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MEDIA RELEASE

LIVE EXPORT SHIP ALLOWED TO SAIL WITHOUT VET OR STOCKMAN

Documents released under Freedom of Information law reveal that in 2008 the veterinarian aboard the *MV Hereford Express*, carrying animals from Australia to Singapore and Malaysia, was removed from the vessel in Singapore. The veterinarian reported that the mortality limit for goats had been exceeded.

Dr Lloyd Reeve-Johnson was made to leave the ship after AQIS came to an informal (and in VALE's view, illegal) agreement with the exporter to remove him. The ship then went on to Malaysia without an AQIS-accredited veterinarian on board, which contravened the Approved Export Program (AEP), the core legal provision protecting the welfare of animals onboard live export ships. The AEP required that the onboard veterinarian remain on the vessel until the last animal was unloaded.

In addition, Dr Reeve-Johnson has told VALE that there was no stockman onboard. The law requires that an accredited stockman accompany animals throughout every live export voyage. From the released documents it appears that AQIS may not have checked whether there was a stockman on board, raising the possibility that there may have been other voyages without the legally-required stockman.

Dr Sue Foster, VALE spokesperson, said: "The onboard veterinarian and stockman are the key people responsible for animal welfare on board live export ships. This incident shows that AQIS is prepared to be influenced by the exporter in a way that detracts from the intention of the law to protect animal welfare."

"It is of great concern that AQIS allowed a voyage to occur without the legally-required stockman and also agreed to the removal of the legally-required onboard veterinarian. This raises serious questions about the ability and will of AQIS to properly regulate this industry."

VALE contacted Mr Dean Merrilees, Assistant Secretary responsible for live export in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, for comment. Mr Merrilees' reply email stated that the exporter, International Livestock Exports, asked for and received informal approval to remove the vet from the ship. Furthermore, Mr

Merrilees admitted that the Department did not issue a revised AEP so the onboard vet had no way of knowing he was no longer required to stay on the ship.

Dr Foster said that having being required to leave the ship by the exporter Dr Reeve-Johnson was put in a position where he could not fulfil his legal obligations.

“The released documents and the email from the Department to VALE reveal that two daily reports which Dr Reeve-Johnson wrote (as required by law) were never given to the Department. Because Dr Reeve-Johnson was removed from the ship before it reached its final destination, there was also no final voyage report or final daily report produced. VALE’s advice is that this is another breach of the law.”

AQIS also announced on its website that there were two vet’s voyage reports with differing goat mortalities. The report with lower goat mortalities was submitted by the exporter. AQIS investigated the issue and concluded there was not enough evidence to proceed with a prosecution of the exporter.

“Given these revelations that AQIS accommodated the exporter’s request to remove the veterinarian from the ship one has to wonder how good the investigation was.”

International Livestock Exports is the same organisation that recently admitted to exporting animals that were allegedly mistreated in three Indonesian abattoirs.

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