

MV *CORMO EXPRESS*, QUARANTINE SECURITY PROTOCOLS

1417. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

- (1) Will the minister please outline the quarantine security protocols that will be in place should the sheep aboard the MV *Cormo Express* be returned to Western Australia?
- (2) Has any consideration been given to returning these sheep to Western Australian farms?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

The answer to part (1) of the question is lengthy and I therefore seek leave to have the answer incorporated into *Hansard*.

[Leave granted.]

The following material was incorporated -

- (1) In considering the issues associated with a possible return of sheep aboard the MV *Cormo Express* to Western Australia I have written to the Hon Warren Truss of the Australian Government requesting assurances

- that the Australian Government present a formal, written approach to the Western Australian Government, followed by detailed discussions on the minimisation of disease risks, logistical and legal issues and costs;
- that it was the conclusion of the Risk Evaluation that there was no unacceptable disease risk or quarantine risk in such a proposal;
- that an off-shore full veterinary examination of the animals reached a similar conclusion;
- that the strictest quarantine measures be enforced during the disembarkation and holding process;
- that the sheep would remain under Australian quarantine orders and therefore would not 'legally' enter WA;
- that the operation of unloading, transport, holding, slaughter and disposal were matters to be managed by the Australian Government under the appropriate Federal legislation;
- that all costs involved in the operation be borne by the Australian Government; and
- that the terms of the Australian Government's quarantine management strategy were communicated to WA's major markets for livestock.

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The quarantine arrangements that would be put in place should the sheep aboard the MV *Cormo Express* be returned to Western Australia are described in the Frequently Asked Questions on the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website. These state that the sheep would only be landed on the Australian mainland when comprehensive clinical examination and sampling conducted off the Cocos Islands during the return voyage showed no evidence of exotic pests or diseases of concern. A comprehensive strategy is being developed to address biosecurity risks if the vessel were to return to mainland Australia. This would include:

- restricting access to the vessel by managing it as a restricted quarantine area
- off-loading and transporting the sheep within Australia under tight control to maintain maximum biosecurity and animal welfare standards
- not allowing cattle, sheep or pigs within a quarantine buffer zone around the wharf where the *Cormo Express* docks or around the transport corridor for a period longer than the maximum incubation time for the pests and diseases of concern
- not permitting working animals such as sheep dogs or companion dogs and cats near the wharf unless sheep dogs are needed for mustering (and, if so, placing them in quarantine afterwards)
- not allowing fodder to be off-loaded from the vessel while it is in port.
- strictly controlling access of people to the vessel and ensuring that anyone given access wears suitable protective clothing
- disinfecting people leaving the vessel and ensuring that anyone, including the crew, who come in contact with the sheep, have their clothing disinfected

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- inspecting all equipment removed from the vessel for material that could carry pests or diseases and ensuring it is cleaned and disinfected before being allowed to leave the quarantine area.
 - ensuring waste material at the wharf is collected, bagged in plastic, sterilised and then deeply buried
 - ensuring waste remaining on board is dealt with at sea after the sheep are off-loaded
 - keeping the environment around the wharf as clean as possible so as not to attract insects, rodents, cats, birds and other wildlife
 - ensuring measures are taken to control the movement of insect vectors
 - putting surveillance in place before the vessel's arrival, and for a period after the operations conclude to ensure that biosecurity arrangements are effective
- (2) Responsibility for this matter rests with the Australian Government, which is exploring all options for dealing with sheep on board the MV Cormo Express. I am not aware of any consideration being given to returning the sheep to WA farms.
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I am able to answer some of this question verbally, because I believe other members of the House will be interested. The Western Australian Government does not favour returning the sheep to Western Australia at all. However, given the information currently available to us, that seems to be the best of a bad lot of options. I have very much appreciated the support that the National Party has given to that view, which is obviously conditional. It is not something that we want to do. In any case, it will rely on a thorough risk evaluation report and a very thorough process of evaluating the health of the animals. It may still be that if the evaluation of the health of the animals does indicate a threat that is considered too great, those sheep will not return to Western Australia. I singled out the National Party because the question was asked by a National Party member, but a number of other political groupings, including One Nation, have also provided some support for that concept.

In the event that those sheep are returned to Western Australia, the chance of them ever going to Western Australian farms is effectively nil. There is some degree of probability that the sheep may return to Western Australia's shores. The member will note when he reads the answer to part (1) of the question that one of the things the Government has insisted is that, in the event that the sheep do return to Western Australia, they remain at all times under the control of Australian quarantine orders; that is, they will not actually legally enter Western Australia but will remain in commonwealth jurisdiction during their entire stay, as short as that might be, in Western Australia. The chances of their breaking out of that boundary inserted by Australian quarantine orders, legally or illegally, and returning to farms, legally or illegally, is virtually nil.