



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

BILLS

**Livestock Export (Animal
Welfare Conditions) Bill 2012**

First Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 10 September 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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| <p>Date Monday, 10 September 2012 Page 3 Questioner Speaker Wilkie, Andrew, MP</p> | <p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p> |
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Mr WILKIE (Denison) (10:08): I will only speak briefly at this time, because the Livestock Export (Animal Welfare Conditions) Bill 2012 was originally tabled some months ago but, regrettably, not chosen in time by the Selection Committee and so it lapsed. I have decide to try and progress it again, in light of the fact that systemic cruelty in Australia's live animal export industry has still not been addressed by the government, despite the severity of the continuing animal abuse and the calls by a great many Australians for something to finally be done about it.

At the end of May last year almost half a million Australians were glued to their televisions watching the *Four Corners* program expose the live export trade for its lack of regulation and its cruelty. Many more people were of course unable to watch, because they knew the images would be too disturbing—or they tried to watch, only to feel the need to turn off their sets. But all were unified by a sense of utter outrage that the system had gone unchecked and unchallenged for so long.

What was most startling about the footage taken by *Animals Australia* was the obvious fear in the animals themselves.

I have mentioned many times already—and I will again today because it has so affected me—the young black bull watching on as his fellow cattle were brutalised and killed in front of him. Few will forget the fear in his eyes as he stood there shaking in the knowledge that he would be next.

My office received hundreds upon thousands of emails, phone calls and visits from people voicing their objection to this cruel trade. I thought, as I am sure many others did, that if ever there was going to be a catalyst for change it would be on the back of this groundswell of public support for reform. How wrong we all were, because the aftermath of the *Four Corners* program was met only by a temporary suspension of exports to certain slaughterhouses in Indonesia and a flurry of rhetoric from the government that ultimately led to nothing more than some fiddling around with the exporters' supply chain, a system that is genuinely failing our animals. How deeply disappointed we were to learn that the government and the opposition hardly give a toss for animal welfare—or they do, but they care much more about the profits of industry and their own political self-interest.

I wanted to phase out live animal exports once and for all. Together with Senator Nick Xenophon I proposed a three-year transition away from live exports and towards processing meat in Australian abattoirs. But this parliament did not support that proposal. I then proposed that the stunning of all livestock be made mandatory, but this parliament apparently does not support that proposal either. The ALP, in particular, is seemingly satisfied with the encouragement of stunning but lacks the courage to ensure it is actually carried out.

I am not satisfied with temporary solutions and rhetoric with no outcome, so I am here today once again attempting to end the trauma that millions of Australian sheep, cattle and goats experience, by again trying to have introduced a requirement for the mandatory stunning of all Australian livestock shipped overseas for slaughter.

This is important, and the need for reform is urgent. Only in recent weeks, in scenes reminiscent of last year's footage on *Four Corners*, ABC's *Lateline* ran a story on the most recent *Animals Australia* investigation into sheep exports to Kuwait. Once again we saw unnecessary and barbaric treatment of Australian animals, once again we saw a bureaucratic apathy that allows the problem to continue and once again we relied on a small charity to act as the watchdog on a multimillion dollar industry. In this most recent episode we witnessed a large group of sheep being sold and slaughtered at the Al-Rai market in Kuwait City. The breed of the sheep indicates that they must have come from Australian sources, showing that the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System is no assurance at all. Terrified and injured sheep having their throats hacked at for minutes on end is an unacceptable consequence of leaks in the chain.

Bizarrely, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has responded by saying that these *Animals Australia* investigations are a pivotal part of a good governmental regulatory regime. While the work of Lyn White and her team at *Animals Australia* is obviously worthy of the highest recognition, to officially regard them as part of the solution is to as much as admit that the system is either flawed or broken. Truly, it is way beyond time for the government, with the support of the opposition, to stand up and take ownership of this issue, to do their job

and to crack down on the unconscionable cruelty being inflicted on Australian livestock being sent overseas for slaughter.

In closing, can I just say thank God for Animals Australia. If it were not for people such as Lyn White and her colleagues, not to mention their colleagues in the RSPCA, so much animal abuse would remain undiscovered. But such organisations and such people cannot be expected to maintain a presence in all countries that receive Australian livestock, or to resource effective investigations from donations and from goodwill. These should be jobs for the government and we should be able to have confidence that they are jobs that are well done. But of course we do not.

I am proud to propose again the Livestock Export (Animal Welfare Conditions) Bill, which would make the stunning of all livestock prior to slaughter compulsory. Frankly, we need to put the onus of monitoring and regulating firmly back onto the government, where it belongs. If the parliament cannot agree to eliminate live exports altogether, at least this bill will go some way to introducing a little humanity into a very inhuman industry.

I again call on all members of this House to dig deep and find some compassion. Support for this bill is support for all animals being exported from Australia and support for those who have campaigned tirelessly to see real and genuine reform. The last catalyst for change was ignored by this House; let us seize it this time.

Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): In accordance with standing order 41(c), the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.