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Our ref: MC249992/LH

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From Rt Hon Jim Paice MP
Minister of State for Agriculture and Food

Dear Keith,

Thank you for your letter of 4 October about the export of live animals for slaughter.

The Government is committed to improving the welfare of animals. If animals are exported live, their transportation should be high quality and comply with welfare in transport rules.

The live export trade is, however, a lawful trade. We cannot unilaterally ban it, as it would contravene EU free trade rules. This has been confirmed in the outcome of two European Court of Justice cases and a number of high court cases in the mid-1990's. Perhaps the most significant of these was in 1995, when the High Court was very firm in criticism of two port authorities and a County Council that attempted to block live exports over concerns about potential protests against the live export trade. The same criticism (and the potential for damages to be awarded against the authorities concerned) could be expected if similar action was to be taken by port authorities or local authorities against those legitimately exporting live animals today.

Nevertheless, despite these legal constraints, the Government would prefer animals to be slaughtered as close as practicable to their point of production, and we consider a trade in meat and meat products to be preferable to the long distance transport of animals to slaughter.

We will ensure that current rules on long journeys (e.g. rest periods, adequate access to water and feed) are properly enforced in this country.

We will be making our views clear in Brussels. We will play a full part in updating of the European law on welfare in transport and will continue to work with welfare, industry and enforcement organisations to identify where improvements might be made.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Paice". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

RT HON JIM PAICE MP