



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

DOCUMENTS

**Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry**

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Back, Sen Chris

Source Senate
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Question No.

Senator BACK (Western Australia) (6.50 pm)—I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

This is the report on livestock mortalities during export by sea for the previous six months, January to June 2009. I wish to draw the Senate's attention to the excellence of these figures, which are demonstrated in the report by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for the six-month period. They show that for the export from Australia of some 400,000 cattle they enjoyed a rate of safe arrival of some 99.9 per cent. For the 1.9 million sheep, there was 99.2 per cent success. Having had many years as a veterinarian in this trade, I draw the Senate's attention not only to the fact of the actual delivery rate but also to the gross live weight of animals that arrived. In the 10 days in the case of cattle or in the up to 30 days in the case of sheep, we typically see a significant increase in the actual live weight of the consignment. In fact, the end customer gets well in excess of 100 per cent of the actual purchase weight of the animals. What is most gratifying is that these figures are consistent with, and in fact even improve on, the success rate of deliveries of cattle and sheep from our shores over the last few years.

I draw the Senate's attention to the importance of this trade. Approximately \$1 billion a year of gross regional product can be directly attributed to the trade itself, with a further \$1 billion approximately from those associated with the trade in our regions. The number of direct employment positions for people in this trade around Australia is conservatively estimated at 11,000, with anything up to 13,000 or 14,000 indirect positions. Of course, these are in areas where alternative employment is certainly not readily available.

I commend this trade to the Senate. It is one that has now become mature. It is one in which Australia is a leader, and that is for several reasons. The first is food security, particularly for our neighbours to the north, in Indonesia, to where we export most of our cattle; it has become a very important source of protein. We are now exporting live cattle to Israel and Libya, and they are very, very satisfied not only with the numbers but

also with the quality and the disease-free status of our herds—and our flocks—here in Australia.

Food security is critically important. A question often asked of us now and one I was asked when I was in the trade is: why don't we replace live animal exports with meat exports? The answer is that there are significant exports of chilled and frozen meat from our shores and it complements, not replaces, the live animal trade. In the past, we in Australia have got a degree of arrogance when we have tried to dictate to the end customer what we may or may not deliver to them. I know from my own experience that, for Islamic religious and other reasons, they actually demand the live animal in many circumstances. Of course, if we will not supply the trade, there are many others who will and who already do.

The second point to be made about that is that tremendous advances have been made in husbandry techniques in these regions as a direct result of Australia's intervention by way of training, assistance and leadership. In fact, the only country that is actually providing these services, this advice and this commitment of moneys is Australia. I have myself observed since the mid-1980s, when I was actively travelling to the Gulf on livestock carriers, the improvement in husbandry, in vaccination technologies and in the actual workforce in that region and of course the significant improvement in the welfare of the animals at the other end. I can assure the Senate that the quality of welfare from the farms to our feedlots, from our feedlots to ships and from the ships themselves is of the highest order—and thus it will always be. Australian stock officers have always been much sought after in the trade, wherever it takes place around the world.

The other point that is often not understood when people ask about chilled or frozen meat in those regions—and I have experienced this myself in the Gulf, in Fujairah—is that, in the heat of their summers, very often their electricity grids are not adequate to provide power 24/7. I have in fact had the experience of a complete consignment of chilled meat from Australia having to be discarded because the chillers did not have adequate power to remain active for a 24-hour period. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.