

# ONLINE ARTICLE

<b>Title:</b>	"More live-export ban calls after 3000 cattle die"
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AN animal welfare disaster resulting in the death of more than half the 5000 cattle on board a Brazilian-owned live export ship bound for Egypt over the past fortnight has prompted renewed calls to ban the industry.

Animals Australia has described the incident as one of the worst shipboard disasters the live export industry has seen in many years.

The animal rights group has also pleaded with the Australian industry and government sources to provide emergency assistance for the surviving cattle, utilising its vast overseas resources.

On Monday, AA Campaign Director Lyn White expressed concerns the ship was still anchored at sea after being refused port access in a number of countries over the weekend including Egypt, where the cattle were originally meant to be offloaded.

AA said authorities were considering moving about 2000 remaining cattle onto smaller boats near Eritrea in the Horn of Africa.

But they said the boat to boat transfer was not the best option in terms of animal welfare and urged unloading straight onto dry land.

AA said by refusing access for the remaining animals on board the shipment, Egypt had breached its World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) obligations and had no confidence they would react any differently if a similar incident occurred in future, for a shipment of Australian animals.

An AA spokesperson said under the OIE obligations, of which Australia is a member, countries were obligated to provide assistance for any animals in danger.

"This is an international agreement and it makes us question why they would honour our memorandum of understanding (which is non-binding so not legal) when they are prepared to breach an international agreement between nations," Ms White said.

AA said it was working with international colleague groups to find refuge for the surviving 2000 cattle after Egyptian authorities refused to allow the animals to be unloaded.

Ms White said it was understood that ventilation problems on the recently converted livestock vessel, the MV Gracia Del Mar, had caused the deaths of more than half of the animals on board since the ship left South America for Egypt a few weeks ago and the ship has been anchored in the Red Sea for over a week.

“This is nothing short of an animal welfare disaster,” she said.

“If remaining cattle are not offloaded more of these animals will suffer appalling deaths at sea.

“We are appealing to authorities in Egypt to offload the remaining cattle at Al Sohkna, as was originally intended.”

Ms White said the disaster was another example of the inherent risks of transporting animals by sea.

She said nine years ago 5000 Australian sheep perished on board the MV Cormo Express after country after country refused to allow it to berth.

This isn't the first time that mechanical issues have caused mass deaths on live export ships, she said.

“We only need to look to the breakdown of the Al Messilah in Adelaide last year,” she said.

“Had that vessel broken down on the open ocean it would have caused a similar welfare catastrophe - as thousands of animals would have died.”

Ms White said Australia also exported cattle to the Al Sohkna Livestock company in Egypt.

But whilst Australia may have a MoU with Egypt - which should ensure the offloading of Australian animals - it has never been put to the test.

“It should not matter if these cattle aren't Australian and if Brazil doesn't have a similar piece of paper, they should not be abandoned to suffer and die at sea.”

The Federal Agriculture Department said the cattle involved in the incident are not Australian cattle.

The Department said it was informed on March 3 by Animal's Australia that a livestock vessel with cattle from Brazil bound for Egypt has had ventilation failure and that a large number of cattle had died with around 2000 live cattle still onboard.

Out of concern for the welfare of the remaining livestock on board and a desire to see this incident resolved quickly, Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer and official representative to the OIE has raised the incident with the OIE, a spokesperson said.

“Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the commercial players and those countries involved to resolve this incident.”

Live export industry members played down calls to ban the trade saying Australia's transport infrastructure was more modern and professional than the facilities and shipping vessels used by the Brazilian traders.

But that lack of comparative spending on modern infrastructure and capital outlay to convert ships, to improve animal welfare and live-stock handling standards, was also making it harder to compete with countries like Brazil that can sell cattle at a cheaper price, into markets where they compete against the Australian industry.

The Australian Live Exporters Council said Australian exporters complied with world's best practice on animal welfare.

ALEC Chairman Peter Kane said his organisation was aware of the situation with the Brazil cattle shipment to Egypt and wanted it resolved rapidly in the best interests of animal welfare.

"We understand the vessel in question does not service the live export trade out of Australia and does not meet the stringent standards set by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority," he said.

"For example in terms of ventilation systems, Australian vessels require a back-up power system, so if the system fails there are secondary generators to power the ventilation system and that is standard set for vessels servicing Australia.

"I don't believe it is a standard that is set elsewhere."

Mr Kane said under the MoU struck between Australia and a number of other countries in the Middle East, the signatories would be obliged to unload livestock, if similar circumstances occurred.

He said that was an additional safeguard for Australian animals.

Mr Kane said Australia had excellent infrastructure and facilities compared to other countries, which set high standards for animal welfare.

"The Australian requirements of live exports, managed by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, ensures we have the highest standards in the industry globally, probably the highest," he said.

"There are various back ups for the shipment of Australian live stock and that's why we have had a very good record in recent years."

RSPCA declined to comment saying AA was handling the issue.