

More custom-built ships needed - Jane Grieve

A WA live export company says it believes custom-built vessels, designed specifically for exporting sheep and cattle, are essential in addressing animal welfare issues. This follows news that Siba Ships has commissioned a new \$47 million livestock carrier, which will begin service in early 2007. Speaking from Italy, Managing Director of Wellard Rural Exports Steve Meerwald says the industry needs a fleet of modern vessels to service Australia's live export trade. In terms of the future of the industry, he says this sort of investment shows a commitment from shipping companies and exporters to the trade. Mr Meerwald says having purpose-built ships means the industry can confidently answer any animal welfare concerns, and any concerns the ships' crew might have. He says the future of the industry depends on investment along these lines. If the trade continues to be serviced by old ships that only meet minimum requirements, then the industry is justified in receiving the criticism it receives about shipping capacity. For \$47 million, livestock can be protected because of its dual propulsion system, which means the ship won't break down at sea. It has a ventilation system three times the current requirements and regulated feed and water systems. Mr Meerwald concedes the June 2000 incident on the MV Becrux, where 880 cattle and 1200 sheep died on board the vessel from heat stress, was a fault of the company's decision, rather than the vessel.

Steve Meerwald, managing director, Wellard Rural Exports.