**Op-Ed**

**Letter to the Editor**

Sheep producers have been too busy to take much notice of the live export politicking by the RSPCA in recent months, but its reaction to news that RETWA has been granted a livestock export licence needs to be called out.

Unfortunately, the RSPCA is increasingly drawn into a battle for activist donations, leaving it to chase an agenda which is clearly more ‘anti-livestock’ and ‘anti-meat’ than ‘pro-welfare’.

I have often defended the RSPCA, arguing that it is a far more reasonable organisation than the likes of Animals Australia or PETA. But now the RPSCA is proving me wrong.

Despite the new technology and ongoing research and development which will ensure animal welfare continues to improve in the live trade, the RSPCA just wants to shut the industry down.

Export businesses like RETWA are willing to ship sheep at stocking rates of at least 17.5 per cent below the existing world’s-best standards, meaning producers might have a chance of selling the backlog of half a million sheep which haven’t been exported due to the suspension of trade over winter. The RSPCA doesn’t seem to give any thought to the on-farm welfare risks this backlog has caused.

It should be recognised that earlier this month in what was the first voyage to the Middle East in months, the Maysora's sheep mortality rate was 0.13pc of more than 20,000 sheep shipped. Of the 10,000 cattle on board, single-digit mortalities occurred. This is an excellent result.

But the RSPCA stopped listening to the livestock industry long ago. It is now a one-way conversation in which our practical husbandry experience and proven commitment to animal welfare is treated with contempt.

Until the new Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock are introduced next year, the 17.5 per cent reduction should satisfy any reasonable person, particularly given the comprehensive ventilation auditing that is completed on vessels and the presence of Australian stockmen, an Australian Government accredited veterinarian and an Independent Observer on every voyage.

But the RSPCA will never be satisfied. They’d criticise any stocking rate, regardless of what the regulator says, or what the best available evidence supports.

The Federal regulator has said the interim stocking rates for the northern winter are guided by first-hand feedback from the veterinarians who have worked as Independent Observers on live export voyages to the Middle East.

These observers are far better placed to provide credible feedback to the regulator than a professional activist organisation in Canberra which is merely looking for headlines and donations.

Jeff Murray

WAFarmers Export Committee Chairperson

Sheep producers have been too busy to take much notice of the live export politicking by the RSPCA in recent months, but its reaction to news that RETWA has been granted a livestock export licence (The West Australian, 14 October) needs to be called out.

Unfortunately, the RSPCA is increasingly drawn into a battle for activist donations, leaving it to chase an agenda which is clearly more ‘anti-livestock’ and ‘anti-meat’ than ‘pro-welfare’.

I have often defended the RSPCA, arguing that it is far more reasonable organisation than the likes of Animals Australia or PETA. But now the RPSCA is proving me wrong.

Despite the new technology and ongoing research and development which will ensure animal welfare continues to improve in the live trade, the RSPCA just wants to shut the industry down.

Export businesses like RETWA are willing to ship sheep at stocking rates of at least 17.5 per cent below the existing world’s-best standards, meaning producers might have a chance of selling the backlog of half a million sheep which haven’t been exported due to the suspension of trade over winter. The RSPCA doesn’t seem to give any thought to the on-farm welfare risks this backlog has caused.

Indeed, the RSPCA stopped listening to livestock farmers long ago. It is now a one-way conversation in which our practical husbandry experience and proven commitment to animal welfare is treated with contempt.

Until the new Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock are introduced next year, the 17.5 per cent reduction should satisfy any reasonable person, particularly given the comprehensive ventilation auditing that is completed on vessels and the presence of Australian stockmen, an Australian Government accredited veterinarian and an Independent Observer on every voyage.

But the RSPCA will never be satisfied. They’d criticise any stocking rate, regardless of what the regulator says, or what the best available evidence supports.

The Federal regulator has said that the interim stocking rates for the northern winter period, where no incidence of animal welfare have been reported, are backed by first-hand feedback from the veterinarians who have been employed as Independent Observers on live export voyages to the Middle East. It should be recognised that the Maysora's sheep mortality rate was 0.13pc, of more than > 20,000 sheep shipped. Of the 10,000 cattle on board, single-digit mortalities occurred.

These observers are far better placed to provide credible feedback and guidance to the regulator, and to the industry, than a professional activist organisation in Canberra which is merely looking for headlines and donations.

Jeff Murray

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