

Australia's livestock export industry: delivering improvements in Australia and overseas

1 Introduction

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) is a producer-owned company with over 46,000 livestock producer members. It supports the entire red meat industry including livestock producers, processors, exporters, food service operators and retailers. Some of MLA's activities include:

- Promoting Australian red meat domestically and internationally
- Working with government and industry to open up new markets abroad
- Carrying out research and development to improve industry **sustainability** and gain a **competitive advantage** for Australia's red meat industry
- Communicating the results of MLA's work to government and industry.

Australia is the world's largest and most successful exporter of livestock. We are an important food source for many countries that lack the resources or geography to efficiently produce livestock to feed their people. Australia is able to meet overseas demand for live, chilled and boxed meat products.

Australia exports live cattle, sheep and goats for either food production or breeding. Cultural and religious reasons mean some countries prefer to purchase live animals. Many people have a preference for fresh meat, and much like us, prefer to eat fresh meat rather than chilled or frozen products. In some cases a lack of infrastructure, such as refrigeration, means consumers need to buy fresh meat daily instead of the chilled meat that is available at supermarkets or butchers.

The livestock export industry's focus on animal welfare is vital to ensuring Australia's animals are well cared for and the industry meets the standards that Australian farmers, exporters and communities expect. The Australian livestock export industry is recognised as having the highest animal welfare standards in the world¹ and is subject to strict regulatory requirements to ensure the wellbeing of Australian animals exported to overseas markets.

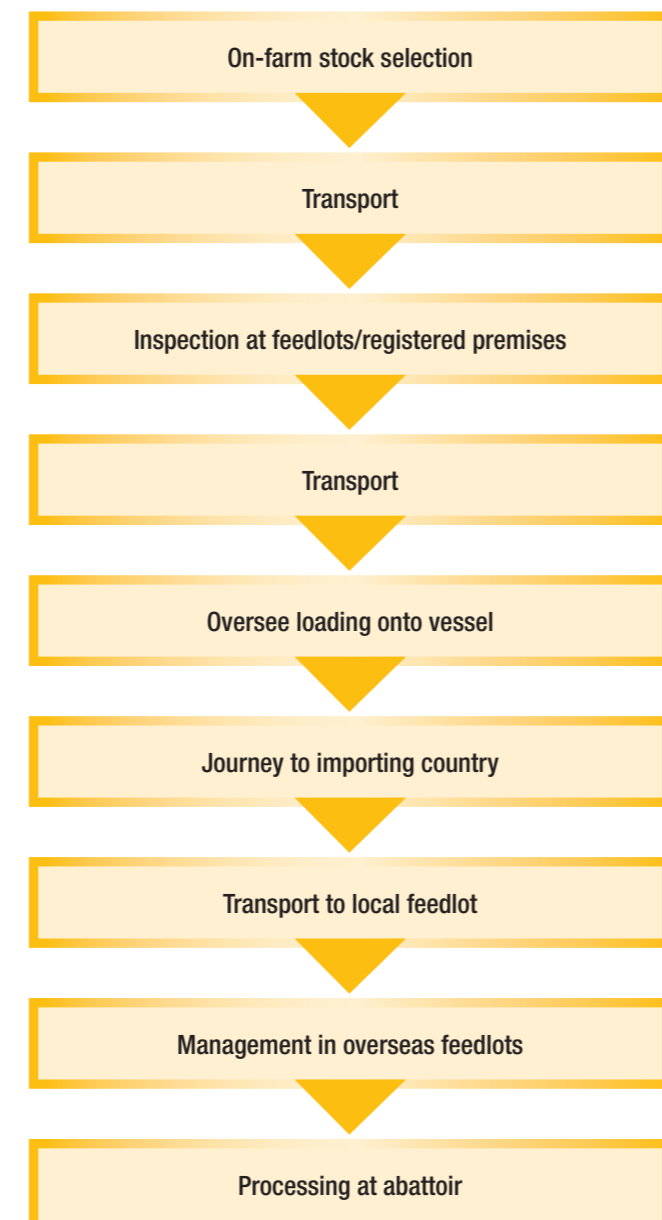
The Australian Standards for the Exports of Livestock (ASEL) covers all aspects of the export process from property of origin, road transport, pre-export assembly, loading and shipment. They were developed in consultation with industry, governments and animal welfare groups.



Overseeing loading at the Port of Fremantle.
¹Alliance Resource Economics, March 2006, "World Livestock Export Standards".

The industry is committed to continuous improvement in animal welfare and management through research and development, consultation and constant review of processes and standards. **Stakeholders** recognise that improving animal welfare is important for the growth and sustainability of the livestock export industry. The industry's long-term survival depends on the community and Government having confidence that the trade is conducted with the highest standards of animal care.

Diagram 1: The export process



2 The livestock export industry

Each year the livestock export industry makes a significant contribution to the Australian economy.

- **Livestock exports** contribute \$1.8b to Australia's **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**
- The industry employs 13,000 Australians across 30 different business types
- The industry pays \$987 million in wages and salaries.

Between 2003 and 2008 the industry contributed \$4.76 billion in export income. The industry provides a vital source of income for thousands of farming families and communities in rural and remote Australia. Livestock exports are an important contributor to economic activity and social wellbeing in these areas.

It is estimated that for every job generated in the livestock export chain another 1.6 jobs are created. There is a 'knock-on' effect to other businesses such as saleyards, transport operators, port and ship workers, feedlot operators, fodder suppliers, veterinarians, livestock agents, stockmen, helicopter mustering services and jobs in the finance and insurance sectors.

LiveCorp, representing the interests of livestock exporters, and MLA, on behalf of livestock producers, jointly fund the Livestock Export Program which ensures Australian farmer and exporter **levies** are invested in programs that support and improve the livestock export trade. Programs focus on the following areas:

- **Market access and trade development:** improving Australia's trade relationships with overseas customers and governments
- **Industry capability:** ensuring quality processes are maintained from the farm right through to overseas markets
- **Livestock management and welfare:** providing training, education and infrastructure upgrades in our overseas markets
- **Research and development:** improving animal welfare on-farm, during transport and in overseas markets.

These programs are crucial for improving animal welfare and maintaining stakeholder confidence in the livestock export industry. The general public, as well as Australian farmers, expect livestock to be properly cared for during each part of the export process.



3 The livestock export process

The supply of well prepared livestock that are fit for travel and export is critical for successful health and welfare outcomes. Australian livestock exporters must hold a valid Livestock Export Licence which is issued by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS). Exporters, agents and producers who supply livestock for export must comply with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL).

For example, Standard 1 describes the sourcing of livestock for export, including:

- Outlining appropriate on-farm practices prior to final yarding. It outlines best practice for activities dealing with stock selection and management, feeding and watering. Recommendations are made about ways to reduce stress on animals and improve animal welfare
- Identifying and illustrating the types of animal that should not be supplied for export
- Recommending best practice pre-delivery, road transport, feedlot and boarding logistics.

The livestock export industry encourages breeding of animals suited to in-market climatic conditions, for example, Brahman cattle are bred in the north of Australia and are well suited to the tropical climate of South East Asia.

Following best practice animal care guidelines prior and during transport ensures animals arrive at their destination fit and healthy. Standard 2 is about planning the livestock trucking transport in Australia in a manner that prevents injury and minimises stress throughout the journey. Industry has developed the 'Is it fit to load' and 'Is it fit to export' field guides to educate producers and exporters about these standards.



I am a partner in the family station, a 2 million hectare property in the Pilbara in Western Australia, where we breed cattle for export. Caring for animals is one of the things I love most about what I do for a living.

As a producer, everything you do, nearly every decision you make is based on the best interests of your animals. If we didn't deeply respect and care for our animals we wouldn't be involved in Australia's livestock export industry.

I have great faith in the future of cattle exports and I plan to be involved in the industry for many years to come. I am yet to find anything else I would rather do or anywhere I would rather be than here at the station, caring for my animals.

– Aticia –

4 Onboard ship

Each consignment of livestock exported must comply with importing country **protocols**. They must also meet the specific ASEL requirements before being issued with an Export Permit by the AQIS. All pre-export assembly facilities must meet established standards and be registered by AQIS. AQIS officers inspect all animals prior to loading to ensure fitness to travel. Experienced veterinarians accredited by AQIS are involved in the preparation of all animals for export. It is their responsibility to oversee and certify that livestock are prepared in accordance with requirements set out in the ASEL.

Standard 4 – Vessel Preparation and Loading outlines the process for preparing and loading livestock vessels to ensure all livestock are loaded in a manner that prevents injury and minimises stress, delivering good animal welfare outcomes. It also sets out stocking densities, provision of feed, water and veterinary supplies for the voyage.

All consignments are assessed prior to departure to determine how many animals can be exported on the ship with sufficient space to move around, access the constantly available feed and water, and lay down. Vessels are also subject to approval by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and must meet strict requirements for the carriage of livestock under Marine Order 43 including space, provision of 'hospital pens,' biosecurity measures and ventilation.

Standard 5 covers the onboard management of livestock from the time the first animal is loaded onto the vessel to the time the last animal is unloaded at the overseas destination.

Highly trained, accredited Australian stockmen accompany all voyages and work with a trained onboard crew to provide care for the animals and report regularly on the progress of the voyage.

In addition to the qualified Australian stockmen, AQIS accredited vets accompany livestock on all Middle East consignments to provide an extra level of care, also reporting daily to AQIS.

My name's Ron and I'm an accredited stockman. I take care of Australian sheep and cattle on their journey overseas on livestock vessels.

It is my job to make sure Australian animals arrive at their destination as fit and healthy as when they walked onto the vessel in Australia.

I start work at 5 o'clock in the morning checking the animals are comfortable in their pens and have enough room to move around and lie down. I check they have food and water, and work with the onboard vet to ensure the animals are well looked after. I've been a stockman for many years, and I'm proud of what I do for a living.

– Ron –



As part of their reporting requirements, vets and stockmen advise the Australian Government on the number of livestock mortalities that occur during the voyage.

Mortality rates on all on voyages are reported to Parliament every six months and posted on the AQIS website. If rates exceed an accepted standard a full investigation by AQIS occurs. Currently, over 99 percent of all livestock arrive fit and healthy at their destination. This reporting is part of the industry's commitment to transparency and accountability.

5 In the marketplace

The livestock export industry invests farmer and exporter levies into improving the way Australian animals are handled and processed overseas.

Once they arrive at their destination, the livestock spend a short time in a feedlot where they are well fed and closely monitored to ensure they are in top condition before being sent to a local abattoir or, in a few cases, to the local market.

The Australian Government and producer and exporter levies have supported projects including infrastructure improvements at feedlots and ports, and the development and delivery of animal welfare training courses.

The industry monitors animal handling and care conditions through regular inspection and assessment of facilities.

Wherever possible, the livestock export industry consults with importing country governments to deliver animal welfare initiatives. It has found that joint initiatives improve engagement with the local community, ensuring more effective results.

We are Australian animal welfare experts based in the Middle East. It's our job to care for Australian sheep and cattle when they arrive here, fit and healthy after their journey from Australia.

We are sharing Australian skills and knowledge with local vets, stockmen, truck drivers, feedlot operators and port staff, teaching them how to care for Australian animals.

We also help improve facilities, including the feedlots where Australian animals have constant access to nutritious food, fresh water and shade to keep them cool during warm weather.

It is important to the Australian livestock industry that our animals are well looked after when they arrive in the Middle East and that's why we're here.

– Peter and Sharon –



6 In the ute, not the boot

The "In the ute, not the boot" campaign was launched in December 2008 during the lead up to Eid Al Adha – the biggest feast in the Muslim calendar. Families and communities purchase livestock for religious reasons and many are unaware of how to properly transport Australian sheep. Bahrain Livestock Company (BLC), MLA and LiveCorp aimed to improve animal handling and transport through a community education campaign consisting of



advertisements in local papers, postage and signage around the feedlot and instructions on purchase receipts. A team of Australian welfare experts based in the feedlot and surrounds ensured sheep were only transported in appropriate utes or trucks.

The "In the ute, not the boot" campaign ensured all Australian sheep were transported properly from the BLC feedlot. The next steps are to take the program to other markets to improve the transport and handling of Australian sheep across the Middle East region.

7 Conclusion

The Australian livestock export industry operates to world-best standards, and is one of the most highly regulated industries in the world. Improvements in animal welfare have been made throughout the entire supply chain, including operating procedures, in the day-to-day care provided to animals during transport and in the overseas markets in which the animals are sold. This improved care is not only for ethical reasons but to ensure the confidence of customers and community engagement is maintained. The industry continues its ongoing commitment to improve animal welfare and to deliver improvements and education to its members and stakeholders.

GLOSSARY

Competitive advantage Exists when one country has a more efficient way of combining resources to produce a good or service that gives that organisation a market advantage over its competitors.

Exports Goods or services that are sold to overseas consumers by domestic producers.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) The total value of all goods and services produced in the economy in one year.

Levies A charge paid by producers and an industry to fund activities such as research and development (R&D), training and marketing and promotion.

Livestock exports Export of live animals including sheep, cattle, goats, dairy cattle, alpacas and camels.

Protocol/s A set of guidelines or rules required by importing countries to certify the health status of livestock.

Regulatory (requirement) A law, licence or restrictions imposed on an industry or business by a government.

Stakeholder/s A person or group who has an interest in how an organisation operates or functions. Examples include management, owners, employees, customers, shareholders, the local community and government. A person or group who has an interest in how a business operates or functions. Examples include management, owners, employees, customers, shareholders, the local community and government.

Standard/s Regulations or laws that set out the procedures, levels of behaviour or specifications for an industry or business.

Sustainability The ability of a business/producer to operate successfully over a long period of time. This ability is dependent on the business not exhausting the resources (people, natural, physical) used to conduct its operation.

Questions and Extension Activities for MLA are on www.afrbiz.com.au
You will also find links to the MLA website