

Opinion

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THE VOICE OF THE COUNTRY SINCE 1869

Focus needed on China bid

IF our story on today's front page does not force the Federal Government to pay some attention to foreign investment, then nothing will.

Shanghai Zhongfu aims to control two-thirds of the irrigated land in what is probably Australia's biggest irrigation scheme.

This is as significant a single bid for Australian farm land and water as we have seen.

And it raises too many issues to list.

Shanghai Zhongfu has cunningly offered to develop infrastructure as a method of accessing our land and water in an undeveloped region of the nation, just as it has done in Africa to access mineral resources there.

It is also understood it aims to force the hands of the Northern Territory and West Australian governments by refusing to take just one parcel of land — it wants the lot, on both sides of the border — and wants native title and environmental approvals hastened on the Northern Territory side.

Western Australia reassures us it may offer the company only a 50-year lease. But a lot can change in 50 years.

The West Australian Government intends to allocate permanent water according to which crop the landowner intends to grow, as it aims to take speculation out of the market and ensure the land is farmed. If Shanghai Zhongfu grows sugar as it has said it will, it would be allocated at least 510,000 megalitres, or a quarter of the region's currently allocated water.

Furthermore, it will be able to do much more with that water than farmers in the already developed Ord land — that parcel was developed in the 1960s with inferior infrastructure.

It's difficult not to feel for the nine other bidders for the land and water, including the Australian Agricultural Company. Those bidders face market forces and need to make a profit from the investment.

They're probably competing against a government-owned company with unlimited funding which does not aim to profit financially.

China wants to be self-sufficient in food and fuel. Buying our land and water is a way for it to achieve that. China's plan is not to improve the production capacity of this land and then hand it back to Australia.



Moove on: It's time for Australia to ban live animal exports, according to Last Chance for Animals.

Our ships of shame

AUSTRALIA'S Government refuses to listen to its people.

Every day countless Australians ask the Federal Government to end the cruel live animal export trade.

But Parliament doesn't care enough to respond and as a result, the global community thinks Australia has aligned itself with barbarity.

Much to the country's shame, the Federal Government's animal welfare framework has failed.

The live export industry continues to expand into new markets with full knowledge that routine slaughter practices in importing countries fall well below standards expected by the Australian people.

New footage and reports of exporters, transporters, and slaughterhouses allowing animal abuse pours out of Indonesia, Turkey and the Middle East.

Adding insult to injury, industry trade group Meat and Livestock Australia makes a concerted effort to convince

Live exports are damaging the long-term interests of Australia, writes CHRIS DEROSE

Australians and the world that "Australia has become an international leader in the development of industry welfare standards and guidelines".

This attempt at propaganda would be laughable if it wasn't so offensive.

Having lived in Australia and returned many times, it angers me to see this group assuming Australians are so stupid and gullible.

One of Australia's most distinguished families, the Murdochs, publicly condemned the live export trade as unethical and bad for long-term business growth.

Rupert Murdoch told me in person he does not support live animal exports.

Dame Elisabeth Murdoch was one of 58 prominent Australians who signed a public notice condemning live exports and asking for an outright ban.

Consumers abroad who pur-

chase Australian agricultural products, support Australia's travel industry and invest in Australia's financial markets share this sentiment.

If the Gillard Government continues to refuse to answer to its people, it will have no choice but to respond to economic silence from abroad.

On January 24, the Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig wrote: "Australia is world-renowned for the quality and safety of our agriculture produce and our reliability as a trading partner. Maintaining this standing is pivotal to the success of our agricultural trade."

Mr Ludwig concludes by looking forward to ensuring Australia's producers "remain some of the most highly regarded and productive in the world".

According to the National Farmers' Federation, however, the number of people employed

in agriculture has decreased by 18,000 from last year.

Agricultural communities across Australia carry the burden of the live animal export trade. It means nothing for the country's farmers to continue to produce high-quality goods when government allows greedy businessmen to exchange Australia's world standing for profit. The long-term outcomes clearly outweigh any short-term gains.

You're doing what your government asks of you. Demand they do what you ask of them. Refuse to let them put the burden of an ugly business on your shoulders.

Speak out against this trade and ask the Government to be accountable to the people.

One person can make a difference.

The louder you are, the more they will be forced to listen.

• Chris DeRose is the president and founder of Last Chance for Animals, a US non-for-profit animal rights group





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