

## LIVE EXPORT SPECIAL REPORT -

# An "unlikely alliance" working together for a common goal



**BRIAN CRAWFORD**  
QLD Branch Secretary

Since the 1970's, this Union has campaigned long, loud and hard about the live export trade – to anyone who would listen.

Since stand downs and job losses have really bitten into meatworkers' incomes over the last 18 months, the Union has accelerated its activities on this front.

One of the most pleasing developments has been the formation of a group of interested parties. Several meetings have been held with major processors i.e. Swift Australia Pty Limited, Teys Bros, Nippon Meat Packers, Fletcher International, the Union and the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) with a view to co-ordinated and united campaigning on the issue.

Whilst the media have been describing this group as an "unlikely alliance", the reality is we all have a common goal and shared interest on this.

Unfortunately, for a number of decades, groups with an interest in challenging the live export trade have been fragmented and their various messages have been inharmonious. In 2010 however, we have been able to bring together all of these forces to speak with a united voice.

### HUMANE CHAIN FORUM – NSW PARLIAMENT

One of the first public events involving WSPA and the Union was conducted on 10 March 2010. WSPA Australia held a public forum at the NSW Parliament

on live exports hosted by highly regarded Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore.

The aim of the day was to launch WSPA's investigation into the live sheep export trade and to highlight the negative impact the trade has on Australian jobs.

Videos of footage from a recent Middle East investigation revealed damning evidence of continued welfare abuse of Australian sheep despite Government and industry claims of improving standards. This footage is available for viewing at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=he6Fy9foKWM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=he6Fy9foKWM).

Grant Courtney, Federal President of the Union, was given an opportunity to speak about the impact the live trade has on employment in the industry. He ended his speech by introducing a video of Townsville meatworkers whose jobs have been severely impacted by the live export trade. You can see this at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wz0PjC831s>.

Excellent media coverage resulted from this event, with SBS news doing a television story, major print pieces in large newspapers such as The Age, Sydney Morning Herald and several radio pieces from ABC local and national.

This event undoubtedly played a major part in the upswing in media interest the live trade has attracted in the last 6 months.

### PRIME MINISTER'S COUNTRY TASKFORCE

It's fair to say that the Union has received no support from the Federal Minister for Agriculture,

Tony Burke MP, in its goal to halt the negative impact the live export trade is having on the processing sector.

With that in mind, the Union has started to target government backbenchers throughout Australia with its message, particularly those members with processing sheds in their electorates.

As a result of some discussions I had with Chris Trevor MP, Member for the Central Queensland seat of Flynn (which takes in Biloela), I was invited to brief the Prime Minister's Country Task Force on 17 March 2010.

The Prime Minister's Country Taskforce is a group of ALP backbenchers who report directly to the Prime Minister about issues affecting regional and rural Australia.

The key message that the Union took to this group through a briefing paper and a verbal presentation was the devastating effect that stand downs and closures have on rural and regional economies. In many country towns the abattoir supports the vast majority of direct jobs. However, those pay packets also keep the local businesses and economy going.

Regrettably, we were able to point to the situation at Killarney and Pittsworth as prime examples of what we were saying.

We received a good hearing in Canberra with this group. The thing that struck me is the lack of balanced information that filters its way through to the average politician. Most of the questions we fielded indicated that the group had clearly only been given one side of the story. Once the discussion was in full swing, they showed a genuine interest in the Union's position.

### MEETING WITH THE PREMIER, ANNA BLIGH MP

In a research study conducted in 2000 by the Australian Meat Processor Corporation Ltd, a highly credible and respected agricultural economist concluded:

*"The live export trade could be costing Australia around \$1.7 billion in lost GDP, around \$280 million in household income and around 12,000 jobs"*

(Impact of the Live Animal Export Sector on the Australian Meat Processing Industry, Dr S. G. Heilbron, 2000, p.6)

The same agricultural economist, Dr Heilbron, was contracted by the big 3 in Queensland – Teys, Swifts and Nippon - to undertake an updated 2010 study into the impact the live trade is having on the Queensland meat processing sector.

Meat processing is the largest manufacturing industry in Queensland and is the second largest contributor of export income, only behind coal.

The 2010 report establishes a few key points:

- The processing sector and live trade directly compete with one another – from stock purchase to the point where product is sitting side by side in overseas supermarkets. Any suggestion that the two industries are "complimentary" is economic nonsense.



*Shelves full of chilled Australian Beef in the Middle East. In Indonesia, the western concept of a "supermarket" is also growing rapidly, along with Indonesian incomes. Yet we're sending 800 000 head of cattle a year to Indonesia and the Australian government is paying to train Indonesian slaughtermen in humane handling methods. Where are the government's priorities?*

*Photo courtesy of Rueben Brand WSPA*

- The live trade is making significant inroads into Queensland – Queensland's share of these exports has risen from 12% to 19%. On current expectations, live exports from Queensland could double in the next 4 years.
- The processing sector in Queensland alone supports 36,000 jobs, most of which are in a regional or rural backdrop. Increased live exports will place further plants at risk of closure and the resulting job losses will be economically devastating in these rural and regional settings and damaging to the Queensland economy overall.
- The Indonesian live trade accounts for 80% of live exports. There are significant trade barriers on chilled beef (including outright bans) imposed by the Indonesian government, but the live trade is heavily subsidised by them.
- The live export trade generally enjoys significant advantages over the domestic meat processing sector through international subsidies and tariffs and a failure on the local front to "level the playing field".

Armed with this information, representatives of Teys, Swifts, Nippon Meat Packers and the Union met with Premier Anna Bligh on 23 March 2010 to brief her on the negative impact to Queensland that live exports are playing, both now and into the future.

We received a good hearing and await a response from the Premier. We hope to report some positive news to members in the future.

**FEDERAL MINISTER – TONY BURKE MP**

I, along with other Union officials, have met with Primary Industries Minister, Tony Burke, on two occasions to see if the Federal Government would enter into constructive dialogue about the live trade.

The Minister made himself available to discuss the issue for a total of 17 minutes – yes, that's the total from two meetings, one in Townsville, the other in Canberra.

I wrote to the Minister on 22 March 2010, pointing out the many hundreds of hours he has spent in recent times addressing supporters of live trade in all parts of Australia – and his trips to the Middle

East and Indonesia with those supporters in tow, promoting the trade.

I also pointed out the considerable amount that this Union provides to the ALP by way of affiliation fees and how the Union and its members were dissatisfied with the constant support and fawning that the live trade enjoys from the Government.

I received contact from the Minister's office a couple of days later. A meeting was arranged in Canberra on 31 March 2010.

With representatives of Teys, Nippon Meat Packers and Swifts, the Union spoke at length about its opposition to the trade. Reference was made to the recent research commissioned by the processors that had been presented to the Premier of Queensland.

The Minister indicated a willingness to consider the report once the Queensland Government had responded to it. He also referred to a feasibility study he had commissioned about the possibility of opening an abattoir in the Northern Territory.

The Minister also advised that he expected live exports to Indonesia to "contract" this year. We will have to wait a few months to see if that's the case.

I have to say honestly that I detected no movement in the Government's policies and approach to the live export trade as a result of this meeting.

**CONCLUSION**

In today's world, nothing works as well as a public campaign. Even John Howard will tell you that the WorkChoices campaign was what sent him into retirement – for good.

Members need to be aware that every time the Union or an opponent of the live trade steps into the media on this issue, dozens of media "spin doctors" from Livecorp, Meat and Livestock Australia and even the Minister's office go into damage control and release dubious counter claims supporting the live export trade.

It's come to the point where they need mass public pressure on the issue. You can't apply that pressure until the public knows your message.

With a federal election due this year, an opportunity exists to continue the work that has been undertaken so far to make live exports a political issue.



Photos taken of a Middle Eastern supermarket (Bahrain) in March 2010. Supporters of the live trade tell us that the trade is necessary because of a lack of refrigeration in these countries and also the stock is needed for religious slaughter. Yeah right. Demand for chilled and frozen Australian beef is there – why are we sending the stock overseas?

Photo courtesy of Rueben Brand WSPA

**QUEENSLAND BRANCH OFFICIALS**



Keith Haslem, Swift Dirimore  
**BRANCH PRESIDENT**

**BRANCH VICE-PRESIDENT**  
Ronnie Weston, Oakey Abattoir

**BRANCH SECRETARY**  
Brian Crawford

**BRANCH TREASURER**  
Mick Ainsworth, Teys Biloela

**BRANCH ORGANISERS**

- Matt Journeaux
- Ian (Macca) McLauchlan
- Darcy Orr
- Dawn Crisafulli
- Paul Jensen - Central Region
- Ray Murphy - Northern Region
- Willian Sardinha - Overseas Guest Workers Organiser

**SUPERMARKET ORGANISER**

- Warren Earle

**REPRESENTATIVES TO BRANCH COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT**

- Mary Bateson, Inghams Murarrie
- Wayne Coates, Hans Wacol
- Andrew Woodcock, Swift Toowoomba
- Toni Lake, Baiada Wulkuraka
- Neil Kemp, Borthwicks Mackay
- Les Beckman, Swift Rockhampton
- Kim Prange, Teys Beenleigh
- Fred Brunjes, Baiada Mareeba
- Darryl McKey, ACC/Cannon Hill Services
- Darryl Sherrington, Swift Townsville
- Glen De Git, Teys Biloela

**AMIEU CONTACT DETAILS**

**TOLL FREE NUMBER (QLD ONLY) 1800 646 195**

Tel: (07) 3217 3766  
Fax: (07) 3217 4462

Address:

Level 1, 39 Lytton Road  
EAST BRISBANE QLD 4169

Website: <http://qld.amieu.net>

