



Level 1, 40 Mount Street
North Sydney NSW 2060
PO Box 1174 North
Sydney NSW 2060
Telephone: 02 9929 6755
www.livecorp.com.au
ABN: 88 082 408 740

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Submission to consultation on the office of the Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports

The Australian Livestock Export Corporation (LiveCorp) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the consultation on the office of the Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports.

LiveCorp is the rural Research and Development Corporation (RDC) and service provider for the Australian livestock export industry. It provides research, development, extension and marketing services that maximise the productivity, sustainability and competitiveness of the industry. LiveCorp is funded through a statutory levy on the live export of beef and dairy cattle, sheep and goats.

LiveCorp works closely with exporters and other industry stakeholders (including the Australian Government), to continuously improve performance in animal health and welfare, supply chain efficiency, regulation and market access. A key aspect of LiveCorp's program to support the industry revolves around the collaborative relationship LiveCorp maintains with the Australian Government. LiveCorp does not engage in agri-political activity.

The Australian Government announced in October 2022 its intention of expanding the office of the Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports (IGLAE) into the Inspector-General of Animal Welfare and Live Animal Exports (IGAWLAE).

LiveCorp is pleased to provide this submission to the department's consultation on the establishment of the office of the IGAWLAE, and in particular in response to questions regarding the use and reporting of animal welfare data.

The consultation paper presents two specific questions concerning the possible expansion of public reporting of animal welfare data via Parliamentary reports or the department's website. LiveCorp questions whether these are appropriate questions for this current public consultation process, and whether they are instead more suitable for examination by the IGAWLAE once established.

Further, noting the complexities highlighted below in regard to the measurement, reporting, analysis, interpretation, and regulatory use of animal welfare data, LiveCorp would recommend careful consideration before making any expansions to government reporting.

Animal welfare is a core focus for the livestock export industry and addressing its complexity has been a priority program of work for LiveCorp and the Livestock Export RD&E Program (a jointly funded collaboration between LiveCorp and Meat & Livestock Australia).

As part of this program of work, the RD&E Program has invested in research projects aimed at identifying meaningful, objective and standardised animal welfare indicators to complement the current use and recording of mortality. These include a university project that identified standardised indicators of animal welfare that moved beyond mortality as the primary measure used by industry (*Animal welfare indicators pilot program for the livestock export industry*, see final report [here](#)); and the *Shipboard Animal Welfare Surveillance* (SAWS) project which developed practical measurement protocols for implementing the animal welfare indicators on livestock voyages (see research report [here](#) and a full summary of the work-to-date [here](#)).

The SAWS project allowed LiveCorp to move forward with developing and rolling out a standardised and centralised data collection and analysis system for the industry, known as LIVEXCollect. This development occurred in close collaboration with the department, and LIVEXCollect now supports the collection of regulatory data against the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (ASEL).

Improving the quality and consistency of that data is now an important goal that LiveCorp is working towards with the support of the department. Projects to develop a digital data collection and reporting application, and training for shipboard veterinarians and stockpersons in how to identify, measure and interpret animal welfare measures are now underway. Animal welfare measures have only been collected through LIVEXCollect for a relatively short time and there is a need for the system to mature, along with the regulatory structures and use of data.

In addition, the RD&E Program has initiated a project in 2023 which aims to develop a science-based approach to interpreting animal welfare measures and data to provide a more holistic and objective assessment of welfare than can be provided through the interpretation of any individual measures/data.

In its *Implementation of Moss Review recommendations* review report, the IGLAE acknowledged LiveCorp and the RD&E Program's work in this area and identified the SAWS project as a valuable starting point for the department to work with the industry. The IGLAE has also previously acknowledged that the livestock export industry collects a combination of qualitative and quantitative (animal welfare) data and recommended the department and industry collaboratively develop quality guidance material, training, and competency assessment processes to reduce subjectiveness in data interpretation (projects which, as noted above, are underway).

LiveCorp also notes that the department currently publishes significant amounts of data that support transparent reporting on the livestock export industry, including in formats that are not deidentified or aggregated – for example, the Parliamentary reports provide individual exporter names and commercial shipment information such as dates of shipments, ports, and export volumes. Further expansions of the public reporting should necessarily be required to meet a high threshold in terms of defined regulatory purpose and interpretation, objectivity, and quality of data – and particularly so where the data is individually identifiable (in which case, it must be clear why the same outcome could not be achieved through deidentified or aggregated reporting).

Additionally, the general public may not typically have the context or understanding to meaningfully interpret animal welfare indicators, particularly where regulatory thresholds have not been set for measures other than mortality.

LiveCorp is seeking to understand public attitude toward the livestock export industry through its multi-year Community Sentiment research project. This is aimed at supporting LiveCorp and the industry to understand and respond to the concerns of the Australian community. The use of data and information from R&D and from LIVEXCollect in formats that can be easily interpreted forms part of that approach.

Findings from the Community Sentiment research also suggest that the general public are not necessarily seeking specific or granular details about the industry's performance; rather, they perceive good regulation itself as a driver of trust, providing assurance that standards are being applied and met. This can be achieved through the development of evidence-based standards and regulation based on science and the meaningful interpretation of data.

Australian regulators have the advantage of Rural Research and Development Corporations as a reputable and trusted source of scientific research and analysis as they leverage government and industry investment to advance Australian agriculture through research, industry services and marketing. LiveCorp will continue to invest in research and services that improve the industry's understanding, monitoring and reporting of animal welfare, including in collaboration with the department where appropriate. LiveCorp looks forward to also working closely with the new IGAWLAE.