



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Live Animal Exports

SPEECH

Monday, 25 June 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Cobb, John, MP

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Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (20:01): I rise to support my colleague the honourable member for Leichhardt on what is an incredibly important motion. The motion outlines the profound impact on our northern cattle industry due to the live export ban and condemns this government's pathetic effort to repair the massive damage to the industry and communities caused by an inept decision.

Live cattle export is a vitally important Australian industry. It is one of the few success stories in northern Australia and it has stood the test of time. In the first two weeks of this month, I was in the north of Western Australia and in Queensland. I will be discussing this issue with the cattle industry in the Northern Territory in the coming weeks. It is fair to say that the industry is being shattered by the ban that took place just over a year ago. In fact, the member for Durack and I were in Broome just a couple of weeks ago. It is fair to say that the industry is incredibly nervous about its future. Wherever the member for Durack and I were, the question people kept asking us was: what is our government doing to repair relations with the government that we totally ignored in making a political decision that we thought would gain us credence with a section of the Australian population?

The cattle industry in northern Australia is dynamic. It has great potential to increase production and provide protein to the Asian market. It has evolved over last 20 years. The reason it has evolved is that 17 abattoirs closed in that time in northern Australia because they went broke, they were unviable and they could not get people to work in them. Although this government does not seem to realise it, this is not an industry that can continue for 12 months of the year. These are incredibly hard-working Australians just trying to get on with their lives. They care for their cattle. I am a cattleman, and we do. Some people spend their whole life trying to improve a herd, and of course they care about the way the cattle are treated. Nobody wants better treatment for cattle than they do. They wanted this issue fixed but the government ignored them. It also ignored one of our nearest neighbours, certainly our biggest and most important neighbour of over a quarter of a billion people, who also wanted the issue dealt with. The government was paralysed by its own incompetence. It overreacted, shut down a \$360 million industry and created more welfare issues for cattle than it solved. No decision by this government or any other government has frightened Australian businesses as much as this unilateral decision to shut down the live export trade overnight without warning, let alone talking to our trading partners and customers in Indonesia.

The decision has also introduced sovereign risk as a factor for those trading with Australia. Indonesia is now looking for alternative markets right around the world because we have shown ourselves to be unreliable because of government interference. Our quotas have been cut for boxed meat. To all those who protested that the only way to solve this was to slaughter the animals in Australia and send out the processed meat: hello? Not only have we had our quotas cut for live cattle; the quotas for processed and boxed meat have been cut as well.

This immature action devastated our industry, and narrow guidelines and a poorly administered assistance package, mentioned very specifically and very articulately by the member for Leichhardt, have meant that worthy recipients have missed out on vital assistance funding and are struggling to recover. This was a panic decision in which they ignored, even though they had a pseudo-assistance package for the industry— (*Time expired*)