Why is the RSPCA opposed to the live export trade?

The export of live sheep, cattle and goats for slaughter has serious welfare problems — some relate to transport conditions resulting in high mortalities and others relate to a lack of control over what happens to animals once they reach the importing countries.

The RSPCA's stated and longstanding policy is to oppose the export of live animals for slaughter.

Instead, the RSPCA advocates the further development and adoption of a chilled and frozen meat-only trade. This would mean animals are slaughtered in Australia to Australian animal welfare standards, processed at Australian facilities and then their meat exported.
Farm animals exported from Australia face a journey of up to a month from the farm gate to their overseas destination. Prevailing weather conditions and requirements of the importing country can considerably increase the length of the journey. The main welfare concerns relate to:

- the duration of lot feeding prior to embarkation;
- the conditions animals are subjected to aboard ships, which often result in inanition (exhaustion from lack of nourishment), salmonellosis, heat stress, pneumonia, and high mortality rates;
- extreme changes in climatic conditions from the farm of origin to the importing country;
- inadequate contingency planning for when animals are rejected at the ports of importing countries; and
- poor handling and slaughter practices in the importing countries.
The RSPCA has long maintained that livestock should be slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production to avoid the suffering associated with their transport. The trade in live farm animals from Australia, which requires transporting millions of animals over thousands of kilometres on arduous journeys which can last several weeks, could not be further from this principle.
Apart from the general suffering resulting from long-distance transport there is a history of disasters at sea in which thousands of animals have died. On long voyages, only mortality rates of 2% for sheep and 1% of cattle will trigger an investigation. So on a voyage involving 70,000 sheep, 1,400 must die before the cause of death is properly investigated. In practice, ‘acceptable’ mortality rates are exceeded on a regular basis.
Once livestock reach their port of destination the animals are outside the control of Australian law. The Australian Government cannot ensure that exported livestock are slaughtered humanely once they have left Australia. Despite claims by the government and industry that this system protects Australian animals, the reality is that Australian Government regulation does not have legal effect in foreign jurisdictions and the standards it attempts to impose do not.
reflect the expectations of the Australian public. Extensive evidence gathered from importing
countries has shown inhumane slaughter and handling practices that would be contrary to
Australian laws and standards.

At their destination, exported animals may spend several months at a feedlot for fattening, or
may be transported directly to a slaughtering facility. Under Australian Government regulation
the animals are not permitted to be sold to individual buyers, however, ‘leakages’ from approved
supply chains occur regularly. Animals that are taken outside approved supply chains are
exposed to even greater welfare risks. Evidence has shown that individual buyers in some
countries will often transport sheep in car boots and on roof-racks in temperatures that may
exceed 40°C. To prevent the sheep from moving their legs are tightly bound together with wire.
Cattle have been documented travelling on the back of utility trucks with only a few ropes to prevent them falling off.

Sheep have been shown being herded into a slaughtering facility, and then dragged one by one to the slaughtering area where their throats are cut and they are left to bleed to death over a drain. In some importing countries, cattle have been shown to face even more horrific deaths. In
slaughtering halls, they have had their tendons slashed and sometimes their eyes gouged in

order to bring them down and, finally, they have their throats cut, often with blunt knives

requiring multiple cuts, and are left to bleed to death. Cattle and sheep destined for ‘home

slaughter’ are no better off and may face equally cruel slaughter methods.

Even when animals remain in approved supply chains they are still permitted to be slaughtered
In Australia, the slaughter of livestock is strictly regulated. Animals intended for slaughter must first be rendered insensible (stunned), then killed before they can regain consciousness.

Unfortunately, for livestock transported outside of Australian jurisdiction, it is impossible to ensure their humane handling and slaughter. In addition to this, no amount of government
regulation can address the significant welfare issues that are inherent to the transport process itself. See article ‘How is the live export trade regulated?’ below for further information about the failings of the regulatory framework governing live export.

The adoption of a chilled and frozen meat-only trade would prevent the suffering inherent in long-distance sea transport and save millions of animals from the cruel fate awaiting them at
their destination.

Visit: https://www.rspca.org.au/live-export#