

30.5.23

The Parliamentary Committee

Submission: The phase out of live exports of sheep by sea.

substantial levels of intensive animal agriculture occur. I'm passionate about the wellbeing of animals, people and the environment, and have an interest in food systems. In the past, I have found news reports of animals suffering and dying during their voyage to abattoirs¹², such as The Emmanuel shipping tragedy, to be horrific and senseless.

1. Potential mechanisms to phase out live exports by Sea

It is crucial that the phase out should commence immediately. Australia's reputation in overseas markets will continue to suffer if we as a nation are seen as delaying an intervention that would have saved animals lives.

Once governments have given a timeframe for the phase out, and a rationale regarding minimisation of harm to the affected animals, raising of Australia's reputation in overseas markets, and a statement regarding other beneficial opportunities offered in lieu of the overseas market, I believe farmers will accept the change, and adapt.

A rewarding transition to help the climate

The program will likely need to offer farmers a subsidy to cushion their financial loss, or a subsidy to support an alternative livelihood. There is, in this time of climate change emergency, a growing opportunity to grow food that has a low carbon footprint. In coming decades, as climate begins to place pressure on food supply, we will require agricultural systems that are local, don't necessitate further clearing of land, use water sustainably, and have no animal welfare risk attached³. This is a tremendous opportunity to meet our goals for carbon emissions, because intensive animal agriculture contributes at least 16.5% of carbon emissions⁴.

I believe that any farmer asked to turn away from an industry involving cruelty and hazard, towards something he/she can be proud of, is an appealing and exciting opportunity for those farmers involved. The change needs to be introduced as ethical, climate saving, and essential.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/05/disgusting-death-of-2900-australian-sheep-on-ship-to-middle-east-sparks-investigation>

² Hutching G (2019). Hundreds of cattle exported to Sri Lanka allegedly died in 'horrific conditions'. *Stuff*. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/farming/111801746/hundreds-of-new-zealand-cattle-exported-to-sri-lanka-die-in-horrific-conditions>

³ Mosnier, A et.al (2022). Chapter 6; Transforming food systems. *Emissions Gap Report 2022. The closing window*. Downloaded from https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022?gclid=Cj0KCQjwmtGjBhDhARIsAEqfDEef3x47iDkJM68huxgflGt1D7PAYCsiGFSS1LiF2hAned4SAaGnkiAaAhqQEALw_wcB

⁴ Twine, R. Emissions from Animal Agriculture—16.5% Is the New Minimum Figure. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 6276. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116276>

Suggested timeframes, and options for implementation

A suggested multi-tiered subsidy program

The subsidies that are offered should be of two types: a “No export” subsidy and a “Transition to plant-based agriculture” subsidy. Please see the table below:

Table 1: Payments allowed under two types of subsidy, the second type allowing higher subsidy for earlier take-up.

Subsidy type/ timeframe	Three months	Six months	Nine months	12 months
“No export” (but continue sheep farming)	One off payment of \$2000			
“Transition to plant-based agriculture”	\$30,000 ⁵	\$15,000	\$7,500	\$3,750

The “No export” subsidy will be a one-off payment for farmers who, through multi-generational entrenchment in sheep farming, cannot envision another way of life. It will be a fairly moderate subsidy to allow them time to locate further local opportunities.

The second subsidy, the “Transition to plant-based farming” is a more generous subsidy, given the retraining, business restructuring and equipment and infrastructure investment required.

There should be guiding advice and support in the appropriate governmental agency, to support farmers taking up this second subsidy. There would likely be professionals within the federal agriculture department who would be able to lead such a group, drawing on expertise from small business, change management, climate change science and plant-based agriculture.

The roll out of subsidies to transition from sheep farming to plant-based farming should be offered in three, six, nine and 12- month stages. The farmers who take up the three-month cessation plan would be rewarded with the largest subsidy. After all, they are taking the largest risk and deserve the most financial buffering.

The subsidies should be reduced with the increasing time frame that is selected. This is a mechanism to encourage earlier take-up, and to engage the farmer’s agency.

The roll out of these subsidies should end at 12 months, when the live export of sheep by sea will be well and truly defunct.

A specified, climate commitment

Each farmer who takes up a “transition to plant-based farming” should be required to commit to solely plant based, to avoid the dilemma of still having investments and income from intensive animal agriculture.

⁵ monetary amounts are example only

Psychological support as needed for farmers and families

Each affected farmer should have voluntary access to the “Better Outcomes in Mental Health” program available through their GP, to assist them with the normal anxieties that arose through facing change and varied circumstances of employment.

A need for immediacy

I am concerned that the phase out of Australian sheep, not scheduled to commence until the government’s second term of office, is problematic in that, if the current Labor Government is not returned, the opportunity might be lost. I would like the government to commence the permanent phasing out immediately, with the practice to cease absolutely within 12 months. I believe this is possible to do, has great benefits, and will be accepted by sheep farmers, given the right support.

I feel that the postponing of the phase out to a potential second term of office in 2025 is a withdrawal of the election promise made in the lead up to the 2022. I feel that it is key, within a well-functioning, credible government, to stay true to promises that have influenced voters and resulted in the government’s successfully taking office.

An opportunity to improve our nations’ animal welfare ethos

I am concerned that Australia’s reputation in animal rights is suffering through our current ethos around animal use, whereby their discomfort is to be “avoided if possible; accepted if necessary”. For example, recently, a researcher at Melbourne Universities Animal Welfare Science Centre admitted that she had understood the impacts upon pigs of carbon dioxide stunning for decades, but had thought “it’s the best option we have at the moment”⁶.

This bias must be removed from our planning for animals. Australia’s animal welfare status is very low for a developing country. We owe a duty of care to the Australian animals who are transported overseas. As soon as the animals leave our shores, we lose ownership of their safe passage. The Emmanuel shipping tragedy demonstrated how perilous these voyages are. In overseas countries, they are slaughtered, and as the ABC’s four corner’s program⁷ demonstrated, we lose oversight of the mechanisms involved in their death.

Risk to cultural identity

Our cultural identity is at risk - the “fair go” idea may seem token, and this is likely to damage our standing in international markets in the future. As well as the threat to Australian identity, there is of course a financial aspect if our products are seen as having less integrity than those of other countries.

Lessons learned from other countries

We have an opportunity, like New Zealand, to gain a higher ranking in the animal welfare stakes, by bringing in a rigorous protection of animals at all stages of their life.

However, we need to make the ban legally binding and permanent, if possible, to reach a bipartisan understanding that prevents the gains being undone by later governments.

⁶ See ‘Stunned’ ABC’s 7.30 report. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-27/pork-industry-carbon-dioxide-stunning-hidden-cameras-730/102094548>

⁷ See ABC’s Four corners program ‘A bloody Business’ 8th august 2011. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-08-08/a-bloody-business---2011/2841918>

We need to ensure that there are no “loopholes” that can be exploited. For example, New Zealand banned the export of animals for slaughter in 2008, but a legal loophole meant that hundreds of thousands of vulnerable pregnant dairy cows could still be exported.

The mechanism to avoid exploiting in this way is to couch the ban in the language of “Care and safety for *all* Australians”. Helping farmers to understand that the ban is based in an honourable ethos, will help them to transition with a sense of meaning. Change couched in meaning leads to greater confidence in adapting and accepting.

Thank you for reading my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Annalisa Cranby

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Annalisa Cranby.