

# Commission on Nomadic Peoples

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THE EFFECT OF THE 1973/74 DROUGHT IN SOMALIA  
ON SUBSEQUENT EXPORTS AND REGISTERED SLAUGHTERINGS  
OF CAMELS, SHEEP, GOATS AND CATTLE  
By N.T. Clark

1. Introduction:

As part of a general review of rangeland production in Somalia the author reviewed the official exports and slaughter statistics for the twelve years 1970 to 1981. The period included a major drought (in 1973-1974) during which 25 percent of the domestic animals are reported to have died and about 270,000 people were placed in emergency relief camps. This paper comments on the effect of the drought on the subsequent export of live animals and local slaughtering of camels, sheep, goats and cattle at official slaughter houses.

The figures were extracted from official statistics by the late Mr. A. J. Willby, livestock expert with the FAO UNDP team assisting the Ministry of National Planning. The data is probably reasonably accurate. It does not include private unofficial slaughterings and although the figures therefore do not quantify absolute offtake, they should reflect the trends.

2. Results and Discussion (See table 1 and figure 1):

A. Sheep and Goats.

The number slaughtered and exported dropped slightly during the drought years but recovered in the following year (1975) before plummeting in 1976 and 1977 (25-30% below average). Most sheep and goat offtake in Somalia is of two year old males and the data reflects the drought-induced low conception rate in 1973/74 which reduced the kid/lamb drop in 1974/75 and the number of two year old males for sale in 1976 and 1977. The "offtake" recovered by 1978. This rapid recovery (i.e., back to predrought levels within four years) is due largely to high reproductive performance in the understocked (high plane of nutrition) post drought period when conception rates, survival, and growth rates per unit, were high. This ability of sheep and goat flocks to increase rapidly after a disaster has also been observed in Afghanistan.

The increased offtake in 1975 may be due to the sale of males that would normally have been sold in 1973/74 but were unfinished during those drought years and held over until 1975. It also indicates that deaths of yearling male sheep were relatively low during the drought.

B. Cattle

The low conception rate in the drought years of 1973 and 1974 resulted in the low slaughter and export numbers in 1977/1978/1979; (i.e., when the 74/75

TABLE 1. EXPORTS AND OFFICIAL SLAUGHTERINGS. SOMALIA 1970-1981

|                                     | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| exports (no)                        | 45   | 59   | 81   | 68   | 31   | 40   | 58   | 55   | 77   | 68   | 93   | 116  |
| slaughtered (no)                    | 127  | 199  | 190  | 111  | 188  | 156  | 132  | 95   | 69   | 83   | 111  | 97   |
| Cattle-slaughtered (no) or exported | 172  | 258  | 271  | 179  | 219  | 196  | 190  | 153  | 146  | 151  | 204  | 213  |
| slaughtered(m. kg) or exported      | 43   | 64.5 | 67.8 | 44.8 | 54.8 | 49   | 47.5 | 38.3 | 36.5 | 37.8 | 51   | 51.8 |
| exports (no)                        | 26   | 26   | 22   | 29   | 24   | 34   | 33   | 33   | 22   | 13   | 17   | 14   |
| slaughtered (no)                    | 31   | 31   | 44   | 30   | 38   | 57   | 39   | 32   | 26   | 35   | 52   | 53   |
| exported or slaughtered (no)        | 57   | 57   | 66   | 59   | 62   | 91   | 72   | 65   | 48   | 48   | 69   | 67   |
| exported or slaughtered (m. kg)     | 22.8 | 22.8 | 26.4 | 23.6 | 24.8 | 36.4 | 28.8 | 26   | 19.7 | 19.2 | 27.6 | 26.8 |
| exports (no)                        | 1151 | 1186 | 1635 | 1384 | 1238 | 1536 | 766  | 926  | 1454 | 1422 | 1451 | 1314 |
| slaughtered (no)                    | 435  | 438  | 348  | 259  | 499  | 454  | 222  | 208  | 238  | 252  | 303  | 280  |
| exported or slaughtered (no)        | 1586 | 1624 | 1983 | 1643 | 1737 | 1990 | 988  | 1134 | 1692 | 1674 | 1754 | 1594 |
| exported or slaughtered (m. kg)     | 39.7 | 40.6 | 49.6 | 41.1 | 43.4 | 49.8 | 24.7 | 28.4 | 42.3 | 41.9 | 43.9 | 39.9 |
|                                     | :    | :    | :    | :    | :    | :    | :    | :    | :    | :    | :    | :    |

all numbers in '000s

liveweight expressed in million kgs. or thousand tonnes.

FIGURE

### EXPORTS AND REGISTERED SLAUGHTERINGS 1970 - 1981

% OF 12 YEAR  
AVERAGE

150

140

130

120

110

100

90

80

70

60

50

40

30

20

10

0

CATTLE

TOTAL NO. LIVESTOCK

SHEEP & GOATS

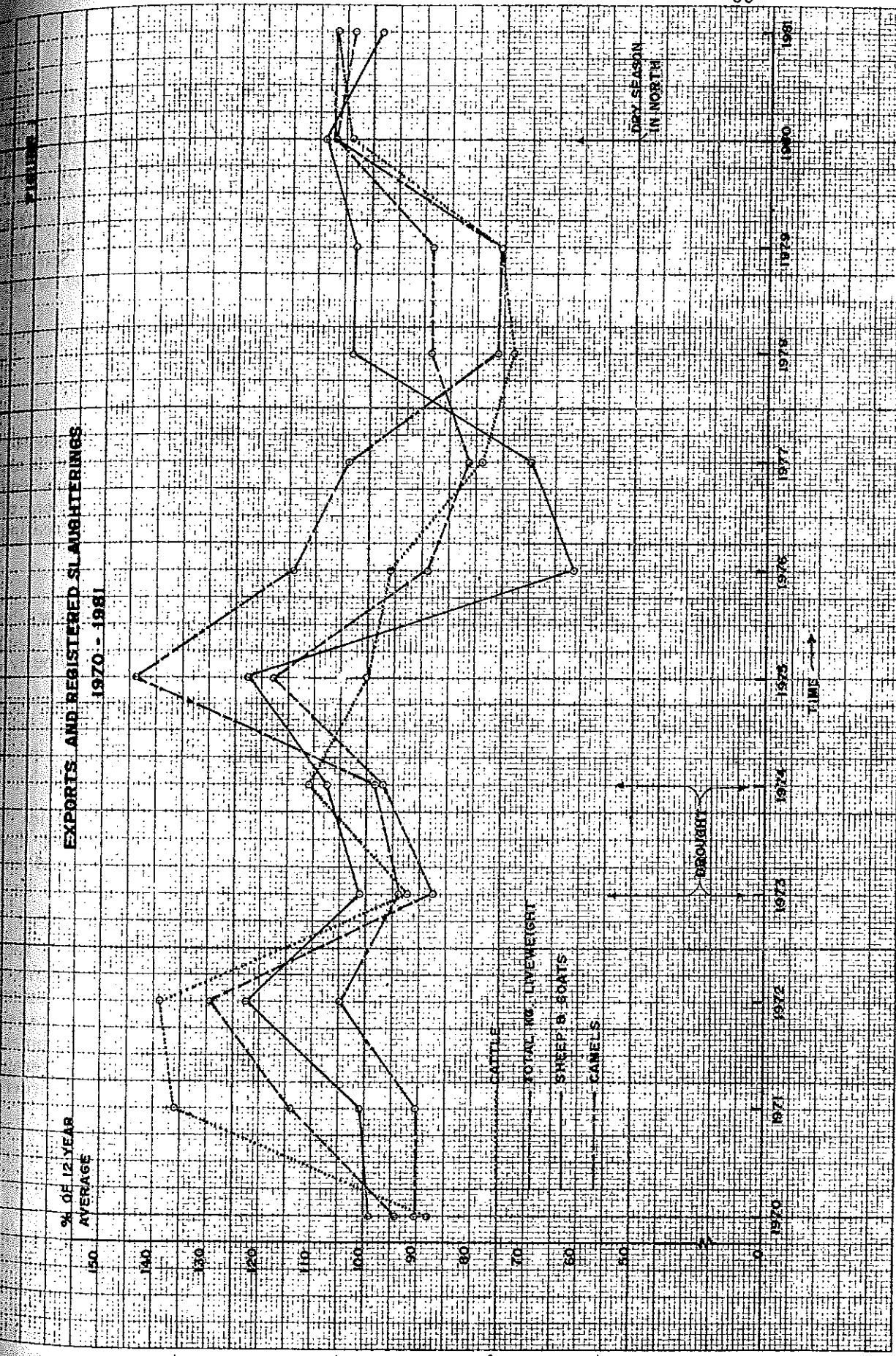
PANELS

BOUGHT

DRY SEASON  
IN NORTH

TIME

1970 1971 1972 1973 1974 1975 1976 1977 1978 1979 1980 1981



drop calves would normally be sold at an age of 3-5 years). By 1980 (i.e., six to seven years after the drought) exports and the number officially slaughtered, had increased to about predrought levels. The cattle story is complicated by cross border movements between Kenya and Somalia. Both countries had government fixed prices for cattle in the mid 1970's and, depending on relative prices, cattle were trekked in or out. This adds some uncertainty to the cattle figures. Also the drought was less severe in the main cattle producing southern part of Somalia so the effect of the drought on cattle numbers may be less than one would normally expect.

### C. Camels

The number of camels officially slaughtered or exported was reduced slightly during the drought years but increased by forty percent in the following year. The drought evidently did not kill many males approaching marketable age and they were held and sold after the drought. Pastoralists had fewer numbers of sheep, goats and cattle to sell in 1976 and 1977 so they compensated by increasing the offtake of camels.

Offtake of camels was lower in 1978 and 1979 (25 percent below the average) presumably due to the low reproductive rate of females and high mortality rate of young camels during the drought (four to five years previously). This results in a low number of five year old marketable males in 1978-79.

### D. General

The effect of drought on the offtake patterns of the different species is important to marketing authorities. For example it is possible to predict that sheep exports to Saudi Arabia from Somalia will be reduced in the second and third year after a similar drought.

There is a greater variation in offtake and in the subsequent supply of food for export and consumption, from single species flocks or herds than from mixed species. The reduced offtake fluctuation is a major advantage of having mixed flocks/herds and is probably one of the reasons that the Somali pastoralists maintain several species. Two recent surveys conducted by Resource Management and Research in the Central and Northern rangelands indicated that the average domestic animal biomass in Somalia comprised approximately fifty-five percent camel, thirty-five percent sheep and goat and ten percent cattle.

## 3. Summary

Data from official exports and slaughterings in Somalia between 1970 and 1981 (inclusive) shows variation in offtake trends of plus and minus 40-45%. Different species have different offtake trends. Offtake for sheep and goats is lowest two to three years after a drought, for cattle three to five years after a drought and for camels four to five years after a drought. For total liveweight offtake the differing individual trends are largely cancelled out and the mixed

flock/herd offtake variation is only plus 30% to minus 20% of the average. A drought results in lowered overall offtake in the drought year, increased offtake in the following year and slightly reduced overall offtake in the following four years. Sheep and goat offtake declines and recovers faster than the offtake of camels and cattle, regaining a "normal" level 4 years after the drought.

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