

Live Sheep Phaseout Panel
 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
 Australian Government
 GPO Box 858
 Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Panel Members & Members of Parliament,

Re: Live Sheep export by sea independent panel consultation process

The export of live sheep by sea from Australia is an industry that has contributed considerable value to Australian agriculture and the regional economy. The sector employs shearers, truck drivers, fodder suppliers, livestock agents, veterinarians, farmers, producers, and their families. Removing it creates uncertainty for farmers and their families and has detrimental flow-on effects on regional communities.

The live sheep export trade by sea is vital to the Australian economy and is worth over \$250 million annually. Phasing out live sheep exports by sea will lead to job losses and economic hardship for many rural communities. For example, in Western Australia, the live export industry supports over 2,000 jobs plus many others in connected industries across regional Australia. A phase out of live sheep exports by sea will devastate families and communities.

Our family has been farming [REDACTED] for many generations. Both my husband and I have been raised in regional communities, my husband as part of a farming family and myself as someone whose parents worked in and for the Agricultural industry, one of which was responsible for the management of Live Export in Western Australia. Over many years both of our families have been involved in Sheep production and marketing, and a considerable amount of time and money have been invested in breeding sheep for the Live export industry.

The impact of the phase-out of Live Sheep export on our business and our local community would be devastating. Our farm is a mixed farming enterprise, we crop around 50% of our land and we use the balance of our land to run livestock, in particular sheep for meat processing. Not all of our land is suitable to crop, therefore a reduction in livestock production and income from livestock production would make a large portion of our farmland unprofitable. Since the phase-out announcement we have already seen a loss of confidence in the industry. This has been reflected in our price per head halving overnight, and the demand and ability to sell sheep being delayed by 6 months so far from our usual sale period. When the costs of production are escalating, and the investment already made in the production of our sheep for the year, the timing of the announcement couldn't have been more devastating on our business already.

Our business alone employs contractors for sheep handling activities, truck drivers, shearers, livestock agents, and farm supply businesses all who live and work in our local community. With a reduction in work comes a reduction in the number of people who can continue to live in our rural communities which has a flow on affect to the whole town. Any timeframe for implementing such a plan phase out with wide reaching implications should be long and well planned out. There needs to be time to establish new markets, increased investment in the establishment of suitable processing facilities, a sustainability plan for increasing local production and markets, investment in re-skilling workers who can no longer earn an income in their chosen field.

As farmers we are also concerned that with the planned phase-out of live export, what will be next on the chopping board for Australian Agriculture, is it other pathways of live export, other livestock – being cattle, pigs and more. The phase-out of live export of sheep by sea is just another nail in the coffin of those that are working every day to put food on the tables of Australian families, and families around the world, who are often undercut by a cheaper poorly produced product from overseas. It would be great if the panel can demonstrate to the government the importance of the Live Sheep export industry to the Australian economy, and the value of supporting our local agricultural industry in general. The old saying of “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you” appears to have been forgotten.

I would also like to raise our concerns with the way this whole Phase out of live sheep exports by sea has been handled, the lack of compassion, understanding and acknowledgement by some members of the panel during recent consultations. Statements along the lines that “all male lambs should be knocked on the head at birth” show that the representatives chosen to implement this plan have no clear understanding of how the Sheep industry even works. The timeliness of the consultations sessions in Western Australia, lack of warning and poor scheduling considerations, at one of the busiest times on the farming calendar was also disappointing, but as you would have realised by the large numbers of community members who took the time to attend – we all recognise the importance of the Live Sheep Export Industry to Western Australian and Australian farming communities.

Australia is an exporter first and foremost, we should be only importing what we cannot grow and produce locally. We also have a worker shortage, across the country. Expecting that increasing processing facilities in Australia will fill the gap in the market, will take at least 15-20 years. We are already seeing a large number of processing facilities in WA being sold through mortgagee sales, unable to attract and retain staff, and the operating costs becoming unsustainable.

The Australian live export industry has made significant investments in animal welfare and transport standards over the years. The industry has strict regulations and self-imposed standards to ensure animal welfare is of the highest standard. With the planned departure of Australia from the Live Sheep Export market, we need to discuss the implications of this departure on the poor animal welfare standards for sheep by the country that inevitably fill the gap. With reduced animal welfare standards, and removal of supply of the live product from Australia, food security for the countries we supply will be compromised with many of these countries responsible for supplying Australia with Fuel/Petroleum products.

I ask you to use your voice and influence on this matter, and work with and listen to industry stakeholders to ensure that the live sheep trade by sea continues. This will protect the livelihoods of many West Australians and the Australian agricultural industry.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact me if you would like to discuss further.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Farmer Owner & Sheep Producers

[Redacted Contact Information]