

Consultation Paper - Phase out Live Sheep Exports by Sea

I would like to contribute and supply my submission to the phase out of live sheep export by sea. I am a concerned Australian citizen who cares about animals and animal welfare. I grew up and live in a rural area and want to ensure that farmed animals are not subjected to unnecessary suffering.

I would like to address the terms of reference in relation to:

- Timeframe to implement the phase out
- Potential ways to support the transition and other opportunities
- Other Matters

Timeframe

The phase-out must begin as soon as possible. Live sheep that are exported from Australia by sea suffer unimaginable stress. Sheep are not able to reach food and water. They are subjected to the stress of watching other animals being put down around them. They are subjected to standing in wet manure and suffer illness from high ammonia levels. Most ships do not have an independent observer on board to ensure compliance with Australian standards.

Furthermore, once the journey is over, there is no guarantee of their safety at their destination. They are subjected to further hot temperatures with no shade or access to adequate food or water. Practices at the slaughterhouses in the destination countries are also not up to Australian standards.

The Labor government was elected with a commitment to end live sheep trade from Australia. Clearly there are issues that have been identified that support this decision. This has been an issue for discussion for years and the practice needs to end as soon as possible.

Potential ways to support the transition

In September 2022, the New Zealand parliament passed a ban on live export of sheep by sea which took effect from April 2023. The issues taken into account by the New Zealand Government were:

1. Animal welfare issues; and
2. Damage to the New Zealand reputation.

The transition that has occurred in New Zealand should be an example of how this can be achieved successfully. The New Zealand government cited that “We have not been able to guarantee the safety of these animals at sea and that’s an unacceptable risk for New Zealand.”¹ The Agriculture minister Damian O'Connor mentioned the commitment to maintaining relationships with international partners but that ultimately, “It’s about animal

¹ Wahlquist, C, 2021, ‘New Zealand to stop exporting livestock by sea’, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/14/new-zealand-to-stop-exporting-livestock-by-sea>

welfare and our reputation”.² The director of World Animal Protection in New Zealand said the decision was a “significant moment in our history for animals, one which governments around the world must now follow”.³ Australia should look to other countries such as New Zealand as an example of how to successfully make the transition.

An analysis of the economic impact conducted by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences in 2021⁴ showed that there will not be a noticeable economic impact by banning live export by sea and that there is a low cost involved in transitioning to alternative markets. The industry has already been in decline for some time. Adequate planning can support farmers and will make the transition easier.

Support to affected farmers could include transitioning to alternatives such as chilled or frozen meat. However, another direction that the government could take is to support farmers with sustainable alternatives such as plant-based or cell-based meat. The market for plant-based meats is growing. It is more ethical, cost effective and has a lower impact on the environment. Plant-based meat is an emerging sector in Australia and is expected to grow. A report commissioned by Food Frontier and conducted by Deloitte Access Economics shows how business, agriculture and the government in Australia can benefit from the growth of the industry⁵. The report identified a multi-billion dollar opportunity for Australian farmers to grow crops for the plant-based meat supply chain and secure market share from imported goods. Concern for climate change is a growing issue and Australians are limiting their consumption of meat due to their concerns about the impact of food choices. The Australian Heart Foundation supports plant-based eating and recommends that people follow their Heart Healthy Eating Pattern that is built on eating plant-based foods. This is an opportunity to keep jobs in Australia, reduce carbon emissions and also support the health of Australians.

Companies such as Magic Valley (www.magicvalley.com.au) in Victoria are able to produce healthy, delicious cultivated meat products using animal cells without causing cruelty to animals or destruction to the environment. The benefits are fewer greenhouse gas emissions, less land use, less water use, less risk of biological disease, increased nutritional value to consumers, decrease in animal cruelty and reduction in food waste. There are huge benefits to making transition away from farm animals.

While a ban on live export by sea will impact farmers, there are significant opportunities that are available and the transition could ultimately assist farmers working towards a more sustainable future. By committing to a date to ban live export, farmers can start transitioning workers and move to alternative markets or use the land to grow plant based crops.

² Wahlquist, C, 2021, ‘New Zealand to stop exporting livestock by sea’, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/14/new-zealand-to-stop-exporting-livestock-by-sea>

³ Wahlquist, C, 2021, ‘New Zealand to stop exporting livestock by sea’, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/14/new-zealand-to-stop-exporting-livestock-by-sea>

⁴ Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment, 2021, ‘The economic impacts of regulating live sheep exports’, https://daff.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/search/asset/1031441/0

⁵ Food Frontier, 2021, ‘2020 State of the Industry’, <https://www.foodfrontier.org/resource/2020-state-of-the-industry/>

Other Matters

The international reputation of Australia is at risk if live export by sea is not phased out as soon as possible. In terms of World Animal Protection official rankings, Australia is ranked as a “D” and a marginal performer under the Animal Protection Index (API). In regards to farmed animal protection legislation, Australia achieved a poor performance ranking and an “E”⁶.

The RSPCA have claimed that live export has “arguably damaged Australia’s farming reputation more than any other practice”⁷. An independent poll conducted by the RSPCA found that the majority of Australians - 2 in 3 (67%), no matter where they live, want to see an end to the practice of live export. In fact, Western Australia, which produces most of the sheep for live export, had the highest opposition at 70%⁸. These polls are consistent with many other polls that show that Australians do not support the live export trade.

Australia is lagging behind the rest of the world on this issue and it is causing damage to our reputation for little economic gain. The views of the general public should be respected over the vested interests of the few in the industry who are benefiting from this outdated practice.

In conclusion, I support an immediate ban on live sheep export by sea. There are measures that the government can take to assist farmers transition to alternative forms of meat or plant based meat production opportunities. The damage that live export is causing to the reputation of Australia and the welfare of animals is not worth the economic gain that it is currently producing.

I thank you for the opportunity to submit my concerns on this issue.

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⁶ The Animal Protection Institute, [https://vac.voiceless.org.au/countries/australia/#:~:text=Rank%2034,%22\)%20under%20the%20same%20index](https://vac.voiceless.org.au/countries/australia/#:~:text=Rank%2034,%22)%20under%20the%20same%20index).

⁷ RSPCA, 2021, ‘NZ Live export ban shows the trade’s time has come’, arguably damaged Australia’s farming reputation more than any other practice

⁸ RSPCA, 2022, ‘Back to the bad old days: RSPCA again warns against live export backflip’, <https://www.rspca.org.au/media-centre/news/2022/back-bad-old-days-rspca-again-warns-against-live-export-backflip>