

Israeli PM Netanyahu says Lucy Turnbull has given promise on sheep issue

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Lucy Turnbull has promised to help remedy animal cruelty in Australia's live sheep trade, after she contacted his wife in response to a personal appeal.

Sara Netanyahu last week put up a video following the 60 Minutes pictures, shot by a whistleblower crewman, of an August consignment by Emanuel Exports in which 2400 sheep died. She indicated she was contacting Mrs Turnbull, saying they were friends.

Her husband posted remarks on Facebook, saying "the video of my wife Sara on the suffering of animals, created waves in Israel and abroad and reached all the way to Australia. Her friend - the wife of the Australian Prime Minister - Lucy Turnbull called my wife and promised to help and remedy the wrongs.

"The ministers of agriculture of both countries will be in touch in this important issue. I am proud in my wife whose concern to animals enters the heart of mine and of many others and motivates to action," he said.

Government sources said the thrust of Mrs Turnbull's message was to agree with Mrs Netanyahu's concern, indicate the Australian government was acting, and say that Agriculture Minister David Littleproud would speak to the Israeli agriculture minister.

The conversation between the two agriculture ministers is expected to take place early this week.

Meanwhile Animals Australia has written to the secretary of the federal Agriculture department asking why Emanuel Exports has not had its export licence suspended, "given the extensive evidence of non-compliance with regulations on ships, and their track record of regulatory breaches in importing countries."

Animals Australia has sent a document to parliamentarians detailing breaches of standards in

the trade to the Middle East. It says that “since 2005 Emanuel Exports’ two directors have been associated with shipments exceeding 1000 sheep deaths on 37 occasions, including 12 ‘reportable’ incidents since 2006”.

Emanuel Exports has the Awassi Express – the ship on which the August deaths occurred - currently waiting to leave Fremantle. It is being held up because the Australian Maritime Safety Authority is requiring changes to ventilation arrangements.

On Friday the Agriculture department announced it had suspended the supply of sheep to a Qatar abattoir after seeing footage provided by Animals Australia. The footage was shown on 60 Minutes on Sunday.

In a statement the department said Animals Australia had given the footage to it on April 9, alleging breaches of the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS).

“The allegations include apparent on-selling of sheep to private buyers from the approved supply chain, and mishandling of sheep at an ESCAS approved abattoir in Qatar. Supply of animals to the abattoir was immediately suspended and any animals already at the abattoir have been removed.”

The department said it was investigating other allegations from Animals Australia made since March 1 relating to Middle Eastern markets.

Meanwhile the WA Agriculture Minister, Alannah MacTiernan has received legal advice saying it is most likely the state has power to stop a vessel leaving when it is believed the animals would suffer.

But MacTiernan on Sunday stressed it was not the WA government’s wish to try to act unilaterally on the live sheep issue - it wanted to work co-operatively with the federal government.

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A senior federal Liberal backbencher, former minister Sussan Ley, last week called on the Turnbull government to end the trade.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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