

A. Preamble

Against Animal Cruelty Tasmania (AACT) is a not-for-profit group based in Hobart, Tasmania. Its aim is to eliminate all exploitation, cruelty and suffering of animals within our state and beyond.

We strive to facilitate change through non-violent action, education and political lobbying on a wide variety of issues. Our current campaigns target the live export industry, intensive farming, and duck shooting. AACT liaises with appropriate groups and organisations to achieve our objectives, which are:

- to encourage and support cruelty free living
- to identify and campaign against the inhumane treatment of animals within Tasmania
- to respond to national and international animal cruelty issues as appropriate

AACT, an incorporated organization in Tasmania, is one of the most recently formed animal advocacy groups in Australia. It was formed in 2003 and has grown in strength and credibility substantially since its inception.

This paper represents AACT's response to the Reference Group's enquiry and discussion paper "Ensuring a profitable and sustainable agriculture and food sector in Australia". AACT's submission comments on the need for humane animal treatment in the agriculture sector, and responds to those sections of the paper relevant to it. AACT therefore makes comment only on those sections of the paper in which it is qualified, or which are relevant to its specific expertise and interests.

The paper is divided into four key areas:

▪ Markets and competitiveness for Agriculture and food

AACT draws the Reference Group's attention to the fact the consumers are becoming more and more sensitive to the way the products they buy are produced and are demanding clear labelling of products to enable them to make an informed choice. Animal welfare, both of the animals produced in the agricultural sector and native animals affected by farming, is a major concern of consumers both in Australia and overseas. Negative publicity currently being generated by the sector in relation to certain industries, such as the wool and live export industries has had detrimental effects on the reputation of Australian wool and sheepmeat. Additionally, a recent case of a mass poisoning of wallabies on King Island by 16 local farmers resulted in a great deal of negative publicity for King Island produce.

AACT urges the reference group to include consideration of animal welfare as an essential factor in the marketing and competitiveness of Australian products.

• **Using and managing natural resources**

AACT is concerned with the sustainable use and management of natural resources, particularly in the contexts of intensive farming and wildlife matters. Native wildlife are often seen as ‘pests’ and in competition with farming industries and inhumane methods of animal control are commonplace. Intensive farming methods such as piggeries and cattle feedlots can have detrimental effects on the environment. Additionally, beef and dairy farming are known to be extremely high water use industries - a matter of great concern in a country as dry as Australia.

AACT recommends that the issues of humane methods of ‘pest’ animal control be considered essential factors within the production of food and other agricultural products. Additionally AACT urges the reference group to take into account the negative impacts of intensive farming and beef and dairy industries on the environment.

B. FUTURE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Clearly the agriculture and food sector will be facing challenges, among them being the adoption of new technology and marketing strategies. As well, the domestic and international market is becoming increasingly aware of animal welfare issues, particularly those to do with intensive farming and the live export trade. Animal advocacy groups will continue to publicize the extremely poor welfare conditions under which most animals are farmed, and the campaign by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has demonstrated that markets are heavily influenced by such welfare issues. The focus of this paper on maximizing “efficiencies” suggests that welfare conditions of cattle, sheep, pigs and chickens in particular will not improve without considerable campaigning by animal advocacy groups. Rather than making false claims in relation to “Australia’s animal welfare record”, the industry/ies should be looking at far more humane methods of farming animals than those currently used.

Considerable improvements implemented in other countries, such as the abolition, outlawing, or phasing out of some systems including the mulesing of sheep, caging battery hens, certain cattle farming practices, the live export trade, and sow stalls and farrowing crates need to be implemented in this country before it can claim any sort of “record” in animal welfare. It is a matter of grave concern to many animal advocacy groups, including AACT, that when “Codes of Practice” are implemented, spurious claims are made that these voluntary “codes” have the support or approval of animal welfare organizations when in fact they are nothing more than mechanisms for animal welfare laws in states and territories to be routinely breached.

◆ **International markets and multilateral trade negotiations and bilateral trade agreements**

It is a matter of great concern to all animal advocacy groups that the live animal export trade continues from Australia. Not only does it have significant impact upon rural and regional communities in which meat processing was the major, or only employer, the welfare standards in the industry are nothing less than appalling. Australia has a thriving frozen/chilled carcass industry which is being impeded by the live export trade, and it has been acknowledged by leading agricultural economists and scientists (S.J Heilbron and Terry Larkins, Professor Lindner) that the live export trade creates massive job losses, forces the price of meat up in this country, causes significant losses to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and to household income. The live animal export trade is heavily subsidized by governments, with taxpayers' funds, for reasons best known to themselves.

The extremely negative publicity about the live export trade, aided by the "*Cormo Express*" tragedy and the PETA campaign, surely indicates that this trade must be replaced entirely by a frozen meat trade. It is not AACT's intention to advocate the slaughter of animals, but there are strict legislative and other requirements in place in this country when animals are slaughtered, and the public perception now is that it is unconscionable, and even a sign of "cultural cringe" that Australia is prepared to have these millions of animals transported long distances under appalling conditions, to be slaughtered in a manner that is illegal in this country. The live export trade has largely been able to regulate itself in spite of three major enquiries recommending that the industry become more "transparent" and "accountable". Two Independent Reference Groups (2000 and 2002), and the government's own Keniry review in the wake of the "*Cormo Express*" made numerous other recommendations in regard to the welfare of the animals on these shocking journeys, and they follow the recommendation by the Senate Select Committee in 1985 that on welfare grounds alone, the trade should end. Yet nothing changes; the ships used are almost all over 20 years old, not purpose built, have histories of major detention episodes in Australia and/or high mortality events, and they are "flag of convenience" ships crewed from third world countries who have little or no interest in the welfare of the animals.

More recently, it has been suggested that Australia is to import fodder from Indonesia to accustom cattle destined for the live export trade to that diet, exposing Australia to any number of biosecurity risks, all to save an industry that cannot morally or financially sustain itself.

In signing Memoranda of Understanding with a number of countries in the Middle East including Saudi Arabia, he has been unable to offer any guarantee that there will not be a repeat of the "*Cormo Express*" tragedy, and the prospect remains of animals being left on disease-ridden ships for weeks at a time. Moreover, there are, according to Hansard, no such memoranda in place with South East Asian countries to which Australia exports animals, therefore no risk management analysis or process is in place in the event of a similar rejection in that region.

Australia is also under international and domestic scrutiny over its treatment of its wildlife, perhaps most notably the mass slaughter of kangaroos, the methods used (such as 1080 poison and aerial shooting) and the ethical and moral issues underpinning this treatment. The perception is that Australian farmers cannot live in harm in harmony with native wildlife, that these animals are demonized so that wide-scale slaughter of them is acceptable, and the community as a whole would be opposed to the creation of an “industry” around the slaughter of native wildlife for commercial gain.

- ◆ *What more should Australia (industry and government) be doing to identify emerging trade trends and future challenges for the sector?*

The government has consistently claimed that animals are being exported to “poor” countries that lack refrigeration; however, the community is now widely aware that this is not the case; the agenda is largely to do with job creation in those countries – at the cost of tens of thousands of lost jobs in Australia. Australia should clearly be promoting the frozen meat trade and its by-products and making live animals unavailable for export.

- *Are there particular impediments to improving the agriculture and food sector’s trade performance and opportunities?*

A particular impediment is the growing international and domestic perception that Australia clearly cares little for animal welfare, while there are tens of thousands of animals shipped live overseas each year, sheep are mulesed, pigs kept for most of their lives in sow stalls or farrowing crates and millions of chickens in cages, as well as proposals to create an industry around the slaughter of Australia’s unique wildlife.

- *How should Australia make best use of multilateral and bilateral negotiations to achieve expanded market access for the agriculture and food sector as well as the eventual elimination of domestic support and the removal of export subsidies?*

Australia needs to demonstrate to the international community that it demands high standards for animal welfare . This means that it will need to develop *better* animal welfare standards and enforce them with a national entity that is objective, impartial and holds the real welfare of farmed animals paramount. If the bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations are as successful as the government would have the community believe, it should be able to use its significant influence over the importing countries’ purchasing choices, persuading them to buy meat from Australia and not live animals.

- *How can Australia play a more effective role in encouraging multilateral trade reform?*

Australia should be seeking to have removed any trade barriers in the form of tariffs on the importation of frozen meat into the countries to which it currently exports live animals.

◆ **Domestic Markets**

Once again, the agriculture/food sector is under scrutiny as the community becomes more aware of farming practices. Successful campaigns by animal advocacy groups, have highlighted in particular the way pigs and chickens are

farmed, and there is growing public concern over the treatment of these animals. Claims that animal welfare is of “paramount concern” in these industries are clearly spurious, as photographic and film evidence shows. AACT believes that *real* improvements in animal welfare practices will need to be forced upon those industries in order for them to gain public acceptance; this includes battery hens no longer being caged, pigs must have freedom to move (the end of sow stalls and farrowing crates), and the mulesing and live export sheep must end.

- *Is there a need for the Australian agriculture and food sector to have more timely and better quality information on consumer expectations about retail food presentation, packaging, cooking and shopping preferences? If so, how might this be achieved/provided?*

Yes. See below.

- *What significant changes in domestic and export markets, with respect to labelling and product traceability, are likely? Are the systems currently in place or under development likely to be sufficiently responsive to future consumer requirements for quality assurance, audit and product information? Should industry responses to such demands be left to businesses (individually or collectively) or is there a role for government here?*

AACT believes the key to consumer satisfaction is clear, truthful labelling of how the product was produced so that the consumer can make an informed choice.

It is important that animal products in particular be clearly labelled with specific information on how those animals were farmed, in particular whether they were from free-range operations or intensive conditions.

- *How can food safety, labelling and other consumer requirements best be achieved in ways that minimise the need for regulation, encourage investment in the sector, and allow maximum flexibility and innovation in product manufacture and marketing?*

There is no room for ambiguity in this labelling.

- *What is the appropriate role for government in resolving the above issues and in relation to the efficient operation of the manufacturing, distribution and retail parts of the food supply chain?*

(Not applicable to AACT)

C. COMPETITIVENESS OF AUSTRALIAN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Clearly in a domestic and international market sensitive to animal welfare and also to health scares from such things as BSE, Australia must be sure to have the highest standards of animal care in order to be competitive.

D. EDUCATION. SKILLS AND LABOUR SUPPLYThe Australasian Meat Industry Employees’ Union estimates that 20,000 jobs have been lost as a consequence of the live export trade, Heilbron put the figure at 17,500. As these

jobs are lost, so are the skills, and rural and regional communities who relied on that sector become fragmented as people leave to seek other employment. In contrast, far from “supporting 9,000 jobs” as the live export industry claims, the live export trade is known to be a relatively small employment group, and a large proportion of those jobs would remain if the live export trade were to end.

- *How can immigration policy (including working visa arrangements), education and training and industrial relations systems be improved to address labour supply issues for the sector? What changes, if any, would assist export competitiveness?*

(Not applicable to AACT)

- *What management skills are most important to farm and food business performance? Once identified, how are they best integrated into education and training policies?*

Education in proper animal management and welfare, with particular focus on encouraging an understanding of animals as sentient beings rather than simply ‘products’.

- *Are there industry, community and government initiatives that would be particularly cost effective in attracting skilled labour into the agriculture and food sector?*

Funding assistance to the meat processing sector in preference to the live export trade rather than vice versa.

E. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

(Not applicable to AACT)

F. INFRASTRUCTURE

- *What criteria should government use in identifying priorities for investment in infrastructure critical to the future of the agriculture and food sector?*

Funding priorities should address:

- Domestic and international perception of the industry in the context of animal welfare
- The creation of jobs, skills and technology in Australia rather than generating jobs in overseas countries with the live export trade as is the case now
- Research and development into real animal welfare from countries that lead the field
- *What infrastructure investments should be funded by the private and public sectors*

General comment: AACT’s understanding of the current business environment is that all businesses need to be independently competitive for survival, and questions primarily the funding provided to the live export industry, but also funding to farmers generally. If they cannot survive as “businesses” in the

current regime, with proper adherence to animal welfare, then ongoing public funding will not seriously address this in the long term.

AACT does, however, have the following comment to make in relation to the use of natural resources, particularly water:

- *How can the need to replace or refurbish major water infrastructure best be managed? Is there a role for governments?*
- *Will existing water resources be sufficient to meet future water needs? Or will further water sources need to be identified?*
- *Will the development of more efficient and effective market instruments for water allocation overcome most of the supply problems likely to emerge?*

As noted earlier, intensive farming, and beef and dairy farming are known to draw heavily – disproportionately so – upon water reserves on an ongoing basis, and with climate change and other factors gaining prominence, AACT questions whether this disproportionate use can be justified in even the short term. Certainly it cannot be justified in the long term.

CONCLUSION

It is AACT's belief that the agricultural industry has brought the present poor publicity it is receiving in the domestic and international communities upon itself with its scant regard for animal welfare, and that the industry has a difficult task ahead to address this publicity. Vexatious court action against those who disagree with the worst of its practices has contributed to this perception, and infighting in that specific industry has left it open to some measure of ridicule.

The agriculture industry and the government need to address themselves to the serious welfare issues in intensive farming, the live export trade and its treatment of native wildlife and "pest" animals.

Truthful, accurate and clear labelling of products and the methods by which they were produced is essential and is in growing demand by consumers domestically and internationally. Australia has an opportunity to exploit this demand by leading the way in animal welfare and product labelling.

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