

Wednesday 7 February 2024

Re: An OPEN LETTER from animal protection groups to live exporters

We, the animal protection sectors in Australia and New Zealand, implore the live export companies trading in Australia to **immediately apply a voluntary suspension of all live animal exports to or through the Red Sea** while the risk of attack remains, and **suspend any extended journeys to the Middle East via the Cape of Good Hope**.

We have grave concerns for the welfare of animals subjected to live export, and especially those travelling to and through the Red Sea region. Reports of escalating violence in the region and targeted attacks on vessels transiting through the area highlight the significant risk to all vessels, including live export ships, their crew and live animal cargo. The current situation involving the *MV Bahijah* is a concerning example of this, having departed for Israel and doubling-back to Australia due to the risk of attack¹ - a futile 30+ day voyage which could have been avoided. Under no circumstances should these animals, who have already endured so much, be forced to face another export journey.

Most global shipping companies have already suspended marine traffic to and through the Red Sea^{2,3,4,5} and we call on live exporters to immediately do the same. The risk to those on board these vessels is extremely serious and extends beyond circumstances that could be mitigated by normal contingency plans. In Australia, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry paused the deployment of independent observers on livestock vessels to all countries in the Middle East region on 9 October 2023 due to the uncertain security conditions; yet animals and live export crews continue to be exposed to those risks.⁶

Sending live export vessels via alternative routes, such as around the Cape of Good Hope, and then sending animals on prolonged road journeys is also unacceptable. These alternatives extend the journey length, and significantly increase risks to the health and welfare of the animals on board. Animal welfare science shows that long transport journeys result in extremely poor animal welfare outcomes; the longer the journey, the greater the risk of suffering.^{7,8,9}

Continuing to export under these circumstances is indefensible. There is no credible argument that live animals are needed in the region for food security (or other reasons) at this time. The escalating risks greatly outweigh any argument for these journeys to continue. We urge exporters to put the welfare and safety of those aboard live export vessels ahead of commercial interests and immediately suspend all voyages both, to or through the Red Sea, and via the Cape of Good Hope, until the escalating conflict and risk of attack subsides, and the situation can be re-assessed.

Yours sincerely



Ms Glenys Oogjes
Chief Executive Officer
Animals Australia



Dr Bidda Jones
Co-Founder & Director of Strategy
Australian Alliance for Animals



Ms Rebecca Linigen
National Director
Four Paws Australia



Ms Erica Martin
Chief Executive Officer
Humane Society International



Mr Todd Westwood
Chief Executive Officer
NZ SPCA



Mr Richard Mussell
Chief Executive Officer
RSPCA Australia



Ms Rosemary Elliot
President
Sentient



Ms Rebecca Tapp
Communications and Events Manager
Stop Live Exports



Dr Sue Foster
Spokesperson
Vets Against Live Export (VALE)



Dr Helen Beattie
Managing Director
VAWA



Ms Ondine Sherman
Managing Director & Co-Founder
Voiceless



Mr Ben Pearson
Country Director
World Animal Protection

- ¹ Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (2024). Live updates – MV Bahijah livestock vessel. 'MV Bahijah livestock departure to the Middle East,' 4.51pm AEDT 19/01/24.
- ² BBC News (2023). 'More big shipping firms stop Red Sea routes after attacks,' 17/12/23.
- ³ BBC News (2023). 'Yemen Houthi rebels claim attacks on two Red Sea cargo ships,' 16/12/23.
- ⁴ Maersk (2024). Website advisory notices. 'Red Sea / Gulf of Aden – service updates: Temporary suspension of all bookings to Djibouti.' 30/01/24.
- ⁵ CMA CGM (2024). Website news. 'Update II: Situation in the Red Sea and Notice of Force Majeure,' 19/12/23.
- ⁶ Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (2024). Export Advisory Notice, 'Pause on independent observer deployments to the Middle East,' 10/10/23.
- ⁷ Nielsen SS, Alvarez J, Bicout DJ, et al (2022). 'Welfare of small ruminants during transport.' EFSA Journal.
- ⁸ Phillips CJC (2022). 'Zoonotic Disease Risks of Live Export of Cattle and Sheep, with a Focus on Australian Shipments to Asia and the Middle East.' Animals.
- ⁹ Moore SJ, Madin B, Norman G and Perkins NP (2015). 'Risk factors for mortality in cattle during live export from Australia by sea.' The Journal of the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd. 2015 Oct;93(10).