

April 29, 2021

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Re: live exports of horses from Canada to Asia for slaughter and human consumption

Dear Minister Bibeau:

The undersigned animal protection organizations have significant concerns about the long distance shipment of live horses from Canada to Asian countries, primarily Japan, for slaughter.

Purpose-bred on Canadian farms and feedlots, the large draft horses used in this trade are destined exclusively for human consumption. The most-coveted end product of these slaughtered horses is "basashi" (horse meat sushi), which is considered to be a delicacy and can be ordered in high-end Japanese restaurants.

In 2020, over 1600 Canadian horses made the journey to Japan from Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg airports. In preparation for air transport, up to four large horses are forced into a wooden crate that is smaller than a conventional single horse stall. Ears of tall horses can often be seen poking through the wooden slats and netting that form the ceiling of the crate. No food, water or rest is provided from the time that the horses leave the Canadian quarantine feedlot to the point that they arrive at their destination in Japan. Total time spent during ground and air transport, without sustenance or rest periods, can exceed 28 hours.

Horses have been observed to wait in crates on the tarmac overnight before being loaded onto the aircraft, and the flights themselves are typically 10.5 to 13.5 hours long. Deaths and injuries have occurred, as well as broken crates and one known incident of damage to aircraft fuselage. In this case, due to an emergency landing in Anchorage, time without food, water and rest was estimated to be almost 39 hours. But this did not include loading at the Canadian feedlot, ground transportation to Calgary airport, waiting time at the airport, nor the unloading and transport to quarantine in Japan. Clearly, emergency situations result in far lengthier periods of time that the horses must suffer in cramped confinement.

It is ironic that horses not destined for slaughter are generally transported by air in proper horse containers, usually made of metal, and the animals are always segregated with plenty of head clearance. Food and water is supplied, and an attendant accompanies them. These well-treated horses are often used for racing, eventing, breeding, or participation in shows. Some are earmarked for use as RCMP mounts.

We are also concerned about Canada's lack of control and enforcement oversight over the welfare of Canadian slaughter-bound horses when they finally reach their destination. Upon arrival in Japan, the horses are then subject to Japan's laws and policies, and Japan is under no obligation to report back to Canada about the arrival condition of the horses. Any reporting on the welfare of the horses is at the discretion of Japanese officials who oversee the living cargo at that end.

Long before the horses ever leave Canada, their well-being can be severely compromised in crowded feedlot conditions. Since the animals are destined for slaughter, no veterinary or farrier care is provided, and drugs for pain relief that are prohibited from the human food supply must be withheld. Many feedlots have no weather protection and recent video footage captured in Alberta has revealed ill and injured horses and even dead newborn foals.

Public awareness about this issue has increased considerably over recent months, with escalating celebrity involvement and media coverage.

A Nanos poll conducted in 2019 by Parliamentary Group revealed that 69% of Canadians are opposed to the slaughter of horses for human consumption. Parliamentary e-petition 3187, sponsored by MP Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, calls for an end to the air shipments of draft horses for slaughter and is currently the most popular petition that is open for signature, garnering more than 28,000 signatures in less than a month.

It is our view that live shipments of horses by air cargo contravene even the most basic and rudimentary animal welfare standards. Horses are considered by many Canadians to be companion animals, their popularity comparable to that of the dogs and cats who share our lives. It is unacceptable to ignore the welfare of live-shipped horses for the sake of wealthy diners in Japan.

We therefore call upon the Canadian government to stop the inhumane shipments of draft horses to other countries for slaughter. We would be happy to meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,

Sinikka Crosland, President, Canadian Horse Defence Coalition

The Canadian Horse Defence Coalition is a federally-registered non-profit organization dedicated to ending the slaughter of horses for human consumption as well as the export of live horses to other countries for the same purpose.

Colin Saravanamuttoo, Canadian Director, World Animal Protection

World Animal Protection is a global animal welfare organization with offices in 14 countries, including China, India, Africa and Canada. We have been working to protect animals from cruelty for over 55 years. We have General Consultative Status at the United Nations and regularly engage with governments, intergovernmental organizations, corporations, civil society and the general public on a range of animal welfare issues.

Amy Morris, Executive Director, Vancouver Humane Society

The Vancouver Humane Society (VHS) is a registered charity dedicated to the humane treatment of animals. Since 1984, VHS has been encouraging individuals, organizations, and governments to take responsibility for the welfare and rights of domestic animals and wildlife influenced by human activities.

Liz White, Director, Animal Alliance of Canada

Animal Alliance of Canada is a federally incorporated, primarily volunteer organization. Our focus is to achieve long-term legislated animal and environmental protection.

Liz White, Leader, Animal Protection Party of Canada

The Animal Protection Party of Canada is the first and only federal political party in Canada that is dedicated to improving the status and treatment of animals and the environment in our society.

Rebecca Aldworth, Executive Director, Humane Society International/Canada

Humane Society International/Canada is a leading force for animal protection, with active programs in companion animals, wildlife and habitat protection, marine mammal preservation, farm animal welfare and animals in research. HSI/Canada is proud to be a part of Humane Society International which, together with its partners, constitutes one of the world's largest animal protection organizations. Celebrating animals and confronting cruelty worldwide.

Camille Labchuk, Executive Director, Animal Justice

Animal Justice is Canada's only national animal law advocacy organization. We work to pass strong new animal protection laws, push to hold industries accountable for widespread animal suffering, and give animals a voice in courtrooms across the country.

Tove Reece, Executive Director, Voice for Animals

Voice for Animals is a registered, non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of animals in a wide range of circumstances. Our focus is on local and province wide issues but our motto could be "think globally, act locally". We believe that we must lend our voices to speak out for animals who are abused and exploited because, whether domesticated or wild, they have virtually no protection under human law. Ultimately, we believe that the disregard for the suffering of other species hurts us all.

Jessica Miller, CEO, Winnipeg Humane Society

Founded in 1894, the Winnipeg Humane Society is Manitoba's leading and longest running non-profit, animal welfare charity. Our organization's mandate is to protect all animals from suffering, and to promote their welfare and dignity. This work is achieved through public education campaigns, animal rescue, the provision of emergency veterinary care, and by continuing to advocate for those who need it most.

Marcie Moriarty, Chief Prevention and Enforcement Officer, British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA)

The BC SPCA is a registered charity established in 1895 to protect and care for BC's most vulnerable animals. We strive to create a new future for domestic, farm, and wild animals through education, advocacy, research, enhanced animal protection, and ensuring vulnerable animals receive the care they need.

CC The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Deputy Prime Minister

Hon. Francois-Philippe Champagne, P.C., M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hon. Mary Ng, P.C., M.P., Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade

Hon. Neil Ellis, Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

Chris Forbes, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

John Hannaford, Deputy Minister of International Trade

Marta Morgan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs