

Ruminations

STORIES *of* LIVE EXPORT

NOVEMBER 2022



Contents

AN INTRODUCTION TO LIVE EXPORTS	04
<i>Why and where we export cattle, sheep and goats, and the regulations involved</i>	
TRIBAL LANDS	05
<i>Errol Gilbo is a proud Kurtijar man providing opportunities for the next generation</i>	
WORKING HARD, LOOKING GOOD	06
<i>Fiona Baird on the importance of building relationships with international co-workers</i>	
INTERPRETING ANIMAL WELFARE	07
<i>The latest research to objectively understand what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ animal welfare</i>	
DAIRY’S DUAL BENEFITS	08
<i>Exporting dairy cattle provides benefits to Australian dairy farmers and communities overseas</i>	
“MEATING” CUSTOMER DEMAND	09
<i>Hussam Sarhan has come up with an innovative way to build demand for Australian lamb</i>	
BUILDING INTERNATIONAL TIES	10
<i>Ifa Hanafi shares her hopes of taking knowledge from an Australian PhD back to Indonesia</i>	
MAKING THE INDUSTRY “SHEEP-SHAPE”	11
<i>Murray Frangs provides insights into how live sheep exports have changed in recent years</i>	
MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN-MARKET	12
<i>Nick Crichton says better infrastructure is the key to keeping both animals and people safe</i>	
COURSES AND CAREERS	13
<i>A certification scheme is improving the job prospects of Animal Welfare Officers in Indonesia</i>	
A HUB FOR EXPORTS	14
<i>Paul Heil on the bustling hive of activity seen daily at a pre-export quarantine depot</i>	
NORTHERN VALUE	15
<i>Benefits flow between northern Australia and the live cattle export industry</i>	

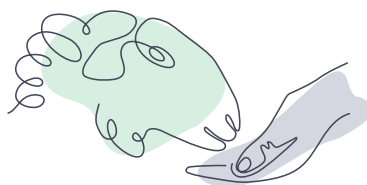


LiveCorp Chair, Troy Setter



LiveCorp is the service provider and research body for the Australian livestock export industry. It works closely with exporters and other stakeholders to continuously improve performance in animal health and welfare, supply chain efficiency and market access. Activities are funded through statutory levies on the export of beef and dairy cattle, sheep and goats, with matching Australian Government funding for eligible research spending.

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Welcome from LiveCorp

We had a great response to the first edition of *Ruminations* and its stories about people working in the live export industry.

There have been significant challenges in recent years, including high livestock prices in Australia, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and outbreaks of livestock diseases in Indonesia, a key trading partner. Export volumes have fallen dramatically as a result.

However, it hasn't changed the underlying demand for Australia's high quality livestock; nor has it changed the commitment of the people helping to build up breeding herds and meet the nutritional needs of families overseas.

This edition once again tells those stories, from cattle stations in Queensland and researchers in New South Wales, to those working on ships and with our international customers to improve human and animal welfare.

Ruminations has been developed in response to surveys of the Australian community, which highlighted the need to do better at explaining how the live export industry works.

We have shared the magazine with livestock producers and international customers, at shows and community events, with politicians and through social media.

Although some readers are familiar with parts of the industry, we hope everyone gets fresh insights and learns something new.

And if you are part of the supply chain and have a story to share or know someone doing amazing things, please let us know for the next edition!

Enjoy the read.

Troy Setter
Chair
LiveCorp



Getty Images

An Introduction to Live Exports

Australia exported 1.1 million cattle, sheep and goats to 15 countries in 2021-22, worth a combined \$1.3 billion.

THE PRIMARY DESTINATIONS were Indonesia for beef cattle, China for dairy cattle, Kuwait for sheep and Malaysia for goats.

Australia produces far more livestock than we need domestically, and exports live animals as well as processed meat for a mix of reasons. Food security and tradition are key drivers, as many countries do not have the land available to breed enough animals to provide quality nutrition, and a lot of consumers consider meat to be 'fresh' only if it has been processed that morning.

While most people think of ships when live exports are mentioned, air freight is also an important part of the industry.

Most areas of the live export industry are highly regulated, including:

- the structure, operation and maintenance of the ships which carry livestock
- the washing of decks during the export of cattle and buffalo, and to meet stringent biosecurity regulations before returning to Australia after carrying any species
- the preparation of livestock for export by sea or air, including multiple checks by veterinarians to ensure they are fit and healthy

- the access livestock have to food and water, how much space they have, and the quality of the ventilation systems during a voyage or flight
- the requirement for animals destined for meat to stay within overseas facilities approved as meeting Australian Government standards for handling and slaughter.

Livestock exported for breeding, including dairy cattle, are not subject to the same regulations once they arrive overseas. However, they are highly prized for their genetics and production.

Exporters and others in the industry are aware of the community's interest in animal welfare, particularly on the ships and in overseas destinations, and share the desire to build on the good practices already in place.

There are staff dedicated to overseeing conditions in market, research efforts focused on welfare, and better data being collected to increase the visibility of what is happening along the supply chain for exporters, the regulator and the general public. ■

Australian livestock exports 2021-22

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics



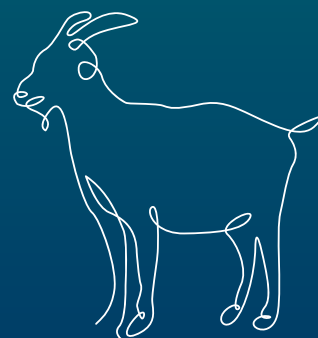
CATTLE

615,024 head = \$1.19 billion



SHEEP

489,064 head = \$85 million



GOATS

3,366 head = \$2.1 million



Errol spends a lot of time in the truck, with a two-day round trip to check all the bores and watering stations on Wrotham Park Station.

Tribal *lands*

Cattle stations in North Queensland can't afford to have the water run dry, especially in summer. It means bore runner Errol Gilbo has spent a lot of time on his own over the years, driving vast distances to ensure pumps are working, there are no leaks, and the water troughs are full.

IT TAKES ROUGHLY two days to drive from one end of Wrotham Park Station and back, checking all the bores and watering stations, and Errol has to be a jack-of-all-trades so he can fix things on the spot if there are issues.

He also looks after the homestead, making sure staff have water for drinking, cooking, and a shower at night.

Wrotham Park is more than half a million hectares in size and runs up to 50,000 head of cattle. It is located 350 kilometres west of Cairns and is the latest in a string of cattle stations where Errol has worked.

He is also on the committee of the Kurtjar Aboriginal Corporation. It owns Delta Downs, which in 1983 became Australia's first cattle station run by Traditional Owners.

"My father and grandfather encouraged me to get involved in the cattle industry when I was a teenager," Errol said.

"My grandfather helped to put Delta Downs back in the hands of our people, which provided employment as well as allowing access so we could maintain culture and traditions on our homelands.

"I spent much of my 20s doing courses in management and working on various cattle stations, and my wife did some book-keeping courses to learn about the management of cattle stations. I've been able to put that experience to good use for Delta Downs as well as other Indigenous-owned stations."

Delta Downs is on the Gulf of Carpentaria north of Normanton, the town where Errol was born. The property is around 400,000 hectares in size, and in good years can run 30-40,000 head of cattle.

"The cattle industry was basically made by Aboriginal labour, and it means a lot to have our tribal lands back.

"It gives us a sense of pride, and adds years to the lifespan of our Elders, knowing the country is being maintained and looked after.

"As well as being a working cattle station, tourists can visit Delta Downs for camping and fishing. It gives us an opportunity to talk to them about what's happening there, and why we protect and work our land."

Errol says many large pastoral companies are working with Indigenous stations, which is helping to make the operations viable and sustainable.

"There has to be a future for the younger generation. I had one young girl and trained her up, and she became Head Stockperson. It sets a precedence, and people think 'if she can do it, I can do it'.

"We've had young fellas come and work at Wrotham Park Station. They see what it's like running a big operation and can take those skills and knowledge with them back to Delta Downs – or anywhere.

"It's imperative that we walk side by side, to get experience in areas like land management and business management, so we can add value to what we have and help to close the gap." ■



Fi with some of the crew from livestock carrier *Greyman Express*, in transit from Townsville to Jakarta.

The work of a stockperson is physically and mentally demanding, but Fiona Baird's daily ritual of applying her signature M.A.C Russian Red lipstick and a spritz of Chanel Gabrielle perfume before she starts the day remains firmly in place even when she is on a livestock export ship.

"YOU CAN TURN up, work really hard, and still look good – that's my theory," says Fi, as she is better known.

Based in Perth, Fi is an accredited shipboard stockperson (stockie) working on ships exporting cattle to key South East Asian markets including Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia. Fi also supports the export company's Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) team.

Raised on a cattle and sheep property in New Zealand, Fi started working in Australia's livestock industry on a cattle station near Mt Isa before moving into live exports in 2010.

After more than a decade, Fi is a friend and mentor to many in the industry, particularly among the tight-knit community of shipboard stockies.

"You've got to be a tough sort of breed to work on the ships," Fi said.

"Usually, you're with a group of up to 25 international workers where you're responsible for ensuring good animal

welfare standards are maintained and making sure the livestock get from A to B without any issues. It's quite a big job."

In recent years, Fi has played a key role in organising an annual forum for stockies, prompted in part by the disappearance of the ship *Gulf Livestock 1* in 2020. Of the 43 people on board, only two survivors were found.

"It really shook up a lot of people. Perhaps being a long-term stock lady and having built relationships with the other stockies, I was contacted by many who just wanted to talk," Fi said.

"A group of us got together and discussed the need for a platform where stockies can voice their concerns or talk about things that will help us do our job in the long run, and have that taken back to the industry. It's also a good networking opportunity."

The first forum was held in 2021 in Darwin, and the second in 2022 to coincide with LIVEXchange.

Beyond her on-board work, Fi started working in destination countries in 2011, helping to implement animal welfare regulations.

"Being a tall blonde woman from Australia added a few unique challenges that I had to navigate because everyone was cautious when I rolled into these facilities. The most important thing was earning trust and getting everyone working together.

"We spent a lot of time prior to implementing any changes just building relationships with facility managers and the workers. It's been very beneficial in the long-term, because we're still very close with all the facilities. Relationships are paramount to getting a good result."

Fi also plays a key role advising and training the team at a breeding and feedlot operation in Indonesia's Kalimantan province.

"I helped to deliver some breeding cattle in 2014, and it was decided I would stay and get the guys started," Fi said.



Jackaroos from Sulung Ranch ready to compete at the biannual gymkhana Fi helped to establish.

“I decided to work it as a I would an Australian cattle station, so the first thing I did was get them on horses. The cattle had been worked with horses prior to being exported, and it just seemed the natural path to take.

“There were unbroken horses there, so we set up a round yard with sand and got to work breaking them in. We also imported ponies from Sumba Island.

“There were two local managers, and once they realised I knew what I was doing, they were brilliant and open to trying new things. We had a poddy pen and did a lot of work training weaners and working on nutrition.

“The support I had from the exporter and outside sources, including the nutritionist, was the only reason it was successful. Again, it was about building relationships.

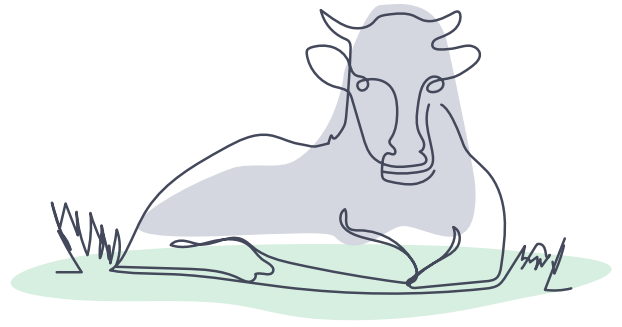
“I still provide support to the team remotely, often giving advice via WhatsApp if they need it.”

In addition to her work on the ships and in-market, Fi runs her own fashion label.

“I lost my father to melanoma about four years ago, when I was living in Indonesia, and started making kerchiefs to cover my neck. From there it grew into shirts as well.

“I had a couple of women who helped me around the house and all of them could sew, so I taught them how to put the pieces together and it’s grown from there.

“They’re women who were clearly talented but didn’t have any opportunities. Now you’ve got this group of women in my studio in Indonesia, creating amazing products that are so loved by the Australian rural community. I consider the team as family.” ■



Interpreting *animal* welfare

Livestock exporters and the community share a common goal: to improve the welfare of animals being exported from Australia. However, defining ‘good’ and ‘bad’ welfare is not as easy as it seems.

THE CONCEPT OF welfare is subjective and at times hard to measure. For instance, a temperature reading alone cannot be used to categorise ‘welfare’, as some animals (like people) respond differently to the same conditions and there are often multiple factors at play.

Industry research has developed a comprehensive set of animal welfare indicators which are collected daily on live export ships. As well as looking at the demeanour and condition of the animals themselves, they cover environmental factors such as temperature and humidity, and measures such as access to food and water.

The industry is not stopping there, with a project getting underway in early 2023 to investigate ways to use multiple measures to determine the overall welfare of a single animal or group.

The aim is to put things in context. As an example, panting is a way for sheep to cope with heat. Considered alone, it could be seen as a welfare problem. However, if those same sheep are exhibiting normal behaviours such as eating, drinking and resting, it tells more of the story and shows they are actually likely to be okay.

The ability to combine and analyse different welfare indicators in a defined and objective manner will help the industry and regulator set practical thresholds that can provide evidence of best practice and assist with a shift toward more outcomes-based regulation.

A key outcome will also be to identify different combinations of factors which,

together, point to situations which need to be proactively addressed to prevent poor welfare, as well as identify the likely cause and severity of any welfare issues.

The quality of the data being used for analysis is an important component of any system. This took a quantum leap forward with the development of a platform known as LIVEXCollect, which is used to collect shipboard welfare data for use by exporters and to report to the regulator.

LIVEXCollect currently uses Excel spreadsheets with drop-down menus, which helped to standardise data collection across the industry. Exporters are embracing technology and, with funding through an Australian Government grant, a digital application is under development. This will further increase the accuracy of data while reducing the time burden of reporting for the stockpersons and veterinarians on the ships, so their focus can remain on the care of the livestock.

High quality data over time provides greater opportunities for analysis, which in turn will inform improvements in the animal welfare indicators and the project to identify welfare thresholds. LIVEXCollect will also allow near to real-time reporting, which means a faster response by exporters to any change in conditions.

The combination of all these projects will help the live export industry demonstrate its performance to the community in a more transparent way. ■



DAIRY'S *dual* BENEFITS

Live export has become an integral part of the Australian dairy industry, with significant numbers of cattle being sent overseas each year. More than a quarter of dairy farms, or 1,300 nationally, were part of the trade in 2019-20.

THEY ARE USUALLY high-value animals with specific requirements around pedigree and pregnancy status. Australian dairy cattle are popular because of their disease-free status, reliable supply and quality genetics. They also generally perform very well in a variety of weather conditions.

Global demand is often driven by countries' nutrition goals and concerns about food security.

The majority of dairy cattle exported from Australia are sent to new or expanding large-scale, corporate dairies. These typically have very good facilities, modern technology, industry best practice procedures, strong international links and management that appreciates the importance of animal care and its relationship to productivity.

Australian dairy farmers also get a lot of benefit from live export being part of the picture.

- It is another source of cashflow to help them deal with the volatility of milk prices.
- It provides a valuable market for excess heifers, which can be sold for higher prices than the same animals would reach on the domestic market.
- Farmers can sell young heifers that are not yet producing milk, and buy in cows which are already in full production.
- A specialist sector has developed which is dedicated to 'growing out' dairy heifers for live export.

There is also a flow-on benefit in Australia into sectors such as transport, animal health and agricultural services. ■

Did you know?

Since the trade started in 2001, Australia has exported 1,284,310 dairy cattle, valued at \$2.8 billion, to 34 countries.

Of those, almost 90% have been sourced from Victoria, and 71% have been destined for China.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics



“Meating” customer demand

Every weekend in Dubai over winter, thousands of people head into surrounding national parks for a barbecue lunch. Thanks to a new concept, many don't even need to pack the car with anything other than their families.

THE OFFERING BY Al Mawashi allows people to turn up empty-handed and pay a small amount for a space with everything required for a picnic: chairs, tables, plates, cutlery, and a barbecue with the charcoal already lit. All they have to do is grab some fresh meat from the food truck, grill and enjoy.

It's the brainchild of Hussam Sarhan, Director of Operations at Al Mawashi's parent company Kuwait Livestock Transport and Trading (KLTT), who says it's also a great way to introduce people to new flavours.

“People work very hard all week and want fresh air and relaxation on the weekend. You'll often see three or four families, from children to the elderly, getting together to play and socialise,” Mr Sarhan said.

“We're selling lamb for the barbecues, with just a bit of salt and pepper for seasoning. This is a new eating experience for many, as meat from butchers in Dubai is often marinated.

“Everyone enjoys it – we get five stars – and then they want to know where to buy the meat to cook at home. We've introduced them to the quality, and built the relationship, and that drives our online sales.”

KLTT imports both chilled meat and live sheep from Australia and elsewhere, and

the company has its own abattoirs as well as Al Mawashi-branded retail outlets.

Mr Sarhan says the market has changed dramatically in the past decade.

“Twenty years ago, KLTT was a leading company importing Australian chilled meat into the United Arab Emirates. At around 20 tonnes a week, we had 30% of the market share. These days we bring in more like 40-50 tonnes, and that's only about 10% of total Australian chilled lamb imports.

“Australian lamb has become a favourite meat, and demand has grown. The population has also doubled in that time, so overall demand for sheep and goat meat has increased.”

KLTT owns several livestock ships, and Mr Sarhan said the live sheep trade became even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic than before.

“A lot of people want the meat ‘hot’ – processed on the same day they buy it – especially those from Iraq and Syria. They don't consider chilled meat to be ‘fresh’, and don't want products that have taken 3-4 days to arrive after being processed in Australia.

“The cost of flying the meat from Australia jumped three or four times higher when the passenger planes stopped and sending it on container ships was difficult because it took so long.

“With livestock ships on the water, we knew the sheep would arrive within two weeks and then we could process them locally as needed.”

Mr Sarhan had no agricultural background before going to work at KLTT, as both parents were teachers. He studied computer science after high school, then got an MBA from Western Australia's Murdoch University.

“I started as a junior, working with IT and in administration. I liked the industry and the trade, so stayed on in various roles.

“My first trip to Australia was in 2002. I spent time visiting abattoirs, learning how meat was produced in Australia. It was good to see how they managed hygiene to maintain quality and reduce cross-contamination, and to understand ways to differentiate the meat products.”

The experience has not just helped to identify Australian abattoirs to work with; it has provided information KLTT has used when building its own facilities to process imported livestock.

“It's all about satisfying customers. Some are happy with chilled meat, especially the younger generation. Others want hot meat so we bring in live sheep and process them locally. If we stopped doing it, others would fill the gap.”

BUILDING INTERNATIONAL TIES

There are challenges with being an international student, and Ifa Hanafi believes a lot of Indonesian students worry about language limitations, but she says sometimes you just have to step out of your comfort zone.

ORIGINALLY FROM MAKASSAR in South Sulawesi, Ifa has called Armidale in NSW home for nearly three years as a PhD student at the University of New England's School of Environmental and Rural Science.

"I like the cold; I don't really like the heat which is weird given I'm from Indonesia. I have absolutely fallen in love with Armidale," Ifa said, while discussing why livestock nutrition is the focus of her studies in the picturesque regional city.

"The people here are really friendly. It's a small city and the university is really supportive of international students. I'm so grateful for all the assistance from my supervisors and friends.

"I was separated from my family for two years when I moved to Australia. My son is here now, but my husband is back in Indonesia.

"I want my colleagues and students in Indonesia to know that it's really important for us to pursue our study overseas and not stay in our comfort zone."

Ifa has studied and worked in the livestock industry for more than 20 years after completing a Bachelor of Animal Science at Hasanuddin University, Makassar.

The region has trade ties with Indigenous Australians going back hundreds of years, and Ifa was heartened to see images of Anthony Albanese visit the university in June 2022 – the first time an Australian Prime Minister had visited the Indonesian port city.

For Ifa, the relationship between the countries is vitally important and one she hopes to help strengthen once she returns to Indonesia.

"I really like working in this area because the science and knowledge keep growing. I've had an opportunity to learn new skills such as animal handling and laboratory work.

"In Indonesia, food security is a challenge, and we perhaps take a simpler approach to it. But I think the time is changing now and we have to pay more attention to animal welfare.

"Larger operators in Indonesia apply animal welfare standards well, but there



Ifa is studying the diet of sheep and cattle to see how it affects ammonia production.

is scope for more education of farmers with two to five animals.

"I hope to be a bridge in terms of science and sharing knowledge of the latest research."

Ifa studied in Australia previously, completing her Masters in sheep nutrition at UNE in 2010.

"After that, I worked at the Artificial Insemination Unit of South Sulawesi Province with responsibilities for bull management and frozen semen production. I was also involved in a Ministry of Agriculture program to increase cattle productivity and populations using artificial insemination.

"When I finished my Masters, I applied for a scholarship a number of times to continue my education, before I was accepted in 2019 and received an Australia Awards Scholarship.

"It was a long wait, but worth it. I hope all the knowledge I gain here is going to benefit the livestock industries in both countries.

"I would love the chance to work on our own animal welfare standards in Indonesia and submit a proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture."

Ifa's PhD involves research trials with sheep and cattle as part of the Livestock Export Program* and University of

New England Project Partnership.

The ground-breaking four-year project is providing the science behind recommendations on stocking density, bedding and ammonia for live cattle and sheep export voyages.

"Australia and Indonesia have a long history in the livestock trade, and I really wanted to be involved in the project," Ifa said.

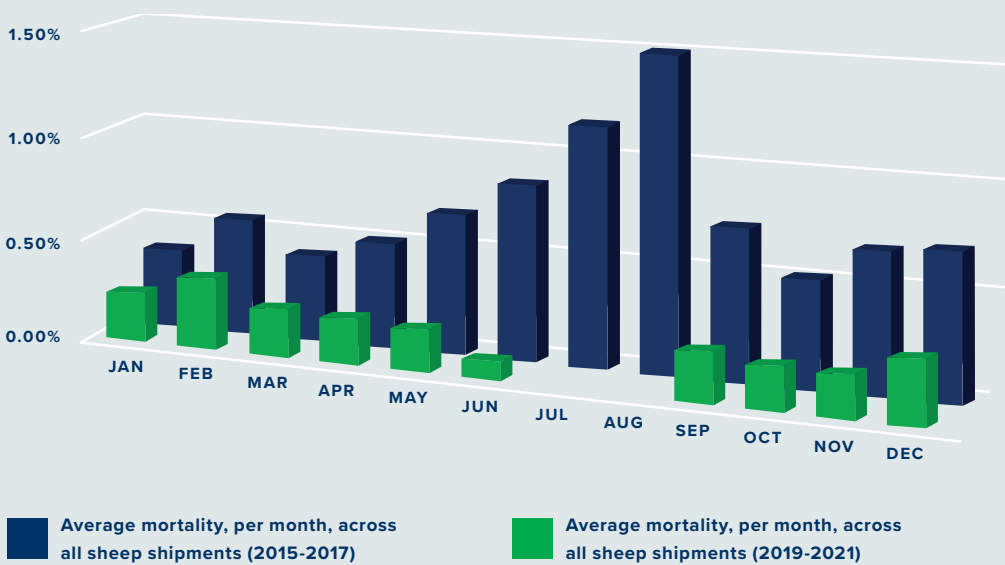
"My trial work focused on the effects of the diet of livestock, and pen management, on ammonia production. By modifying the diet of sheep and cattle in order to reduce ammonia from manure, we can potentially reduce air ammonia on the ship. It may also be relevant for intensive livestock farms.

"We have to treat livestock well and, of course, the study here at UNE will be really beneficial when I go back to my institution in helping develop my own livestock management standards and guidelines.

"Indonesia is one of the biggest consumers of Australian livestock and I hope the cooperation between our two countries will be ongoing for many years." ■

* The Livestock Export Program is a collaboration between LiveCorp and Meat & Livestock Australia – the research corporations for livestock exporters and producers respectively.

AVERAGE MONTHLY MORTALITY RATE (%)



Mortality rates are not a perfect measure of animal welfare, but there is a correlation. The prohibition on live sheep exports to the Middle East during part of the year has influenced a steep drop in average mortalities. However, the decline is evident across every month – so other changes to industry practices and regulation since 2018 have also had a significant impact.

Making the industry “*sheep-shape*”

Before the shipping season gets underway for live sheep exports from Australia to the Middle East, Murray Frangs needs to kick start a collaboration with several hundred people across Western Australia.

A TYPICAL SHIPMENT by exporter Rural Export and Trading (RETWA) is 50-60,000 sheep. As General Manager, Murray coordinates the service providers in a supply chain that starts with sending buyers and agents out to visit the 150-200 farmers from whom the sheep will be sourced.

It then takes about 100 truckloads to get the sheep to the pre-export quarantine depot, and more to bring in feed. A staff of around 20 prepare the sheep to meet export regulations and importing country requirements, and a team of another 20 or so shear up to 25,000 head.

Just before the ship is due, both exporter and government veterinarians check the sheep before they're allowed to be loaded on the 100 or so trucks taking them to the port, where a team of 25 company inspectors, stevedores and operational coordinators will put them – and around 60 truckloads of feed – onto the ship over a period of two days.

Since the Australian Government prohibited the export of sheep to the Middle East during the northern summer, Murray says getting things up and running after a 3-4 month break really highlights the broad impact of the industry.

“We need to go back out to all those people in the supply chain to make sure

they – and the sheep – are available, and give them confidence about the rest of the year and our ongoing support for the industry,” Murray said.

“RETWA is owned by a sovereign fund in Kuwait and its mandate is to support food security. As with many of the Gulf countries, it doesn't have the capacity to produce meat and other basic food necessities itself.

“We've been operating in this industry for over 50 years and are definitely in here for the long haul. Given that mandate, it's not about commercial profits, so even with sheep prices doubling in recent years, there's been no question that we'll be sending shipments when we can.”

The live sheep export industry has fundamentally changed over recent years, with industry initiatives, regulatory reviews and research all contributing to continual improvements in animal welfare.

The summer prohibition is just one factor, with others including stricter on-farm selection criteria, sheep being given more space on ships, and the development of numerous animal welfare indicators which are now being collected on every voyage.

Double-tier vessels were also banned, and RETWA's parent company bought a new ship a few years ago as a

replacement for the older style vessels no longer allowed to trade from Australia. It also upgraded a second ship it owns.

“The advantage of owning rather than chartering ships, and having relatively new ones, is the ability to incorporate the latest thinking in technology to provide the optimum welfare conditions,” Murray said.

“The ventilation systems don't just meet but surpass new requirements, we have state of the art reverse osmosis plants to make fresh water, use automated data loggers to collect information such as temperature and humidity, and hire crews well trained in stock handling to work alongside the Australian veterinarians and stockpersons that travel on every voyage.

“We've also spent a lot of time in recent years working with the regulator to make sure we have world leading livestock management practices in place across the whole supply chain, from sourcing sheep on farm all the way to slaughter in the destination countries.

“The combination of all this, and the dedication of the staff working alongside industry to regulate the trade, has achieved amazing outcomes when it comes to the welfare of the sheep.”

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN-MARKET



Nick in Russia, training feedlot staff about cattle handling

From icy, windswept Russian paddocks to abattoirs in the Middle East, Nick Crichton has experienced it all when it comes to the Australian live export industry's diverse global markets.

ORIGINALLY FROM SOUTH Australia, Nick is now based in Norway and has spent the past 12 years working closely with companies importing Australian cattle and sheep to get the best possible animal welfare outcomes. **ONE OF THE** critical factors he believes has contributed to tangible improvements – not only for animals, but the people who work with them – is good infrastructure.

“Ten years ago, the industry thought that training workers in low-stress stock handling techniques was a key solution. However, a big problem was often sub-standard facilities that were just hard work to get the stock to move through,” Nick said.

“If animals don’t want to go through a gateway or yards due to poor design, you’ll have handling and welfare issues very quickly, even with the best low-stress handling aspirations. The stock are stressed, and the people frustrated.

“In my experience, if you get the infrastructure right, you’re at least 50% towards achieving good animal welfare outcomes before doing anything else.

“Regardless of whether you’re in Australia, the United States, Pakistan, or Dubai, you have to create pathways that are conducive to the animals, their natural behaviour and how they think.

“A key part of designing and building good infrastructure is to minimise the human intervention (pushing) factor as much as possible and harness natural behaviour so that the stock are happy to move through gates, pens, raceways, onto trucks and so on.”

Nick says ensuring the safety of people working in market with Australian cattle is another key benefit.

“Many of the workers in market have grown up in villages with highly domesticated animals as part of their households. With that comes a completely different approach to livestock handling.

“The cattle we export, especially out of northern Australia, aren’t used to being handled and need to be treated very carefully. We have a real duty of care to look after people so they don’t get hurt or worse.

“We now work on getting the infrastructure and facilities right first, and then do the training. That’s made a huge difference and, all of a sudden, the training becomes very effective.”

From simple improvements, such as widening gateways or narrowing raceways, through to major works to design and install sheep and cattle yards or lairages at abattoirs, Nick has been involved in projects that have effected real change.

He says good infrastructure improvements don’t have to be high cost; they can be quite simple yet effective.

“For example, we designed and built a cattle discharge platform in the United Arab Emirates which is working really well and has transformed the transfer process from ship to truck and reduced a range of risks for people and cattle. In Kuwait, we re-designed the lairage at the main sheep abattoir using bugle yards and curved raceways.

“All these things allow for the animal’s natural behaviour to move forward, as opposed to people having to push them along.

“We now have some benchmark facilities in the Gulf states that have not only benefited Australian livestock but have made a big difference for the highly domesticated and tame local or East African imported livestock that are put through the same facilities.”

After a career in the livestock industry in Australia, in 2010 Nick started working out of Switzerland with customers in Russia, Turkey and Pakistan who had imported Australian beef and dairy breeding cattle.

Since then, he’s undertaken animal welfare work in a range of markets for various Australian exporters and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA).

For the past five years, Nick has been a supply chain specialist in the Middle East. He’s generally in market every six to eight weeks, so being based in northern Europe provides easier access than the long trek from Australia.

“I really like working on supply chain efficiencies and identifying where we can make improvements for livestock handling and welfare, and also for the business itself,” Nick said.

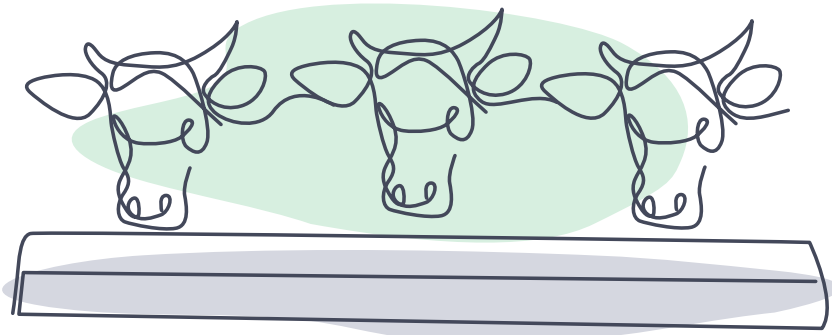
“The more effective and efficient things are, generally the better off the livestock are going to be, the workers are calmer, and good welfare outcomes are achieved.”

Working in a range of countries has also taught Nick the importance of taking the time to build relationships with customers and respect their culture.

“I’ve learned the hard way you can’t roll in with your ‘Aussie’ hat on and try to get people to do things our way. Australia is an isolated country and sometimes we’re not the best at being culturally sensitive.

“We can supply the best livestock to customers, but if we don’t do it the right way, it’s just not going to work well.

“Building relationships is absolutely critical in doing business in our markets. Being face-to-face with customers, talking about their families and other things in life, and understanding what’s important to them is vital to building friendships and trust.” ■



COURSES *and* CAREERS

Sending Australian livestock overseas, rather than meat that's already been processed, creates not just jobs but careers for many of the people in the countries where they end up.

IN INDONESIA, ANIMAL Welfare Officers (AWOs) are employed in feedlots and abattoirs receiving Australian cattle. Part of their job is to make sure all the staff understand and meet the standards set by the Australian regulator, and to provide information to exporters so they can meet their reporting requirements on what happened to the cattle they sent to those facilities.

Australia's live export industry supports the AWOs in multiple ways, managing regular forums and providing training. A collective approach helps to ensure facilities can benefit from the knowledge gained by others and builds capacity across the board.

A recent initiative was to develop an AWO certification scheme to assess 16 competency units in animal management, welfare, Work Health and Safety, and product handling. So far, 100 AWOs from Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan have been certified, from feedlots, abattoirs and integrated cattle/palm plantations, as well as government officials.

Some of those participants are now going through a 'train the trainer' course which will ensure qualified and competent animal welfare trainers are available in facilities which handle Australian cattle. The advanced course covers low-stress animal handling, animal welfare best practices, public speaking,

training module preparation and effective communication.

Interviews have shown that having the AWO certification has helped with performance reviews and supported their roles as advocates of animal welfare within their companies.

Indonesia also has animal welfare laws in place that require companies which process animal products to have staff who are competent in animal welfare practices. As the certification is valid for four years and recognised by other facilities, it also provides an avenue for career advancement and new jobs. ■



Animal Welfare Officers participating in the certification scheme at Lembu Andalus Langkat feedlot.



Paul and the team don't just have jobs – it's also about the lifestyle. Photo: Sally Batt Photography

A HUB *for* EXPORTS

Nestled between Townsville and Charters Towers in North Queensland, Reid River Export Depot sits at the heart of a live export regional hub that's crucial to a large part of northern Australia.

WITH CAPACITY FOR up to 17,000 cattle, the depot is a bustling hive of activity all year round.

It plays a vital role in managing the preparation of cattle exported from the Port of Townsville to markets in South East Asia including Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines.

The depot, owned by Paul and Kristy Heil, has prepared more than 250,000 head for export since it became operational in 2019.

Paul and Kristy lead a team of up to 15 people who live on-site, many of whom have worked in the cattle industry throughout their careers, and at the depot since its establishment.

"The live export industry is our life and many people in the region depend on it. Not having the industry here would be like having a shoe shop without any shoes," Paul said.

"It's not just a job for the team here, we're more like a family. It's certainly not a 9am-5pm job; it's both a livelihood and a lifestyle."

The depot's economic ripple effect is significant. For example, about 80% of the cattle delivered for preparation come via trucking companies based in the Charters Towers region, and these local carriers also transport cattle from the depot to the port. Feed is also sourced from across Queensland.

"Cattle are sourced from Queensland, the Northern Territory, and as far afield as New South Wales and South Australia at times, and they're generally at the depot for about 10 days before export," Paul said.

On arrival, cattle are weighed and given any health treatments required by the destination country.

"We draft the cattle into different weight categories and types, and they're penned based on that data," Paul said.

"They start on a mix of hay and the pellets they'll be fed on the ship, then transition to just the pellets so they get used to them."

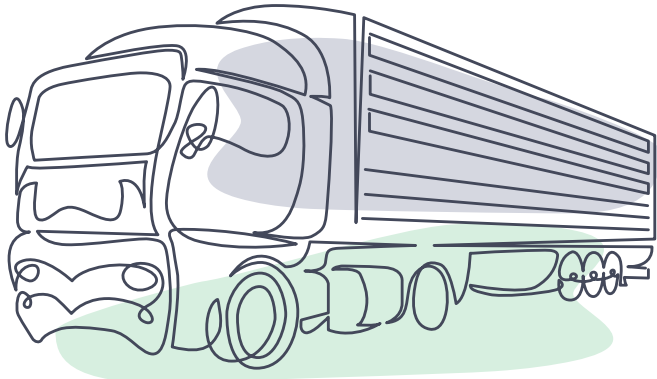
The purpose-built, modern facility is designed to ensure high standards of animal welfare, enabling cattle to flow freely through the yards to minimise stress.

"Our stock people walk through the pens every day to monitor the health of every animal. When we're 24 hours out from shipping, the exporter's veterinarian checks the cattle and removes any considered not fit to travel," Paul said.

"A government vet will then also inspect the cattle with us and identify any they think should be removed before they sign off on behalf of the regulator.

"We do a truck plan which correlates with the shipping plan because cattle have to arrive at the port and be loaded on to the ship in a certain order, depending on their weight."

The logistics are immense and getting a load of cattle ready and on a ship provides the Reid River team with a great sense of accomplishment. ■



NORTHERN VALUE

A recent study found that Australia's live cattle export trade contributes \$1.4 billion to the national economy and employs 6,573 people.

THE IMPORTANCE OF the live export industry to regional communities is amplified in northern Australia, which contributes more than 80% of the direct value and is ideally suited to provide cattle to major markets in South East Asia.

THE MASSIVE CATTLE stations across the Top End are perfect for breeding animals, but don't have the right conditions to fatten them for processing. The climate is also best suited to tropical breeds of cattle such as Brahman, which do not produce the type of meat Australians traditionally eat.

This complements South East Asia, which has a similar climate and a preference for Brahman-type cattle. Many of these countries don't have the land available to breed enough cattle for their needs, so prefer to bring in animals almost ready for processing.

Indonesia, for example, is the largest market for live cattle and took more than 65% of all those exported from Australia in 2021-22. It has a lot of plant-based agricultural industries with high-energy waste products perfect for feeding to cattle, so typically buys lighter-weight animals that spend several months in feedlots.

Around 40% of all live cattle exports by sea were sent from Darwin in 2021-22. Other key hubs include Broome and Townsville. These regions have developed extensive infrastructure to support the trade, including mustering contractors, pre-export yards for quarantining livestock, fodder mills, livestock buying agents and port services for livestock ships.



Reid River Export Depot with 13,000 head of cattle in the yards.



Cattle at Reid River Depot are fed a mix of hay and shipper pellets when they first arrive.



If Australia's live cattle export trade were to stop immediately, the beef and cattle industry would **lose \$8.1 billion** over the next 20 years.



The Katherine, Barkly and Kimberley regions contribute more than **50% of the value** of live cattle exports from northern Australia.



Without live cattle exports, the value of grazing land in the Northern Territory would **decline by 34%**.

rumination

[roo-muh-ney-shuhn]

Noun

1. the act of pondering or musing on something

Understanding little of what was happening, I was semi-consciously storing away experiences, impressions, and ideas for later rumination.

2. the act or process of chewing the cud, as cattle, sheep, goats and some other animals do

Rumination helps cows efficiently turn grass and other feed into nutrient-dense milk.