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New cruelty allegations focus on Israeli abattoir

12 Dec 2012



The animal welfare record of the live export trade is again under scrutiny after ABC television broadcast further footage of animal cruelty in overseas abattoirs last night.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has launched a new investigation after ABC's 7:30 program screened images cattle and sheep being mistreated in the Bakar Tnuva abattoir in Israel.

The footage, filmed by an Israeli journalist who was working undercover, originally appeared on Israel's television program Kolbotek last Thursday, December 6.

The Exporter Supply Chain Assurance system (ESCAS), which was introduced to assure the welfare of Australian cattle in foreign markets following last year's ABC Four Corners expose of cruelty in Indonesian abattoirs, was extended to cover supply chains in Israel on September 1.

"The images are distressing and show some staff actions that are not consistent with the animal welfare standards that are a condition of approval for the export of Australian animals," DAFF said in a statement released after last night's 7:30 story.

DAFF has stated that the abattoir in the video was given an initial clearance in an audit for an Australian exporter.

ESCAS requires Australian livestock to be treated in accordance with World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) standards.

DAFF said initial independent audits are conducted as part of an exporter establishing a supply chain.

The initial audit establishes whether the supply chain can meet Australia's regulatory requirements.

Further regular performance audits are then required after animals have entered that supply chain.

DAFF said an initial independent audit of the Bakar Tnuva abattoir was undertaken in July 2012.

"DAFF publicly released a summary of the outcomes of the initial audit on 4 December 2012. The initial audit found the abattoir met ESCAS requirements.

"However, the initial independent audit was just that, a first initial audit. Australian livestock exporters currently with consignments in Israel will be required to submit subsequent performance audits after livestock have moved through the supply chain."

The DAFF statement said the Australian Government had also taken a number of actions on the issue:

- "As the independent regulator in Australia, DAFF is investigating the issues raised in the Israeli TV show and on the 730 program.

- "DAFF has formally approached Israeli authorities welcoming their investigation and offering to assist in any way possible.
- "The Department also welcomes the reports from the CEO of the abattoir that the plant manager will be replaced and the contract workers involved have been ordered not to come to work."

DAFF said it has sought additional assurances from exporters that they remain in a position to comply with ESCAS. The abattoir in question is only included in one Australian exporter's supply chain and the exporter has been directed to commission an additional audit of the abattoir.

The department said it has contacted Australian exporters and the industry councils, ALEC, MLA and LiveCorp to ensure they are working with their members to have ESCAS requirements met for future consignments of livestock to Israel.

"DAFF also reminds people that anyone – exporters, animal welfare organisations, the media, members of the public - with information that ESCAS standards are not being met should immediately report that information to the Department."

Joint industry statement

The National Farmers' Federation, the Australian Livestock Exporters' Council, the Cattle Council of Australia and the Sheepmeat Council of Australia issued the following joint statement early this morning:

"Inhumane animal handling in an Israeli abattoir, as seen tonight on ABC's 7:30 Report, is unacceptable, says the Australian livestock and livestock export industries.

"The treatment of animals seen in the Bakar Tnuva abattoir in Israel is especially disappointing, given the facility was deemed suitable to receive Australian cattle earlier this year.

"The abattoir has taken swift and decisive action which has included the removal of the abattoir manager and other staff seen in the footage mistreating the animals," said Jock Laurie, President of the National Farmers' Federation.

"We understand that CCTV cameras are to be installed, and at the request of the importer, industry-funded training consultants are currently on the ground in Israel to instigate a comprehensive training program at the facility."

"The Israeli Ministry of Environment and the Department of Police are currently investigating whether criminal charges are to be laid under Israel's Cruelty to Animals Law.

"The welfare of animals is of paramount concern to the Australian red meat and livestock industry.

"Australia is the only country, from more than 100 countries across the world that export livestock, which actively works in overseas markets to help improve animal welfare conditions and associated infrastructure and training.

"Significant improvements in animal welfare have been made in facilities across Australia's livestock export markets in Asia and the Middle East through the implementation of the new animal welfare regulatory framework – the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) – which will cover 100 per cent of markets by the end of this year.

"Under ESCAS, all facilities that are approved by the Federal Government to receive Australian animals are regularly monitored to assure the agreed standards of animal welfare are maintained.

"The Australian industry strongly supports the Federal Governments regulatory framework and will continue to deliver initiatives that encourage and assist compliance.

"The industry is committed to improving animal welfare," Mr Laurie said. "Achieving positive results requires a long term investment in animal welfare across all markets. Importantly, we are also seeing

Australia's higher standards leading to better treatment of non-Australian livestock in a number of our export countries."

"It is important that Australia remains a part of the livestock export trade, continuing in its role as a world leader in the delivery of positive animal welfare outcomes."

RSPCA response

The RSPCA issued the following media statement following last night's program:

"Tonight ABC's 7:30 exposed shocking animal abuse in an Israeli abattoir just weeks after it was approved by the Australian government's Exporter Supply Chain Assurance Scheme (ESCAS).

"The program revealed that an audit of Bakar Tnuva abattoir was conducted between 16-18 July 2012 and found its only failings to be a rusty gate causing excessive noise, yet this footage, taken only two to three months later* shows extensive animal abuse taking place.

"Footage shows sheep being aggressively beaten, thrown and dragged by a single leg to move them towards the slaughter area. Injured cattle are seen being repeatedly shocked with an electric prodder around the face, eyes and genitals. Workers are filmed dragging injured cattle out of the holding area with a forklift before pulling them off the ground with ropes.

"The workers are deliberately inflicting pain on injured animals in order to get them to move. It's a severe case of animal cruelty, and if this facility was in Australia the community would expect government to shut it down," says Dr Bidha Jones, RSPCA Australia Chief Scientist.

"Israel media is reporting that the Israel government and police force has opened a criminal investigation into the incident, which is further proof of the extent of abuse occurring in this facility.

"The footage shows this abattoir does not meet even basic OIE Guidelines in terms of the competency of the workers or the arrangements for the handling and slaughter of cattle or sheep.

"The fact that a facility like this, with such entrenched problems can pass an ESCAS audit casts a huge shadow over the entire supply chain assurance system. The entire process rests on the veracity of the auditing arrangements.

"This is proof that no scheme or agreements can fully safeguard the welfare of animals exported live overseas for slaughter. No matter how much industry or Government involvement there is, the live export trade presents an unacceptable level of risk for the animals and is inherently cruel.

"The Australian government must immediately reject any applications by exporters that will involve this facility to prevent further animal suffering.

"Live export is a senseless trade – from both an animal welfare and economic perspective – and planning for a future without it is in the best interests of Australian animals and a sustainable livestock industry in this country," says Dr Jones."



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1 COMMENT

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Kate - 12 Dec 2012

It would be interesting to know if there was a producer/reporter at 7.30 that has a particular interest in pushing anti live export stories.