



WORLD ANIMAL PROTECTION AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION TO THE AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS TASKFORCE

AGRICULTURAL COMPETITIVENESS GREEN PAPER

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We were known as **WSPA**

(World Society for the
Protection of Animals)

World Animal Protection submission on the agricultural competitiveness green paper

Further to our March 2014 submission in response to the Issues Paper part of the White Paper process, World Animal Protection is pleased to make a submission on the Green Paper to “ensure agriculture remains a significant contributor to the economy and regional communities”. Our previous submission was sent under our former name, World Society for the Protection of Animals.

In this submission we canvass briefly and make suggestions regarding:

- The governance of animal welfare in Australia
- Transparency and monitoring

We also summarise the arguments we advanced in our March submission as to why live exports do nothing to strengthen Australia’s agricultural competitiveness in the longer term, and how Australia could best contribute to global food security.

Governance of animal welfare in Australia

World Animal Protection welcomes the recognition by the Australian government that “animal welfare is a concern for the Australian community” (Green Paper, page 23). We acknowledge the government’s exhortation of states and territories to drive animal welfare reform, including the enforcement of animal welfare legislation and development and implementation of animal welfare standards and guidelines to achieve good animal welfare outcomes.

However, we believe that economic drivers can have variable impacts on the animal welfare treatment of farm animals and the community has an expectation that there is a role for the government in moderating such impacts in partnership with industry and civil society. A primary mechanism to achieve this is federal government coordination of the animal welfare policy and legislative work of the states and territories. More and more people in Australia and elsewhere want to know where their food comes from and the conditions under which it is grown or reared. Many farmers are responding to this and are taking positive steps to improve animal husbandry. More and more of the world’s major food companies are responding to consumers and taking positive steps to include animal welfare issues in their supply chain and production decisions, e.g. Nestlé (which has signed a worldwide partnership agreement with World Animal Protection to grow their expertise on animal protection), Unilever, Heinz, McDonalds, as well as Coles and Woolworths in Australia.

- These responses underline the need for a nationwide, coordinated and consistent animal welfare framework within which livestock producers and all participants in the animal-sourced protein food chain, through to and including retailers, are able to plan for and conduct their operations.

Also underlying the need for a national and coordinated animal welfare framework is the fact that animal welfare is of growing interest to investors. For example, the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare provides information to investors on companies’ efforts to improve animal welfare. The issue is also of

growing importance to international organisations, e.g. the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, FAO, and the International Meat Secretariat: a trade body that represents 70 per cent of the global red meat industry.

In recent years, in response to trading patterns and demands for accountability by governments when they are devising national trading strategies, animal welfare standards have been included in bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs), e.g. the EU-Chile and the EU-Korea FTA. The Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP) currently under negotiation between the US and EU where tariffs are already relatively low aims to achieve regulatory “convergence” or “coherence” including possibly on animal welfare standards.

- Therefore, consistent with its work to promote the competitiveness, productivity and profitability of primary industries in Australia, and mindful of constitutional responsibilities and limitations, we urge the government to resume coordinating the animal welfare policy and legislative work of the states and territories so that a harmonised approach to animal welfare is once again adopted throughout the country.

Transparency and monitoring

The Green Paper states on page 23 that “Stakeholders suggested, and the Australian Government encourages, that States and Territories strengthen their laws to stop trespass on farms and to meet the challenges of new invasive technology including surveillance devices.”

World Animal Protection does not condone or endorse trespass or other illegal actions undertaken against farming or other enterprises. We fully understand the importance of biosecurity to Australia, which earns about 12 per cent of its GDP from agriculture. We also subscribe to the rights of property and business owners to protect their properties against trespass. But we also subscribe to the right of consumers to know the provenance of their food. Therefore, policy makers and legislators should work with all stakeholders to achieve a balance between legitimate biosecurity and privacy considerations, the public interest and consumer protection, and animal welfare.

- Rather than focusing on “ag gag” type legislation the government should instead focus on encouraging and developing protocols to improve transparency and monitoring throughout all farming systems including intensive animal production facilities to ensure compliance with animal protection legislation, while at the same time ensuring biosecurity provisions and other legislative requirements are maintained.

Live exports

Our March submission argued that live exports do not strengthen Australian agriculture in the long term, that its overall negative impacts outweigh the financial returns enjoyed by relatively few people, and that to the extent that it does contribute to regional economies, a transition to domestic slaughter would not see that benefit reduced (see <https://agriculturalcompetitiveness.dpmc.gov.au/published-submissions-issues-paper>).

In summary we made the following points:

- Australia's live export trade of slaughter animals, especially sheep, is largely driven by the tariff and subsidy regimes of destination countries. Even with the new Australia-China Free Trade Agreement the tariff differential favouring live exports over meat will be for the next nine years.
- The live trade and domestic slaughter trade compete against each other for suitable animals. This competition does nothing to grow overall demand or the economy.
- Domestic sheep and cattle prices underpin live export prices. On the other hand live exports can exert downward pressure on domestic prices because of the potential supply "overhang". They can also exert pressure on domestic processors to offer more to cattle producers to secure supply of cattle. In the extreme this could see domestic processor margins squeezed to the point where they go out of business or downsize in order to supply only the domestic market.
- Live exports have a negative impact on regional employment as they do not provide opportunities for value-adding: instead, they transfer value-adding opportunities to destination countries.
- Live exports are relatively insignificant economically, notwithstanding the additional revenues to be gained by exporting more cattle to China, and any significance is outweighed by the negative impacts and risks attaching to the trade.
- At a community level the live export trade and the cruelty associated with it has a polarising effect on the community, with implications for the social licence necessary for the legitimacy of the livestock industry.

Of particular relevance are statements attributed to the former New Zealand deputy Prime Minister (the Age, 15 November 2014). He claims that rather than New Zealand suffering as a result of stopping live exports, the country has in fact benefitted. He is reported as saying, "It's like the lowest level of commodity exports you can possibly make. You're exporting jobs at the same time and you're doing away with any possibility of high-value processing. As a country we wouldn't even think of it now." His statement is supported by record high New Zealand meat exports and impeccable branding.

We also argued in our earlier submission that Australia could best contribute to global food security in three ways:

- Exporting agricultural technology and know-how including animal welfare expertise, including through bilateral and multilateral aid programmes, to increase the agricultural productivity and output of destination countries without raising their domestic prices.
- Continuing to promote the development of a global trading system that allows food, including chilled and frozen meat, to be moved to where it is needed.
- Taking advantage of value-adding opportunities as a trade policy priority and positioning Australia as a proven and reliable supplier of brand-recognised safe, traceable, high quality, high value, high welfare agricultural commodities, including meat produced in accordance with Halal requirements.

We are convinced that live exports are not necessary. They are a high risk enterprise in terms of the longer term economic welfare of those farmers whose business models rely on them, and to the welfare of the animals engaged in the trade. They endure long sea voyages that are inherently cruel and will often suffer inhumane conditions and slaughter in destination countries where animal welfare legislation and protection is often rudimentary and in some cases non-existent.

- More than 280,000 Australians so far agree with us and have joined our campaign against live exports.

Conclusion

To conclude, we believe Australia's agricultural competitiveness can be enhanced and its long term sustainability assured at high levels and values of animal production if inter alia, the government resumes its animal welfare coordinating role and works with the other jurisdictions, with meaningful and proportionate inputs from community and industry stakeholders, to achieve a level of farm animal welfare that satisfies community values. We urge the development of protocols to improve transparency and monitoring of all farming systems to reduce the need felt by some community members to engage in trespass and other illegal acts. We believe the live export of animals from Australia has no place in an agricultural sector that is serious and committed to animal welfare.

We would be happy to discuss further. Queries should in the first instance be directed to Graham Nicholls at 07 55453475 or 0438763200 or by email to gnicholls@worldanimalprotection.org.au

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