

Meat industry knew of Indonesian cruelty last year

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Indonesian cattle slaughter.

Animals Australia secretly filmed inside Indonesian slaughter houses.

THE Australian meat industry was warned of gross animal welfare abuses in Indonesian abattoirs long before shocking footage of the inhumane treatment of Australian cattle surfaced last month.

Meat and Livestock Australia and LiveCorp have repeatedly claimed that both bodies were unaware of the extent of animal welfare problems in Indonesia before the airing of a *Four Corners* program on May 30.

How much they knew is now the subject of a Senate inquiry.

Yet a report, commissioned by MLA and LiveCorp and handed to the bodies early last year, extensively documents every aspect of the abuse revealed last month.

The report makes repeated references to the shortcomings of the Australian-made restraining boxes, warns about the non-compliance with World Organisation for Animal Health standards, and says only four abattoirs in Indonesia had stun guns.

Most damning are accounts of slaughtering fully conscious animals, which suffered protracted, agonising deaths.

"At an abattoir in Sumatra the neck was struck with a knife using a hard impact to sever the skin above the larynx and then up to 18 cuts were made to sever the neck and both arteries," the report says.

"Bleeding was impaired in 10 per cent of cattle ... possibly resulting in extended consciousness ... In some instances where stunning was not used, the delay between restraint and slaughter was significant."

On the performance of the restraining box, "finding better methods of restraint with higher animal welfare outcomes is essential", the report concludes. The "mark 2" box, designed to solve the problems, makes the plight of the animals even worse, the report says, to the point of being "not acceptable".

Thrashing, prostrate animals bashed their heads on the box's concrete plinth an average of 3.5 times before death. The report says: "Where the severity of the fall was severe and head slapping occurred, significant animal welfare issues were identified that should be addressed."

The halal practice of dousing the thrashing animal with water requires "revision", as "disturbed behaviour ... was particularly apparent when buckets of water were thrown over the animal before slaughter".

In a written response to the *Herald*, MLA and LiveCorp said they had always acknowledged poor handling in some abattoirs in Indonesia and had already implemented some of the report's recommendations.

"MLA, the livestock industry and government do not have the power to enact legislated animal welfare standards in Indonesia," they said. "We have, however, worked with Indonesian operators to provide training and infrastructure to make animal welfare improvements."