

**Opening Remarks to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture
Tuesday, 12th February 2019
Ray Doyle, Livestock Services Executive**

Ireland has over 6.7 million cattle, producing approximately 2.4 million calves annually. This results in almost 1.7 million cattle being presented for slaughter, of which we export almost 90%. Almost 1.8 million cattle and 750,000 sheep are traded through the livestock marts in 2018 and we can have between 200,000 - 300,000 of live exports depending on year. This trade is vital in maintaining competition in the marketplace and acts as a counter veiling force against the beef processing sector which is dominated by 4 private companies. Ireland has always been a provider of live cattle for export to Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, other European countries and 3rd country exports such as North Africa and Turkey. As a nation, we are only consuming approximately 10% of what we produce and in 2018, Ireland produced over 480,000 tonnes of beef meat for export.

The United Kingdom on the other hand is only approximately 75% self-sufficient in beef meat and must import approximately 350,000 tonnes of additional beef to satisfy national demand. Ireland supplies the vast majority of this imported beef meat as you would expect due to our proximity. In 2018, Ireland produced and exported over 250,000 tonnes of beef meat to the UK representing almost 70% of their total imports. With Brexit only 6 weeks away, we should be promoting as much live export as possible to all possible countries to counteract the potential drop in sales volumes into the UK especially if a hard Brexit were to initiate large tariffs on beef and sheep meat.

It will not be in the Irish beef and sheep farmers best interest if this valuable source of competition is lost with little or no real scientific argument to back it up other than emotive stances taken by NGO's. The beef processing industries and large multiples would be delighted with a ban on live export as it would allow them to stifle and manipulate the prices that the primary producer receives as much as possible. The meat industry and UK multiples are fully aware that when live exports are buoyant, prices rise and by ensuring the live trade is hindered ensures a depressed live trade price and a cheaper raw material price for them. Irish and all European farmers need to get a fair and true market value for their stock and this can only happen when you have multiple avenues of competition for livestock.

Irish livestock marts adhere to stringent EU legislation and so too does our live exporters. This is the correct thing to do, as maintaining high animal welfare standards is not just the right thing to do, its good business as any animal that performs poorly or potentially dies during transport represents an economic loss and nobody wants this to occur.

It's hugely important that the live export sector is heavily regulated and it is under 1/2005 which is enacted to the letter of the law in Ireland by our DAFM. If all EU countries ensured compliance with 1/2005 the NGO's would have very little cause for complaint with EU transporters of cattle and sheep. This is the real issue with live animal transport in the EU, current legislation is not being enforced in some eastern European member states and the reaction by NGO's and some members of the EU parliament is to simply ban live transport, this is flawed logic. The consumer demands high animal welfare standards and ICOS agrees with this approach but we need to promote, foster and enhance full compliance in other EU countries also as simply banning live transport of all animals could potentially cause bigger animal welfare issues in the future. For example, if the lesser quality dairy calves could not be exported to Holland and Spain, as they have been for the last few years,

what would happen all calf prices? Would this trigger animal welfare issues where animals were worthless? What we currently have in the form of EU regulation 1/2005 does exactly as it states “the protection of animals during transport” and as long as member states abide by the regulation there is no animal welfare reason to crudely ban all live exports.

Our DAFM enacts a very stringent interpretation of 1/2005 and while on a practical level some exporters and farmers mightn’t agree with all aspects of it, it has and will safeguard our live exports into the future. Everything has to be done in full compliance with the regulations regarding stocking densities, disease status, planned routes and adherence to regulated unloading at lairages for example in France, where calves are fed, given a rest period and then reloaded – that all has to be and is currently properly managed.”

All live transport but especially from Ireland comes under “**huge scrutiny**” from prominent animal welfare groups during peak calf export season.

There are animal welfare lobby groups and action groups that monitor us very closely, in addition to the regulatory bodies whose job it is to supervise this activity, so it is in the public eye. Some lobby groups intentionally stir up emotive arguments on the subject of live transport of young calves in particular as they are usually only a few weeks old but these animals are managed properly during transport. Its vital we continue to manage these and all animals in the best possible manner in order to protect these markets that want to purchase Irish livestock because of our reputation for raising quality livestock, it’s a reputation we as a country have always had and want to protect.