

Australia to probe new cattle cruelty video

CANBERRA: Australia will investigate new images appearing to show cattle being mistreated at an Indonesian abattoir, and could reimpose an export ban on the slaughterhouse if it broke animal welfare rules, Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig said yesterday.

Australia suspended live cattle exports to Indonesia for a month in 2011 after a video showing cows being beaten and whipped before slaughter was aired on Australian television. The footage outraged many Australians, while the government response angered farmers who said the move jeopardised Australian jobs.

Fresh footage that animal rights activists said showed cows being inhumanely treated in an Indonesian abattoir were broadcast in Australia late on Tuesday, prompting calls for Australia to end the US\$340 million (RM1.03 billion) live cattle trade with its biggest customer, Indonesia.

"There will be mistakes, there will be slips, but the system ensures we can deal with those slips and mistakes," Ludwig told Australian radio.

He said an independent regulator would investigate the latest incident. Under rules introduced after last year's outcry, the Australian government requires exporters to

ensure animal welfare standards are met at the Indonesian abattoirs they supply, and can punish firms which ship cows to where cruelty occurs.

Animal rights group Animals Australia said the latest images came from an Indonesian investigator and showed workers slitting a cow's throat without first stunning it, as required under the new rules.

"Australians will rightfully feel betrayed to know that despite government assurances, the cruel treatment of cattle is continuing," Animals Australia's campaign director Lyn White said.

The Australian Greens said the latest incident proved Australia needed to suspend live animal exports.

"We don't have confidence in the present system," Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon said.

Industry bodies, the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association and the Cattle Council of Australia, rejected calls for any suspension of animal exports, and said the new rules for trade with Indonesia would allow authorities to fix problems with individual abattoirs.

"Last year when that happened there was no system of regulation which sat underneath the industry in Indonesia," Cattlemen's Association head Luke Bowen said. - Reuters