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MEDIA RELEASE

HIGH MORTALITY VOYAGE COVER-UP BY GOVT

Animal welfare standards aboard live export ships are much lower than Australian domestic animal welfare standards. The only incidents which are investigated by the government are 'high mortality incidents', for example where more than 2% of sheep in a consignment die during a voyage. Deaths are reported by employees of the exporter, either the onboard vet, or onboard stockman.

Vets Against Live Export (VALE) has always suspected that the reported mortality figures are seriously massaged. This has now been confirmed by the government investigation report into a 'high mortality incident'. This is unprecedented.

The voyage happened in July 2016, when exporter Emanuel Exports Pty Ltd had a high mortality event on a voyage to the Middle East. About three thousand less sheep were unloaded on arrival than had been loaded at Fremantle. This was recorded as 4.36% mortality in the 6 monthly report tabled in Parliament.

VALE has analysed the government investigation report relating to this voyage. Bizarrely, that report contradicts the original report to parliament. It says that only 1741 sheep died, while another 1286 sheep were "unaccounted for".

VALE Spokesperson, Dr Sue Foster said "It would be a reasonable assumption, with these conditions, that most of the 1286 missing sheep had in fact died, giving a mortality of 4.36%. However, the government in its investigation seems to have covered up the extent of the mortality event by reporting it as only 1741 deaths (2.51%) in the official report. The awful scale of this disaster, with thousands of animals dying in a short space of time in extreme heat conditions, is indicated by the onboard vet's record that there were so many bodies decomposing rapidly in the heat that it was impossible to count how many dead bodies there were."

The report states that "The exporter assigned the deficit to a loading dispute in which fewer sheep were loaded and more were discharged than what was recorded, with the latter being primarily responsible for the discrepancy." As all Australian animals are required to be traceable to endpoint under the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance Scheme, or ESCAS, the complete disappearance of a substantial portion of 1286 animals from the supply chain would seem to be a major non-compliance with the ESCAS requirements.

Dr Foster said "There are only two possibilities here 1) that this was an extreme high mortality event which the government is effectively covering up or 2) that this is an

ESCAS non-compliance issue that the government has chosen to ignore. Either way it is an astounding government cover up of a major live export disaster.

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