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Investors get better return on Animals Australia

If you missed Landline on the ABC on 16 June you may be interested to watch it online as the live export debate featured in the segment on 'Animals Australia under the microscope'. Australian Live Export Council spokesperson Alison Penfold claimed Animals Australia's approach was destructive, and she went on to assert that money donated to Animals Australia (allegedly \$3 million last year) could be better spent on the ground in overseas markets.

Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), Livecorp and the Australian Government have poured many million of dollars, some from industry levies but mostly from the taxpayer, into schemes designed to promote animal welfare in overseas markets. Measurable improvements are conspicuously absent but disasters such as Mark 1 restraint boxes supplied to Indonesia are more obvious. Most of the money has disappeared, paying for spin and cover-ups. Animals Australia's paltry \$3 million would soon disappear down the usual black holes of consultants, expert reports and long lunches, throwing good money after bad.

On the other hand by supporting a well-focused and credible pressure group, donors to Animals Australia have probably received maximum bang for their buck. That may be why they are supported by an investment banker; bankers don't tend to throw money into poor investments.

The revelations on Four Corners in May 2011 regarding slaughter practices in Indonesia changed the landscape of the live export debate. An MLA report published just a few months earlier described welfare as 'generally good' and non-stun slaughter as an 'aspirational goal' not likely to be embraced any time soon. A trial using stunning equipment in two abattoirs was abandoned. After suspension of the trade in June 2011 the industry was forced to accept the Export Supply Chain Assurance Scheme (ESCAS) in order to get it started again. Suddenly, within a couple of years, the industry claims that 85% of Australian cattle are stunned before slaughter. This is surely a good animal welfare outcome. It would not have happened without the media exposure and public revulsion at the evidence gathered by Animals Australia, the ABC and the RSPCA on the ground in Indonesia. One would have to conclude that the biggest improvement in animal welfare in the live trade has been due to Animals Australia (AA).

It is clear from the most recent revelations in Egypt that without a brave whistleblower vet contacting AA it would be business as usual at the Ain Sokhna abattoir. His evidence demonstrated that there is absolutely no concern for animals at this 'state of the art' facility. Even worse, the filming of the appalling torture of the cattle was done to provide a bit of entertainment. This confirms yet again that efforts

to change local attitudes by imposing completely alien sensibilities will not work. The result? A suspension of trade to Egypt.

Going back to 2006, AA revelations of mistreatment of sheep in Egypt resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding being signed between Egypt and Australia that was supposed to ensure that slaughter and handling of sheep would follow the minimal OIE guidelines. Within months AA demonstrated that this was not happening, the trade was suspended and fortunately has yet to resume.

Surely preventing animals from being sent to Egypt is good for animal welfare? Alison Penfold would disagree. She continues to peddle the argument that Australia can improve animal welfare in Egypt by continuing to send animals there – but the evidence overwhelmingly runs in the other direction.

In conclusion, it would seem that supporting pressure groups such as AA is an effective way for people to express their opposition to live export. Thus far, it has resulted in the only discernible welfare improvements in the trade.