

Live Animal Exports: an Inhumane and Unnecessary Trade

**Peter Stevenson, Chief Policy Advisor,
Compassion in World Farming**

Each year millions of farm animals worldwide are transported very long distances to slaughterhouses or for further fattening. This trade is responsible for a huge amount of animal suffering. And it's completely unnecessary.

Compassion in World Farming (Compassion) agrees with the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe that "Animals should be reared as close as possible to the premises on which they are born and slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production".¹

The UK exported an estimated 80,000 sheep and young calves in 2011. Many of the calves are sent to be reared in continental veal units and sheep are exported for slaughter abroad. Compassion wants live exports from the UK to be brought to an end.

We are opposed to calf exports because of both (i) the detrimental impact of long journeys on calf welfare and (ii) the very poor rearing systems in which calves can be kept

“
**The UK exported
an estimated 80,000
sheep and young
calves in 2011**
”

on the continent. A review of the scientific literature by Dr Claire Weeks concludes that scientific evidence indicates that young calves are not well adapted to cope with transport.² Dr Weeks stressed that "[calf] transport should be avoided where possible; particularly as morbidity and mortality following transport can be high". Some British calves have been exported to Spain and calves from Northern Ireland have been sent to both Spain and Hungary; these exports entail extremely long journeys.

Once on the continent, the calves are sometimes reared in very barren systems in which they are kept on

concrete or slatted floors without any straw or other bedding. Such systems are illegal in the UK as UK legislation requires calves to be provided with appropriate bedding³ whereas there is no such requirement in EU law. We believe that it is wrong for UK calves to be sent for rearing abroad in systems that have been prohibited on welfare grounds in the UK.

Much of Europe is criss-crossed with long distance animal transport routes. For example, almost 3 million pigs are exported each year from The Netherlands on long journeys to Southern and Eastern Europe. Most are young pigs going to be fattened though some are being sent to distant abattoirs. The Netherlands also imports around 180,000 young calves each year from Poland, Lithuania and Ireland; this trade entails prolonged journeys for these delicate animals.

Unfortunately Council Regulation 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport permits these long journeys.⁴ The Regulation provides that where certain (not particularly demanding) vehicle standards are met, cattle and sheep can be transported

¹ http://www.fve.org/news/position_papers/animal_welfare/fve_08_016_transport.pdf

² http://www.ciwf.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/u/uk_calf_transport_and_veal_rearing.pdf

³ Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations, Schedule 6, paragraph 8(1). Similar legislation is in force in the other parts of the UK.

⁴ Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection

of animals during transport and related operations.
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:003:0001:0044:EN:PDF>

for 28 hours, pigs and horses for 24 hours and unweaned animals for 18 hours after which they must be unloaded and given food, water and at least 24 hours rest. This pattern of travel and rest can be repeated indefinitely. We are campaigning for the EU to place a maximum limit of 8 hours on journeys to slaughter or for fattening.

Welfare problems and poor enforcement

Animals in the EU are regularly packed into overcrowded trucks and are often given no, or far too little, food, water or rest. As the journeys progress, the animals become increasingly exhausted, dehydrated and stressed. Some get injured. Many



We are campaigning for the EU to place a maximum limit of 8 hours on journeys to slaughter or for fattening



journeys take place in extreme summer heat in severely overcrowded trucks with inadequate ventilation. Combined with water deprivation and the sheer length of the journeys, this leads to great suffering. In the worst cases, many animals die.

Reports by the European Commission's Food and Veterinary Office show that many transporters ignore key aspects of the Regulation

and many Member States fail to enforce it properly. Common breaches of the Regulation include: failure to give animals the rest, food and water required by the legislation for lengthy journeys; exceeding the permitted stocking density; insufficient headroom; failure to provide water on the vehicle; the use of vehicles that fail to meet the legislative standards for journeys exceeding eight hours; and the transport of ill or injured animals.

Live exports from EU to third countries

The EU exports a huge number of animals to third countries. It has, for example, recently developed a massive live export trade to Turkey; in 2011 over one million sheep and cattle were exported from the EU to Turkey.

Subsidies (export refunds) are available on the export of cattle from the EU to third countries for breeding. A European Commission paper reports that €8.6 million was paid in export refunds for live bovines in 2010.⁵ These refunds were paid in respect of the export of 70,147 cattle. Some of these animals were transported on extremely long journeys to Russia and Kazakhstan.

Although it is often assumed that breeding animals are transported in good conditions, the Commission paper reveals that some of the breeding cattle exported from the EU experienced very poor welfare. For example some gave birth or aborted during the journey, others were badly injured and yet others died. In a number of cases transport conditions

were found to be unsatisfactory as regards the provision of food and water. In all 2,149 cattle experienced welfare problems. Compassion believes that it is wrong for taxpayers' money to be used to subsidise a trade that entails much animal suffering.

Once the animals leave the EU they will be covered in some countries by the European Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport.⁶ This was made by the Council of Europe which has a much wider membership than the EU. Regrettably, however, few Council of Europe members outside the EU have signed and ratified the Convention.

Live exports from Australia and South America

Each year Australia exports over two million sheep by sea to the Middle East and over 500,000 cattle, mainly to South East Asia but also to the Middle East. The animals are often transported in overcrowded conditions and at certain times of year temperature and humidity are high and ventilation may be inadequate. A proportion of the sheep die en route from inanition (failure of grazing animals to adjust to the pellet food provided on the ship), disease and injury. The mortality rate is, however, only the tip of the iceberg. Many sheep who survive nonetheless suffer greatly from injury and disease, for example eye infections and even blindness, as well as from hunger, thirst, heat and exhaustion.

⁵ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st15/st15182.en11.pdf>

⁶ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/treaties/html/193.htm>

Brazil too exports cattle to the Middle East on sea journeys that take around 18 days. In a recent disaster 2000 Brazilian cattle died when the Gracia del Mar, which was carrying them to Egypt, encountered severe weather conditions.

Investigations by Animals Australia have repeatedly shown animals being subjected to immense cruelty during slaughter in the Middle East and South East Asia. The animals are usually not stunned. Their throats are cut while they are fully conscious and they are left to bleed to death, a process which in some cases can take several minutes. But it is not just a question of the lack of stunning; the pre-slaughter handling can be atrocious.

New film footage shows cattle in Egypt being beaten – very hard – on the head with a large pole. In many cases it takes several blows before the animal is so dazed that it falls to the ground when its throat is then cut. Other footage from Egypt shows slaughtermen slashing the leg tendons of cattle in order to control them.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (known as OIE, its historical acronym) has adopted Recommendations on welfare during transport and slaughter.⁷ These could have a beneficial impact but regrettably are ignored in many of the OIE's 178 member countries. The OIE has to date done far too little to persuade its members to put its Recommendations into effect. Compassion is calling on the OIE to adopt a leadership role in encouraging and assisting its

developing member countries to implement its Recommendations.



The long distance transport of animals for slaughter or fattening often entails great suffering. This trade should be brought to an end worldwide. Animals should be fattened on or near the farm where they are born. They should be slaughtered as near as possible to the farm of rearing with long distance trade being in the form of meat and carcasses.

⁷ http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=titre_1.7.htm