

Live Export Trade by Sea. [REDACTED]

Why the trade exists and how it has evolved.

The Live Export Trade by Sea is demand driven by the religious beliefs, cultural practices and economic circumstances of our trading partners. Western Australia is the most favourable Australian state for live export trade to the Middle East due to its preferable location. The state itself has a relative finite demand for sheep meat consumption, so the live sheep trade by sea has provided a vital market to WA sheep farmers to trade surplus wethers in particular.

Over the course of the past few years the standard of care of sheep on the ships has improved dramatically, so much so that the percentage of deaths on board is now less than what farmers experience as their sheep free-range on farm. The improvements were demanded by the vocal public and they have been met. West Australian farmers were not responsible for the poor conditions on board vessels but rallied behind our representative organisations to support improvements to the animal welfare standards both en-route to the Middle East, and during the slaughter phase of the animals once they reached their destination. Australia has worked with our trading partners to improve standards through education and a variety of other tools. Compared to other countries who export live animals into the Middle East, Australia's standards are world best practice. Surely after all the dollars and time invested into improving these standards we would be negligent to walk away, aware that the high animal welfare standards implemented by Australia may well not be upheld to animals imported from other countries.

So after millions of dollars of investment into improving the trade, the closure of live sheep export by sea demonstrates that this country is more interested in the welfare of agricultural animals (bred for human consumption), than the important role we farmers have in feeding the world. It reeks of cultural superiority where the vocal few believe they have the right to tell other people from other cultures how they must behave in order to have access to food grown in Australia. Australian farmers were recently punished by the Chinese for political issues beyond our control. The Australian public was not happy with being bullied by a bigger, stronger nation. Yet the Australian government is pursuing this outrageous ban which is hugely detrimental to the livelihood of West Australian farmers and the businesses in the small towns who support us. The mental and economic well-being of us farmers and affiliated business owners appears to be of little concern to the federal government.

Impact on our business.

Our farming business will have to make considerable changes to its land use enterprises should the live sheep trade cease without a viable alternative being fully operational at the time of cessation. The impact of such changes to local businesses from our business alone include for example; a drop in payments to our shearing contractor by around \$50 000 per annum, livestock requisites purchased through local agents will decrease by around \$55 000; the freight company who transports the sheep will lose \$15 000. Our farm income from sheep and wool will decrease by close to one third. We are just one of 100+ farmers in our shire so these numbers quickly reach tens of millions of dollars to our small economy alone.

Our wool clip will drop considerably if we transition out of wethers. We currently employ over 10 people for 6 weeks of the year to crutch and shear our sheep. The impact of all farmers dropping sheep numbers will be profound to our small community. Our town will see an exodus of shearers and their families. This alone will result in a considerable population drop with significant negative effects on our local school student population, sporting organisations, cash flow to small businesses such as the local IGA. The flow on negative effect on our population's mental health and well being is immeasurable. It goes well beyond the economic fall-out.

The Transition & Opportunities

In order to survive the devastation of a ban on live export by sea, it is imperative that the federal government source alternative export markets and financially support the building and staffing of more processing plants in WA. **The ban must not take place until such time as these export markets are established and demand is at least equivalent to the current level of export of live sheep.** Any lag in this time frame will see farmers dramatically reduce their livestock numbers as it will simply not be profitable to keep the sheep on farm. It takes several years to rebuild numbers and if small communities lose shearers and other livestock contractors then farmers may deem an increase in numbers unviable.

Farming practices have changed hugely over the past 20 years or so. In our region all farmers run mixed livestock and cropping enterprises. Consequently there is now almost no down-time in the agricultural calendar and most farmers work at least 60 hours per week. The cost price squeeze continues to affect many farming businesses. Finding labour is challenging, meeting OHS documentation requirements is hugely time consuming, not to mention the need to be computer savvy in order to complete BAS, PAYG and STP for the government. Farmers are scrambling to understand the impact of calculating green house emissions on their business, let alone how to best deal with it. In WA we are facing new requirements with the implementation of the changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act which may well adversely affect the current seasonal practices of farmers. The compliance issues, social licence demands, reporting requirements, OHS standards and climate issues have increased exponentially in recent years. While dealing with this our core business must remain on daily farming practices in order to present healthy animals to market and profitable crop yields. The uncertainty surrounding us is creating incredible anxiety among our farmers.

The point of the above paragraph is to clarify the challenge of farming in the 21st century and the lack of understanding by the federal government on the expectations/ demands it places on people who are already working at near-breaking point. This is an opportunity for the federal government to show support for those quietly toiling away producing food and fibre for Australia and the world.

We need the Federal Government to hear our voice, to work with us to maintain and improve our worldwide reputation to supply quality food and fibre. We need the federal government to commit to protecting our agricultural business from any negative impacts from the ban to the live sheep trade by sea, and to speak up in support of us when we are being unfairly vilified by special interest groups expert in manipulating the truth.