



Animal Welfare.
Worldwide.

12 March 2026

Minister John Henry Steenhuisen
Department of Agriculture

Per email: MinisterDoA@nda.gov.za ; LandelaMatoti@nda.gov.za ; NcumisaT@nda.gov.za ;
ea.dg@nda.gov.za ; AliciaS@nda.gov.za

RE: Urgent request for prohibition on exports of live animals to the Middle East

Dear Minister Steenhuisen,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the potential export of live animals from South Africa to the broader Middle East in light of the renewed escalation of hostilities in the region, and to request the immediate prohibition of such transports.

The port of Haifa, which is the primary entry point for livestock vessels arriving in Israel, is located in an area directly exposed to missile attacks.¹ During the previous escalation, missile strikes occurred in close proximity to vessels unloading animals, forcing workers to seek shelter and leaving animals stranded.² These were not theoretical risks but concrete events that clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of both animals and operators in such circumstances.

Destination countries for vessels transporting animals from South Africa, including Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia,³ are also located in or near areas currently experiencing instability and armed conflict. The maritime corridors, including the Strait of Hormuz, used to transport animals from South Africa to these Middle Eastern destinations, passes through or near broader conflict zones, highlighting the potential exposure of live animal shipments to similar risks.

The region is now again faced with rapidly increasing security risks, with hostilities expanding, cross-border missile exchanges, and a growing risk of further escalation affecting additional ports in the region. The situation around the Strait of Hormuz further compounds the risks for vessels navigating these waters. The 6–12 March 2026 edition of Daily Maverick reported that Iran has closed the Strait of Hormuz with threats to attack vessels there. Several companies stopped shipments after at least five (oil and gas) tankers were hit near the strait. As Seatrade Maritime News reports, the threat level to ships, their crews and cargoes means that almost all shipowners and charterers have suspended transiting the strait. The cost of maritime insurance has skyrocketed, and some of the world's biggest maritime insurers have cancelled war risk cover, leaving ships stuck both physically and financially vulnerable. Even if owners do want to take the risk of transiting the strait, they may well find that their crews refuse to sail.

¹ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/operator-says-oil-refinery-in-haifa-sustained-localized-damage-in-iran-missile-barrage/

² https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/animal-rights-groups-call-on-european-commission-to-suspend-export-of-live-animals-to-mideast-during-iran-war/

³ https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/ZAF/Year/LTST/TradeFlow/Export/Partner/by-country/Product/01-05_Animal

FOUR PAWS in South Africa

9B Bell Crescent,
Westlake Business Park,
The Green Building,
Cape Town, 7945

Phone: +27 21 702 4277
E-mail: office@four-paws.org.za
www.four-paws.org.za
www.lionsrock.org

Registration Number: 2006/039176/08
PBO Number: 930025282
FNB Account number: 62139547759
Branch code: 230 133



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Transporting animals into an active or potentially expanding conflict zone presents an unacceptable and unnecessary risk for animals and humans. Animals transported by sea are entirely dependent on human handling and functioning infrastructure for feeding, watering, ventilation and emergency response. Any disruption caused by military activity, port closures, strikes on infrastructure or delays at sea can result in severe suffering, prolonged confinement, injury and/or death.

In addition, these transports expose crew members, port workers, drivers and veterinarians to serious and avoidable risks to their health and safety. Missile attacks, air raid alerts, and the targeting of strategic infrastructure create conditions in which neither animal welfare nor human safety can be effectively guaranteed.

The *Animals Protection Act*⁴ clearly states that it is an offense to transport an animal 'under such conditions or in such a manner or position or for such a period of time or over such a distance as to cause that animal unnecessary suffering'. Proceeding with exports to areas where hostilities are ongoing or likely to intensify is incompatible with this obligation; Live export poses an unnecessary risk, especially since viable alternatives, such as exportation of chilled product and alternative proteins, already exist.

In this context, we urge the Department of Agriculture to:

- Immediately prohibit the export of live animals to destinations in the Middle East affected by the current hostilities.
- Assess, as a matter of urgency, the systemic shortcomings that allow exports despite clearly foreseeable and serious risks.

The current situation illustrates, once more, the limitations of relying on enforcement of policies aimed at regulating live export. Where exports take place to regions affected by armed conflict or severe geopolitical instability, Competent Authorities cannot in practice ensure that regulations are complied with throughout the entire journey. These recurring crises demonstrate the need for legislation that prohibits live export and prevents animals from being exposed to predictable and extreme risks in the first place, rather than attempting to manage them through enforcement.

We look forward to further engagement and receiving your response by email.

Sincerely,

Nicola van Wyk
Policy Advisor

nicola.vanwyk@four-paws.org

⁴ Act 71 of 1962, s 2(1)(m).

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Westlake Business Park,
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This request is further endorsed by the following public interest organisations:



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