

STATEMENT ON WELFARE CONDITIONS OF THE CATTLE ABOARD VESSEL "NADA": A REFLECTION ON THE LAST EVENTS DURING THE EXPORTATION OF CATTLE IN THE PORT OF SANTOS

Initial clarifications

Animal welfare is a very well defined concept recognized by international health authorities. In 1986 Professor Donald Broom of the University of Cambridge, UK, defined animal welfare as "...its state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment". This definition was ratified and expanded in 2008 by the **World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)**, establishing in its **Terrestrial Animal Health Code** (<http://www.oie.int/es/normas-internacionales/codigo-terrestre/acceso-en-linea/>) that "Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives." According to the OIE "An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress." At the end of its definition, the OIE reinforces Donald Broom's original proposal by assuming that "Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal; the treatment that an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment" (the full version of the OIE definition is available in <https://www.oie.int/doc/ged/D5517.PDF>).

It is worth remembering that Brazil is signatory to this code and therefore undertakes to respect it, as it is well characterized in the manifestation of the Coordination of Good Practices and Animal Welfare (CBPA) of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAPA), when stating that "... knowing and applying the OIE recommendations safeguards national livestock production, favors the image of producers, generates credibility for the official veterinary service and directly benefits animals..."

(<http://www.agricultura.gov.br/assuntos/sustentabilidade/bem-estar-animal/recomendacoes-oie>).

It is based on these elements that we analyze the recent (and controversial) events related to the export of live cattle (for the purpose of fattening and slaughtering in the destination country) through the Port of Santos, focusing on the animal welfare issue.

The controversial situation triggered by the export of cattle through the Port of Santos

We have recently witnessed, through the media, the legal battle between the forces that defend and the ones that condemn the export of live animals, resulting from allegations of mistreatment of the cattle headed to Turkey.

In order to know whether or not the allegations were well-founded, objective assessments of the animal welfare conditions at all stages of the process should be conducted using animal welfare indicators to assess the conditions under which land transport was carried out (including the waiting time from the arrival of the lorries in the port to the boarding of animals onto the ship) and the boarding, in addition to the conditions of accommodation, feeding, health and behavior of the animals in the ship's stalls (being docked or moving towards its final destination).

According to the publicly available documents, the only objective evaluation focusing on animal welfare that used scientifically validated indicators (as recommended by the OIE) was carried out by the veterinarian Magda Regina (CRMV-SP 7583), named by the judge in charge of the legal cause to perform the inspection. The report is well documented and illustrated with photos showing that housing and food/water supply conditions were inadequate to ensure the welfare of animals already on board, as proposed by the OIE. The following negative points were highlighted in the report: food and water supply shortages, mobility and space limitations, poor hygiene (as evidenced by manure accumulation in the stalls and on the bodies of the animals (especially those housed in overcrowded stalls), severe noise pollution and high concentration of gases in the atmosphere). Based on her findings, she concluded that "...there are abundant indications that show mistreatment and explicit violation of animal dignity, in addition to disrespecting the criteria of basic reasonable use of the five freedoms that guarantee animal welfare."

MAPA's Technical Committee on Animal Welfare (CTBEA) also spoke up, by issuing Technical Note No. 1/2018 / GAB-GM / MAPA, contesting the complaint that the animals were being subjected to mistreatment. In this document, CTBEA states that MAPA, due to the work carried out by Federal Agricultural Auditors, has "... full control and monitoring, in all stages of the export of live animals operations... which implies, compulsorily, in carrying out verification of practices for the promotion and maintenance of animal welfare conditions..."

However, this Technical Note does not present any information on how the animal welfare assessment was carried out during land transport, ship boarding or on the environmental conditions within the ship NADA. In addition, it was emphasized in the Technical Note that the export of live animals (including the case under evaluation) is regulated by a series of normative acts, which are in line with the animal welfare principles established by the OIE. If so, something needs to be changed urgently, as there is no denying the existence of welfare problems of the animals aboard vessel NADA. The evidence presented in the report of the veterinarian responsible for judicial inspection is undisputed, clearly characterizing disregard for OIE recommendations.

After careful reading of the documents and public statements related to this case, including those presented by CTBEA / MAPA and the company involved, no well-founded contestation was found to the solid evidence presented in the report of the veterinarian responsible for the inspection, which characterizes a clear disrespect to the OIE recommendations, with regard to animal welfare.

Something must be done urgently, we can not be labelled as bad example. Brazil, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture (MAPA), owes clear and detailed regulations on how to deal with farm animal welfare in different scenarios (breeding, land and sea transport, slaughter, sport, work, etc.). Clearly, such norms should be formulated based on scientific evidence, as recommended by several international entities, including the OIE.

Brazil is a major producer of animal protein in the world, and therefore all stakeholders (in particular government agents) should be concerned about the negative impacts that certain attitudes bring to our livestock production reputation. Despite the challenges we are facing, Brazil's situation regarding farm animal welfare is, in general, much better than the scenario evidenced in recent events in the Port of Santos.

However, there is no denying that there are still few technical regulations dealing with farm animal welfare issue in our country and for the most part, they are vague, inaccurate

and extremely incomplete, offering no objective indicators that allow practical evaluation of animal welfare in a broad and precise way.

Finally, we ratify our commitment to responsible animal husbandry, which, in addition to promoting income generation, contributes to the maintenance of healthy communities, the preservation of natural resources and the promotion of well-being of all involved, human and animal. In our country, there are many good examples in the various livestock production chains that this balance can be achieved, also bringing economic benefits.

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