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MEDIA RELEASE

Unprecedented revelations of animal suffering on live export vessels

The recent reports of cruel treatment of Australian animals overseas have deflected attention away from conditions aboard live export ships. Dr Lynn Simpson, who has been an official onboard veterinarian for 57 live export voyages, recently made a damning submission to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) about conditions on the ships.

Dr Simpson has described in graphic detail the suffering of animals resulting from exporters seemingly ignoring the law. She documented cattle that exceeded the allowed weight and consequently sustained debilitating leg injuries requiring euthanasia. She described animals being loaded with conditions listed as specific rejection criteria. She also reported that, for commercial reasons, animals were often deprived of water during the last stage of the voyage (which could last for several days), including under conditions of extreme heat and humidity in the Middle East when the animals were already chronically fatigued.

The live export law is designed to ensure that animals do not give birth onboard ship. However, Dr Simpson has reported that significant numbers of animals give birth while on the ship. In one case, about 100 lambs were born on a single voyage.

Dr Sue Foster, spokesperson for Vets Against Live Export (VALE), said “We have noted that onboard births have been described in many recent voyage reports by DAFF. This is a gross breach of the standards.

“A new perspective emerging from Dr Simpson’s report is that too little space is given to animals on long live export voyages. We have long suspected this was the case, but this is the first time an onboard veterinarian has expressed this view.”

Dr Simpson’s report notes that the space allocated is so small that animals cannot lie down and rest properly, and that animals which do lie down are often trampled or smothered.

The lack of adequate bedding for cattle was also starkly illustrated. It is clear from Dr Simpson’s report that many cattle suffer serious leg problems on long haul voyages as a result of standing and lying on bare metal or bitumenised decks. She presented pictures of cattle showing severe lesions of the hooves and limbs that can result in joint and bone exposure.

“These conditions are extremely painful. Animals will be reluctant to stand but unable to lie down because of the limited space. Anybody allowing these lesions to occur as a matter of routine in Australia would be prosecuted,” said Dr Foster.

Some of the most striking photographs taken by Dr Simpson on her voyages show animals heavily coated in faeces, animals lying in slurry and 'waterfalls' of faeces coming from upper decks onto lower decks where animals are housed. Dr Simpson's report indicates that these occurrences are quite routine and notes in her report “these voyages are not all short and clean as depicted by industry and their public relations machine”.

Dr Foster said, “This unique report once again underlines the absolute need for independent veterinarians on live export ships. The current practice of exporters employing veterinarians ensures that this poor animal welfare has been and will continue to be unreported.

“The report also illustrates the inadequacy of the regulatory system that has been in place for nearly a decade. DAFF has failed to prevent this cruelty. We repeat our call for a completely independent regulator of this trade.”

The report is available on the DAFF website (scroll to find 'Dr Lynn Simpson.pdf').
http://www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/export-trade/submissions_to_the_review_of_australian_standards_for_the_export_of_livestock_and_the_livestock_export_standards_advisory_group

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