



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION ISLAMABAD

17 September 2012

Response of Australian High Commissioner to press on Australian sheep consignment

The confusion around the delivery of a consignment of live sheep to Pakistan earlier this month is unfortunate, as is the suggestion that Australia would export diseased or inferior animals that would not be consumed at home. Australia is the world's leading supplier of high quality live cattle, sheep and goats to countries around the world, in particular throughout the Middle East and South-East Asia. We are held in high standing as a world leader in animal welfare and live exports. Our animal health status is one of the highest in the world, and this has been independently verified by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

The livestock delivered to Pakistan were inspected by the Australian Government and assessed to meet international standards. The animals were certified for export by the Australian Government and meet Pakistan's animal health requirements for imported sheep. The animal health requirements were verified with Pakistani officials before Australia issued the animal health certificate. The welfare and animal health of the sheep was closely monitored by an accredited veterinarian onboard the vessel and no major disease issues were reported. The animals were inspected by Pakistan's veterinary health officials on arrival and were approved as meeting Pakistan requirements.

The same ship that carried the sheep to Pakistan also delivered sheep to Muscat in Oman and Doha in Qatar where they were unloaded without incident and are being processed. The shipment of sheep was diverted to Pakistan to ensure the welfare of the sheep - not because of any significant human or animal health risk.

To the best of our knowledge, the sheep remain healthy and pose no risk for human consumption. There have been suggestions that they have scabby mouth. This is a common, minor disease in all sheep populations of the world. Scabby mouth is not notifiable to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the international body which deals with animal health matters. Nor is there any suggestion that there are risks to human health from eating animals with scabby mouth. In relation to other reported concerns, bacteria such as actinomyces, salmonella and E. coli are part of normal gut flora and are present in livestock throughout the world, and in this form pose no threat to human health. The sheep do not have foot and mouth disease – Australia is free of this and most other serious infections. We are surprised and concerned therefore, that culling of the animals has been initiated.

Australia has a reputation as a market leader in the export of live animals. While our current trade with Pakistan is low, both Australian and Pakistani exporters want to see the indices improve. To do this, we need the cooperation of federal and provincial authorities to ensure barriers are not placed on trade that are more restrictive than necessary for the protection of human and animal health.

The tests undertaken by the OIE show the sheep pose no human or animal health risks to Pakistan. For this reason, it is unclear why further testing was undertaken on sheep that were reported as healthy on initial examination. If necessary, any further verification of the health status of the sheep should be conducted by an OIE-accredited laboratory. I am confident that independent advice on the health of the animals will allow an early resolution to the confusion around the consignment.

Peter Heyward
Australian High Commissioner

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