

To whom it may concern;

I am a sheep farmer, having recently been able to fulfil a lifelong ambition of owning my own farm. My ancestors were one of the first serious Merino-farming families in Australia, having bought their original breeding stock [REDACTED] I am also a Farm Consultant and a Sheep Production Consultant.

Whether farming or consulting, animal welfare is at the forefront of my concerns. Indeed, a happy and healthy animal is a profitable animal. I think it is vital that the government understand that those with a vested interest in keeping Live Export are those who genuinely care for animals. Closing the most successful and only regulated Live Export trade in the world, and knowingly handing the baton over to un-regulated suppliers, would pose a very serious animal welfare risk – ironically what you argue as a reason to close it down.

The closure of this trade would affect my family, my income, my welfare, my community, and the industry that is the centre of all I do. It will no doubt affect some so badly that mental health issues (or worse) will result. It would mark the end of multi-generational enterprises. It would mark the end of Merino – the sheep that helped build this country. I already have clients in despair.

Adaptability is being thrown around as an ‘easy out’ for this situation – ‘*You just need to adapt.*’ We are adaptable, but never before have we had a government force the closure of a thriving, world-leading industry upon us. Adaptability has come about through a willingness to continually improve, which is precisely what has been (over)achieved, following the (probably staged) footage from 2018.

Not all agricultural land is arable, especially in Western Australia, where ~30% of all farms cannot be cropped. This is another so-called ‘easy fix’ – ‘*Just crop more*’. Although the average WA farm has 30% unarable land, it can often be utilised for grazing, hence our large sheep flock. Removing Live Export therefore poses a very real threat of removing up to 30% of an average WA farm business. Please note well that WA does not have the infrastructure or storage to cope with current levels of grain production, let alone increased production. Consider also that increased production leads to lower prices. And for those interested in environmental impacts, increased crop will result in increased applications of chemical and synthetic fertilisers. One of numerous benefits of sheep in a mixed-farming system is a legume-based pasture rotation in between crops.

Merinos are the largely dominant breed in WA. It has been made clear that the Fremantle wool trading facility will close if the wool clip drops >20% from where it currently is. If Live Export is to be banned, there will be >20% of Merino producers forced to quit their stock. Inherently then, the wool clip will drop by the same. This makes Merinos even less profitable and therefore more will quit the breed.

Another apparently easy alternative is to switch breed (from Merino) to one less reliant on Live Export. What must be understood though is that this too is not as easy as you think. If Fremantle closes, all wool sheep will come under huge pressure to remain viable. British breed (coarse wool) sheep won’t be able to compete and will likely disappear rapidly as their wool will end up costing more to shear than it’s worth. Hair/shedding sheep will be the only remaining option. However, these cannot be run on the same farm as wool sheep due to contamination of hair in wool. So, phasing one out in favour of the other is actually extremely difficult, if not impossible. Add to this the cost. Wool sheep will be worth very little. Shedding sheep are already expensive in comparison but will experience a price surge with new demand. The difference could be as much as \$500/head. With an average farm holding no less than 3,000 breeding ewes, the cost of switching over would never be considered economically sensible.

Sheep have always offered risk mitigation in WA farming businesses. They do not tend to have the big highs and lows of cropping, and buffer poor cropping seasons. Removing Live Export poses an increased business risk to WA farmers. With an increased risk profile comes increased interest rates and removal of various financial facilities.

Please don't be fooled by the decreasing numbers of live exports over the past few years – another supposed reason to close the trade. This is a direct response to the (unnecessary) moratorium, which has not only limited our sales opportunities (also dropping our prices), but also led to our export partners filling the void with other willing participants. The global Live Export industry is continuing to thrive – build even – but ours is declining, only because of red tape imposed by Labor governments. It is not a reason to phase it out, rather an engineered excuse.

My farm business has already suffered, and will continue to, simply as a result of discussions around the closure of Live Export, which has reduced market confidence and therefore price too. My consulting business, which focuses largely on Merino production, will unquestionably suffer a loss of business, with less farmers requiring my expertise as they exit the industry in their droves if the phase-out goes ahead. My suppliers may be forced to close due to a lack of business. As a family, we may be forced to move away from our rural area, along with many others. The community has the potential of dissolving, whereas it could continue as a thriving town, with many small businesses currently doing very well.

The question of why has not been answered. Why is Live Export even being considered for shut down? With the best records in the world for animal welfare outcomes, it definitely can't be that. The global trade is increasing in numbers, so it certainly can't be that either. Forcing the closure of an industry without providing a reason is going to be hard to accept. In fact, it is well documented that successful change management can only be achieved when the 'why' is known and understood. Requesting farmers to input how to remove their livelihood without telling them why this is happening will not result in positive change at all, ever.

I would like to request the removal of Heather Neil from the panel, due to a major conflict of interest. As the ex-CEO of the RSPCA, she has a personal agenda to see the end of Live Export. This was made abundantly clear during a private meeting I had with the phase-out panel. Her attitude and demeanor were in stark contrast to how she portrayed herself in public. I believe the panel should be completely objective in their findings. Her inclusion would undoubtedly leave the panel tarnished by her strong subjective opinion.

Live Export is not an animal welfare issue; banning it is. The industry of Live Export is profitable, sustainable, and growing. It is of vital importance to Western Australian farmers and our economy. I therefore implore you to reverse your decision. It is not too late to do the right thing.