

Saturday soapbox



ONE-WAY TRIP: Cattle are prepared for live export.

Short-term gain no excuse for long-term pain

Don't let greedy businessmen and neglectful politicians speak for Australians when it comes to live animal exports, says Chris DeRose

AUSTRALIAN'S Government refuses to listen to its people.

Every day countless Australians ask the Government to end the cruel and inhumane 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, Julia Gillard's animal welfare framework 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 and the global community.

New footage and reports of exporters, transporters and slaughterhouses allowing animal abuse on a level the international community rejects pour 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 Australians and the world that "Australia has become an international leader in the development of industry welfare standards and guidelines".

With a Government actively ignoring its people and industry leaders who care more about profits than morality, 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 export. Dame Elizabeth Murdoch was one of 58 prominent Australians who signed a public notice condemning live export and asking for an outright ban.

Consumers abroad who purchase 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, Minister for Agriculture 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."

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

However, according to the National Farmers Federation, 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 the Government allows greedy businessmen to exchange Australia's world standing for profit. The long-term outcomes here 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.

It's unfair, selfish and lazy for any government to ignore its people simply for temporary profit, especially when those short-term gains will inevitably hurt the long-term wellbeing of its people.

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 president and founder of Last Chance for Animals. Mr DeRose has spent more than 40 years advocating for people with disabilities, children and animals. He is also a writer, speaker and investigator.**

Talkin' 'bout

A mini baby boom is bulging through Tasmania's ageing population. It is in our interests that they are well educated, writes demographer Natalie Jackson

AT the 2004 Budget, Australians were encouraged by then treasurer Peter Costello to go forth and multiply: "One for the father, one for the mother, and one for the country."

The subsequent increase in birth numbers – which actually began a year before Costello's exhortation – is presently delivering the largest birth cohorts ever born in Australia.

The increase in births has only a modest connection with Costello's baby bonus. Other factors, such as a large reproductive age cohort that had delayed much of its childbearing, are also involved.

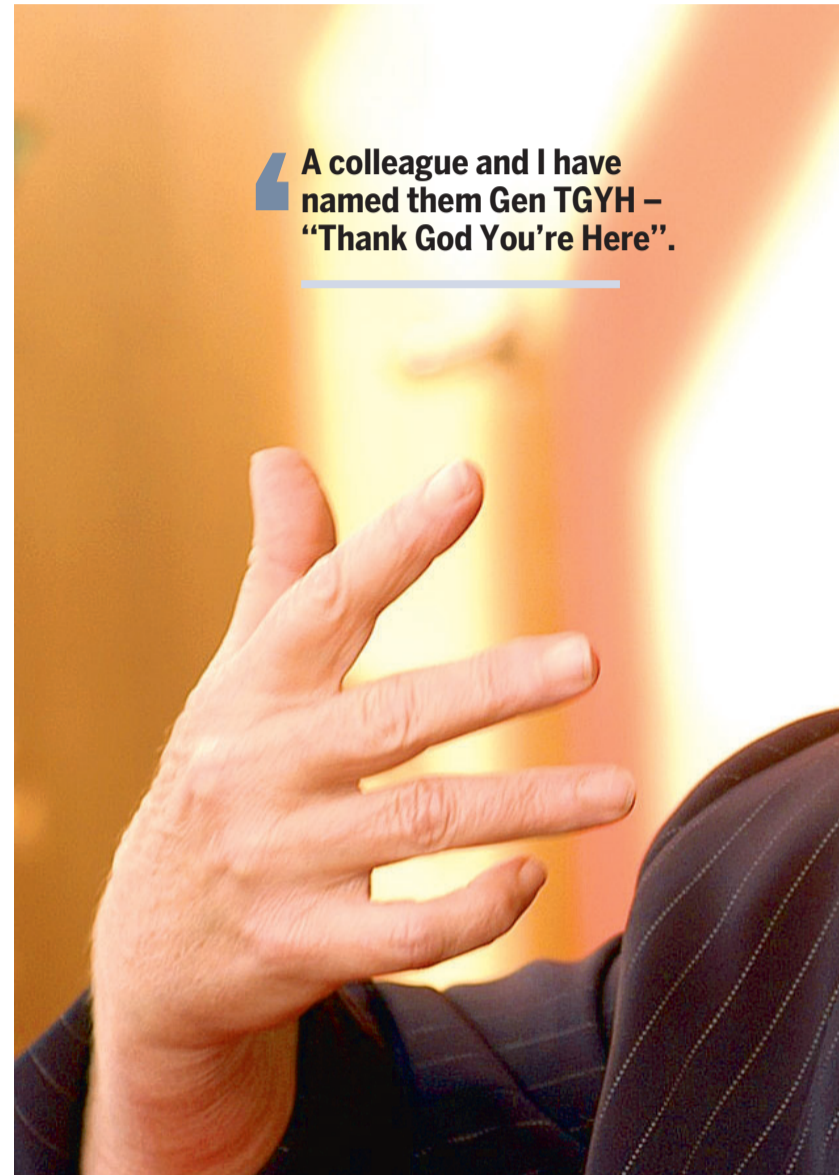
Nevertheless, numbers are well up, about 8 per cent above their previous peak year of 1971, and the question on my lips is to what extent these much-encouraged and indeed subsidised births will continue to be valued and supported as their bounty weaves its way through childhood and into the young adult years?

Will we see these precociously desired youngsters squeezed into the temporary classrooms that were the lot of their Baby Boomer grandparents?

Will teacher-to-pupil ratios be forced down even further than at present, or will vision prevail and an appropriate number of teachers and eventually lecturers be provided to respond to this diverse and IT-savvy, education-hungry multitude?

The question is important, because this bumper crop will play a very important role in Australia's future.

▲ A colleague and I have named them Gen TGYH – "Thank God You're Here".



They will start arriving at the door of the labour market at exactly the same moment the largest Baby Boomer cohorts (born in the early 1960s) retire.

Australia is already short of skilled labour, and by the time this "baby bonus" makes its way to labour market age, that situation will be dire. Indeed, if we don't plan ahead very quickly, we will struggle to have sufficient teachers and lecturers around to teach them!

The taxes of this bounteous group will then help boost an economy by then slowed by the passage of the Boomers out of the highest income-earning age groups, and their (probably top-notch) earnings will help them buy up the homes of the said Boomers.

For these reasons a colleague and I have named them Gen TGYH – "Thank God You're Here".

The question regarding how much we will value and support Gen

Gillard is in no rush

HERE'S a novel thought. Julia Gillard might be right when she says she'll lead Labor to the next election.

It's hard to believe, given all the chatter about a leadership change in the corridors of Parliament House.

"One more cock-up and that's it. She won't survive."

"The NSW Right is moving. Joel Fitzgibbon [Chief Government Whip] has dropped her, no matter what he says publicly."

"Richo says she's got a month. If things haven't improved by then, she's gone."

"John Howard knows what he's talking about. They'll dump her for Rudd."

But it ain't necessarily so. Having rejected the chance to change leaders in February, Labor MPs might not get another opportunity, no matter how despairing they become.



LAURIE OAKES

And they are despairing. There is no doubt about that.

Labor's primary vote, now at a paltry 27 per cent, is still heading south, and the party is looking at the kind of electoral disaster that could threaten its very survival.

The clumsy handling of the Peter Slipper mess and the grubby Craig

Thomson affair reminded Caucus yet again of Gillard's lousy political judgment.

Gloomy Labor MPs admit they have their fingers crossed that there won't be more prime ministerial ham-fistedness to mess up the selling of Tuesday's Budget.

So far the Budget sales pitch has gone pretty well. The advance messaging about the importance of moving back into surplus has been strong, reinforced by the Reserve Bank's hefty interest rate cut.

And while it might have been bungled, the sidelining of Slipper and Thomson did enable Budget news – the carefully arranged leaks of key aspects – to break through the distractions of political scandal.

Those in the know say Wayne Swan's fifth budget will reflect solid Labor values. Crucially, focus group research tells them that, despite some disagreement among