

Live Export of Sheep by Sea Submission

I'm a member of the general public, with no involvement in the sheep live export industry, therefore hope I can have a balanced view of all the arguments. Whilst I generally don't favour a major political party at federal elections, one overwhelming reason for voting Labor this time was due to their commitment to phase out live export. I understand this is only for sheep by sea at the moment, but I'm hopeful it will be the beginning of the end of this terrible industry for all animals in the future. After listening to the panel set up to advise the government in the virtual forum in May of this year, it was made clear that this wouldn't happen in Labor's first term of office. Why? I realise that there is a lead time to phase this out, but given the possibility of a change of government, it needs to be legislated and implemented in this term. It's imperative that there is no opportunity for the industry to bring about a reversal of the decision entirely.

Of all the issues surrounding live export, animal welfare is the most concerning. I listened to the panel and their reference to our world-leading reputation for first class live export processes and wonder how they arrive at this conclusion? From the live exporters themselves? The farmers? The fact that these animals are subjected to long voyages from Western Australia to the Middle East in the height of their Summer is unacceptable and the mortality rates are extremely high. There have been many documented instances of animal cruelty in this industry and despite systems being put in place to address this, it's made absolutely no difference. We are a civilised, Western country, sending livestock to countries with no protections for animals, where they suffer abuse and illegal methods of slaughter. Most of this information only ever gets out to the general public by television exposés, where someone has had to bear witness to this terrible cruelty. There is no acknowledgment from the people in this industry that their animals suffer so much before being killed, as profit will always trump humanity every time. If they care so much for their animals, as I've heard so many say they do, then why would they turn such a blind eye? I think the apt term is cognitive dissonance – understanding the abuse that will no doubt befall their animals, but making excuses and justifications and doing it anyway.

I realise with the second largest sheep population in the world, this is a very big industry, but does generations of farming for live export make it right? We know that in the last 30 years, the industry of live export has had a significant downturn. The Australian government has spent decades and millions of taxpayer dollars reviewing and trying to make accountable an industry that continues to abuse animals, not to mention what happens to them at the unregulated abattoirs they are shipped to. It's clear that whatever has been put in place is simply not working. Why are successive governments propping up a dying industry? When I heard that live exporters had successfully been granted financial compensation after the temporary cessation of the live export industry during the Gillard government, it made me wonder who actually runs this country. This government has made a commitment to end this industry, a promise made many years ago and now it's backtracking on that promise. A phase out is needed to put in place alternatives for farmers, I understand that, but it needs to happen now, not after 2025. The industry isn't in power here, but it feels like it.

The other most important issue for me after animal welfare is the environmental impact and use of fossil fuels for so many long voyages. There have already been 60 live export voyages this year so far, 39 by sea and 11 were sheep. If Australia has a goal to combat climate change and reduce its carbon footprint, then stopping this industry will have a significant impact. Further to this, there seems to be no discussion about the fact that animal agriculture in itself contributes to climate change and perhaps a transition for farmers away from this industry completely would only be a positive step. A transition to more plant-based farming will benefit the animals, the health of Australians and the farmers themselves, with the right government support.

On that note, the success of the phase-out of live sheep exports hinges on the support provided to farmers during the transition process. There must be adequate assistance and resources to successfully navigate this significant change. This should include financial aid and access to alternative and more sustainable agricultural practices, in order to transition away from live sheep exports. This will protect the welfare of animals, but also help farmers maintain their livelihoods, as the agricultural landscape changes and evolves. This will no doubt be very challenging, but we, as a country, should be at the forefront of the changing world, looking to the growing demand for ethically sourced products and alternative industries, including plant-based production. Australia can position itself as a global leader, by investing in technologies that prioritise animal welfare and sustainability, in producing and exporting ethically sourced products.

The Australian government, by phasing out live export by sea, has galvanised all those who support this initiative and share a common commitment to animal welfare - animal welfare organisations, veterinarians and the general public. The significance of what this government could achieve, by phasing out live export by sea, which no other government has been brave enough to do, highlights a shared vision to uphold the highest standards, ethical considerations and sustainable practices. Currently we are very much the poor performer by world standards, in relation to animal welfare best practice and our international reputation is at risk. The first live export investigation was in 2003, lifting the lid on the suffering of sheep, endemic to this trade. Why has it taken dozens more investigations throughout the Middle East, multiple major media exposés and a shipping catastrophe at sea for an Australian government to act. Countries around the world have been lobbying their governments for decades to ban this industry. As a democratic nation, all our voices should be heard, not just those who seek to make a profit from animal suffering. Let's follow New Zealand and Brazil's lead for a better, more compassionate world.

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