

INDONESIAN ABATTOIRS — LIVE CATTLE TRADE SUSPENSION

Statement

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.05 pm]: Tonight, I would like to make a few comments about the knee-jerk decision to suspend the export of live cattle to Indonesia made on 8 June by the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Joe Ludwig. The decision was brought about after the showing of the *Four Corners* program on 30 May. I watched the footage and do not condone the cruelty towards the animals involved; especially since the majority of my life has been spent running livestock such as sheep, cattle and goats, in the pastoral areas of the Gascoyne. During that time, I sacked employees for cruelty to animals; it is certainly something that I would not put up with.

Last year, Western Australia exported some 370 000 head of cattle with about 80 per cent of those going to Indonesia. Over half the cattle came from the Kimberley; that is, some 185 000 head of cattle. The live cattle trade is worth some \$250 million to Western Australia. When I refer to dollars, I refer to export dollars; the real dollars, not the dollars circulating, or the extra dollars that come into our state.

For the moment, I will concentrate on the Kimberley, although the live cattle trade has been affected right across Australia. The ban on live cattle exports could not have come at a worse time. This is the dry season, when pastoralists muster, from May to September. This is their opportunity to muster their cattle, yard them, mark up the calves and send off the cattle for sale. Because they have only a six-month period in which to do all that, and this suspension could take up the whole six months, they will not have any income for this year. This, of course, will have a flow-on effect to all those other industries, including businesses from trucking to helicopter mustering, fuel companies and store provisions et cetera.

I have here an interesting open letter from a feed lot holder in Katherine in the Northern Territory. The letter was written by Cyndi Bakalian from Northern Feed and Cube in Katherine. I will read a bit of the letter —

My husband, Steve, and I own Northern Feed and Cube Pty Ltd in Katherine, Northern Territory.

We make stockfeed and our primary market is the live cattle trade from the Top End Ports of Wyndham, Darwin, Karumba, Maurilyan, Cairns and Townsville.

Of course, they say that the live export is not a portion of their business, but is their whole business. They have been stopped dead in their tracks. They have 12 employees and do not know what to do. The letter continues—

... after the suspension of Live Cattle to Indonesia we had 1 pre export order for the cattle that were now not going on a boat scheduled for the next few days. That has now been delivered and we have no orders. Not one order on our order board.

... we still have 12 full time employees. Employees who are counting on us to pay their wages, their super, their holiday and sick pay.

We are still irrigating hay that we have already paid to plant, ...

We still have contractors harvesting hay ...

We still have equipment being worked on at local mechanics.

We still have payments on vehicles and equipment ...

We still have maintenance that must be done on schedule ...

We still have to buy fuel for all of those to run, and pay for the fuel ...

And it goes on. I think that list is a good example of some of the costs facing some people after such a quick decision resulted in that trade no longer being there.

An economic analysis of that industry was completed in 2007. The industry employs some 7 000 people with over 1 000 of them employed in the north of Western Australia.

I am pleased to say that the minister, on behalf of the Western Australian government, has been active in this and I would go so far as to say that he has taken a lead role. The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Terry Redman, visited Port Hedland and Broome and met with interested parties, including exporters and pastoralists on Thursday, 9 June and Friday, 10 June. Hon Wendy Duncan and I attended the meeting on 10 June. We also met with a greater group of concerned pastoralists at Roebuck Plains Station, which is an Indigenous Land Corporation property located about 30 kilometres out of Broome. Three hundred and seventy people turned up for that from all over the Kimberley and the Pilbara. Hon Jon Ford was also there. Everyone expressed their plights, how they felt and where they were going. People were of course very concerned about the future.

Minister Redman then visited Indonesia. He returned only today. I will be interested to hear his views. I believe his visit was certainly the trigger that instigated the federal minister, Minister Ludwig, to also visit Indonesia.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: He was a bit slow.

Hon KEN BASTON: He may have been a bit slow, but it took the efforts of Western Australia to make him go over there. Yes, I agree; I believe as soon as the federal minister saw the *Four Corners* program he should have gone to Indonesia. If I had been the minister, I would have been over there the next day to work out a solution. There are abattoirs in Indonesia that meet Australian standards. I have not visited there, but I am certainly told that by good sources. We could use those abattoirs to continue to get the cattle in there. If we ban this trade to Indonesia, Indonesians will get cattle from somewhere else. We will not have any input into looking after the animals and improving the facilities for those animals to be killed. I believe it is imperative that we in Australia participate in that trade and that we look after those animals. Other animals will not be looked after. We certainly cannot guarantee it if we are not involved.