

Media Release

26 October 2011

Australian sheepmeat industry outlines plan for improved animal welfare in the Middle East

The sheepmeat industry today outlined its strategy to assure the welfare of Australian sheep in major Middle Eastern markets, including during the upcoming religious festival Eid al Adha.

Sheepmeat Council of Australia (SCA) President Kate Joseph said the plan comes ahead of the implementation of a new regulatory framework in 2012 for Australian livestock exports announced last week in the Australian Government's response to the Farmer Review.

"Industry has been proactively working in Australia's major sheep export markets – Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait – to address potential welfare issues, including during this year's Eid al Adha celebration," Ms Joseph said.

"Key to assuring the welfare of Australian sheep is the implementation by importers and importing governments of a 'no private sales' policy to unknown slaughter points in these markets. Instead, sheep will be processed in onsite or nearby facilities that comply with global animal welfare standards."

Australian Livestock Exporters' Council (ALEC) Chairman Peter Kane said the agreement to end private sales in these markets was a groundbreaking decision and represented a significant cultural shift for these countries.

"It must be remembered that we are dealing with complex cultural and religious tradition and that Australia has no jurisdiction in our overseas markets. Industry is, however, committed to continuing to deliver change through these activities and through implementation of the new regulatory framework." Mr Kane said.

SCA and ALEC welcomed the Farmer Review of the livestock export industry, which recommended the implementation in 2012 of a new framework assuring that Australian animals are only exported to audited supply chains that meet global animal welfare standards. In advance, Australia's livestock exporters are implementing plans through their supply chains to improve animal welfare outcomes in all Middle East markets.

SCA, as the policy group for sheepmeat producers, has directed the industry's service provider, Meat & Livestock Australia, to work with commercial operators in implementing necessary changes for Eid al Adha through the provision of specialist animal welfare skills and on the ground resources.

Background: Eid al Adha is one of the largest annual celebrations on the Muslim calendar. During the festival Muslims are required to sacrifice animals as an act of obedience to Allah. One third of the meat from these animals is eaten by immediate family and relatives, one third is given away to friends and one third is donated to the poor. Eid al Adha will be observed this year between November 6 and 9.

In 2010/11 2.9 million sheep valued at \$343.5 million were exported to Middle Eastern markets.

Ends.

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