

Phasing out live sheep exports by sea

Live export represents a significant portion of the agricultural market in Western Australia with the total value of Australia's livestock export revenue in 2019 – 2020 being \$1.3 billion. Livestock exports contribute approximately \$7 billion to Australia's gross domestic product each year.

Australia's current standard of practises for the live export of sheep is the highest standard in the world, but if we leave that market sector entirely, we will no longer be able to lead by example in raising standards for the rest of the world. Other countries will not cease live-export just because Australia does. We have seen what other countries find acceptable in their treatment of animals and our abandoning the lead in what is acceptable will lead to the appalling treatment of livestock, which will be sourced from countries with inhumane and unacceptable treatment standards.

Farmers are already struggling with the rising costs of farming inputs such as fuel, fertilisers and wages. Farmers do not have the ability to control their input costs and nor do they have the ability to control the value of their produce. Economic modelling conducted by ABARES and the Centre for International Economics has found that Australian livestock exports generate about 10,000 jobs across Australia and that a cessation of the trade would impose a net cost of about \$300 million annually on Australian livestock producers. This is unacceptable and if the government is not careful they will find they will have to concentrate more on importing food to feed the people of this nation as farmers disappear from the land.

Merino wethers are primarily sold for live export representing approximately half of the merino sheep produced in Australia. If these no longer have a viable market, farmers will be unable to continue operating with a usable efficiency of 50%. The removal of live export of sheep will result in a mass exodus from sheep breeding and will have a flow-on effect.

Reduction of sheep prices to an unfeasible value will result in the killing of animals on farm by farmers simply because the transport cost will be high and the price obtained at market will be low, resulting in a loss. This is obviously not in the interests of animal welfare and nor is it in the interests of the farmer. Many farmers will not have the luxury of a choice in this matter; they will not be able to afford to send them with the current market pressure and the future outlook of losing such a large portion of their assets. Some farmers may choose to breed only ewes, slaughtering all wethers born on farm as there is no market available.

Many farmers will redirect their production into alternative sources of income, predominantly cropping. This will damage these relevant markets as they become flooded with a supply higher than the demand. This will also lead to an unbalance in the ecosystem of a farm where cropping is the only land use especially with an increase in herbicide and insecticide use, which is both unfavourable to our quality of life. This proposed prohibition will negatively affect all sectors of agriculture.

The financial failure associated with a prohibition will force many farmers to sell, and will result in a significant reduction to the economies of rural communities. If there is no viability to farming in rural areas it will have a flow on effect to local businesses, schools and rural communities which rely on each other to exist. This will most certainly have a huge impact

upon a mass exodus of people to the cities looking for work and to the actual composition of rural Australia. The average age of farmers is 62 years making many of them unsuitable for re-employment and likely to increase national debt further with many claiming unemployment. Add to this the 10,000 associated workers who will also be out of work and requiring government assistance and we are looking at a huge increase in government debt and unemployment.

The financial loss will have a huge impact upon farmer's mental health. Suicide rates among farmers in Australia, is up to 94% higher than non-farmers. On average, one farmer dies by suicide every 10 days according to a study by NRHA conducted between 2009 - 2018. According to Monash University concerning rates of suicide are prevalent in farmers, veterinarians and in the transport industry, all of which are connected to our Australian rural communities. Any Minister voting for this prohibition will most certainly be personally responsible for the suicides it causes and the pain and destruction it will cause to the family left behind. Farmers will be pushed to suicide with no viable options being presented by the government for any other avenues to survive in a farming situation, especially those in considerable over-draft positions. Truckies, stock agents, shearing industry workers and others involved with the sheep industry will also be pushed to levels of despair because of the prohibition.

The Labor government will be responsible for Australia leaving behind the Merino sheep and the associated world-renowned wool. This is a considerable part of Australia's reputation and identity and will most certainly affect our tourism industry and the way other countries view us.

Farmers are struggling to make ends meet in the current climate. With increased interest rates, increased farm input costs, natural disasters and the government's interference with live export as very few boats are transporting from WA, farmers are finding it an increasing battle to continue to run their agricultural businesses. Live export may not be our largest income source but it does represent for many the difference between surviving on the land or selling our properties and leaving the agricultural industry.

Farm land will not be purchased by Australian farmers because of the lack of viability one can only assume that overseas investment will most certainly increase. These investors will export their produce out of Australia to feed their own countries populations. Overseas ownership of land has already occurred in many areas decreasing the value of Australian export value and destroying our rural communities.

If this proposed ban comes occurs, members throughout the whole industry may be in a position where they feel the only option is to take litigative action through a class action against the government to obtain enough compensation to survive. Given the lack of consultation and that the industry has already gone above and beyond to meet improved standards that are now the best in the world, it is feasible that they would be within their legal right to do so.

There has been an inadequate consultation period with farmers being notified of meeting on the same day as the meeting. Many farmers were unaware of the meetings and were unable to attend. Meeting have also been held during a busy period when most farmers are busy cropping. There has been inadequate consultation, with consultation only sought on ways to

lessen the blow of prohibiting live export as opposed to whether a prohibition is even viable or appropriate.

There has been no solution previously thought of by the government and no expression of interest to build more abattoirs in Australia and process the sheep here. Of course this option has its own issues as it is not viable as abattoirs take time to build and staff cannot be found to operate them. Our existing abattoirs are currently running at significantly less than full capacity due to lack of staffing. Based on a show of hands at the consultation meeting at [REDACTED] the vast majority of WA farmers have had trouble this year in getting their sheep into abattoirs due to this lack of staffing and as a consequence sheep prices in the domestic market are already at unreasonably low prices. We have watched many abattoirs be closed down [REDACTED] with no alternatives being built and now the government is expecting farmers to come up with solutions and do the government's job. The alternatives should have been thought of a long time ago instead of this knee jerk reaction to what we suspect is opposition by uninformed activists who have no understanding of any issues they will cause.

As more farmers are forced to sell and more farms move total cropping operations, the amount of locally produced food will decrease and the reliance on imported foods will rise. This is not in the best interests of quality of food or the health of our nation. Plant based foods may seem a great idea but they come at a cost we don't believe the government understands and most certainly the people of Australia are not grasping.

We can understand the desire to ban live export by many but we believe we need to look at all sides of the decision and who they affect. It would boost our economy to slaughter and process sheep in Australia but only when we have the means to do so, not when we are making decisions that cannot achieve this outcome immediately. There has been no forward planning, no building of abattoirs and infrastructure to support the transition from live export to local processing. You cannot expecting farmers to wait until abattoirs are built sometime in the future your short sightedness is making this an impossible situation. What research has been completed studying the countries where our sheep are being exported and researching whether these countries can accept frozen produce, whether small villages are comfortable to eat our meat in such a way? It is obvious that none of these factors have been investigated and the government is being irresponsible and liable for the losses it will directly be causing.

We are truly disgusted that Australia's Agriculture Minister is making a decision about an industry he obviously has no understanding of and making these changes without proper consultation. We believe the Minister, his advisers and the media need to educate themselves as to the true effects this decision will have upon the Australian people and its economy. We have not been presented with any solutions or alternatives to this issue only the complete destruction of the live export industry. We do not believe the industry itself is being consulted in a timely manner but instead forced to destroy itself by committees who have zero understanding and knowledge on the matter where there has been no proper planning and resembles the emotional and erratic irresponsible rabble that protest against live export without ever stopping to understand the full process and help find solutions rather than the path of destruction.