon.

QUESTION: What is the welfare of the sheep?

WARREN TRUSS: The latest reports from the ship's captain is that they're still doing well. They've taken on additional food. They've got adequate water supplies and so their condition is quite good.

QUESTION: How many have died?

WARREN TRUSS: I've already indicated that more than 2% of the animals have died and that triggers automatically a fully and open investigation into the shipment. Now, once that investigation is under way, then all of the information will obviously be available. I'm aware that there's speculation in various places about the numbers of deaths. You can read all that sort of thing.

I am merely confirming that the number of deaths is above the 2%, which triggers a public investigation. That public investigation will be held. The report will be made public and everybody will be able to assess all of the issues - what's happened and what's been done to seek to resolve it.

QUESTION: What are the implications for the live sheep trade in Australia? There's a protest today in Victoria. Are you concerned that the trade will be damaged by this incident?

WARREN TRUSS: Look, the trade's already been damaged by the incident. The public concern about this issue inevitably draws into question how the trade can continue into the future. I would emphasise however, that this is an isolated incident. We've had 40 shipments now successfully unloaded in that region since the new protocols were put in place.

This is an incident that's occurred for reasons we don't fully understand. Even since this incident, several ships have successfully unloaded in other countries in that region and without incident. And so the trade is proceeding normally and with good, fit, healthy sheep and good animal outcomes in other parts of that region as we speak.

QUESTION: Minister, will you take up the Australian Veterinary Association's offer to do another assessment of the health of the animals?

WARREN TRUSS: Well I'm interested in their offer and I'll certainly have a look at it when they provide us with details. Let me assure you, however, there is an Australian vet on board and I'm sure the Australian Veterinary Association is not seeking to question his professional competence. He's a very experienced vet and he's been reporting regularly on what's happening on board the vessel.

There's also an experienced Australian stockman on board. We've also arranged for other vets to inspect the sheep, including a vet from the International Animal Welfare, Animal Health Organisation - the OIE. I think it's been more important in this context to have an international vet attest to their good health in relation to finding the successful outcome

and particularly in our negotiations with other countries.

So there's been quite a number of vets already inspect the sheep. I hope we can resolve the issue so quickly that this doesn't become an on-going issue. But clearly, if the vessel goes - if the vessel stays at sea for too much longer, we've got to look at relieving the existing vet and so somebody else would need to go on board. But that's all for the future. I hope we can resolve it quickly, promptly and with a satisfactory outcome.

QUESTION: What's quickly though?

QUESTION: ...go far?

WARREN TRUSS: Sorry?

QUESTION: Well what is quickly. The sheep have been on their cruise for a little time now.

WARREN TRUSS: Yes, they've been at sea for a long time. And I wish the issue could be resolved and we are putting enormous efforts into ensuring that that happens as quickly as possible. There are some very promising negotiations and I'm hopeful that they will achieve a satisfactory outcome.

QUESTION: ...that maybe you're handling the situation, what's your response to your critics?

WARREN TRUSS: Well I note the Labor Party has criticised me for banning the trade to Saudi Arabia. They said I shouldn't have imposed this ban; that I should have let more ships leave for Saudi Arabia while the issues were unresolved. Frankly, I think that's an incredibly irresponsible approach for the Labor Party to take. They're clearly demonstrating double standards. I was not prepared to allow other sheep to go to Saudi Arabia until we were confident that they could be unloaded successfully and clearly I don't have that confidence at the present time. We don't know the reason, the real reason, why the Saudis have rejected these sheep. And until those issues are completely resolved and I can be satisfied that there are protocols in place that can be relied upon and will work, there'll be no further shipments to Saudi. And I think therefore that the Labor Party's approach to this issue has been quite hypocritical and incredible.

QUESTION: Minister, you must be able to give us some indication as to whether we're talking days, even a week, two weeks. You must have some definitive estimate for us.

WARREN TRUSS: Well, as I said earlier, the sooner the better. We're putting every possible effort into achieving a rapid outcome. The industry is being very co-operative in achieving that objective. There's a lot of initiative being undertaken in a number of countries as I've mentioned. There are a significant number of offers on the table at the present time. We're working through those and obviously the best option will be the fastest option.

QUESTION: Has there been any hysteria around this, do you think, from animal rights activists and so on?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, there's been some quite inflammatory comments obviously, and I share the concerns of the animal welfare organisations about the sheep. I thought the comment by the Australian Veterinary Association yesterday about the practicalities and the animal welfare implications of slaughter at sea were a very helpful contribution to the debate.

I think it is important for people to realise that slaughter at sea is not an attractive option. It is not a good animal welfare option. It could be a very slow and difficult process. And therefore negotiations to find a land base for them to be unloaded are clearly and by a long, long way the best priority.

All of the other options have serious animal welfare and other implications and that's why our maximum efforts are going into the diplomatic and commercial efforts to achieve a satisfactory outcome. While we naturally do work about what other contingencies there might be, our priority is most assuredly to find a home where they can be unloaded in the best possible way.

QUESTION: What [indistinct] the Prime Minister was involved directly? What do you say to that?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, the Prime Minister has been regularly informed about what's going on, kept in the loop by - briefed Cabinet about the situation yesterday, and he's been very constructive and helpful in every way that I could have asked of him.

QUESTION: Is there any concern that Saudi buyers might try to get the money back from the sheep - from the Australian farmers for never receiving the sheep?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, all the Australian farmers have been paid for their sheep so have all of the other people who've been associated with the assembly of the sheep. They're completely the property of the importer and so those issues are matters for him. To the best of my knowledge, all of the bills have been paid including the ship's charter expenses. The banks have received their funding and so there are really no financial issues from Australia's perspective.

But clearly the owner of the sheep faces significant losses. And any, even any commercial outcome is not likely to deliver to him the sort of returns he might have hoped from this trade.

QUESTION: Are you going to promptly release any reports you receive on the risk of bringing the sheep back to Australia?

WARREN TRUSS: Well the investigation - all the reports associated with the investigation will be public and they'll be released as is the normal course.

QUESTION: What about the quarantine risk of bringing the sheep back to Australia?

WARREN TRUSS: Well that would obviously be one of the issues associated with the idea of bringing the sheep back to Australia. But I've already indicated that the animal welfare implications of any of those alternatives are much less attractive than the prospect of finding a domestic market for them in the area where the sheep are currently located.

It would be far, far better for us to be able to find a commercial and satisfactory outcome in the region. That's what we're working on at the present time. I remain optimistic that we'll achieve a successful outcome. I appreciate that there are pieces of information that people would like to have, that are not being made available because of the commercial sensitivities.

It'll all be available in due course and I just ask people to be a bit patient.

Ends

26th September 2003

"Cormo Express" - the latest

Reports that a deal has been done and that the *"Cormo Express"* will dock in Iraq tomorrow to unload its cargo of live sheep are incorrect.

The Australian Government and industry continue to be involved in a number of sensitive negotiations with a number of countries and organisations in an endeavour to arrange a suitable destination for the sheep as soon as possible.

The Australian Veterinarian on board continues to report that the sheep are in good condition. The vessel has adequate supplies of food and water.

Further media inquiries:

Minister Truss' office:

Tim Langmead - 02 6277 7520 or 0418 221 433

30th September 2003

MV "*Cormo Express*" - update

The Australian Government is continuing efforts to secure a port at which to discharge a consignment of sheep aboard the MV "*Cormo Express*", Australian Agriculture Minister Warren Truss said today.

"Advice overnight from the task force indicates that logistical and security concerns in southern Iraq mean discharge in that country is less likely," Mr Truss said. "Diplomatic efforts are continuing to secure an alternative destination in the region. I am advised that the "*Cormo Express*" is about to take on additional feed for the sheep and supplies for the crew. The sheep are healthy and have adequate supplies of feed and water."

Mr Truss said a team of senior Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry animal welfare experts are also in the Middle East as part of a whole-of-government effort to gain approval for the sheep to be unloaded at a port in the region.

"As has always been the case with this issue, no outcome is possible without direct government-to-government negotiations to secure import consent," Mr Truss said. "For this reason, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials are engaged in diplomatic negotiations at the highest level to secure a market in the Middle East, while Department of Agriculture officers are using their expertise in livestock management and animal welfare to ensure the consignment remains healthy."

"Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Gardner Murray, is leading an expert animal welfare task force (stationed in the Middle East) to assess discharge, stockyard and processing facilities for the sheep to ensure these meet Australia's requirements and that they are suitable for the humane processing of the consignment. The task force also includes veterinarians and livestock management experts."

Mr Truss has ruled out the option of slaughtering the sheep at sea.

"Any consideration of slaughtering the sheep at sea would require significant extra personnel and supplies, would take weeks to complete, and the animal welfare and environmental outcomes would be poor," he said.

"Work is well advanced on the arrangements that would have to be put in place for the consignment to return to Australia for processing at a secure quarantine facility. However, I wish to stress that no decision has yet been made to pursue this option."

"It has only been in the past week that Australia has been able to gain control of the sheep, following their purchase by Australian interests from the original Saudi owner of the consignment and charterer of the vessel."

"We will continue to explore all possible options to achieve the best possible outcome for the welfare of the livestock."

A background on this issue is provided below.

Background

A consignment of more than 57,000 sheep purchased by a Saudi Arabian livestock importer, Hmood Alali Alkhalaf Trading and Transportation company, left Fremantle on 6 August. The consignment arrived in Jeddah on 21 August.

The shipment was inspected by a Saudi Ministry of Agriculture vet who claimed that six per cent of the sheep had a condition - similar to cold sores in humans - called scabby mouth. This is not a condition that can be passed on to humans through consumption of meat. The sheep were vaccinated twice against scabby mouth before leaving Australia and the Australian veterinary on board the vessel estimated the number of cases of scabby mouth to be 0.3 per cent, well below the 5 per cent accepted level in the specifications for the trade.

When it became clear Saudi authorities would not accept the sheep, the Australian Government began working with the Saudi owner of the consignment to help secure an alternative port of discharge.

Australia was hindered in what it could accomplish by the fact that the sheep were owned by a citizen of another country, were aboard a foreign vessel thousands of kilometres outside Australian waters.

On Wednesday, 24 September 2003, the Saudi principal agreed to an offer to purchase the sheep by the Australian Government on behalf of the Australian livestock industry for \$4.5 million. This arrangement provided for the unloading of the sheep in an unnamed Gulf port without delay.

When Australia gained control of the consignment, our expectation from British field commanders in southern Iraq was that the sheep would be accepted as food aid. The British have however subsequently raised concerns about security and any diversion of their resources away from key security roles.

Australia is continuing to negotiate for access to a number of countries including Iraq, but logistical and security concerns remain a significant obstacle for authorities in Iraq.

Whatever the result of those negotiations, the "*Cormo Express*" has adequate supplies of feed for the next several days and arrangements are being made for sufficient additional provisions not only for any port in the region, but also for a possible return of the vessel to Australia. The vessel has already reprovisioned on four occasions in the region.

Discussions on options to place the sheep have involved parties in Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan, Libya, Cyprus, Tanzania, Eritrea, Qatar, Italy, Poland, Israel, Ukraine, Argentina, Mauritius, Indonesia, Malaysia and a number of other countries.

Egypt has indicated it is unlikely to approve trans-shipment through the Suez Canal for possible European or north African destinations. An outbreak of Rift Valley fever in Egypt could also compromise the health status of the sheep if they were to pass through the Canal.

Any attempt to slaughter the sheep at sea would require significant extra skilled personnel and supplies and would take several weeks to complete. It would require modifications to the vessel (which we do not own) to install a portable abattoir facility. It would be very difficult to undertake such a large-scale slaughter safely and humanely. There are also significant animal welfare and environmental concerns with such an option.

Any decision to return the consignment to Australia would have to be managed in accordance with Australia's strict quarantine requirements. My Department is examining what arrangements would need to be put in place to receive the vessel in Australia and to arrange for processing the sheep in a secure quarantine environment.

My Department has already completed a thorough scientific assessment of how to manage any potential quarantine risks. I stress that no decision has yet been made to pursue this course.

We are still working hard at the highest level to secure a port of discharge in the Middle East.

I have already indicated that there will be a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding this incident as soon as possible and the results of the investigation will be made public.

In addition, the Government and the industry are committed to further reform to the livestock export arrangements in an endeavour to ensure that there is no repeat of an incident of this nature.

This is an important industry to Australia. So far this year Australia has exported 3,074,146 sheep to the Middle East on 46 voyages.

4th October 2003

World Animal Health Organisation vet confirms "*Cormo Express*" sheep are healthy and free of disease

Australian Agriculture Minister Warren Truss today welcomed the findings of an independent international veterinarian that the sheep onboard the "*Cormo Express*" are healthy and fit to be landed in any country in the Middle East region.

"The Australian Government is continuing negotiations with countries in the Middle East in an attempt to gain approval to land the sheep in the region," Mr Truss said.

The "*Cormo Express*" is expected to spend another two to three days reprovisioning in Kuwait.

"Dr Gardner Murray, Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, yesterday boarded the *Cormo Express* in Kuwait to inspect the sheep. Separately, an independent veterinarian, Dr Ghazi Yehia, from the Office International des Epizooties (OIE or World Animal Health Organisation) also examined the consignment.

"The OIE veterinarian examined sheep on all decks of the ship, studied veterinary reports, mortality figures and post mortem summaries, and interviewed the on-board veterinarian.

"In his official report, the OIE veterinarian confirmed that:

- the sheep are fit, healthy and suitable for human consumption (following normal veterinary inspection);
- there is no evidence of any infectious or contagious disease;
- there is no evidence of any disease to suggest the consignment would be unsuitable for admission to any country in the region; and
- there is no evidence that there has been a significant outbreak of scabby mouth aboard the vessel at any time during the voyage.

"The OIE veterinarian also noted that it is important to land the sheep quickly in the interest of their welfare."

5th October 2003

Kuwait provides valuable assistance for sheep aboard MV "*Cormo Express*"

Australian Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Minister Warren Truss today thanked Kuwait's Government and port authorities for their assistance in loading feed and other supplies on board the MV "*Cormo Express*" as part of Australia's continuing commitment to the welfare of the sheep on board the vessel.

"On behalf of the Australian Government, I would like to express my appreciation for the support provided by the Government of Kuwait in facilitating an opportunity for official inspection by a senior Office International des Epizooties (OIE or World Animal Health Organisation) veterinary surgeon," Minister Truss said.

"The OIE vet found that the sheep are fit and healthy, free from disease, and suitable for admission to any country in the region.

"Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Gardner Murray, has confirmed the OIE veterinarian's report that there is no evidence of a significant outbreak of scabby mouth aboard the vessel at any time during the voyage.

"We remain hopeful that Dr Murray's scientific expertise, and continued efforts by officers from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, will succeed in locating a suitable port at which to discharge the consignment.

"The welfare of the sheep aboard the "*Cormo Express*" remains the highest priority for the Australian Government, and I thank the Kuwaiti Government and port authorities for giving us the opportunity to carry out veterinary inspections and attend to the welfare of the sheep," Minister Truss said.

10th October 2003

Minister announces live export industry review

Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Warren Truss today announced that Dr John Keniry, past President of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will chair a broad-ranging investigation into Australia's livestock export industry, with particular reference to the MV "*Cormo Express*" incident.

"Dr Keniry brings to the review a lifetime's experience in agribusiness, both in research and management roles," Minister Truss said.

"Dr Keniry is currently chairman of the Ridley Corporation, and has played important roles in food and agribusiness organisations, including chairman of Sugar Australia and Unisearch. He is a former chairman of the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Authority and member of the NSW Environment Protection Authority.

"I will be consulting with Dr Keniry about the other members of the review team, which will report to me by the end of December," Minister Truss said.

The review team will examine:

- animal welfare codes of practice as they apply to livestock exports;
- current regulatory arrangements for live exports, from farm of origin to ultimate destination;
- the types of livestock suitable for export;
- supervision of export voyages to ensure accurate reporting; and
- the specific factors that contributed to mortalities on the MV "*Cormo Express*" following its arrival in the Middle East, the requirements of the Saudi Livestock Export Program and arrangements for the Saudi market.

"The review team will take into account the recommendations of the Independent Reference Group's action plan for the livestock export industry.

"It will also consider the arrangements to ensure enforcement of appropriate standards for livestock exports, and risk management strategies to address the health and welfare of animals during export journeys, including measures to ensure the industry can manage unforeseen events associated with the trade.

"If Australia is to have a viable and sustainable livestock export industry, the industry must be involved, responsible and accountable. I am confident that Dr Keniry and the review team will play an important role in helping industry achieve those outcomes," Mr Truss said.

11th October 2003

Transcript

**Doorstop Interview – Warren Truss, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
Sheep stranded on board the “Cormo Express”**

WARREN TRUSS:

Everyone ready? Well, I thought I might give you a little bit of an update on what's happening in relation to the “*Cormo Express*” and arrangements that are being made for the future.

The vessel is still in port in Kuwait, it's taking on feed. That process is very slow and we anticipate that it'll be Monday evening before the vessel is re-provisioned and able to again set out to sea.

Whilst the vessel has been in Kuwait an OIE vet has been on board and made a report on the sheep. There's been detailed inspections of the cargo and the OIE report has been made available to you a few days ago.

The OIE is basically satisfied that the sheep are in good condition and fit for the trade and fit for use in that part of the world.

In addition we've taken more than a thousand blood tests on the sheep, to check whether they have contracted any exotic disease while they've been in that region, and to ensure that the health status' of the sheep is as it appears.

We continue in active negotiations with a number of countries and with a number of different organisations in order to find a destination for the sheep in that region, and those discussions are continuing. Some of them show some promise but I have to say that we need also to be looking at what the alternatives might be.

When the ship leaves Kuwait it will be heading towards Australia. We would anticipate that the next load of feed that it will take on board would need to be Australian, and so we need to be as near to our waters as we can.

Whilst it's travelling we'll continue with the negotiations with various countries and interested parties and we'll naturally divert to whatever port might be appropriate for unloading.

In addition to that, whilst on the journey, sheep will be obviously disposed of and any that are in poor condition slaughtered so that in fact we are able to effectively deal with the sheep that are on board.

It's perhaps of interest to point out that the cargo was 57,000 sheep, but the vessel's actually got a capacity of perhaps as much as 70,000 or 75,000. So suggestions that they're unduly crowded or in particularly cramped conditions are not true.

In addition we'll certainly be taking the opportunity while the vessel is at sea to undertake a more extensive cleaning of the vessel, and also spraying and so forth disinfectants and the like to try and improve conditions on board. But also to help ensure that no disease is able to spread amongst the sheep.

If the sheep are to come back to Australia it will obviously need to be under very detailed and effective quarantine arrangements. The OIE have agreed to participate in arrangements to oversee any quarantine arrangements to bring them back into Australia and we'd also be looking to ensure that there was some international observation of those measures. That's important, to ensure that there is no suggestion internationally that we are compromising our quarantine status as a result of bringing these sheep back to Australia, and that no questions can be asked about the suitability of Australian sheep or beef for sale in other parts of the world.

When the vessel arrives in the vicinity of the Cocos Islands it's intended to put on board a party of vets and skilled stockmen and others who can assist with the process to take another set of blood samples. Indeed, we've envisaged taking several thousand blood samples of the sheep on board. They would then come back to the Animal Health Laboratories in Melbourne for detailed examinations to ensure that any of the exotic diseases that might exist in the Gulf region have not been passed on to the sheep.

I'd point out again that the sheep have not left the vessel in the whole time since the voyage began. They have not been in contact with other animals, there's been a quarantine zone around them whenever they've gone into port. And so the prospect of them having picked up a disease from that part of the world is quite low. But nonetheless we would naturally be keen to ensure that any risk is minimised in that regard.

I should also point out that, when we do thousands of tests like this, it's quite common that there would be a false positive. In fact, one would expect that in that number of tests there'd be some false positives, so we would need to then go back to those sheep and do further tests to make sure none of them have contracted any disease before they're allowed to come to Australia.

If they come to Australia there are two options: one is to put them into a quarantine zone in Australia for whatever period is necessary to ensure that there is no risk to the Australian flocks; the second would be to bring them to a port where there is an abattoir close by, and the sheep would then be unloaded from the vessel into an enclosed truck for immediate transfer to the killing floor of the abattoir where they could be processed without any contact with other animals, or wildlife, or Australia flora and fauna.

So those are the options that we're looking towards. I am aware that there are some people in farm industry organisations who would prefer to have the sheep slaughtered at sea. We consider that to be an extremely difficult option, if not impossible. The proposals that have been put forward by industry to undertake this task would involve high levels of risk to the people involved.

Talking about slaughtering the sheep, or killing the sheep, and then slitting them open and then cast overboard in international waters, the people involved in the slitting open process would have to be tied onto the vessel to avoid any risk of them falling overboard. We're in high seas, the vessel would have to be kept in motion during the whole process so that its water treatment plants can operate and to ensure also that there's not a build up of carcasses in the region. There's a risk that some of them would float to the surface and, even though it would be a long, long way from shore, who knows where they might end up.

So we're not attracted to the option of slaughter at sea, and we believe that it is possible to manage under strict quarantine conditions what needs to be done to bring the sheep back to Australia.

Finally, let me emphasise again our priority is to find a destination for the sheep as close to where they are at the present time. We're proceeding with those negotiations and we hope that they will be successful.

The work being done in relation to bringing them back to Australia or, for that matter, the option of slaughter, are fallback positions in the event of us not being able to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

QUESTION:

Would it be attractive to slaughter them on Cocos?

WARREN TRUSS:

There are huge difficulties associated with slaughter on Cocos Island. Whilst it was an old quarantine station many years ago it hasn't been used for that purpose for about a decade. There's never been more than about seven or eight hundred animals on the quarantine station at one time. The vessel can't get within about 10 kilometres of the Cocos Islands so they'd have to be barged ashore. We'd need to bring all the feed and water required for the sheep from, presumably, mainland Australia.

If they were to be slaughtered on the island then there's the issue of what to do with the residue from the slaughter process. Clearly it'd all have to be taken off the island. That's a huge difficulty.

Some of those things might be a little easier on Christmas Island than Cocos but, again, the vessel can't get close to Christmas Island, it'd have to be five or so kilometres offshore, and so there would be a lot of practical difficulties also with doing it on Christmas Island.

QUESTION:

But that's what you're considering, though, aren't you, that you'd go through that process on Cocos Island? Is that the preferred number one option at the moment?

WARREN TRUSS:

We're considering that option but that is a fairly low priority. We're far more likely, if there's a slaughter operation to occur, for that to happen in Australia - on mainland Australia.

QUESTION: [indistinct] close by that you could use would you be considering for that.

WARREN TRUSS: Sorry?

QUESTION: [indistinct] mainland?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, if we're going to take them straight from a ship into a slaughter facility there are only a couple of options. There aren't many ports that have got a slaughter facility close by, and I guess the one that comes first to mind would be Albany, in Western Australia. But there are a couple of other possibilities.

If they come to shore and go into a quarantine station that would be very likely to be Fremantle.

QUESTION: What [indistinct] are there?

WARREN TRUSS: Oh well, I suppose you could look at Geraldton, you could look at some of the other ports in other states. But I've already effectively ruled out bringing them to any port in Northern Australia because of the risk that the sheep would contract the blue tongue virus which is active in Northern Australia at this time of the year.

So I think, even though there's been offers from some places in Northern Australia I don't think that that's really practical.

QUESTION: Who's picking up the cost of this operation, the extra days at sea, the trip back to Australia, the feed, the quarantine and the vets? Is that still the livestock exporters?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, obviously the diplomatic effort and some of the commercial negotiations and some of the quarantine-type activities are at the cost of the Federal Government. But most of the expenses such as feed, the purchase of the sheep, ultimately will be borne by the industry, industry funds are being used as a part of this process at the present time. But the intention is that a levy will be put in place on the live export trade and that these funds will be recovered in time, through that levy.

QUESTION: [indistinct]

WARREN TRUSS: Well, the purchase price of the sheep was four and a half million dollars. We are paying high prices for all the services being provided overseas, I can assure you there are no 'mates rates.' It's all very expensive and so the costs build up quite substantially. And to reprovision the ship in a case like this may well add a million dollars to the cost, and so these costs are quite substantial.

But our priority is the welfare of the sheep, it remains the priority and we will not cut costs if that in any way compromises the welfare of the sheep.

QUESTION: Are you going to recover about \$6 million for the levy?

WARREN TRUSS: Oh, it's impossible to put a figure on it at this stage, but I think that would be a conservative number.

QUESTION: What's your time-line here? When do you have to make your final decision?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, the vessel will leave port as soon as it's taken on adequate provisions, I indicated that we anticipate that will be Monday evening. Now, as it moves further and further away from each country, that lessens the likelihood that any commercial arrangement could be put in place with that particular country.

Clearly, if an arrangement came to fruition, the vessel would turn around and go back to that country. So we don't rule out absolutely any destination but, clearly, we need to move the vessel into a place where it can take on further feed and water if that's going to be required. And we believe that the most practical option for that is for that to be as near to Australia as possible.

QUESTION: Two weeks, three weeks?

WARREN TRUSS: Oh, well, the vessel will only take about 10 days to get back to the Cocos Islands, or that general area. Of course that's still some distance from mainland Australia but we will be working during that whole process.

QUESTION: Is it your second option to bring them back to port and going straight to the slaughter house, that won't have quarantine facilities, will it? How will you reassure the farmers' group, at the moment, that are saying the risk is too [indistinct]?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, if the vessel comes into the harbour and is loaded straight from the vessel onto an enclosed truck, and then to the slaughter house which has a significant buffer area around it, there will be an effective quarantine.

But, by that stage, we'll have already blood tested the animals under international supervision to ensure that they don't have diseases that are exotic to Australia. So we'll already have eliminated most of the potential risk by the time we reach that stage.

QUESTION: Do you concede that there's opposition within the Government Backbench about bringing them home? There seems to be some support from rural Liberal and Nationals that they should be killed at sea.

WARREN TRUSS: Well, I can understand the concerns about the - about any risk to compromising our high standards of quarantine, we value very strongly our clean and green image. And I can assure you that any proposal to bring them back to Australia will not compromise our reputation for quality products. We will ensure that appropriate standards of quarantine are maintained.

QUESTION: Just [indistinct] the sheep. Have you ruled out slaughter at sea? And why would you consider sending them to Cocos Island if you're not going to be doing anything there apart from bringing them back to Australia?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, we need to have a place that is in Australian waters that is as smooth as possible for food transfers and things of that nature - sheltered waters as much as possible. So that's the reason why that general region, without having identified a spot on the map, has been identified as a likely place where we could undertake some of the further testing that will be required, and any additional serving any quarantine purpose.

Well, if there do prove to be quarantine-type issues, if indeed we end up with the unthinkable and these sheep have attracted some disease, well then obviously the further they're off the mainland the better.

Now, when you say have I ruled out slaughter, clearly, if we did get positive tests and there was a disease of some kind that we don't have in Australia, well then obviously the concept of bringing them back to the mainland would be absolutely off the list and we'd have to do something else. And there'd really only be two options left then: one would be to take them to a country that's already got that disease or, alternatively, they'd have to be slaughtered some way at sea.

QUESTION: So will the Cocos Island testing happen before any thought of slaughter at sea?

WARREN TRUSS: Yeah, well our preferred option remains finding a destination where we can land the sheep and they can be usefully used. The second option is to bring them back to Australia, and it would only be if that option became impossible for one reason or another that we would countenance the idea of slaughter at sea.

QUESTION: How far away is the *Al Kuwaiti** from docking, and have you had any indication that there may be problems there as well?

WARREN TRUSS: I can't tell you how many days away it's from docking. It left, from memory, Western Australia about the middle of last week - or was it Thursday last week - so it is probably, it's about a 14, 16 day journey. So that would give you a rough idea of about where it is. We've had no indications that there's any difficulties. The sheep were subject to additional inspections before departure and the observations were that they were fit for the trade and in good condition.

We have had no difficulty with unloading other Australian loads of sheep in that region, even since the "*Cormo Express*" incident. There seems to have been in interruption to the trade, apart from this vessel.

QUESTION: [indistinct] checking, you've been saying Cocos Island is a no - unloading in the Cocos Islands is highly unlikely, as well?

WARREN TRUSS: Yeah, it's highly unlikely. There seem to be a whole range of practical issues, as well as the environmental concerns, that have been brought to attention.

Now, no-one ever rules anything out absolutely because, if we get into a catastrophic situation where some emergency has to be undertaken, well there may be ways of managing the issues on Cocos Island. But it's not a priority at the present time.

QUESTION: Under that plan, to take them to Cocos and then test them and then bring them back, we're looking at least a month, aren't we, before the sheep will be unloaded?

WARREN TRUSS: It'd be difficult to put a time frame on it but, you know, we've got ten to twelve days' journeying time, the testing process will obviously take a few days and then it's a further few days' travel to Australia. So we're certainly looking at several weeks.

Perhaps, one other thing I could add, that time is also effectively in a quarantine station. So, effectively, the likelihood of any disease not having manifested itself over that period would give a greater degree of comfort to the Australian industry.

Most of the diseases we're talking about have an incubation period of just a few days. None of them are apparent on the ship yet, none of them have come up in any of the post mortems. But with a further seven to ten days' travel time, further round of blood tests then taken at the Cocos Island, further travel time, any reasonable incubation would've passed. And so the presence of any disease would also be obvious to the vets on board, as well as through any of the testing that's undertaken.

QUESTION: The death toll at the moment? How many sheep have died?

WARREN TRUSS: Er, I don't have the exact number, it's about - something over 5,000. Around about, you know, 20, 30 or so die each night. So that's just in round figures.

REPORTER: Thank you.

WARREN TRUSS: You're welcome.

22nd October 2003

Transcript
Interview – Warren Truss, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry
ABC Radio 936 Hobart
Sheep stranded on board the “Cormo Express”

COMPERE: Tell me about Tasmania and some live lamb exports because I'm sure you've not been having any trouble getting to sleep and counting sheep. Actually first of all, where is “*Cormo Express*” and what is happening to the sheep still on board?

WARREN TRUSS: Well we're still seeking to find a place around the world where perhaps they may be able to be unloaded. But we've obviously had to make arrangements to bring them back to Australia because the negotiations with countries around the world have been exceptionally difficult. We've approached at least 30 countries now. There are still some discussions going on and we hope that they may be fruitful but it is important that we have a fall back position. And that's why the work is being done on what needs to happen to bring them back to Australia without in any way compromising our disease-free status and our clean and green image.

Senator Campbell, who's the Minister for Territories, led a delegation to Cocos and Christmas Island over the last two days to look at what infrastructure is there. And what opportunities there might be to use the facilities in that region as a part of this process and we'll be factoring that into the discussions in the next few days.

My preliminary report back from him was that Cocos didn't seem to offer really any possibilities, it was virtually impossible, but it might be possible with some effort to do something at Christmas. So we're looking at those options along with obviously bringing the sheep back to Australia, mainland Australia, or either slaughter or placement into a secure quarantine facility.

COMPERE: Is it a nail in the coffin of live sheep exports? I realise that there are probably live sheep exports that happen all the time we don't hear anything about because they're conducted and concluded successfully. But when this happens it puts Australia in a terribly unfortunate light, not just here but within a global context. Do you see that a time will come where Australia can no longer afford to be part of it?

WARREN TRUSS: Well naturally we're seeking to increase the carcass trade wherever we possibly can. If we can value add our products in this country that just makes good sense. But there are a number of markets for which that's not an option and that's generally the case with the Middle East. We have a small carcass trade into that region, and it's growing, but growing quite steadily.

So because of cultural reasons, religious reasons, the lack of refrigeration often available, the desire in many of those countries to actually slaughter the

animal as a part of the feasting celebrations, suggests that I don't think there'll ever be a capacity to totally substitute a carcass trade for the live trade.

You're right to say that most of the shipments progress without any incident. Indeed, since the new protocols were put in place the better selection and management systems in Australia we've had around 45 shipments now go to the Middle East without a single incident. Even the "*Cormo Express*" of course, arrived without any problems, the problems occurred once the sheep arrived there.

And because this was such an unforeseen and still unexplained incident, we really clearly have to be able to deal with even the unexpected. And I've instituted an inquiry into the trade, and one of the things it's going to have to look at is what kind of fall back mechanisms we can put in place in the event of an incidence like this occurring again.

COMPERE:

Would it be fair to say we are lacking one of those at the moment? That we don't have a plan B?

WARREN TRUSS:

Well, we always had a plan B, because there's always been other countries that have been prepared to take the sheep. In incidents in the past there would have little difficulty in placing them in places like Pakistan, Italy, and for that matter other Gulf countries. Now the Gulf Co-operation Agreement, for customs seems to have developed much more intently and they've adopted pretty much a one out all out approach. So the fall back mechanisms that have been in there in the past haven't worked this time.

Now if we're able to bring the sheep back to Australia, even though that will be under the tightest quarantine measures we've ever seen in this country and be very expensive. But even if we are able to demonstrate that that can be successfully done then there is a fall back mechanism. Not one we'll want to use every year, or even every ten years, but something that we can do in an absolute emergency.

Now the work that's being done on diseases and pests and things of that nature suggest I think that we can achieve that. And the Chief Veterinary Officer has been briefing the industry and the public about what proposals are in mind over recent days. And I think most people are impressed by the extent of those measures and what we really will be able to do to essentially guarantee that these animals are disease free when they come back to Australia.

COMPERE:

I don't want to sound like a conspiracy theorist, Warren Truss, but I know I'm about to and I'm curious you mentioned that one out, all out approach from the Gulf countries with this shipment. And I wonder if Australia is perhaps paying a price for its involvement in the war in Iraq. If there is a greater solidarity perhaps in the Middle East than we've experienced before and if this might be the way of the future.

WARREN TRUSS: Well, the Saudis have never mentioned the war in Iraq as a reason for rejecting these sheep. They have stuck rigidly to their view that it was on health grounds. Now if they wanted to make a point about Australia's involvement in the Gulf War, they certainly would have said something publicly, that that was associated with this rejection. I might add though, also, that there have been more than half a dozen other shipments have gone to other countries in that region without incidence, since the "*Cormo Express*". So it really does suggest that any idea that there's any links with the Iraq war is just simply not credible.

COMPERE: There's a wash down effect for Tasmania in a shipment of lambs that's due to leave here in January. Is that likely not to take place, would you say?

WARREN TRUSS: Well I understand that there has been an intention to assemble 50,000 or so sheep for the Saudi market with the departure date the end of this year or early next year for the raj. We have placed a ban on all exports of live sheep to Saudi Arabia, it would simply be irresponsible to have another shipment leave for that country until we know why this one's been rejected and put in place mechanisms to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

I put that ban in place almost as soon as the "*Cormo Express*" was rejected in Saudi, because there was actually a vessel in Port Adelaide ready to take on board another cargo. So we - that vessel was not able to take its cargo, no other shipments have gone to Saudi or will be allowed to go. But shipments to other countries have proceeded without incident and so there's no reason to place any penalty on those countries because we've got a problem with Saudi.

COMPERE: And what - a shipment of that size, 50,000 from Tasmania - make much of a difference to the industry at a state level? Should it not be reinstated in time?

WARREN TRUSS: Well, obviously there are many farmers will have been preparing animals for that shipment, and so it will be a blow to them. The live sheep trade has helped create a very buoyant market for sheep at the present time. Now the plight of those farmers would be eased to some extent by the fact that there's been a drought on the mainland and there are many farmers who are now wanting to rebuild their flocks.

So there's a lot of potential for sales domestically to help in the rebuilding process following the drought. I don't want to underestimate the inconvenience and the concern that local farmers will have about the ban but I think they understand that we simply don't want 50,000 Tasmanian sheep floating around the world the way these 50,000 West Australian sheep are at the present time. And until we're really confident that they can be unloaded safely, it would be irresponsible to allow them to depart.

COMPERE: This will be a disappointment for Tasmanians who like to eat lamb, because at the moment if you buy a leg of lamb you need to keep it in the safe, and some people thinking that 50,000 might flood the market a bit, but that's not going

to be the case. Twenty five past nine, Warren Truss is my guest on ABC Tasmania.

Just on the question of live shipments, with the sheep on "*Cormo Express*" for example, who actually owns those sheep today?

WARREN TRUSS:

Well, when they leave Australia the general practice is that their sold what's called FOB, in other words, they become the property of the exporter, sorry of the importer, as soon as they board the vessel. So in this particular case a company called Hamoud* Transport and Trading, from Saudi Arabia owned them as soon as they left Fremantle. All the Australian farmers have been paid, all the bills have been met here, so he was the owner.

However, he was clearly unable to find any market, we believe he was behaving somewhat erratically and then we were particularly concerned when the masters of the vessel were given instructions by the Saudi importer to return the vessel to Australia, even though there was no import permit issued by Australia.

And we were concerned that we would have the ship back in our own waters with insufficient feed for the journey and then a major crisis on our hands. So in consultation with the industry the Government intervened at that time to purchase the sheep and so they are actually the property of the Australian industry, and the Australian Government at the present time.

COMPERE:

What price did you pay for them?

WARREN TRUSS:

We paid four and a half million for the shipment. And there's obviously been expenses subsequently associated with feeding them and the ship's charter and those sort of arrangements. We felt that was the only thing we could do to make sure that the welfare of the sheep, which has always been the priority issue, was adequately protected. We didn't want 50,000 starving sheep on the shipment, and we also felt that it may give us greater influence in a capacity in the negotiations with various countries.

COMPERE:

Instead though we've had 50,000 dying sheep and an international shame, haven't we?

WARREN TRUSS:

Well, the number of deaths is obviously a concern, but since the vessel has left Jeda and Saudi, the number of deaths has obviously been quite small. When the ship was in the port, in the very hot weather there are often large numbers of deaths. One of the few good things that's happened with this whole affair has been that the weather's been relatively kind and the temperatures quite low and so the numbers of deaths have been quite modest in the last week or two.

But nonetheless, we want the sheep off the ship as quickly as we possibly can. We've been able to adequately provision it now - that was a very difficult task in Kuwait. And since we've taken on a whole of extra provisions, cleaning

equipment and all sorts of things. Blood tests have been taken on the sheep, and a lot of work has been done to help prepare for the journey back to Australia, which is also quite a long journey. And then also to put in place additional measures that we will need to take as soon as it gets close to our waters. And to take additional blood tests with more veterinary people on board so that we can make a full and complete assessment about their suitability to come back to the mainland.

COMPERE: How many of those sheep have died?

WARREN TRUSS: It's about 5 ½ thousand from memory at the present time.

COMPERE: We've had a number of calls through Talkback here, Minister, saying why doesn't Australia just donate the sheep to Somalia, Ethiopia, any African country which it would be closer to where the ship has been than the ship back to Australia?

WARREN TRUSS: Well I can assure that's the kind of deals we're talking about. We're well past any idea that we might sell the sheep and make a profit, what we're talking about is giving the sheep away. But even more than that, giving them away with perhaps some financial incentive and, or some contribution to care for the sheep when they arrive in the country of destination.

So yes, we are looking certainly at providing the sheep to countries where there is an urgent need to provide food, it's been surprising to us. Even some of those countries have been unwilling to take the sheep, and that's been very disappointing.

COMPERE: On what grounds, what do they tell you?

WARREN TRUSS: Well the fact that there is a view around the place that these sheep are diseased means that poor countries say well why is this rich country Australia trying to dump diseased sheep on us? And Saudi won't take them so we don't think it's safe for our people as well. And of course, some of that has been actually aided and abetted perhaps unwilling, by people in the Australian industry who are talking about not wanting them bringing them back to Australia because they might be diseased.

Now these are Australian sheep and the idea is to bring them back to Australia but I know they have been cruising in areas where there are diseases that we don't have here. But they're in an enclosed vessel, there's a forced ventilation system, they haven't been in contact with any other animals. So the risk of them picking up disease is exceptionally small, but nonetheless we don't want to take any risks of that nature.

But it's hard to explain to an African, or an Asian country or somewhere else in the world that the diseases we are talking about are not ones that they

should be concerned about. We would literally be looking a gift sheep in the mouth.

COMPERE:

We're just about out of time, I just want to ask you very quickly, will you be moving to ensure, or to have put in place a system whereby there is not what appears to have been a speculative importer of these sheep. Someone saying yes I'll buy them and I'll find a buyer for them in Saudi Arabia, to ensure that there is an importer, proper facilities and a buyer for sheep before they even board in Australia? Because there is obviously a vested interest in this here in Tasmania.

WARREN TRUSS:

Well the Hamoud Trading Company have been in the business for a long time and they have always had markets for their sheep and I'm sure they had markets for this load as well. But it was clear that some things have gone wrong, the Australian vet on board commented that he was suspicious when the vessel arrived to note that there were no trucks at the wharf to receive them. So something clearly went wrong that was unusual.

It hasn't been Hamoud that's been assembling the cargo in Tasmania, it's another company called Almakerish* and they've also been reputable participants in the trade for a very long period of time. So we don't understand what has gone wrong but we do have a licensing provision and we have suspended the license of one company last year that we were dissatisfied with. It was a Kuwaiti company and they don't have their license back. Essentially we have a capacity to take away the licence of somebody who hasn't performed and we will obviously continue to do that because I think everyone knows this trade is at least very sensitive and we've got to make sure that performance is satisfactory.

The public won't wear bad animal welfare outcomes and frankly, neither will I. And the industry knows it's got to be above reproach and it's got the work very hard at ensuring it's improving its performance and ensuring that sheep that leave this country, or cattle for that matter, arrive safely at their destination.

COMPERE: Thanks for your time this morning, thanks for being so generous with your time

24th October 2003

Eritrea accepts 52,000 sheep from Australia

The Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Warren Truss and the Eritrean Minister of Agriculture, Arefaine Berhe, announced today that Eritrea had agreed to accept the 52,000 sheep on board the MV "Cormo Express".

Mr Truss said he was delighted with the outcome and recognised the contribution this would make to the agricultural relationship between Australia and Eritrea.

"It is very satisfying that we were able to find a destination for these sheep within a few days' sailing of where the ship was recently reprovisioned and so enable the sheep to be unloaded in a much shorter period than if we had brought them back to Australia," Mr Truss said.

Minister Berhe said Eritrea welcomed the opportunity to accept the sheep.

"We have put in place unloading, transport, holding and distribution arrangements that will ensure the welfare of the animals. Australia has provided valuable technical assistance and fodder that will also help in this regard," Mr Berhe said.

Both Ministers acknowledged the independent veterinary reports that clearly demonstrated that the sheep are healthy, free of disease and safe for human consumption.

Backgrounder

The unloading of the consignment of Australian sheep aboard the MV "*Cormo Express*" began at about 3:30pm AEST today, 24 October 2003 at the Port of Massawa, Eritrea.

A memorandum of agreement was signed last Thursday, following three weeks of talks. Minister Truss identified Eritrea on September 30 as one of more than 20 countries then approached by the Government. The agreement hinged on final veterinary inspection and inspection of the stock by Eritrean officials.

The sheep are being transported 58km from the port to a feedlot with a capacity of about 60,000 sheep. The feedlot has ample watering points, shade and sheep-handling facilities. It is anticipated that the sheep will be processed and distributed under the direction of the Government of Eritrea.

Australia will provide over 3000 tonnes of feed and \$1 million to meet expenses associated with the unloading, transport, holding and slaughter of the sheep.

The feed will come from three sources, including the remainder of the fodder on the MV "*Cormo Express*", and two further shipments of 1000 tonnes and 1700 tonnes.

A team of Australian personnel from Meat and Livestock Australia, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Western Australian Department of Agriculture have been in Eritrea for up to two weeks led by two officials from Australia's High Commission in Nairobi.

The Australian personnel have been involved in negotiations and preparations for the unloading of the vessel and will assist in the disembarkation arrangements.

It was imperative that details of the negotiations and movement of the ship over the past few days remained confidential in order to secure a satisfactory outcome for the negotiations.

It is eight weeks since the MV "Cormo Express" was turned away from Saudi Arabia.

Mortalities on board the "Cormo Express" as of 22 October (the latest date for which figures are available) were 5581, or 9.63 per cent

The sheep are being vaccinated against sheep pox, pasteurellosis and peste des petits ruminants on arrival at the feedlot. Facilities already in place at the feedlot will enable efficient vaccination

Most members of the technical team already in Eritrea - two officers from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, two officials from the West Australian Department of Agriculture and three industry representatives - will remain until unloading and vaccination at the feedlot has been completed. It is estimated this will be completed in several days.

For more information, please go to: www.daff.gov.au

Fact Sheet - Eritrea

Location: bordering the Red Sea, between Sudan, Djibouti and Ethiopia

Area: 124,800,000 sq km (DFAT country profile)

Capital: Asmara

Main port: Massawa

Population: 4.4 million

Languages: Arabic, Tigrinya, Amharic

Religions: Christian (Coptic, Roman Catholic, Protestant), Muslim

Currency: Nafka (worth about AUS 10 cents)

Head of State: His Excellency, President Isaias AFWORKI

Geography/climate: hot, dry desert, semi-arid in western hills and lowlands; cooler and wetter (up to 61 cm rain/year) in central highlands. Frequent droughts.

Government type: 'transitional': Constitution and legislature established in 1993; parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2001 postponed indefinitely.

Arable land: 3.9 per cent GDP (\$US million): 766.6 (2002)

24 October 2003

"Cormo Express" Sheep Disembark in Eritrea Q&A

When was agreement reached with Eritrea to take the consignment?

Negotiations have been under way with the Government of Eritrea for about three weeks.

An MOU was signed between the Australian High Commissioner in Kenya and the Eritrean Minister for Agriculture on 16 October. However, arrangements were not finalised until Eritrean Ministry of Agriculture veterinary officials had inspected the consignment and approved its discharge.

When did the Australian Government know Eritrea was likely to take the sheep?

We could not be certain Eritrea would accept the consignment until veterinary inspections were complete and approval to unload was granted.

What does the arrangement cover?

Australia has provided the consignment to the Government of Eritrea as a gift, along with 3000 tonnes of pelletised feed, technical expertise and \$A1 million in financial assistance to the Eritrean Ministry of Agriculture, to defray the expense to Eritrea of handling such a large consignment and meeting animal welfare requirements.

Will copies of that agreement be made available to media and the public?

The agreement is a government-to-government memorandum and it is not normal practice to publicly release such documents.

How many Australians have been involved in the preparations for this arrangement?

As well as considerable work over several weeks by a large number of Australian Government officers based in Canberra, we had a technical team of government officials and industry representatives in Kuwait for several weeks which included Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Gardner Murray, and Trevor Flugge, Australia's Senior Agriculture Advisor in the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. Subsequently, a technical team of officials and industry representatives were sent to Eritrea to assist in arrangements there. The team in Eritrea comprised two officials from the High Commission in Nairobi (which covers Eritrea), two officers of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, two officials from the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and 3 industry representatives.

How long have Australian officials been in Eritrea?

The team of Australian Government and industry officials was sent over the past two weeks as soon as the Government of Eritrea indicated it was interested in accepting the consignment.

What assurances can the Australian Government provide about the health and welfare of the sheep?

All unloading, transport and holding facilities have been inspected by the Australian Government officers already in Eritrea. They have confirmed that:

- the consignment will be unloaded from the Cormo Express at a dedicated wharf in the port of Massawa
- sheep will move down ramps from the vessel into a fleet of trucks, which will transport them 58 kilometres to a feedlot on the highway to the capital, Asmara.

Australian veterinarians have been supervising the health and welfare of the sheep throughout the voyage. On arrival in Eritrea, they are being supervised by the Director of Veterinary Services for Eritrea and his staff. The Australian team has discussed the needs of the sheep with Eritrean officials.

What about processing?

It is anticipated that the sheep will be processed and distributed under the direction of the Government of Eritrea.

What about the "Cormo Express"?

The Australian Government is deeply appreciative of the assistance provided by the owners, master and crew of the MV "*Cormo Express*". This successful outcome would have been very difficult to achieve without their support.

The support provided by the Australian vets and industry stock inspectors has also been outstanding.

It is important to note that the vessel's good management of the consignment has been confirmed through a series of inspections by Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, an independent veterinarian and veterinary officials from the Eritrean Ministry of Agriculture - all of whom have reported that the sheep are free from disease, healthy, in good overall condition and acceptable for human consumption.

The destination of the "*Cormo Express*" is now a matter for the owner and charterer.

Will the Australian Government release the risk evaluation for return of the sheep to Australia, as prepared by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry?
Yes.

How much has this exercise cost and who will foot the bill?

The final figure is not yet known, but we estimate the full costs will be around \$10 million. The Government has agreed that the costs associated with resolving the Cormo Express incident should be recovered from industry. The most practicable way to do this would appear to be through a specific levy designed to raise the revenue from the sector that benefits from the live animal export trade. I will discuss specific details of the recovery mechanism with industry before finalising arrangements and putting them in place.

Does this development mean the review of the live export trade chaired by Dr John Keniry will no longer go ahead?

The review will go ahead. Australia's livestock export industry is worth \$1 billion a year, and it is essential that there are systems in place to protect that industry and to ensure there is no repetition of events such as the Saudi rejection of the consignment on board the Cormo Express.

This has been a unique situation; Australia has already successfully exported more than three million sheep to the Middle East so far this year.

Was the Australian Government aware of this deal when there was also public comment telling the Australian people the sheep were coming to Cocos Island?

The Government and its officials have made it clear on all occasions the preferred option was to find a destination near to the Middle East for these healthy Australian sheep. There have always been three options. Option one, the preferred option, to find a market for the sheep. Options two and three (disposal at sea or the return to an Australian quarantine zone) have been crucial contingencies developed in conjunction with industry to deal with the situation should no market be found for the sheep. These contingency arrangements had to be thoroughly developed because Australia could not take for granted that a market could be found. As you know, Australia has discussed possible destinations for the consignment with more than 50 countries. Our experience throughout this issue has confirmed that we should not put a successful outcome at risk by making premature announcements: right up until the time the sheep were unloading, we were still actively involved in preparing for all contingencies.

26th October 2003

Live animal export review panel announced as almost one third of "Cormo Express" sheep unloaded

Australian Agriculture Minister Warren Truss today announced the members of a panel to conduct an investigation into Australia's livestock export industry, as sheep continue to be unloaded from the MV "Cormo Express" in Eritrea.

"About 14,000 sheep are now off the ship, and settling into a feedlot 58km from the port of Massawa as the third day of unloading is about to start," Mr Truss said. "Reports received overnight indicate that almost a third of the consignment has been unloaded, with about 6,000 head taken off on Friday and a further 8,000 yesterday.

"The sheep are being vaccinated for a number of diseases potentially present in Eritrea as they leave the vessel. The vaccination procedure is slowing the unloading process. The Australian Government is now focussed on ensuring there is no repeat of this incident.

"Dr John Keniry, past President of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will chair a broad-ranging investigation into Australia's livestock export industry, with particular reference to the MV "Cormo Express" incident.

"I am pleased today to be able to announce that Dr Keniry will be supported by a panel that has considerable expertise and experience at the highest level in the livestock industry and animal welfare concerns," Mr Truss said.

The review team members are:

- **Mr Murray Rogers**, chairman of the Quarantine and Exports Advisory Council. Mr Rogers is also chairman of the National Management Group established in 2001 to help forge a national approach to managing possible disease incursions.
- **Professor Ivan Caple**, Professor of Veterinary Medicine and Dean of the faculty of Veterinary Science at Melbourne University. Professor Caple is also chairman of the National Advisory Committee on Animal Welfare.
- **Dr Michael Bond**, Assistant Veterinary Director of the Australian Veterinary Association, and a former Director of Animal Health in the WA Department of Agriculture, and former chairman of the Veterinary Surgeons Board of WA. Dr Bond is currently in Eritrea as part of the team overseeing the unloading of the MV *Cormo Express*.
- **Mr Lachlan Gosse**, a sheep and cattle producer from Hallett, South Australia. Mr Gosse has extensive livestock industry experience and has been a member of a number of State and national advisory bodies.

The review team is to report to the Minister by the end of December after examining:

- animal welfare codes of practice as they apply to livestock exports;
- regulatory arrangements for live exports;
- the types of livestock suitable for export;
- supervision of export voyages; and
- factors that contributed to mortalities on the MV *Cormo Express*, the Saudi Livestock Export Program and arrangements for the Saudi market.

Appendix 3

Transcript

Dr Gardner Murray, Chief Veterinary Officer 20/10/2003

**Press Conference - Dr Murray discusses the MV “Cormo Express”
and comments on the health of the 55,000 sheep.**

QUESTION: I'll just ask you to start with, what you've seen of the sheep and could you describe briefly their condition [indistinct].

DR GARDNER MURRAY: Okay, then. Is somebody going to ask that then?

QUESTION: Off you go.

QUESTION: [Indistinct] the sheep, Gardner.

DR MURRAY: So I'll go? Okay, look I had a look at the sheep in Kuwait on the “*Cormo Express*”. I had a look at them perhaps on six occasions and I'd have to say that they're in remarkably good condition given the travel, given the length of time they've been at sea.

There was no infectious disease. They were tired of course. But in the course of seven days in Kuwait, they ate a lot of food and some of them even put on weight.

Having said that, a number of sheep still die because of tiredness and exhaustion. But the balance of sheep, the healthy ones, are very fit.

QUESTION: How many sheep would have died [indistinct]?

DR MURRAY: There'd be over 5,000 sheep have died during the whole voyage.

QUESTION: Can you give more detail about the conditions on board [indistinct]?

DR MURRAY: Yes, I can. The carrier is a medium to large size carrier. It has nine levels. The lighting in the ship is very good. You can have a look quite easily at the sheep. The illumination is fine. The crew's quarters and the way the captain looks after the ship means that it's a very tidy, neat and well managed facility.

QUESTION: [Indistinct] that they don't actually - that the [indistinct] isn't actually cleaned out, that it remains [indistinct]...

DR MURRAY: What happens is normally the manure pat builds up during the course of a voyage. And this particular voyage, because it's been so long, the manure pat is built up a little bit more than would ordinarily happen. And in humid conditions it becomes moist. Because of that, the ship's crew and our vet and stockmen on board have been cleaning out as much of that damp manure as possible.

The situation however now in Kuwait is that the temperature is lower, the humidity is lower, and all of the remaining pat is drying out very well.

QUESTION: What sort of timeframe do you think there will be before we get a decision on this?

DR MURRAY: Oh I think probably a couple of weeks.

QUESTION: And what do you base that on?

DR MURRAY: Well I based it on the fact that at the moment a series of options are being looked at, comprehensive evaluations are being conducted and meetings with industry are being carried out at the moment as with States and Territories, and so there is a lot of discussion going on at present.

QUESTION: If the sheep are diseased, can you rule out the option of slaughtering them at sea?

DR MURRAY: I'd have to say that if the sheep have an exotic disease, we'd have to really strongly reconsider any option about bringing them back to Australia or for that matter putting into another country.

QUESTION: How would you compare the sheep's condition to the sheep that we have sent to the [indistinct]?

DR MURRAY: They're in far better condition than the ones I've seen during the drought. And in fact arguable they were in better condition than two of the ships that landed sheep when I was in Kuwait.

QUESTION: Information [indistinct] there would be a buffer zone on the wharves where the sheep were landed, how long would that buffer be in force and how big would that be?

DR MURRAY: It would depend on which particular area. But the buffer zone would be one that would ensure biosecurity and be proclaimed under the Quarantine Act, and there would be thorough controls.

QUESTION: What do you think would be the most likely [indistinct] inevitable. If another market isn't found, what do you believe might happen [indistinct].

DR MURRAY: Well I think at this stage the return to Australia option is being considered.

QUESTION: When will those sheep arrive at the Cocos Islands and how long will they remain there?

DR MURRAY: They are due to arrive at Cocos Islands some time during the first week of November. How long would you stay there? Between five and seven days.

QUESTION: While they're offshore there, if the market option came up, would the ship then head off to another country to deliver them or would that be out of the question?

DR MURRAY: I think the Government's priority is quite clear. Other market options, but if that crops up, I think they would push for that option.

QUESTION: On the basis of what you saw on...

QUESTION: Why do you think no one will take the sheep?

DR MURRAY: To be frank, because the ship has got such a bad reputation. The media have said diseased shipment, sick shipment...

QUESTION: ...said diseased shipment?

DR MURRAY: Well it's all over the media in the Middle East.

QUESTION: So it's the Middle Eastern media?

DR MURRAY: Well I think you should perhaps have a look at some of the captions I think you'll see on the Internet and you'll see what I mean.

The facts of the matter are it's got a bad reputation. I think everyone now knows that the sheep are healthy and fit to land, but carrying that reputation makes it very difficult for countries to consider taking them.

QUESTION: Well if the sheep are fit, why did the Saudis reject them?

DR MURRAY: The Saudis rejected them because of a disease called scabby mouth. Scabby mouth occurs everywhere in the world, and the issue wasn't that there was no scabby mouth. There was because our vet said there was a level of scabby mouth. The issue was the level of scabby mouth, the quantity of scabby mouth. That's the issue.

QUESTION: Is that the real reason though?

DR MURRAY: That's the reason we were given, yes.

QUESTION: Can you tell us a bit about the National Management Group that the States and the Territory [indistinct] in discussions at the moment?

DR MURRAY: The National Management Group is meeting right now. It comprises all interested industry parties, cattle, sheep, you name it, and it comprises States and Government officials as well as Commonwealth officials. And they're sitting down today discussing all the issues and all of the options and working through the next steps.

QUESTION: Can you explain quarantine arrangements for unloading, if they are unloaded in Australia, and transport to abattoirs?

DR MURRAY: Well if sheep were unloaded in Australia, it would be done under triple quarantine conditions in insect proof facilities. They'd be transported in insect proof trucks. They'd be accompanied by quarantine inspectors and so on.

QUESTION: Does that mean they couldn't travel anywhere through any regions where there was [indistinct]?

DR MURRAY: There'd be no contact with farms, no.

QUESTION: Was there ever an option for the ship to have stood off for say a week while the - and then have the scabby mouth reassessed?

DR MURRAY: I suppose that was an option but I'm not familiar with that particular situation.

QUESTION: Could it have saved all of this, if they'd done that?

DR MURRAY: I don't know. I wasn't involved in that part of the episode to be honest.

QUESTION: There have been some [indistinct] about the sheep and [indistinct] RSPCA saying that they are not being treated properly and that sort of

thing. How do you answer those sorts of criticisms [indistinct] Australia [indistinct].

DR MURRAY: Yes, well I'd have to say that on board the ship, the ship's crew have been fantastic. In fact they took on six more crew in the United Arab Emirates purely to try and help look after the sheep.

QUESTION: So the RSPCA is wrong? Is that what you're saying?

DR MURRAY: Well I've been on the ship, and I can tell you the sheep are in good condition and their welfare is being looked after. But if the RSPCA or other people have been on the ship, they can contradict me.

QUESTION: What about the damage to Australia's trade reputation if the sheep are off-loaded in Australia?

DR MURRAY: Well clearly that is an issue. I don't think there would be damage if you did it properly, if you did a full risk evaluation and if we had international experts review our work.

QUESTION: Can you list the mainland ports that have been considered, if they are brought back here?

DR MURRAY: I could list many ports but I don't want to go into any particular ports at this stage.

QUESTION: But there are less than eight [indistinct].

DR MURRAY: I don't plan to list any ports at this stage, no.

QUESTION: Are they all Western Australian ports?

DR MURRAY: In Western Australia, at this stage, yes.

QUESTION: The sheep will have been at sea for something approaching three months I think at a time they were to reach Australia. What sort of conditions would you expect them to be in by then?

DR MURRAY: Well clearly there will be a low level of mortality, everything else being equal. But the remaining sheep if they continue as they've been going for the last couple of weeks that I've seen them will continue to eat and remain in reasonable condition.

But of course if the weather changes, if there's high humidity, if other factors come to play, circumstances will be different.

QUESTION: Can you outline the difficulties of slaughter at sea?

DR MURRAY: The main difficulty with slaughter at sea are, in my view anyway, occupational health and safety. How you actually handle such a large amount of animals at sea in very difficult and uncontrolled circumstances. Of course there are other issues relating to environmental matters and in fact relating to the welfare themselves of the sheep where slaughter at sea might not be as welfare-friendly as at a normal abattoir.

QUESTION: But the industry says it's quite practicable to do it.

DR MURRAY: Of course it's practical to do it but it's a very difficult practice to undertake, and I've just given you the risks.

QUESTION: Have you had any discussions with the farm groups [indistinct]?

DR MURRAY: The answer to that is only very briefly this morning. But I'm with you at the moment. I'm not at the National Management Group meeting. So I'm briefing you on what is occurring in the National Management Group meeting at the moment.

QUESTION: What do they [indistinct]...

DR MURRAY: They will just talk in general terms but we'll have more discussion later.

QUESTION: Where is the "*Cormo Express*" scheduled to arrive at the Cocos Islands?

DR MURRAY: I suspect everything else being equal, first week of November.

QUESTION: How was the captain and the crew, in terms of the fact that they've had to do something they wouldn't normally do?

DR MURRAY: Well I have to say I thought the captain and crew were brilliant. And they'd been on the ship for a long time and, to be honest, the biggest problem I think they have and our vet and stock inspector on board had was not having an ultimate destination. If you have a destination, you can make your plans. But not knowing what's going to happen next is very difficult.

But the ship's crew were in great condition. The ship was as clean as it could be. And people were very active, although tired.

QUESTION: What was the situation with the feed and water when you got on board?

DR MURRAY: The feed was running very low. The water was adequate but the ship can produce about 200 tonnes of water a day at sea through desalination plants, but onshore it can't, and so therefore we had to get a couple of thousand tonnes of water and a thousand tonnes of fodder.

QUESTION: [Indistinct]

DR MURRAY: It's a hard question. I went on it on the 1st and 2nd October and last, say, last Wednesday was the last time I was on the ship.

OFFICIAL: I think we might just wind it up there, if you don't mind. Thanks very much for coming.

QUESTION: Thank you.